

The Brazilian Television Mini-series: Changes to a Genre and Representations of Brazil

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Abstract

Brazilian television is known worldwide. The *telenovela* is as popular in Brazil as its export to other countries, relying on enduring formulaic and narrative devices such as famous casts, elite Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo settings, topical social issues and storylines incorporating viewer feedback. Brazilian television drama is not limited to the *telenovela*, however, nor does the form wholly embody Brazilian television's representations of the nation. This paper identifies another important form of Brazilian television drama; looks at how Brazil has been represented through it; examines how these representations substantiate textual and social-cultural change; and gauges how this occurs through institutional and public perspectives. I discuss the *Brazilian television mini-series* and how this genre is changing its own formulaic techniques and constructs of social-cultural representation. This occurs in part by introducing independent forms of cultural production and unconventional techniques, which have come to replace literary adaptations and political-historical epics, resulting in more 'realistic' representations of Brazil, namely of its historically underrepresented. Finally, by relating the textual features of newer mini-series to concepts of hybridity, I argue for how this changing form challenges its dramatic predecessors with the realism of confronting and negotiating urban geographical, racial and gendered conflict, and with implications for understanding how more contemporary texts of a television genres are changing the conventions of representing Brazil.

Keywords: Brazil; television; mini-series; representation; hybridity.

Introduction: Romance and Realism

Brazilian television drama is widely seen as a reflection of Brazilian society and culture (Mattleart and Mattleart 1990; Ortiz, et al 1989; Straubhaar 1991; Vink 1988). One well-known Brazilian scriptwriter observes, the "*telenovela* is the magic mirror of Brazilians. It reflects our reality", while another sees it as "a product of national integration. It reflects Brazilian reality and has the power to improve it."¹ More critically, however, Beatriz Jaguaribe sees that *telenovela* "productions still largely portray the romances and expectations of the urban middle classes", while more "cinematic and literary realist productions have centered their attention on the poor, the excluded, and the marginalized in an attempt to instill a critical perspective and ensure their access to a wide audience"; in turn, the latter form "part of an ongoing dialogue concerning the feasibility of the nation, the possibilities of urban living, and the agendas for the future" (2005: 79). Between proponents and critics of the *telenovela* the Brazilian television mini-series emerges as another important form. While it relies on formulaic conventions of 'romance and expectation',

¹ Respectively, Lauro César Muniz and Maria Adelaide Amaral, quoted at <http://www.teledramaturgia.com.br>.

it employs 'cinematic and literary' realism in order to do so. Yet this combination of the 'romantic' and 'realistic' raises a number of questions: how is the mini-series different from the *telenovela* or other conventional forms? How does it demonstrate change to Brazilian television's better-known conventions and representations? Do these changes reflect a more comprehensive vision of Brazil, one in which 'the marginalized' are included, thus including 'urban living' in a 'dialogue of the nation' and 'agenda for the future'? How is this conceived and what are reactions to it? These questions guide the following analysis and discussion in understanding changes in Brazilian television drama, its capacity to represent alternate aspects of Brazil, and the implications of such change for larger representations of Brazil.

Television Drama: The Mini-series in a Broader Context

Understanding how the Brazilian television mini-series constructs change in textual and social-cultural representations of Brazil first means differentiating it from the other kinds of international television drama that form its basis. Many dramatic television genres – series and serials, the single play, soap opera, the *telenovela* and mini-series – use similar formulaic conventions, which makes differentiating them unclear. Glen Creeber notes this, writing "increased serialisation and complexity of television drama means that it has become increasingly difficult to make clear distinctions between the series, serial and mini-series" (2001a: 35). While series and serials are differentiated respectively by "a particular story within a discrete episode" or characters' "unrecorded existence' until the next [story] begins" (Geraghty 1981: 10), crossovers between discrete episodes and continuous stories have appeared outside of Brazil in American police drama (*Law & Order*, 1990 – present, NBC), as well as other, more recent productions (*Sex and the City*, 1998 – 2004, HBO) (Bignell 2004). Furthermore, single-play programs such as British costume dramas, American 'made-for-TV-movies' or the Brazilian *teleteatro* further blur such distinctions when reprised or made into sequels. However, Creeber notes that it *is* possible to distinguish the mini-series from proximate forms by identifying narrative subtleties in formulaic similarities. While the continuous or never-ending serial is frequently associated with soap opera ... the finite serial or *mini-series* ... has sometimes been linked with less 'formulaic' drama. Because of its inbuilt narrative arch, it is arguable that characters and storylines are frequently given more room to change, evolve and develop (2001a: 35; original emphasis)

Despite crossovers, then, the 'inbuilt narrative arch' of the mini-series allows greater plot and character development by avoiding episode constraints and infinite duration. Contrasted with the soap opera's "impossibility of ultimate closure" (Allen 1995: 18), or "the 'open structure'" of the *telenovela*, which, "carried out according to a plan [is] open to the influence of its readers' reactions" (Martín-Barbero 1995: 277), the mini-series' adaptations of existing texts, such as novels, history and biographies, renders 'closed'

storylines, finite in length and 'unopen' to viewer response. Finally, where characters are concerned, Creeber (2001b) notes that the mini-series' tendency towards portraying its characters personal lives does not necessarily mean that it also assimilates all the other characteristics of both the soap opera and series. The 'creative coherence' that [this] finite serial form shares with the single play, also means that it can resist many of the most restricting and 'formulaic' conventions of the series and soap opera (2001b: 442). With noticeable difference in fixed (versus open or revolving) character casts, fewer episodic or weekly 'cliffhangers', and shifting settings as opposed to series or soap opera's community-based contexts. These differences are also reflected in mini-series viewers. According to Roger Hagedorn, while "high production values, location shooting, and star casting ... contribute to garnering a large viewing audience", these qualities also attract viewers "who read the book on which a particular mini-series is based ... [and] would not generally watch television, including the up-scale viewers sponsors are interested in reaching" (1995: 38; in Brazil, see Mattelart and Mattelart 1990: 59). By drawing on the continuous serial, where "the time which passes between each episode is always known to the audience" (Geraghty 1981: 10), and the single-play's 'creative coherence', the mini-series mixes 'continuity' and 'intimacy' to "transform history so that it gradually becomes identifiable, empathetic and discursive to a mass audience" (Creeber 2001b: 453). In other words, by neither replicating nor abandoning continuous and discrete qualities, the mini-series transforms literature and history into generic features recognizable from the soap opera or *telenovela*, but that render the literary or historical narratives of their adapted sources in a way that draws on the melodramatic and episodic appeal of the latter.

In further contextualizing similarities and differences, but here with foreign and Brazilian versions, British costume dramas such as *Middlemarch* (1994 BBC) or *Pride and Prejudice* (1995 BBC), and American mini-series like *Roots* (1977 ABC) or *North and South* (1985 ABC) are based on European or North American literary works and historical events. Brazilian mini-series, also often adaptations, are almost exclusively based on Luso-Brazilian works or events. Additionally, Brazilian mini-series began airing in the early 1980's. British and American productions began as early as the 1950s and 1970s (Halliwell and Purser 1987). Finally, British or American versions are generally limited to less than 10 episodes (Halliwell and Purser 1987), while Brazilian productions range from three or four to as many as 50 or 60 episodes. Structural variations within the Brazilian genre underpin different ways that themes are represented and have changed over a comparatively much shorter period of time. To illustrate this, I provide background to the literary-historical Brazilian mini-series, culminating in analysis of *Os Maias* (2001 Globo) as an exemplary text. Then I look at the short history of newer versions of the genre, leading to analysis of *Antônia* (2006 Globo), another exemplary text. Besides the texts themselves, analysis considers interviews with creators

and commentary from television critics, which reflect institutional and public reactions to the ways these programs are constructed. I then turn discourses surrounding *Antônia* back to ideas of the changing representations of Brazil, questioning whether such change indeed substantiates an 'ongoing dialogue' with 'the feasibility of the nation' in a more realistic manner.

Literary-Historical Mini-series: Balancing the Erudite and Popular

Among the first mini-series produced in Brazil, and primarily by its largest television network, Globo, were adaptations from successful Brazilian novels such as *Meu Destino É Pecar* (1984 Globo), *O Tempo E O Vento* (1985 Globo), *Tenda dos Milagres* (1985 Globo) and *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1985 Globo), which has continued with more recent productions like *A Muralha* (2000 Globo), *Pastores da Noite* (2002 Globo) and *A Casa das Sete Mulheres* (2003 Globo). From its first years, the Brazilian mini-series has also portrayed important figures and events in the nation's history, from *Lampião e Maria Bonita* (1982 Globo) to *JK* (2006 Globo) and *Maysa* (2009 Globo). Though primarily focused on national works, figures and events, the Brazilian mini-series has also adapted a few foreign novels (*O Primo Basílio*, 1988 Globo; *Luna Caliente*, 1999 Globo; *Os Maias*) or focused on Brazil's European links through colonization (*Marquesa de Santos*, 1984 Manchete; *A Invenção do Brasil*, Globo 2000; *O Quinto dos Infernos*, 2002 Globo) and immigration (*A Muralha, Um Só Coração*, 2004 Globo).

Of all of these texts, *Os Maias* is significant and thus was selected from them in having combined many of their traits: it was adapted from the 1888 novel by Portuguese writer Eça de Queiróz, depicts characters in nineteenth-century Portugal with links to Brazil and so establishes a series of literary-historical and narrative relations between the countries in the period following Brazil's independence from Portugal. It was also produced with great anticipation of its success and with large financial investment on the part of Globo.

Os Maias portrays Dom Afonso's attempts to protect his grandson, Carlos Eduardo, from a life of shame following abandonment by his Brazilian mother's and the subsequent suicide of his father. Dom Afonso's gives Carlos Eduardo a life of privilege in return: English tutors, tours of Europe and an education in medicine. But Carlos Eduardo falls in love and couples with the mysterious Maria Eduarda, who has arrived in Lisbon after years in Brazil, and of whom Dom Afonso has an increasingly ominous sense. Maria Eduarda, it turns out, is Carlos's estranged sister, taken by their mother when she abandoned Carlos and his father. The shock of discovering their true relationship, now incestuous, shatters the protagonists' lives. Carlos Eduardo and Maria Eduarda must part. Despite their love for each other, the relationship is severed and

can never be restored again. In this sense, Carlos Eduardo and Maria Eduarda serve as a metaphor for Brazil's relationship with Portugal: the traumatic conditions of separation and impossibility of reunification. *Os Maias* is also significant in exemplifying the literary-historical re-creation of distant eras, settings and sensibilities. The text painstakingly reproduces minute details of dress, décor, speech and mannerisms in nineteenth-century Lisbon. Lighting, set design and camera reinforce the brooding, *noir*-like aura, portending the protagonists' shocking discovery. Finally, a concentration of interior scenes, slow and lingering shots and visual motifs such as mirrors and candlelight give the text a close, introspective feel, as Figure 1 illustrates.



Figure 1: *Os Maias* (2001 Globo).

In interviews with *Os Maias*' creators, a prevalent theme is the detail that was involved in this level of re-creation and reflected in the text. A related theme is the fidelity of the mini-series to the original novel. According to a producer², such detail and fidelity require grasping the richness of the original work, then interpreting it for television:

you have to start with the text, to study the work of Eça de Queiróz, and look for the following: How did people dress at that time? How did people walk at that time? How did people behave, eat and speak at that time, right? The work of Eça de Queiróz is a very detailed work.

Detail and fidelity, though pronounced in *Os Maias*, can also be understood as qualities that characterize the literary-historical mini-series and that link this kind of text to traditions of its foreign counterparts, such as British costume dramas. Despite the detail and fidelity to the novel required in its adaptation, however, a certain amount of *infidelity* to the original was also required to translate *Os Maias* into the language of television:

the scriptwriter follows the existing book, right? And makes it into an adaptation. But the scriptwriter ... changes it ... adapts the text, that is, this detail ... At times, the scriptwriter doesn't cite things that are so delicate in the story, that have to do with the story of the original work. So ... in the case of *Os Maias*, it's a lot more difficult to adapt to television. Because the [original] author was so detailed.

In other words, this reveals discrepancies between the need to adhere to the original text and to adapt it to television. In fact, this acknowledged difficulty in adapting such detailed work to television corresponds with a need to know the success of previous, similar television productions, such as *A Muralha* and *O Primo Basílio*. This is not only in terms of how works were adapted, but also how successful those adaptations were with viewers. The producer thus reflects, "when people begin a work like this ... there's always the experience before ... *Os Maias* is a rich work, erudite, all that, but ... the [scriptwriter], in fact, also looked for ... how to make it a little less erudite".

In the case of the mini-series' adaptation of the novel, then, and against a history of previous adaptations' success with viewers, fidelity can change significantly, with implications not only for its professed 'erudition' but also for the integrity of the original work. Or, as this producer explains:

Os Maias was made ... by combining two more novels of Eça de Queiróz with the mini-series ... There's the novel *Os Maias* and the scriptwriter thinks the following: *Os Maias* is a really sad story, a really heavy story. We need to put a cast of happy people in there.

In the mini-series, a brothel scene originally part of another Queiróz novel was introduced. By combining texts, the 'heaviness' of the original work was 'lightened' with bawdier elements from others. This, the

² Managing producer, Globo, interviewed 5 December 2006.

producer explained, is part of turning literary into television experience. Thus it is necessary to make a mixture of these stories it's a little of the formula of these things When you go to the cinema, for example, sometimes you watch something a little more authorial ... You're going to see something that you know ... and you know that director is more erudite, more authorial, right? But only here in television, television is somewhat popular.

Beyond the implications of erudition and integrity for the original and adapted texts, as mentioned, this producer's statements have implications for the ways that viewers are conceived in terms of the text's construction and the medium conveying it. Therefore, the 'erudite' literary-historical work conveyed by the 'popular' language of television means that to Brazilian viewers "you have to give culture without appearing that you're giving culture ... that neither weighs on the erudite side nor the fluffy side".

Through this producer's words, an attempt is made to balance the 'erudite' traditions of British costume drama or single-play that the Brazilian television mini-series draws upon and the 'fluffy' traditions of 'popular' programming like the *telenovela*. What can be drawn out even further from examining the text against these statements is a disparity in conceptualizations of engagement with the mini-series, represented on the one hand by institution and creators, and on the other, by reactions they evoke from those actually engaging with it. But what seems to further underwrite this disparity is class. Or, as put by this *Os Maias* producer, "you have to support the two sides, because in truth ... you have an elite people and an audience that you have to ... have." In regards to that audience specifically, he adds: "It's ... poor people ... you see? So [the mini-series] has to be even *more* appealing each time for you to be able to maintain that audience." Though not constituting 'that audience' in Brazil, television critics nevertheless offer a valuable counter-perspective to the textual features and testimony we have just seen, as well as a public voice that adds dimensions to the disparities that have arisen from them.

***Os Maias*: Press Response**

On *Os Maias* viewer appeal, a critic³ comments: "Popularized television made in the last years has dominantly transformed a taste incapable of appreciating a biscuit as fine as the excellent mini-series by Globo". He then asks:

What more could the television viewer hope for of TV fiction ... in this excellent adaptation? Passion, prejudice, intolerance, treason, ecstasy, abandon, anguish, the most varied ingredients in an emotional recipe ... in anticipation of what will still be even hotter: suicide, incest, desperation.

Os Maias, however, was an unsuccessful mini-series: despite concerted efforts to balance literary and popular elements, it did not secure high audience ratings, which according to other critics and creators,

³ Gabriel Priolli, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 21 January 2001.

should be at least 30 points.⁴ In fact, *Os Maias* earned about half those ratings points.^{5,6,7} Furthermore, this journalist concludes, audience disapproval was a significant enough indicator of public power to influence similar future programming: "The public, spurning the advertisers and at the same time deterring the market with its power of persuasion, has prevented the network from obtaining sponsors for its refined product". Also implicating viewers in the possibility of a 'refined' television product, Leal Filho (2006: 103) writes:

Remember *Os Maias*? Its audience rating of around 20 points was low for Globo, who did not persist with productions of the same level. Where did the television viewers go that resulted in that rating? ... [T]hey turned the TV off, abdicating the right to receive a public service as that of television.

Refined television, as conveyed by the comments above, has contradictory implications for Brazilian viewers: their criteria should meet those of creators or critics, like the above, who extol the text's qualities; but 'abdicating the right' to refined television is the price paid for lacking these criteria. This has contradictory implications as well for a 'public service' like television in Brazil, which, despite the notion, is mostly comprised of large, private entities like Globo. Reflecting this, another critic⁸ writes: "TV is a public concession that is exploited by a private enterprise. The commitment of a public concession should be to the social improvement of the Brazilian people. [But] The objective of the enterprise is profit – at whatever price."

Perhaps more aware of these contradictions, Arnaldo Niskier⁹ writes: "The more faithful it is to the book, the less [*Os Maias*] acquires the proper rhythm of TV. It is this slowness that puts people off". Antonio Olinto¹⁰ similarly notes that while "the mini-series could be even slower ... the television viewer would not be able to stand it ... The problem is that television is addicted to stories made for TV, in which the author knows that there should be a fight every two minutes". From these comments, a set of disparities parallel to those mentioned above emerges.

First, viewers *should* (in the case of public service) and *could* (given proper criteria) appreciate *Os Maias*' refined qualities and literary-historical traditions, but what a public service offers instead is predictable, numbing fare. Second, because of the standard of much Brazilian television, it is necessary, recalling the accounts above, to 'mix stories' and 'give culture without appearing to.' Reflecting this, another article¹¹ states that while *Os Maias*' "'cinematographic character' of ... planes, camera movement, framing and

⁴ Independent screenwriter, interviewed 31 July 2008.

⁵ Carlos Graieb, *VEJA*, 21 March 2001.

⁶ Keila Jimenez, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 11 February 2001.

⁷ Gabriel Priolli, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 21 January 2001.

⁸ Luiz Carlos Merten, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 20 October 2002.

⁹ Niskier quoted in Cristian Klein, *Folha de S. Paulo*, 4 January 2001.

¹⁰ Olinto quoted in Cristian Klein, *Folha de S. Paulo*, 4 January 2001.

¹¹ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 4 February 2001.

lighting [are] typical of the big screen and not of the small”, deciding “to improve the storyline with a comical cast and situations taken from other books [is] ... insufficient for turning the mini-series more popular and palatable”. More than anything, then, this may reflect confusion on the part of viewers confronted with so many conflicting mechanisms, instead of lacking criteria, abdicating a public service or anything else that has been more generally assumed of them.

***Antônia*: Changing the Genre**

Antônia is part of a more recent set of representations of Brazil. Since 2000, independent films like *Palace II* (2000 Globo Filmes), *Cidade de Deus* (2002 O2 Filmes), *Carandiru* (2003 BR Petrobrás) *Ônibus 174* (2002 Zazen Produções), *Falcão: Meninos do Tráfico* (2006 MV Bill) and *Tropa de Elite* (2007 Zazen Produções) have portrayed the more ‘realistic’ sides of urban, marginalized Brazil. In turn, these films have yielded mini-series that also represent Brazil’s urban peripheries, but through the vastly more accessible television medium, including *Cidade dos Homens* (Globo 2002 – 2005), *Carandiru: Outras Histórias* (Globo 2005) and *Antônia*. *Antônia*, discussed at length here, but also *Cidade dos Homens*, discussed in the following section, are both significant in incorporating other experimental media, bringing to television much of what is often otherwise inaccessible and representing groups characterized by inaccessibility. These mini-series also reflect a shift away from literary-historical traditions epitomized by *Os Maias* and towards contemporary looks at traditionally underrepresented aspects of Brazil.

Although *Antônia* uses many of the same conventions as *Os Maias*, such as an ‘inbuilt narrative arch’, intimate character portrayals and an unfamiliar, even distant setting, the mini-series turns these into a unique *and* successful production, reflected in statements by creators and commentators alike. *Antônia* is also an adaptation, but instead of literary-historical sources, the mini-series was adapted from an eponymous film screenplay. But *Antônia: The Film* (2006 Coração da Selva) was released only after the mini-series’ earlier broadcast, thus anticipating that Brazilian television viewers, with much greater access to television than film and so much larger in number than cinemagoers, would be able to become familiar with the narrative. By incorporating these narrative and commercial aspects of film, the mini-series was also contained to only five episodes. Thus contrasted with *Os Maias*’ multiple literary sources and forty-two episodes, formulaic variations within the genre already begin to emerge.

Transformative as well is *Antônia*’s treatment of distant, unfamiliar settings. While *Os Maias* keeps nineteenth-century Lisbon remote, *Antônia*’s setting of the São Paulo *favela* Vila Brasilândia, perhaps as remote to many, becomes intimate and familiar through the mini-series’ five episodes, as do *Antônia*’s protagonists, four black female musicians from the same community. There are other ways in which conventions of the genre are transformed, and in both obvious and subtle ways. On the one hand, *Os*

Maias' complex literary adaptation demanded a cast of over 60 characters, while *Antônia's* film inspiration required only eight. On the other hand, *Antônia's* episodes may be viewed discretely, like the film, although jointly they form an ongoing and escalating storyline characteristic of the literary-historical mini-series. Additionally, unlike *Os Maias'* enclosed spaces, many of *Antônia's* scenes consist of exterior shots: the streets, rooftops, stairways and other public spaces that constitute everyday life in Vila Brasilândia, as Figure 2 illustrates.



Figure 2: *Antônia* (2006 Globo).

Unlike the 'cinematographic character' of *Os Maias*, *Antônia* uses a range of experimental techniques: black-and-white or documentary-style filming and hand-held cameras, which provide varied perspectives on Vila Brasilândia's setting, characters and events. Thus the text becomes a way of not simply portraying the 'periphery' of Brazil, but also of documenting and experiencing it. These techniques also become a vehicle for representing an alternate side of Brazil unseen in much of its elite and remote television landscape.

Commentary on *Antônia* by creators and television journalists points to commensurately different perceptions about the ways in which the text has been conceived and received. Vila Brasilândia, and the protagonists' aspirations to become successful hip-hop musicians, construct and deploy ideas of potential, growth and mobility through artistic expression, in spite of the meagerness of background. Additionally, commentary centers on the need for increasingly realistic, expansive and positive representations of Brazil's urban peripheries, not just in film but particularly in television.

***Antônia*: 'A Country Inside the Country'**

Representing *Antônia's* characters and their backgrounds as 'real', as actually representing Brazil's urban peripheries, is crucial to the mini-series' creators. When interviewed, one producer¹² recounted the challenges of maintaining such 'reality' within television drama. For instance:

Security is an issue. While filming ... residents of the *favela* can get the idea that the show is theirs, that the equipment is theirs. To have a microphone or a camera grabbed by someone for his [sic] own use [can be] a common occurrence.

But as much as this appears to amplify the risks involved in making a 'realist production' representing Brazil's urban peripheries, the producer stressed not only the importance of independent artistic outputs to these very communities but also the need for circulation beyond the 'centers' of Brazil.

An important aspect of the show is the music of the periphery. Radio and television have always been at the center. In the peripheries, there's a different means of diffusion using the same media [as the center]. [But it] relies on word of mouth.... [since] [p]roductions are independent.

In fact, by keeping Vila Brasilândia and the narrative of four of its actual residents' ambitions integral to *Antônia*, there is a degree of realism involved that invokes genres like reality television, but with the differentiating factor of legitimizing concerns of the larger community within the space of television drama. Accordingly, this producer stressed how local talent forms part of the overall fabric of Brazilian cultural output; but how 'mainstream' Brazil and its main communication channels have hitherto ignored this. "The network of communication [in the periphery] is outside of the mainstream. But television is obliged to absorb this. Brazil is countries inside the country".

¹² Producer, Globo, interviewed 16 November 2006.

Thus, the theme of rectifying what has epitomized the 'bad' sides of Brazil, its *favelas*, emerges. *Antônia*, the producer continued, depicts people with the same struggles and ambitions as mainstream Brazil; and although the worst aspects of Brazil's bad sides are indeed deleterious, communities such as Vila Brasilândia should not come to embody this.

The overall objective of the show is to reveal the good side of the bad. That there are normal people who work and carry on with normal lives in the *favela*; that the periphery isn't made up entirely of drug dealers.

This producer's subsequent work, a documentary series called *Central de Periferia*, reflects continued efforts to represent Brazil's urban peripheries in a more realistic light. She concluded by hoping that this was having an effect: "*Central de Periferia* is creating a pattern and having an influence within and outside of the [Globo] network, with *Cidade dos Homens* and *Antônia* ... examples of this".

***Antônia*: 'Mainstream' Response**

Unlike *Os Maias*, Brazilian television critics mainly share *Antônia*'s creators' views. They also recognize change in the kinds of television drama normally produced. As a journalist¹³ remarks: "Besides putting the periphery in the center of the story, *Antônia* subverts the Globo tradition of teledramaturgy by presenting heroines [who are] black, poor, rappers and from São Paulo". Taking into account the short history of these representations, she adds: "This Globo of the periphery began in 2000 with *Palace II* ... It was then that Brazilian TV showed the Rio de Janeiro *favela*, its 'villains and heroes', with an unprecedented realism".

The musical aspirations of the mini-series characters' ambitions are another point of recognition. One article¹⁴ first cites the lyrics of one of the group's songs, then ties these into the characters' social and professional aspirations:

'*Antônia* shines / I am *Antônia*, you are *Antônia* / *Antônia* shines / And in anyone *Antônia* can be'.
These lyrics open the rap "*Antônia*" and assume the spirit of the homonymous series that airs this Thursday ... On the small screen, [this is] the day-to-day of four women from Vila Brasilândia, a neighborhood of São Paulo's periphery, who fight for a better life and follow their dream: success in their music.

Another article¹⁵ describes how the protagonists' music comments on life in the periphery: "The music continues to be a strong point of the series ... the young women compose four more unreleased raps that speak of the reality of the group at the moment, touching upon themes such as violence, money and friendship".

¹³ Laura Mattos, *Folha de São Paulo*, 12 November 2006.

¹⁴ *O Globo*, 17 November 2006.

¹⁵ *Folha de São Paulo*, 18 September 2007.

With musical talent substantiating a conduit for economic improvement and social critique, another important point emerges: representing Brazil's urban periphery through its actual people, places and events. *Antônia* does this by interweaving occurrences that actually affected Vila Brasilândia into the mini-series narrative. As another journalist¹⁶ reports:

In Brasilândia ... attacks by the First Capital Command¹⁷ (FCC) have frustrated shooting in local prisons. [*Antônia*] ... has scenes shot in a women's prison in the first episode. [Or it] would have ... the producer had to suspend shooting once the attacks on the city gained new force in August, and no authority wanted to run the risk of shooting in a house of detention during a climate such as this.

The writer continues, "attacks by the FCC will be portrayed in one of the five episodes [set in Vila] Brasilândia, which begin filming this month". Indeed, one episode depicts FCC members coercing a character into firebombing a city bus, followed by another episode in which he is pursued and captured by police. Yet this actually occurred when the FCC set a wave of attacks upon São Paulo just months before these episodes, bringing the city to a halt. By bringing the reality of urban Brazil to the plot and characters of television drama, *Antônia* also changes remote headlines into real events and places.

Like the mini-series producer, critics also note how *Antônia* attempts to fuse reality with more positive elements of the urban periphery. Bia Abramo¹⁸ notes the strength of the protagonists' friendship, in spite of their adversities, by incorporating older forms of Afro-Brazilian culture into their music.

What sustains interest is the beautiful and subtle range of friendship between these four women, at times with the triply 'subordinated' conditions of gender, race and social class. In every respect, they are searching for their identity, autonomy and means of survival with dignity in a hostile city ... The way is music, a more melodic female hip-hop, in which the voices (and lyrics) are as assertive as those masculine, but ... [which] seek a softer and more sensual expression ... [and] highlight as well the work to rescue black Brazilian music ... [such as] easy-going *brega* ... [and] the *sambas* of Candeia.

Despite the dramatic change in the Brazilian mini-series genre that these two texts substantiate, and thus a counter-argument to my own that they represent not a change in, but two entirely different texts of, the genre, there is correspondence between their textual features and comments made upon them that indicate *similarity though difference*. On the one hand, *Os Maias*, in its remote and protracted qualities, seeks to remove viewers from everyday reality, if not refine their sensibilities or prompt them to ask more of 'public service' television. But *Os Maias* depends so heavily on counterbalancing the erudite with popular

¹⁶ Keila Jimenez, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 29 August 2006.

¹⁷ FCC, or Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), is a vast organized-crime circuit based in São Paulo. Most of its leaders are incarcerated in São Paulo's prison system, but from where they still control criminal activity.

¹⁸ Bia Abramo, *Folha de S. Paulo*, 19 November 2006.

elements that it ultimately confounds the worthwhile attributes of each, as well as their reconcilability. On the other hand, *Antônia*, though not discarding generic conventions such as adaptation and distance, captures a side of contemporary urban life through innovative techniques and truly popular traditions that bring its characters and plot much closer.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Antônia* was successful, earning audience ratings double those of *Os Maias*¹⁹. In spite of textual and receptive differences, *Os Maias* and *Antônia* both reflect the concept of hybridity as, respectively, a textual device and a socio-cultural condition through the construction of the former and the representations of the latter. But *Antônia* marks significant change in Brazilian television drama and, along with *Cidade dos Homens*, mentioned above, will next illustrate how a conceptual framework of hybridity makes sense of emerging representations of Brazil, their implications for new modes of production and shifting social-cultural dynamics.

Hybridity: From Texts and Genre to Society and Culture

To illustrate how hybridity frames representations in the Brazilian mini-series, I first discuss broader socio-cultural contexts in which the concept has been considered. Hybridity, as argued by Stuart Hall (1990, 1996, 2001), Homi K. Bhabha (1994, 1996) and Paul Gilroy (1993, 2000), refers to processes of contesting and negotiating social-cultural difference between ethnically, geographically, historically and politically opposed groups who share a common, often postcolonial, context. For Hall, much like for Saussure (1986), this means “a system where every concept or meaning is inscribed in a chain or a system within which it refers to the others, to other concepts and meanings by means of the systematic play of differences” (2001: 11). In other words, this describes a situation where people negotiate different ‘authentic’ cultural expressions; but in which this ‘play of differences’ yields a “cultural life ... nowhere to be found in its pure, pristine state.... [as it is] always-already fused, syncretised, with other cultural elements.... traversing and intersecting our lives at every point” (Hall 1990: 233).

This ‘systematic play of differences’ between cultural elements is apparent in *Antônia*, particularly with Vila Brasilândia the setting and its residents the cast. In the second episode, the character Bárbarah meets an attractive white man from the rural interior at a São Paulo nightclub. They hit it off and go to a motel together, where, after playfully teasing each other about their different skin colors, accents, and norms, the man asks Bárbarah how much she ‘charges for her program’, assuming that in São Paulo an attractive, affable black woman could only be a prostitute. Negotiating these cultural conflicts also occurs in response to Vila Brasilândia – its clandestine housing, cramped spaces and labyrinth passageways – and in relation to

¹⁹ *Folha de São Paulo*, 22 November 2006.

'conventional', mainstream environments. Yet by framing these differences with a realistic depiction of the characters' lives and ambitions, what surfaces is an understanding 'fused and syncretised' by its very centre-margin divides.

For Homi K. Bhabha, the "Third Space" (1994: 53) signifies a hybrid ground for "both colonialists and nationalists who have sought authority in the authenticity of 'origins' ... [but also] as a separation from [these] origins and essences [in which] this colonial space is constructed" (1994: 171). Thus the postcolonial context facilitates a series of social-cultural exchanges where although "the productive capacities of this Third Space [might] have a colonial or postcolonial provenance ... [they] open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*" (Bhabha 1994: 56; original emphases). This 'inscription and articulation' of culture corresponds with its "ambivalent *movement* between the discourses of pedagogy and the performative" (Bhabha 1994: 214; original emphasis), or "the tension between ... an a priori historical presence ... [and] the performance of narrative" (1994: 211). A 'Third Space' and its inscriptive-articulated tensions are manifest in the group 'Antônia's' hip-hop music. It fuses American rap with Afro-Brazilian *brega* and *samba*, 'inscribing and articulating' them by separating them 'origins and essences'. Antônia's music is also a meeting ground of the pedagogical and performance: it relates the 'historical presence' of being poor, black, and female, but 'constructs' roles as artists and social commentators, where the 'performance of narrative' is retold in the recording studio or live concert.

A hybrid, Third Space corresponds with Paul Gilroy's idea of hybridity as a state of "double-consciousness" (1993: 30; Du Bois 1996: 5). This represents the irreconcilability of African slavery in relation to ambivalent expressions of black identity in modern Western culture. By tracing black cultural identity from Africa to the West, Gilroy finds that it has lacked both cohesiveness and consciousness of its cohesiveness. However, Gilroy also finds that the resulting "transformation of cultural space and the subordination of distance are only two factors that contribute to a parallel change in the significance of appeals to tradition, time, and history"; thus, invoking African "tradition becomes both more desperate and more politically charged as the sheer irrepressible heterology of [modern] black cultures becomes hard to avoid" (1993: 194). Double consciousness, then, is a way of channeling painful histories into fruitful forms of expression, and Antônia's lyrics illustrate this politically charged effort: "With knowledge / I will be liberated / I have the gift / Forget the war / I have the sound / I came to bring back / The sound of victory / I will show you / How to fight, how to live..."

Hybridity and *Mestizaje*

Hybridity is a concept that applies to the Latin American social-cultural context as well. One way is through the idea of *mestizaje*. For Gloria Anzaldúa (2007), *mestizaje* embodies the ethnic-historical conditions of the American southwest, where “Indians and *mestizos* from central Mexico intermarried with North American Indians.... [and the] continual intermarriage between Mexican and American Indians and Spaniards formed an even greater *mestizaje*” (2007: 27). In other words, this is a way of seeing hybridity as a “convergence [that] has created a shock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country” (Anzaldúa 2007: 33) in which the simultaneity of both Western and Indio-Mexican-Spanish norms means: “Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes” (2007: 59).

Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993, 2001) takes *mestizaje* from ethnic-historical settings and situates them in Latin American mass culture. With mass culture, Martín-Barbero argues for “a new way of looking that, on one hand, reveals the actual span of *hybridization between visuality and technicality* and, on the other, redeems the imagistic as a location of a strategic *cultural battle* (2001: 15 – 16; original emphases). The visual-technical hybridity of Latin American mass culture and resulting ‘cultural battles’ for control of ‘the imagistic’ reveal how *mestizaje* represents the negotiation of cultural identity in Latin American ‘made’ society (lived and experienced) and ‘remade’ culture (*representations* of the lived and experienced). *Mestizaje*, in other words, provides a means of interpreting the forms and practices of Latin American society as much as re-interpreting them in Latin American mass culture. Latin American *urban mass culture*, Martín-Barbero finds, is particularly apt for understanding both the made and remade dimensions of *mestizaje*.

Mass culture is the hybrid of foreign and national, of popular informality and bourgeois concern with upward mobility ... of ... those who try to look rich without the means to do so ... and ... those crushed by the hopelessness of the slums on the edges of the cities and in the underworld. Mass culture is essentially an urban culture which compensates its open materialism – the supreme values are economic success and social ascent – with a superabundance of the sentimental and the passionate (1993: 159).

The contentiousness of Latin America’s hybrid urban cultures is revealed in the mini-series *Cidade dos Homens*. Adapted from the film *Cidade de Deus*, the mini-series is set in a Rio de Janeiro *favela* and depicts the struggles of its two young black protagonists, Acerola and Laranjinha, in contending with the poverty, racism, drugs, corruption and apathy endemic to their community. The episode “Uólace e João Victor” (2002 Globo) parallels a day-in-the-life of Laranjinha and João Victor. ‘Uólace’, Laranjinha explains, is his birth-name, a phoneticism of ‘Wallace’, and his estranged mother’s attempt to bestow upon him Anglo-Saxon nobility. João Victor, in contrast, bemoans his traditional Portuguese name, a remnant of his now-

divorced middle-class parents' concern with image and status. Already, this pairing illustrates 'the hybrid of foreign and national, popular informality and bourgeois upward mobility', made by the protagonists' competing situations and remade by paralleling their disparate lives in the text. Indeed, this parallel also reflects 'people who inhabit both realities, forced to live in the interface between the two'. At the episode's end, Laranjinha and João Victor confront each other, Laranjinha walking towards his *favela*, João Victor looking down from his condominium bedroom window. As João Victor spies Laranjinha, he thinks: "What's he doing on the street at this hour?" Laranjinha, looking up at João Victor, thinks: "What's he doing at his window at this hour?" João Victor continues, "He appears to be bad-off", while Laranjinha thinks, "He appears to be just fine". In unison the two conclude, "Which isn't me."

Hybridity: From the Socio-cultural to the Material-economic

Although recognizing the made/remade duality of *mestizaje*, Néstor García Canclini (1995a, 1995b) argues for the role that capital plays in Latin America's hybrid societies and cultures. Through social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977: 184; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: vii – xi), negotiating cultural identity in Latin America is further problematized when individuals transcend the traditional 'high-low' binary of modernity and instead contend with the material-economic issues of postmodern identity. This perspective thus underscores the material-economic dimensions of hybrid cultural identities by revealing how the latter shift depending on individual aptitudes for engaging with various cultural products, as well as the many, more subtle powers involved in realms of contemporary cultural production. So while *mestizaje* informs the social values of 'economic success and social ascent' or the cultural values of 'the sentimental and the passionate', capital has the advantage of not representing ... [any] set of stable and neutral goods with values and meanings that are fixed once and for all, but rather ... a *social process* that, like the other kind of capital, is accumulated, reconverted, produces yields, and is appropriated in an unequal way by different sectors (García Canclini 1995a: 136; original emphasis).

For García Canclini, then, interpreting Latin American mass culture in terms of forms of capital requires "different conceptual instruments" (1995a: 206). But first, needed is "a substitute for what can no longer be understood under the signs of cultured or popular: the formula 'urban culture'" (García Canclini 1995a: 207). So while urban culture for Martín-Barbero is an "attempt to contain the diverse forces of modernity", the material-economic dimensions of postmodern culture reveal "three key processes for explaining hybridization: the breakup and mixing of the collections that used to organize cultural systems, the deterritorialization of symbolic processes, and the expansion of [their] impure genres", which in turn "determine ... articulations between modernity and postmodernity, between culture and power" (García

Canclini 1995a: 207). Interpretation of the Brazilian mini-series by these conceptual instruments of 'the breakup and mixing of collections', 'the deterritorialization of symbolic processes', and 'the expansion of impure genres' shows how representations of Brazil in television drama are changing.

An episode of *Cidade dos Homens* (2002 Globo) opens with a schoolteacher lecturing her class on how Portuguese royalty fled the Napoleonic Wars and founded the Brazilian Empire. Protagonist Acerola relates these remote events to his own day-to-day experience. Like nineteenth-century Europe, Acerola's *favela* is divided into factions, but with the latter ruled by drug lords instead of generals or kings. Acerola superimposes this scenario on the teacher's blackboard, and her voice is eclipsed by Acerola's explanation of his *favela* to the viewer. Distant history, then, is a metaphor for contemporary urban culture; and Acerola's own forms of social and cultural capital merge in 'a social process' that, while 'accumulated, reconverted and appropriated in unequal ways', make sense of these remote events.

Another episode (2003 Globo) has Acerola and Laranjinha's traveling from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília to deliver a letter to President Lula. In the letter, the grandfather of Acerola's girlfriend pleads for his prison release, overdue when the verdict was lost in bureaucracy. Rather than linear storytelling, however, the letter reveals complex relations between characters, settings and events. The grandfather migrated as a boy from the desolate northeast to the more prosperous southeast with young Luíz Inácio da Silva, both in search of work. This is depicted by a grainy sequence of two boys in the back of a truck, surrounded by other migrants, bumping along dusty roads. Interwoven are scenes of Acerola and Laranjinha filming each other with a hand-held video camera on their own present journey, visiting Brasília attractions, or at the presidential palace where they have been granted a visit with President Lula. But the narrative reverts to Acerola and his girlfriend visiting her grandfather in his Rio prison, waiting in a long queue, and finally speaking with the old man, who dictates the contents of the letter to them. This, too, is interwoven with testimonies of Brazilian women with sons or husbands incarcerated. The latter are presented in documentary style, where the women address the camera directly, as if the viewer were interviewing women in the prison queue itself. Meanwhile, scenes of *chapeleiras* are interspersed, women who rent clothes outside the prison so visitors can appear presentably to their relatives. Thus the viewer pieces-together an intricate string of people, places and events in order to understand the legacy of the protagonists' journey.

Here, the break-up and mixing of collections is crucial: the journey is portrayed through seemingly unrelated recordings, testimonies and documents, which, in fact, provide the fundamental story. Indeed, this reflects a disintegration of how once cultural systems were organized, including television narratives. *Cidade dos Homens*, in contrast, makes a conscientious break from traditional narrative organization, illustrating that "the current reorganization of culture is not a linear process" (García Canclini 1995a: 271).

Important, too, is the deterritorialization of symbolic processes, where the meaningfulness of the protagonists' journey from the social-economic margins of Rio de Janeiro to the political-economic center of Brasília is paralleled by the grandfather's own migration from the rural northeast to the urban southeast long ago. Finally, this episode illustrates the expanse of impure genres by invoking and mixing traditions from folk-oral cultures, the 'road-film', the *bildungsroman*, documentaries, and the 'home-movie', all within serialized television drama.

Conclusion: Re-thinking (Ways of) Representing Brazil

In terms of hybridity, it is clear from the above considerations that applying common frameworks to representing Brazil through the mini-series is problematic. While there are common strands of representation between *Os Maias* and *Antônia*, Hall's notion of "ruptures and discontinuities" constituting "what we really are" and "what we have become" (1990: 225) better describes such representative frameworks. This is evident by the fact that ruptures and discontinuities are not only fictional devices deployed between the mini-series analyzed above, and perhaps in many other dramatic forms, but in *Antônia's* case, refer to specific local characters and their histories, interlacing these with issues of gender, race and class. But where Hall refers to cultural identity as "not an essence, but a positioning" (1990: 226), it appears fitting to apply such an idea on broader terms, in which the texts have been described and spoken about above. For it appears that whether in the texts, creators' or commentators' statements, there are ways by which people position themselves, particularly alongside or against other positions determined to be normative or aberrant. So it seems that these relations are what afford characters recognizability, creators 'signature' and critics voice in the public spaces surrounding the Brazilian television mini-series. Equally so, Bhabha's notion of the "in-between" to situate social-cultural representation amidst a past "not originary" and a present "not simply transitory" (Bhabha 1994: 313) is useful for interpreting how these mini-series are *ever-concerned* with issues of Brazil. That is, how themes of difference, acceptance and belonging appear and reappear between them, leading to ongoing concerns not so much with the immediate narrative as with successive manifestations. This is also apparent in textual, creative and critical statements in which such issues are implicated equally in historical "claims of the past" and actual "needs of the present" (Bhabha 1994: 313). Though valuable, Bhabha's parallel concept of 'interstitiality' brings into question cyclicity: when does "an interstitial future" (Bhabha 1994: 313), reckoning with ongoing modes of representation, cease to reiterate fundamental problems cast in different times and settings and offer solutions instead? What "form of the 'future'" (Bhabha 1994: 313) can be envisioned if it is constituted by a present intersticed with the same representational issues of the past? Perhaps the over-abstractedness

of the in-between and interstitial is what places cyclicity over change or continuity. Thus while Gilroy's concept of double consciousness may recall a similar impasse between 'originating' values and the possibility of their cohesiveness in a newer setting, as we have also seen in the texts and accompanying statements, the idea nevertheless prompts historical *and* contemporary invocations of "more desperate and more politically charged" (Gilroy 1993: 194) representations, witnessed in the changing boundaries by which mini-series like *Antônia* and *Cidade dos Homens* have more recently come.

Martín-Barbero's "continuities in discontinuity" (1993: 188) offers another useful conceptual path. It seeks neither immediate resolution nor historical reconciliation to representational disparities. Rather, *mestizaje* as a "cultural history which emerges" from the multiplicity of others allows for simultaneous "explanation of our existence" as a "web of time and places" (Martín-Barbero 1993). This in turn allows for representations to extend from nineteenth-century Lisbon to present-day São Paulo, from over 100 years in the past to a present-day setting, with little distance between portrayals. But the idea of *mestizaje*, then, makes possible only continuity and *not* change. If issues of representation in the mini-series are constituted by the simultaneity of eras, peoples and places, then the possibility of change is unimportant, if not nonexistent. García Canclini's emphasis on the postmodern tenets of Latin American culture, then, namely the 'decollection', 'deterritorialization' and 'impure genres' that describe it, is perhaps a more useful approach to gauging noticeable representational change over infinite 'continuous discontinuity'. These conceptualizations of contemporary Latin American culture and its departure from western standards, at least in these mini-series, thus allow us to see how representation has changed and not remained a nebulous web through its shifting histories, geographies and characterizations, in the statements made by creators and commentators as well.

It could also be inferred from previous discussions that recent, 'realistic' mini-series substantiate an entirely new form of Brazilian television drama, and thus a clean break from literary-historical predecessors. Intermittently, however, there have been precursors to this newer form, well before its noticeable appearance in 2000, namely *Bandidos da Falange* (1983 Globo) and *Capitães da Areia* (1989 Bandeirantes), among others. What I have shown here, but that requires further investigation, is that more recent incarnations of the mini-series have increasingly incorporated the forms and conventions of other texts, genres and media, as well as taken on growing issues of class, race, urban geography and 'traditional' avenues of mobility and success. Also, these newer forms do not assume normative standards of television audiences as passive viewers or even consumers, rather as increasingly familiar with the mechanisms, demands, preferences and choices with which they are equipped in negotiating a globally evolving medium. What I have also only begun to illustrate is how the mini-series is currently reshaping and rearticulating the conventions of its generic progenitors, like *Os Maias*, perceptible in the alternate character developments,

temporal-spatial settings and simultaneously open-and-closed narrative structures of more recent productions. This has broader implications as well for undertaking additional studies on the influence of literature, film, music, even new media like the Internet on Brazilian television drama, as these crossovers reflect not only an acknowledgement, but also the practice of, not treating texts, genres and media discretely; that not only their content but their forms, conventions and histories are versatile and reinterpretable in Brazil, and beyond.

Neither is hybridity a new conceptual approach to analyzing mass culture in the postcolonial context, particularly Latin America (see Freire Lobo 2000; García Canclini 1995a, 1995b; Martín-Barbero 1993, 2001; Mattelart and Mattelart 1990; Ortiz 1985, 1988; Ortiz, et al. 1989; Rowe and Schelling 1991). What is missing from some of these approaches, or requires revisiting, is not how Latin American mass culture hybridizes the forms, practices and traditions of the *past*, rather how contemporary mass culture, especially the popular cultures of mass media, look *presently*, even *anticipatorily* to other forms, practices and traditions in order to continue to change and thus hybridize representations of Latin America.

As the above analyses have attempted to reveal, this is recognized by, and important to, creators and critics alike of Brazilian television drama. But in returning to the original tension between proponents and opponents of the *telenovela*, who find either a 'window to the soul' of the Brazilian nation or a 'door closed' to its realities, the mini-series serves as an important link. It shows how Brazilian television drama need not be limited to the predictability of elite urban settings, star-studded casts, topical themes and popular storylines. Rather, by introducing the distant and unfamiliar while preserving the resonance of commonly understood themes, the mini-series demonstrates how distance and unfamiliarity become not only identifiable but also *negotiable*, and not simply 'to a mass audience' but to a diverse array of participants attempting to portray, engage with, understand or negotiate the world around them in a more comprehensive, accessible and meaningful way.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professors Robin Mansell and Sonia Livingstone for valuable comments on previous versions of this paper, as well as 'The Mark Poster Seminar Group' for useful perspectives on thinking beyond it.

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