



Profugos: new formats and regionalization in Latin American television serial fiction

Prófugos: Novos Formatos e Regionalização na Ficção Seriada de TV Latino-Americana

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ABSTRACT The resumption of audiovisual productions in Latin America during the 1990s have not only affected the cinematographic sphere, but TV production as well. The latest production aimed at exploring this genre is a Chilean series co-produced with HBO Latin America named *Profugos* (Runaways), featuring four popular local actors and directed by Pablo Larraín of the acclaimed film *Tony Manero* (2008, Brazil/Chile). *Profugos* shows that definitely soap opera is no longer the only Latin American fictional format, besides dialoguing with the action genre global tradition, also marking the consolidation of major networks intervention policy towards the local market.

KEYWORDS Latin American TV series; HBO Latin America; crime and action genre; serial fiction; neo-crime genre

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INTRODUCTION

The international success of movies like *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*, Fernando Meirelles & Katia Lund, 2002), and *Tropa de Elite 2* (*Elite Squad 2*, José Padilha, 2011) – the highest-grossing movie ever in the history of Brazilian cinema – have inspired a whole new wave of crime dramas and action television series in Brazil. The television screen was invaded by series like *Força-Tarefa* (*Task Force*, Globo, 2009-2011, José Alvarenga), *9 MM: São Paulo* (HBO, 2008-2011, Michael Ruman), *A Lei e o Crime* (*Law & Crime*, Record, 2009, Alexandre Avancini), and *Mandrake* (HBO, 2005-2007, José Henrique Fonseca), besides *Fora de Controle* (*Out of Control*, Record, 2012, Daniel Resende & Johnny Araújo), written by Marcílio de Moraes. While Record is negotiating a new series agreement with Fox Films, Globo has announced the TV series *The Web* (*A Teia*) to be released in 2014. This trend, however, is not peculiar to Brazil, nor can it be explained solely in terms of box-office success.

TV Series like Argentinean *Cops & Robbers* (*Poliladrón*, Canal 13, 1995-1997, Sebastián Pivotto, Fernando Spiner), *Epitaphs* (*Epitafios*, HBO, 2004-2009, Jorge Nisco), and *Brothers & Detectives* (*Hermanos y Detectives*, Telefe, 2006, Damián Sziffrón), a franchise series developed in eight different countries, as well as the Mexican series *Cappadocia*, (*Capadócia*, HBO, 2008-2010, Epigmenio Ibarra), produced in association with HBO, became part of the Latin American Imaginary surrounding the genre with a fictional production which speaks of violence and social clashes, realistically addressing urban issues while also mirroring the tradition of these genres in world cinema, especially in the U.S.

The successful Argentine miniseries *The Can-*

vasser (*El Puntero*, El Trece, 2011, Daniel Barone)² combines action, suspense, and political thriller elements (GULLINO, 2012). By establishing a visual identity of their own, these TV serials have been largely contributing to bury, once and for all, the idea that Latin American television serial fiction is simply a parody of the American sitcoms or just as a synonym for *telenovela* (soap opera) or “melodrama”.

One recent example of this trend is the series *Profugos* (HBO, 2011-2013) - a Spanish word that means “runaways” – produced by HBO Chile in partnership with local production companies Efectres and Fabula, running for two seasons³. The series is quite typical of Latin American police literature of the 70’s and 80’s, and the same applies to cinema: the most important parts of the plot is neither solving the mystery nor finding the truth. However, its imaginary owes more to movies and television drama than to literature itself. This paper took into account the police genre as a concept according to studies by Jason Mittell (2004), who proposes approaching genre as a social category, hence analyzing its emergence in American television with the *cop shows*⁴, since the American model is this sort of production most

² In fact, differently from cinema, television opening credits highlight the roles of both scenario author and scriptwriter, as shown in *El Puntero* with Adrian Suar and Mario Segade’s names. There is also the concept of *showrunner*, as in Fox’s *9 MM* credits for Roberto Dávila, the producer who signs the series creation along with Newton Cannito and Carlos Amorim.

³ The second season’s finale will be aired in December, 14th 2013.

⁴ Actually, early cop shows ran on the radio as crime drama, a formula that is similar to docudrama and documentaries inspired by police journalism which have migrated to television and cinema (MITTELL, 2004). The term refers to television police serials.



Figure 1 – The villain Mario Moreno, played by Luís Gnecco.

relevant reference both to producers and audience. Jesus Martin-Barbero (2006) concepts were used to analyze reception and addressing modes. Cultural Studies provide the main approach to the most recent reception studies in Latin America (FRANKEMBERG et al, 2009), and Martin-Barbero is one of its heralds, specially due to his studies on the significance of television's hegemony over the Imaginary. According to Martin-Barbero, the classification of television genres functions as a strategy for attracting the audience, and although *telenovela* is the most popular format in Latin America, it doesn't mean other references have not inspired cop shows as well.

Usually, this new Latin American film and television production was dubbed neo-crime or "novela negra", in Spanish, alluding to the concept of *noir* created by French critics, as used in studies on the genre in France (NAREMORE, 2008). The term "neo-crime" was used in reference to the genre's expansion as a literary phenomenon in Latin America, particularly since the 80's with writers like Paco Ignacio Taibo, Ricardo Piglia, Patrícia Melo, Ramon Diaz Eterovic, Leonardo Padura, and Marçal Aquino, whose works turn to the continent's reality instead of the distant reality of the American model, for the policeman image is not one of heroism: most of them earn little and live in conflict inside the corrupted corporation. Some of them have also played an essential role during the times of the military dictatorship, when police corps supported authoritarian and repressive governments. Although Naremore (2008) dismisses the influence of police genre and specifically *noir* in literature as irrelevant compared to film, it is important to note that this literary tradition in Latin America was consolidated in parallel with the resumption of local film production, which included

some of these literary works adaptations for the screen.

By its turn, the term *noir* was first used by Nino Frank (1946), and it is discussed here under the perspectives offered both by James Naremore (2008) and Frank Krutnik (1991), since the audiovisual codes of television genres, and especially crime news shows developed in the United States derived from cinema.

When they were first released, noir movies were identified as social criticism for showing modern societies' conflicts, in which evil seems to be inherent to civilization. Like the American cop shows of the 50's, which challenged sitcoms' schmaltzy formula by showing America's other side (MITTELL, 2004), Latin American police and action series are responsible for introducing post-modern conflicts in television fiction with more realistic characters, a setting distant from the electronic-feuilleton, the easy formula of social improvement through marriage and the happy endings.

This paper aims at understanding the dialogue between the genre's Hollywoodian formats and Latin American audiovisual tradition, and more specifically Chilean, through the television series "*Profugos*" produced by filmmaker Pablo Larraín in association with HBO, and classification of Hollywoodian genres as proposed by Steve Neale (2000).

Contemporary action and crime

The "*Prófugos*" series tells the story of a family who makes a living out of drug dealing in the region between Bolivia and Chile. The Ferragut family is headed by Kika (Claudia di Girólamo), a woman who, after losing her husband, convinces her



Figure 2 - Vicente Ferragut (Nestor Cantillana, background) and Alvaro Parraguez (Benjamin Vicuña) become partners in prison.

eldest son, the veterinarian Vicente (Néstor Cantillana), to take over his father's job and becomes the head of the cartel. Kika has also a daughter, Laura (Blanca Lewin), a lawyer, with whom she maintains an uneasy relationship. Against her will, Laura is encharged of defending and concealing the family business before the law. The family is also aided by the handyman Mario (Luis Gnecco), a violent man who used to be a torturer during the Pinochet regime.

Oscar (Francisco Reyes), one of the drug smugglers, was a revolutionary in the 70's but after being diagnosed with a terminal illness he will resort to trafficking in order to assure his daughter's future. There's also Álvaro Parraguez (Benjamín Vicuña), an undercover police detective who impersonates a drug dealer by the name Tegui. His job is to infiltrate the cartel, often forcing him to take attitudes against the very same law he defends.

After a string of decisions, Álvaro becomes a police fugitive which leaves him on his own, with only the help of Ximena (Aline Kuppenheim), his former police partner who risks her own career to save him whenever it is necessary. She is subordinate to Bruno (Marcelo Alonso), the local police chief who usually manipulates the law in order to accomplish his mission of capturing drug dealers.

The Ferragut enemies are the Aguilera, a family who controls a rival cartel headed by Iván (Luis Dubó), who is considered as one of the most powerful and ruthless drug traffickers in the region. Created by Pablo Illanes, Josefina Fernández, Mateo Iribarren, and Enrique Videla, the series was developed with the average 13 episodes per season, the American television serials standard format. Each episode invariably ends with experimental folk singer Camila Moreno, whose songs

produce a certain estrangement. There's no rock and roll, no jazz, not the slightest trace of the typical American soundtrack. The song "*Cuatro Heridas*", written by Moreno and Juan Cristobal Mezas, who composed the soundtrack for *Profugos*, combines traditional Mexican instruments such as cuatro, tiple, charango, and zampoña.

"*Prófugos*" main screenwriter Pablo Illanes enjoyed a successful career in television at first in TV drama aimed at the younger audience segment, addressing issues like homosexuality and drugs, and later with the huge hit "*¿Dónde está Elisa?*" (Where is Elisa?, TVN, 2009), classified as a *teleserie* by TVN (Chile's state national television). The story was loosely inspired by the Millennium trilogy by Swedish writer Stieg Larsson, particularly Book 1, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*⁵. *¿Dónde está Elisa?* follows the investigation of the bogus disappearance of Elisa Fernandez, the sixteen year old daughter of a successful Chilean businessman who goes mysteriously missing after spending all night partying at a club with her cousins.

In his essay on Hollywoodian genres, Steve Neale (2000) proposes a classificatory category named "contemporary crime", which includes *detective films*, *gangster films*, and *suspense thrillers*. As to the first of them, Neale argues that it has been partially overshadowed by the discussion surrounding *noir*. Film *noir* is a problematic concept since it simultaneously appears in several different works referred as to a style, a trend, a genre, and a subgenre (KRUTNIK, 1991: 15; NAREMORE, 2008: 27). Due to the difficulty of finding *consensus*, it eventually was included among detective films as a subgenre. When *City of God*

⁵ The trilogy was published in Brazil in 2009 by Companhia das Letras.



Figure 3 – Freddy Ferragut (Alfredo Castro), leader of the cartel, performing in a scene in the Atacama Desert.

was released abroad⁶, the movie was classified by its distributor - Miramax⁷ - as a “gangster movie”, and so it was released together in a package including Martin Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York* (2002). Apparently, judging by the first episodes, full of high-speed chases and escapes, *Profugos* would fit this description perfectly. However, in later episodes of the first season we realize nothing is quite as simple as it seems. In fact, the runaways (*prófugos*) make up an authentic panel of characters typical of Latin American reality and recent past, and more specifically, Chile. Their escape through the Andes mountain pass, along the Bolivian borders, also provides a pretext for exposing not only the true face of Police Corporation and politics, but the conflicts of a country that is still struggling with its past in order to think about the future. One of the fugitives is an undercover cop, and there are also a former torturer, a former partisan fighter, and a drug trafficker who actually never wanted to commit to the family business and reveals he is gay as the plot unfolds.

The suspense thriller category (NEALE, 2000) offers a suggestion for subdivision, which seems to make more sense when applied to the search of a definition for *Profugos*, that was labeled as a series heavily influenced by the genre’s American narratives. It is “the-innocent-on-the-run-thriller”, when the whole plot is supported by a single person who is accused of a crime or transgression one didn’t commit. The examples are *The man who knew too much* (1955, Alfred Hitchcock, USA), *The Parallax View* (1974, Alan J. Pakula), *Three Days of Condor* (1975, Sydney Pollack), and

John Landis’ *Into the night* (1985). Played by actor Benjamin Vicuña, Parraguez-Tegui gradually takes on the leading role during his apparently unending escape, in an irreversible situation, since he ends up as a prisoner at the first season’s finale.

The second season takes place both in the Easter Island and the Atacama Desert, addressing issues about maximum security prisons and the relationships between international drug trafficking and political support to neoliberal governments, emphasizing even more the corruption issue. A few escape scenes were based in real events. The natural scenery, however, where bucolic means nothing but poppy fields used to produce heroin, is not the only element to bring out the Latin American neo-crime identity. The reunion of a former torturer and his victim, the partisan fighter, leaves no room for redemption or reconciliation with the past, even though the present brings both of them together in strategic alliances. Neither greed nor corruption manages to neutralize this conflict. Both police and military forces are given new functions in democratic countries, but *remnants of a recent past* insist on stepping into the spotlight. Former torturers, dictatorship supporters, and corrupted politicians are the kind of characters who hardly would lead to a happy ending. This is not an exclusive characteristic of *Profugos* but of this genre’s several productions, Brazil included.

Presented by HBO as its Latin American channel first action series, an image boosted by tons of adrenaline through quick-cut, fast-paced vignettes and teasers that reminds of American series frenzied car chases, *Profugos* gradually unveils a parallel narrative, its other face - reality is different. Initially, there’s a group of four rogues who join together to carry cocaine across the border but are betrayed. In the escape sequence,

6 The movie was released in the US in 2003 in order to be nominated for the Oscar in 2004.

7 The Weinstein brothers left Miramax in 2005.



Figure 4 – Minister Macarena Munita (Antonia Zegers), engaged in organized crime and corrupt practices.

these four protagonists take on their true identity. Once again there is conflict over the idea of police as a moral authority in the struggle for truth against “dark forces” both within the corporation and the government. Corruption seems inherent to the system.

Parraguez-Tegui (Benjamin Vicuña), one of the four runaways, is the ultimate personification of the *tough guy* (KRUTNIK, 1991), crucial element in film noir. Struggling with the values he has always defended and living under an identity crisis, eventually he would get involved with the story’s rogues. As an undercover cop, he finds out that he must forget about who he used to be, and abandon all formal police procedures as well, in order to unravel the truth. Except for Ximena (Aline Kuppenheim) and Fábian Salgado (Cesar Caillet), his former police colleagues seem more interested in making a lot of money. Naturally, it is expected that, at some point, the whole enigma shall be solved and hence, truth comes out, rescuing the good guy from his distressful condition. By the end of the first season, it is clear that there is no such possibility, what is emphasized along the following season. Parraguez-Tegui gets so deeply involved in the criminal circle in order to investigate it that he hardly recognizes himself as a cop anymore. And while the second season revolves around the influent cartel matriarch Kika, in the second season, the reappearance of her husband Freddy Ferragut, played by actor Alfredo Castro of *Tony Manero*, heightens old family conflicts, adding to the narrative typically noir psychoanalytical nuances (KRUTNIK, 1991), thus affecting Parraguez-Tegui and both his children Vicente Ferragut and Laura (Bianca Lewin).

Yet, with the inclusion of the father in the story and the revelations about Parraguez-Tegui’s

past which link him to the clan along the second season, the focus on the Ferragut family and the relationship among the characters deepen a certain melodramatic feature evoking televisual soaps. For the second season, Larraín joined the Uruguayan director Adrián Caetano, who lives in Argentina and is best known for films like *Pizza, birra, faso* (Pizza, Beer, and Cigarettes, 1997)⁸, *Bolivia* (2001), *Un oso rojo* (A Red Bear, 2002) and *Crónica de una fuga* (Chronicle of an Escape, 2006), as well as the television series *Tumberos* (Tombers, 2002, América TV), a *lunfardo*⁹ slang meaning prisoners. The series is about life in prison, resorting to elements of fantastic tales, macumba, and witchcraft.

The two major influences of Chilean television - whose regular production has consolidated specially in the 80’s - are Brazilian, as evidenced through remakes of Cassiano Gabus Mendes and Janete Clair’s works, and Argentinean productions (SANTA CRUZ, 2005). One of the local contributions to the telenovela genre was lessening the use of interior scenes while increasing both exterior and action scenes, thus making them more similar to movies, what attenuates the use of foreground scenes that are so typical of soap operas. On the other hand, these influences are repeated in cinema, through an irregular production, though, as particularly seen in film festivals like Vina Del Mar. Coincidentally, the only restored Chilean feature film of the silent era is Pedro Sienna’s epic *El húsar de la muerte* (The Hussar of Death, 1925), which narrates the

8 Awarded at the Gramado Film Festival in 1998, as Best Movie, Best Screenplay, and Best Director, along with Bruno Stagnaro.

9 Lunfardo (thief) is an argot developed by Buenos Aires lower classes which is also used in Montevideo, Chile, and Paraguay.



Figure 5 – Action scenes require pre-production training and physical conditioning from the actor.

adventures of Chilean Independence hero Manuel Rodríguez, a resounding success at the time (MEMORIA CHILENA, 2013).

Entertainment, Nationality, and Cultural Industry

In Chile, the undifferentiated use of both the terms *teleserie* and *telenovela* is quite common. According to Valerio Fuenzalida, researcher at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, they are applied indistinctly to formats similar to *telenovela*, or television series similar to the American ones due to a mistaken idea of format (HERRERO, 2003).

In fact, for websites like IMDB the term *TV series* is applicable either to *CSI* and *Law and Order* franchises or to the Brazilian telenovela format, and it is used by IMDB's online indexing system in order to classify *Insensato Coração* (Foolish Heart, Globo, 2011).

Particularly in the case of *¿Dónde está Elisa?*, the narrative is characterized by a combination between Brazilian miniseries and American television serials. Although American series seasons are defined by specific themes, and divided into 13 episodes each, it is the narrative development that makes all the difference. *¿Dónde está Elisa?* introduction chapters do always begin from the previous episode's cliffhanger, and by the end of each one, the image freezes, turned into a graphic representation of both scene and character. Also, the division of scenes reminds of action and adventure serial movies of the 1930s and 1940s – *Jungle Jim* (1937, Ford Beebe e Cliff Smith, USA) and *Buck Rogers* (1934, USA) – with wipe effects that make it clear to the spectator that it is a fictional story. Actor Francisco Reyes, former partisan fighter Salamanca from *Profugos*, plays Bruno Alberti, who is married to the main villain Consuelo (Paola Volpato).

The movie became known for consolidating the crime/suspense genre through a strong storyline combining murders, clandestine love affairs, and homosexuality with a realism that is rarely found even in Brazilian drama, and also exploring character's related online blogs and polls allowing the audience to guess the final outcome. The success in Chile led to the negotiation for a Philippine version, currently being aired in that country. Anyway, TVN has presented "*¿Dónde está Elisa?*" as a *telenovela* or *teleserie*.

On the other hand, *Profugos* was released by HBO as an action series. By the end of the second season, Pablo Larraín, head of the project, had just finished his movie *No* about the referendum that put an end to Pinochet's 15 years dictatorship, starring Gael García Bernal, who plays a deportee advertiser who returns home from his exile in México to work in the campaign. His previous films – *Tony Manero* (2008, Brazil, Chile) and *Post Mortem* (2010, Chile/Germany/Mexico) address issues concerning Chilean society and life after Pinochet's military regime. In *Tony Manero*, he narrates the story of an old dancer (Alfredo Castro) who dedicates his life to impersonating John Travolta's character from "*Grease*" (Randal Kleiser, 1978)¹⁰ in television shows. This identification with the Hollywood star leads Tony into believing he is a superior being. More and more immersed in a world of his own, he begins to kill people, getting rid of anything or anyone who might upset his imaginary relationship with his idol. In *Post*

10 O filme se chamou no Brasil "Nos tempos da Brilhantina", e embalou as reuniões de jovens da década de 70, que imitavam os passinhos de John Travolta. In Brazil, the movie was known as *Embalos de Sábado à Noite* and it has launched a dancing frenzy among youngsters who imitated John Travolta steps in the 1970s.



Mortem, the tacit support for Pinochet's brutality comes from somewhere else, away from the main character. An over-zealous and subservient employee of the local morgue, Mário Cornejo (Alfredo Castro), who indifferently watches the procession of bodies being stacked before his eyes. Some of them are still alive, and so are killed right there. Mário falls in love with his neighbor, a burlesque theater actress who is friends with partisans and eventually offers her shelter. But Mário does not have any involvement with politics. It is a cruel portrait of middle class. The actor who stars both movies is the same faultless Alfredo Castro, included in *Profugos* second season. Larraín, who was born in 1976, investigates that turbulent period of Chilean life without passion, from a distant, however, engaged gaze¹¹. The result, both in *Tony Manero* and *Post Mortem*, are movies that dialogue with the genre's traditions without forgetting the social context, what makes them singular. The serial killer Tony Manero's trajectory is not narrated only as a traditional police thriller, also because none gets punished. *Post Mortem's* love story will never fulfill. The characters indifference towards the reality surrounding them reaches the ultimate point, celebrating the infeasibility of individual triumph against the social.

11 As Senator Hernán Larraín's son, the director's political views are openly socialist, as seen when he publicly showed his support to socialist Michele Bachelet, in contrast with his family's conservative political tradition linked to UDI (Unión Democrática Independiente, or Independiente Democratic Union). Curiously, when the series was released his mother, president Sebastián Piñera's Minister of Habitation Magdalena Matte have renounced in the same year due to speculations concerning her supposedly involvement with over billed public works, what coincides in some measure with the character Macarena Munita (Antonia Zeggars). His maternal grandfather Arturo Matte Alessandri supported Salvador Allende.

Somehow, this is the point in common with the runaway's trajectory: disdain for reality and the absence of a critical view of social institutions hinder any possibility of living in truth and justice. Thus, it is hard to go on with a Manichean view of good and evil, ignoring the permanent conflicts brought about by social organization itself, what eventually places the "good guy" in a marginal position within the narrative. This is an inherent dilemma to neo-crime narratives.

A key concept for Latin American neo-crime is precisely the subversion of morality and law itself (JIMENES, 2006). Originated in literature, the term neo-crime refers to a new reading of the genre, since Latin America did not actually know a significant police literary tradition in the past decades, not even in cinema. Part of this production, however, remains associated to the more recent boom of police and noir literature from the 1970's and 1980's. Suspense is another concept often referred to as to this approach to police literature and also suspense is the concept of the discourse on post-traumatic memory (OLIVARES, GONZALO, 2009), for curiously the emergence of this phenomenon in literature occurred in parallel to the fall of dictatorial regimes, particularly in South America, followed by the resumption of audiovisual production in the continent. So, the trend certainly could be extensive to audiovisual productions, many of them based in both fictional or testimonial narratives from those times. Doubtlessly, the other reference originates in television, our own local cultural industry which narrates the nations more properly than cinema with its incipient production, as well observed by Martin-Barbero (2006).

The critic has been emphasizing the Hollywoodian appeal of these series effectively produced

with an eye on the foreign market, either in Chile as in the rest of Latin America (CASTRO, 2011). This worry is not only expressed among the specialized critics, but also in blog posts (FLORES, 2011), where the audience frequently complains about the insistent sharing of such “violent” view of the country being shared with foreigners, a hard criticism suffered by *City of God*, and also both the *Elite Squad* movies have suffered around here. Regarding violence and realism, Globo avoids repeating the formula for the TV screen, finding support in the ABERT code¹². The Brazilian movie and also series *Antonia* (2006)¹³, both produced by Globo in partnership with 02, were meant as an attempt at redemption, a way of showing a better picture of the Brazilian periphery. While Globo romanticizes the vision of the *favelas* (slums), its main competitor Record openly champions this realistic trend – like in the telenovelas *Vidas Opostas* (Opposite lives, Alexandre Avancini, 2006-2012), *Poder Paralelo* (Parallel Power, Ignacio Coqueiro, 2010), and the series *A Lei e o Crime* (Law & Crime, 2009, Alexandre Avancini) and *Fora de Controle* (Out of Control, 2012, Daniel Rezende & Johnny Araújo).

Nonetheless, these television series innovate in opposition to the traditional melodrama typical of the *telenovela* genre, the most popular one in Latin America. Thus, as it happened to American cop shows from the 1950’s, which have challenged sitcoms mellow formula by showing America’s other

12 The Brazilian Broadcasting Code of Ethics developed by the *Brazilian Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters* (ABERT). Available at <http://www.abert.com.br>

13 Tata Amaral was both the director and scriptwriter for the movie. By its turn, the series had several scriptwriters from 02, including Fernando Meirelles, and was directed by Luciano Moura, Tata Amaral, Roberto Moreira, Fabrizia Pinto, and Gisele Barroco.

side, Latin American action and police series are responsible for introducing post-modern conflicts in television fiction with more realistic characters, a setting distant from the electronic-feuilleton, the easy formula of social improvement through marriage and the happy endings.

In Brazil, the culture industry and the entertainment production are established by television, not cinema or literature (PAES, 2001). The idea of a resistance cinema as opposed to entertaining eventually configured a single model for the national films, and telenovela, the national format of serial fiction, is almost a synonym for low artistic quality, accordingly to the models depicted by Adorno in his famous essay *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*. The idea of a culture industry established through television could be extensive to the rest of Latin America. The works of Martin-Barbero (2006) and other scholars interested in reception studies concerning the production of television serial fiction have retrieved the discussion, but the notion of telenovela as a constructor of the national Imaginary not necessarily includes studies on this production artistic quality, but other wisely of its empathy among the audience.

The idea of a culture industry established through television could be extensive to the rest of Latin America. Cinema have always been strategically dominated by foreign production and predominantly Hollywoodian in the past decades. Even the major film producers in the continent – México, Argentina, and Brasil – were not able to beat out the competition. If this Latin American production is being resumed since the 1990’s, it doubtlessly has been shared throughout the continent thanks to major companies distribution.

In Brazilian television broadcasting, being Rede



Globo the major network in the country, the predominant fictional genre still is telenovela, also known as electronic-feuilleton. The feuilleton originated in France in 1836, and it became very popular by the second half of the Nineteenth century, when these narratives were published on a daily basis in newspapers on entertainment pages both to *promote* their access and create new readers. The police romance was published in papers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and has inherited a few feuilleton features such as the involving text, the detective's role as a hero, the battle between good and evil, verisimilitude, and the informative journalism's topicality. Besides, it pursues a thematic similar to *faits divers* and crime coverage. In Brazil, back in the time of early film, many movies indeed were based in police cases (GOMES, 1980) in order to elude foreign movies competition and attract audience. Although currently they are almost synonyms to television fiction series, the first adventures and action movies were also *exhibited in chapters*. *The idea of a dialogical narrative with steady characters has always been a fruitful strategie towards engaging the audience and creating other related productions.*

Police and action serial fiction have been rocking traditional television narratives with daring proposals and an extremely critic approach to reality, like *Epitaphs*, *9 MM-São Paulo*, and *Profugos*, for instance, as well as more hybrid formats like *Los simuladores* (The simulators, Argentina, Telefé, 2002-2003) and *Donde está Elisa*. The television series which explore genres similar to American series, hence incorporating the season format, with themes and episodes with the structure of "beginning, middle, and end", have been posing themselves more and more as refer-

ences. Addressing unusual situations, and, in the case of cable systems, being more experimental concerning postproduction effects than movies. they might be able to conquer big audiences in the short run. That's how local media groups try to improve their competitiveness within the local and global markets (FUENZALIDA, 2011: 18). Not only the national channels are engaged in this project, but also major companies, particularly Fox and HBO, which have been producing police and action series specifically oriented to the domestic market under the benefit of fiscal exemption policies.

Regionalization and local production

Profugos is an HBO Latin America production, which has been investing in local partnership productions for some time. In Brazil, they have already produced several series like *Mandrake*, that also was turned into a movie with two sequels in 2012, *Filhos do Carnaval* (Sons of Carnival, Cao Hamburger, Brazil), *Epitáfios*, and, recently, *Señor Ávila* (Mr. Ávila, 2013, Fernando Rovzar, Alejandro Lozano & Alfonso Pineda, México).

The first evidences of the expansion of HBO – a Time Warner television network – towards Latin America emerged in 1989 with the release of *Selecciones* (selections), an a second audio program in Spanish language available during part of HBO programmation in the US. By the end of 1991, HBO already had a fully operating channel in Latin America, but not in Portuguese. It was due to an agreement between Warner, Venezuelan Omnivisión Latinoamérica Entertainment (OLE), and Brazilian Grupo Abril¹⁴, that HBO Latin America began to take shape in 1994, with the idea of

¹⁴ Who left the company in 2000.

functioning as a retransmitter but also operating in this market through co-productions with independent partners. This offensive began to worry the big local media groups. The rise of Globo Filmes, a company owned by Grupo Globo, in 1998, has a much more political connotation – improving competitiveness – as well observed Butcher (1996)¹⁵, than merely economical.

The politics for major companies local market actions in Latin America is not new, but the partnerships with local producers today is more daring than during the period of the Good Neighbor Policy, when all one could expect was having characters like Joe Carioca hosting his friends Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse in a Disney cartoon set in Rio de Janeiro. Not to mention, obviously, *Repórter Esso*, the program exhibited in 15 countries with ready-to-use text and film delivered from the USA¹⁶. Among this production, the recent productions of channels like Fox and HBO, which have been investing in productions apparently oriented to the Latin American market through partnership with local producers.

However, their strategies differ. HBO focus on the Latin American bloc as a whole, as in remembrance of the good old times of the Good Neighbor Policies of the 1940's, whose purpose was crea-

15 Unsuccessfully, other Brazilian media groups have tried to follow the steps of the *major media holding-company* in the country. Record Filmes, which became Recorde Entretenimento, has only been producing documentaries like *Uma noite em 67* (*A Night in 67*, 2010, Renato Terra & Ricardo Calil).

16 The radio news show created by the American government and aired by 60 different station in 15 Latin American countries, and eventually migrated to television, also had a Chilean edition - *El Reporter Esso*, which ran on the radio from 1941 to 1973, and in television from 1964 to 1968 (Channel 13). International news were predominant.

ting a representation of the Latin American Imaginary for the American market, but without any implicit political and ideological bias of the time. The idea is promoting an acculturation, promoting an intercultural hybridization in the terms Garcia Canclini (2006) defended, but keeping their headquarters in Coral Gables¹⁷, what, as it is known, may always end up like MTV Brasil – delivered back to its owner. Apparently, the channel's logic is the same that places *Anaconda* (1997) with Jennifer Lopez and John Voight in the Amazonian jungle with a fake Paraguayan accent, or *Brenda Starr* (1989), starred by Brooke Shields, in an Brazilian Amazonia *made in* Flórida – it is the logic of budget optimization. The channel elaborates its products with words in Castilian, in an undifferentiated manner throughout its schedule. Local releases are commented in their native language. And this certainly produces a totally differentiated effect.

HBO is not the only one investing in local markets. Fox has been also creating productions on the same terms, yet less aggressively – it was the co-producer for the franchise *9 MM: São Paulo* and *Contos do Edgar* (*Edgar's Tales*, 2013), for instance. Fox does not seem to have a concise strategy regarding local neither international markets¹⁸, in the sense of creating an identity. In the series *Tiempo Final* (*Final Time*, 2007), produced in Colombia¹⁹, they have attempted at creating a king of Latin American standard format joining

17 HBO Latin America headquarters in Florida, with offices in São Paulo.

18 This could change after the News Corp division that originated 21st Century Fox in June, 2013, responsible for the entertainment segment.

19 Fox Colombia series was based in the homonym series produced by Telefe, Argentina.



together 100 actor from different countries of the continent, what resulted in a mess from both aesthetical and content points of view. The excellent franchise series *9 MM* couldn't take off and apparently there was no further project for it. Previously, Fox happened to invest in a co-production with Record, *Avassaladoras (Overwhelming Women)*, 2006, Mara Mourão), based in the homonym film, but it only announced its plans to improve its Brazilian headquarters and invest in more shows by mid 2011. In 2012, the successful *A verdade de cada um (Each One's Own Truth)* was released in co-production with 02. In 2013, Fox Films joined Globo in the co-production of the comedy sitcom *Se eu fosse você (If I were You)*, based in the homonym movie franchise, and promises to repeat the experience with Record, this time in a police serial.

However, their strategies differ. HBO focus on the Latin American bloc as a whole, as in remembrance of the good old times of the Good Neighbor Policies of the 1940's, whose purpose was creating a representation of the Latin American Imaginary for the American market, but without any implicit political and ideological bias.

Although the channel avoids using regional Castilian expressions and accents for the sake of expanding the production reach towards the continent. Albeit not ignoring Portuguese speakers, the project of creating an ideal Latin American model persists from the economical and cultural perspectives, however with fewer clichés than in the times of Carmem Miranda, whose nationality remained unknown by many since she was ideally conceived as Latin American, thus expressing a mix of influences as Michael Caine accounts in Lucia Murat's documentary *Olhar Estrangeiro (The Foreign Eye)*, 2006).

In Brazil, following the police series *Mandrake*, HBO have decided to invest in series combining drama and social criticism like *Alice* (2008, Karim Ainouz & Sérgio Machado), *Mulher de faixas (Fickle Woman)*, 2011, Ana Luiza Azevedo), and *Destino: São Paulo (Destination: São Paulo)*, 2012, Fábio Mendonça). Apparently, eroticism is the new goldmine for HBO, which have produced a documental series named *Sexo Urbano (Urban Sex)*, 2013) and, more recently, *O Negócio (The Business)*, 2013), about the life of luxury prostitutes. This new modality, however, did not lead them into abandoning police and action series, a format established both by American television and cinema - the very space where they make their technical supremacy evident. Some episodes of *Destino: São Paulo* (2012) and *Destino: Rio de Janeiro* (2013), a co-production with 02, feature crime and suspense plots. Police and action serials require more budget, though. The Mexican series *Señor Ávila* (2013) presented Mexican actor Tony Dalton with a remarkable performance as our local Dexter in a kitsch scenery, with a script written by the outstanding Slevich brothers, who have also created the Argentinean series *Epitáfios*. *Señor Ávila* is supposed to run for a second season. Lately, HBO Latin America has been struggling to affirm itself with its own production, independently from American HBO.

Since this production is aimed at the Latin American bloc, concessions were made concerning the script, including not only the characters' accent, but also unlikely information. In *Prófugos*, many of the issues addressed do not exactly correspond to Chilean reality, but to events occurred throughout the continent, such as liquid heroin trafficking when the drug is rarely found on that route, and also the connection with the Australian

mob. For instance, as to narratives based in real events, both Argentina (*Cárcel de Caseros*) and Brazil (*Carandiru*) have faced similar situations of prisoner riots.

Conclusion

Profugos is inscribed in a new segment of television serials which have been labeled as neo-crime by some studies, a classification originated in literature to account for action, police, and suspense movies in which fictional elements leave the solving of the enigma on the background for corruption and the system itself also kill, being somehow the real murderers. Another usual expression, especially in the cases of Spanish-speaking countries, where the term is *negro* (dark) due to cinema and literature references. The boundaries between law and crime are tenuous. However, differently from previous movies which have addressed this issue, the role of the police corporation has acquired new shades. Not every policeman is corrupted or a torturer. Policemen have always played a secondary or evil role in previous police movies. Also, the series addresses the direct intervention of the government over police corporation and its participation in alliances with crime circles, a recurrent theme in Brazil, both in television and cinema – like in *Força-Tarefa* (2009-2011) and *Tropa de Elite – O inimigo agora é outro* (*Elite Squad: the enemy within*, 2010).

The relationship between political power and organized criminal factions punctuates *Profugos*' narrative, as much as the attempt at making amends with the recent political past. Chile is no longer scenery integrated to the narrative that unfolds like a real road movie, subverting the Hollywoodian rules for the genre. A scenery that

often literally steals the spotlight in many of the most prominent movie awards.

The production is part of HBO Latin America strategy aimed at the Latin American market of working on co-productions with local filmmakers who manage international production models, as an alternative for the predominance of the *telenovela* format in open television channels' program schedule in Latin America. That's the reason why they usually cast popular *telenovela* actors and resort to dramaturgical features inspired in the electronic feuilleton, however enjoying a freedom totally unlike in open channels, as well as a narrative forged of world conventions for the police and action genres, with noticeable American influence.

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Profugos: new formats and regionalization in Latin American television serial fiction

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Sent: 30 de agosto de 2013.

Accepted: 20 de novembro de 2013.

