

# Television and Brazilian political culture: “mandonismo” in the soap operas *Renascer* and *O Rei do Gado*<sup>1</sup>

## *Televisão e cultura política brasileira: o mandonismo figurado em Renascer e O Rei do Gado*

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### ABSTRACT

Based on an analysis of the television style, this study explores the presence of power and oppression relationships in scenes taken from the soap operas *Renascer* (1993) and *O Rei do Gado* (1996). The objective is to discover how these relationships can offer the audience a visual experience of the land and its cultural matrix. We conclude that there are different approaches in both soap operas: while in *Renascer* the deal with the Devil reveals a blend of the origins of “mandonismo” and marvelous realism, in *O Rei do Gado* negotiations between farmers and landless reveal land policies, the personification of power, and the unfinished nature of agrarian reform.

**Keywords:** Soap opera, television style, land, cultural matrices

### RESUMO

Baseado na análise do estilo televisivo, este artigo explora a figuração das relações de poder e de subjugação em cenas extraídas das telenovelas *Renascer* (1993) e *O Rei do Gado* (1996). A meta é investigar como tais materialidades oferecem ao público uma experiência visual da terra e a matriz cultural que a subjaz. Concluímos que há um deslocamento na abordagem: enquanto em *Renascer* o pacto com diabo revela a imbricação das matrizes do mandonismo e do realismo maravilhoso, em *O Rei do Gado* a negociação entre fazendeiro e sem-terra revela a política fundiária, a personificação do poder e a incompletude da reforma agrária.

**Palavras-chave:** Telenovela, estilo televisivo, terra, matrizes culturais

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INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE<sup>2</sup> EXPLORES, at the audiovisual level, how power and oppression relationships were constructed in scenes taken from the soap operas *Renascer* (1993) and *O Rei do Gado* (1996), written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa and directed by Luiz Fernando Carvalho, both broadcast by Globo TV. Through the development of descriptive and functional analysis methods of television styles as proposed by Jeremy Butler (2010), we sought to understand, through the visual experience provided by these scenes, how the land and elements of popular culture and melodrama achieve showing the cultural matrices involving this topic and that are personified in the figure of the coronel.

In order to ground our arguments, we share the perspective of Jesús Martín-Barbero (2009) regarding the importance of soap opera as a cultural product in Latin America that provides national and historical accounts for culturally illiterate populations. Martín-Barbero considers culture a locus for situating the study of mass media communications and proposes the thinking of communicative processes based on social demands and uses, in other words, understanding the mediations that articulate communication practices with cultural dynamics.

The theoretical formulation of Martín-Barbero (2004; 2009; MARTÍN-BARBERO; HERLINGHAUS, 2000) is developed, in large part, as an attempt at understanding a modernity experience set in Latin America as a reality in which the rational, age-of-enlightenment-based project acquired specific and unique characteristics, especially with respect to the presence of television, expressions of popular culture in urban scenarios, education processes, the rural exodus forced by violence and poverty, and the formation of large urban centers – violent, saturated, with hard mobility, etc.

Other Latin-American researchers<sup>3</sup> (Bunner, 1988; 1993; 1994; Canclini, 1997; Herlinghaus; Richard, 1996; Sarlo, 2010; Walter, 1994) also dedicated themselves to this topic and built a critical social theory, encompassing this particular geographic region, proposing concepts and analyses that pioneered a local epistemology – one which leads to an escapism of dualisms (center-periphery, for example) and investing in cultural hybridization processes and merges that explain the social phenomenon that ended up becoming Latin-American modernity.

Within the scope of this epistemology, Martín-Barbero describes and explains such processes by defining them as mediations from the perspective of a Latin-America that is interethnic by default. These are the mediations that structure social life, construction of meaning and the subject's perception of the world,

<sup>3</sup>There exist European and American authors living in Latin America who aim to understand the specificity of modernity processes and rhythms in the cultures of the region. Thus, in many cases, there are references to a *modernity experience*, rather than *modernity project*, since, as mentions Canclini (1997: 17), in our experience, traditions have still not ended and modernity has not fully arrived yet.

interconnecting several cultural matrices. These, in turn, form the prominences and indentations of the *espejo trizado*<sup>4</sup> that Latin America is, namely, they reveal the complex articulations between tradition and modernity, continuities and discontinuities. In other terms, Latin American cultures articulate, in their historical condition, multiple *mistimes* (*destiempos*), as in them coexist junctures of pre-Columbian, colonial, post-colonial periods, and modernity. It is in this context that the soap opera allows us, we believe, “to understand the culture and society it expresses” (Lopes, 2004: 125).

In the theoretical framework created by Martín-Barbero, the cultural category assumes a mainly critical, strategic and metaphorical role for handling the contemporary shuffle between the boundaries of the cultural field and the various meanings of the concept of culture (mass culture, popular culture, etc.). Therefore, such a notion is taken as a metaphor not to represent the reduction from text to code, but rather to evoke all the wealth of local and historical determinations that fall outside of both code and text themselves; that which is shown as incalculable (history, procedural, popular) within the mass communication, but is also a condition for the materialization of its products. It is metaphoric in that this idea arises from multiple possibilities to explain something that generates something new: be it the algorithmic matrix, whose ordination generates new numerical series, be it the uterine matrix that generates a new being, and so on. Francisco Cruces Villalobos (2008: 176) points out that “the semantic marking that they [the multiple possibilities for explanation] share is the notion of something whose form is given, in a generative manner, to others (a template, but, also, a pattern, a model, a record)”<sup>5</sup>.

## SOAP OPERA AS ARTISTIC-CULTURAL PRODUCT

The soap opera, like other television products, combines the hybridization ability (Canclini, 1997) to technical and artistic enhancement, expressed in a conservation/innovation mechanism (Butler, 2010; Morin, 2002). Jason Mittell (2010) provides important inputs for the comprehension of how television (and its products made through unique operational modes) should be viewed from a cultural perspective, characterized by this hybridity both in creative and stylistic terms. According to the author, this merge makes serial narratives complex, and this process is strengthened by the rupture of institutionalized practices of the medium and the exchange with other audiovisual narratives.

We perceive this medium based on the *television circuit*, proposed by Mittell. In it, it is possible to observe the existence of six dimensions/functions of television as circumscribed in culture<sup>6</sup> (Figure 1). Mittell (Ibid.) explains that

<sup>4</sup>Brunner’s metaphor (1988) for the complex game of Latin American culture in its multiethnic formation. For the author, when faced with culture, it give us a *espejo trizado* that strips our heterogeneity and plurality (Ibid.: 15). We preserved the Spanish term because we believe this definition expands what is described in the dictionaries – to fragment and/or destroy. Brunner seems to invest in a circumstance/ surface/condition where meaning is associated to construction and/or formation. That is, the surface may have *trizas*, but it does not break, it does not fall.

<sup>5</sup>In the original: “la marca semántica que comparten es la noción de una cosa apartir de la cual se da forma, generativamente, a otras (un molde, pero también un patrón, un modelo, un registro)”. This and the remaining translations belong to the authors of this article.

<sup>6</sup>These dimensions and functions are evaluated as vital in American culture, but we can observe them, as well, in Brazilian society, save the corresponding cultural proportions and of social organization.

these dimensions/functions coexist and, therefore, create tensions towards each other. According to the author, especially with regard to the scientific research field, understanding television in its entirety – based on all these dimensions – is not an easy task; thus, researchers elect and focus on one or another dimension.

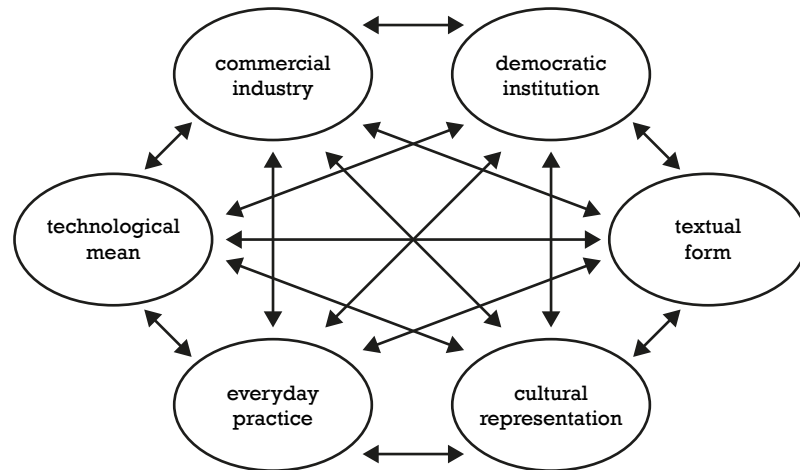


FIGURE 1 – Television circuit  
Source: Mittell (Ibid.: 9, our translation)

In television studies, the dimension of the *textual form* concentrates the smallest research investment, compared to the remaining dimensions of television in society. Researchers from the USA and Brazil (Butler, 2010; Mittell, 2010; Pucci Junior, 2013; Rock, 2015; 2016; 2017; Santana; Pucci Junior, 2014; Thompson, 2003) observe that the textual form has been historically neglected. Butler (2010), Mittell (2010) and Thompson (2003) register some reasons for this fact: i) the prevalence of sociology and ethnography studies that, historically, do not necessarily result in methods that promote an audiovisual analysis of television, a possible horizon of investigation; ii) television is historically observed either with prejudice in being considered art or able to produce art; or coupled to other media, without addressing its technical specificities and language, and its programs individually<sup>7</sup>.

In the introduction to *Television Style*, Butler (2010: 1-2) asks: “Dare we look closely at television?”<sup>8</sup>. The question is justified, as Butler registers in epigraph a quote attributed to Rudolf Arnheim, for whom it would be impossible for television to go beyond its transmissive function and project itself, like the radio and cinema, as a means of artistic interpretation of reality. Furthermore, according to the author, the notion of authorship considered style as a manifestation of the *vision* of the individual. It was based on this notion that François Truffaut

<sup>7</sup> Given this context, Thompson (2003) identifies a delay in analyses of television products in a specific manner, due to the prevalence of the notion of flow, based on Raymond Williams (2016), who mentions the sequential and interrupt organization dynamics of television programs.

<sup>8</sup> In the original: “Dare we look closely at television?”

and creators of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* launched the author's theory, during the 1950s, discrediting the notion that the television industry, a field seen as aesthetically stunted and an industrial product, could reveal authors. In 1953, André Bazin (1997: 80) envisaged that "the image of television will always conserve its mediocre readability"<sup>9</sup>.

These authors did not have the opportunity to follow/witness the development of television in society, however, their theoretical postulates remained and are still used to analyze the television medium. Thus, according to Thompson, either is aesthetic and artistic potential persistently denied as belonging to television; or television images are evaluated based on a cinematographic aesthetic. Pucci Junior (2013) seems to corroborate with the perspective of Thompson (2003) when arguing that television products, for decades, were characterized as "unsatisfactory with regard to the demands of intellectuality and of the public with aspirations of cultural refinement" (Ibid.). For the author, in the specific case of Brazilian soap operas, many criticisms, compared to cinema, were (and to some extent still are) based on the fallacious argument of lack of aesthetic quality and low image resolution of the productions from the period of analog technology.

Thompson (2003) argues that television, although appropriating the techniques of cinema, for example, has made its own changes compared to traditional narrative form. In this regard, the development of specific technologies, particularly the implementation of digital television and the popularity of high definition (HD) devices, is noteworthy. Together, these processes enable an increase in technical quality and innovations in television style, leading to changes in both the audiovisual dimension of products as well as their communicability strategies. In other words, regarding perspective, we believe that television has, increasingly, broadcast its narratives based on elaborated visual compositions, and that the approach of this dimension may prove to be a fruitful research field. This article is part of this research effort.

Based on what we exposed until here, we can, therefore, make two observations that mobilize us: i) soap opera has its cultural value widely recognized and, in the verbal dimension, the aspect of thematic referentiality is valued, in this case, the land thematic in Benedito Ruy Barbosa; ii) the same cannot be said about the audiovisual potential of these works and the recognition of the importance of these images on television. According to Butler (2010), to consider the artistic potential of television products and enter within stylistic analysis of the medium – and not, strictly speaking, an individual's unique style – requires recognizing that the style exists and leaves marks in textual form – are not mere *embellishments* on/of audiovisual composition.

<sup>9</sup> In the original: "the television picture will always retain its mediocre legibility".



For this, observing soap operas, more specifically as artistic and cultural productions, implies recognizing the style marks resulting from collective effort, i.e. the collection of expertise at different production stages (photography, sound design, sceneries, costumes) and the syncretic strategies of television products composition, the merges (Martín-Barbero, 2009) and hybridization of formats (Canclini, 1997) which make the compound image/word/sound more complex.

### METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS FOR A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF TELEVISION

Television derives its style from the relation image/word/sound. Butler defends an understanding of style as being any technical standard of image-sound that has a *function* within the television text. Thus, we can conclude that all television texts contain style. To Butler (2010: 15), “style is their texture, their surface, the web that holds together their signifiers and through which their signifiers are communicated”<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> In the original: “style is their texture, their surface, the web that holds together their signifiers and through which their signifiers are communicated”.

Butler’s inspiration comes from David Bordwell (2008), a movie style historian that sought to establish poetics as referring to the study of how movies are grouped and how, in certain contexts, they elicit particular effects.

Style in movies matters because what people call content come to us through the use of standardized techniques in the medium. [...] Style is the tangible texture of a movie, the perceptual surface we find while we see and hear, and this surface is our starting point in the progression of the plot, the topic and the feeling – all that matters to us. (Ibid.: 32)

That is, style can be seen as the physical manifestation of the topic and the narrative, and these elements are always culturally situated. Thus, style questions the significant power of sound and image on television – or, in other terms, the compound image/word/sound. The observation level required for a formal analysis focuses the attention of the researcher onto certain ways of displaying whose specific characteristics go beyond formal choices.

As Butler (2010) argues, style analysis also questions what the function is, and the most appropriate place for carrying out a formal heterogeneity analysis of a representation is in the representation itself. To consider function contributes to the understanding that the relation image/word/sound is not a mere technical question, but instead the *locus* of a conflict. In other words, word/image/sound are the connections in which political, institutional and social antagonisms come into play on the materiality of the representation itself.

In our study, we use two of the four methodological steps proposed by Butler (Ibid.): *descriptive analysis* and *functional analysis*<sup>11</sup> of style. Description would be what the author calls basic step, and all media studies dedicated to style should develop a description method of the “surface of perception” (Bordwell, 2008) of a work. It is then necessary to search for style within the details of the transmission of sound, word, and image. It is necessary some sort of “reverse engineering” of the television textual form in order for us to understand its style. Thus, the attention to detail that writers, directors, editors, and remaining professionals dedicate to the construction of a television text is demanded and employed in its deconstruction. The purpose of description is not to replicate a program, but rip from it elements that are useful in promoting analysis.

In turn, functional analysis, based on the “functional theory of style” in cinema by Noël Carroll (2003), aims to detect the purposes of style and its functions in the compound image/word/sound. In doing so, the analyst examines the functioning of style within the textual system, seeking patterns of stylistic elements and, at a higher level, the relationships between patterns themselves. Using style and form interchangeably, Carroll affirms,

The descriptive [approach] states that the movie form is the total amount of all relationships between the elements of the movie. The functional approach states that the movie form includes only the elements and relationships intended to serve as the medium for the purpose of the movie. (Ibid.: 141)

Butler points out various functions of the television style. The first four were inherited from cinema, and the remaining were developed by him for this specific medium. These are: denote, express, symbolize, decorate, persuade, hail or interpellate, differentiate and signify liveness.

Regarding the above, our research effort tends to focus on textual television form – its compound image/word/sound – in order to: i) recognize the audiovisual and aesthetical potential of television products, especially the soap opera; ii) elect the textual form of such products as objects/guides for the cultural reflections they provide/lead to; iii) understand that television products consist of, “on the one hand, styles, poetics, narrative models; on the other, historical, political-cultural and aesthetic-popular matrices, and relations with the audience” (Rocha; Pucci Junior, 2016: 12).

What we exposed thus far also aims to situate us in two places: i) the theoretical-conceptual place from which we watch the tv and its inscription in culture, our basis being the Latin-American critical social theory; and ii) the methodological place that focuses on textual television form, whose procedural

<sup>11</sup> *Historical analysis* would depend on a retraction in similar programs in order to identify patterns. In the case of *evaluative analysis*, even Butler understands how problematic the lack of more specific parameters to judge the television aesthetic is. For now, these analyses do not fit into the size of this article.



orientation is inspired by Butler (2010), providing us descriptive and functional analyses, not only to understand style, but also to point out the elements that constitute visual experiences, fulfilling certain functions and indicating what is out of – and is, at the same time, underneath – materiality, i.e. cultural matrices.

**SCENE ANALYSIS: WHO’S IN CHARGE AND WHO OBEYS?**

For analysis, two scenes depicting a character with possessions and a character with no possessions in negotiations involving land were chosen. The excerpts are from the soap operas *Renascer*<sup>12</sup> and *O Rei do Gado*<sup>13</sup>, which are part of the group we named *A Saga dos Coronéis*<sup>14</sup>, as provided in Figure 2.

<sup>12</sup>Broadcast by Globo TV from 8 March 1993 until 14 November 1993, and by Canal Viva, from 7 November 2012 until 5 September 2013.

<sup>13</sup>Broadcast by Globo TV from 16 June 1996 until 15 February 1997, and by Canal Viva, from 9 February 2011 until 30 November 2011.

<sup>14</sup>Comprises plots whose narrative focuses on the issue of land, a subject that we, during our research dissertation, found to be transversal in the work of Barbosa (between the decades of 1960 and 2010), based on a protagonist landowner. The naming of the group has no normative character and the proposition is based on the analysis of the synopses.

A saga dos coronéis

VELHO CHICO	2016	GLOBO	Soap Opera	21h
MEU PEDACINHO de CHÃO	2014	GLOBO	Soap Opera	18h
PARAÍSO	2009	GLOBO	Soap Opera	18h
SINHÁ MOÇA	2006	GLOBO	Soap Opera	18h
CABOCLA	2004	GLOBO	Soap Opera	18h
O REI do GADO	1996	GLOBO	Soap Opera	20h
RENASCER	1993	GLOBO	Soap Opera	20h
PANTANAL	1990	MANCHETE	Soap Opera	21h30
VOLTEI pra VOCÊ	1983	GLOBO	Soap Opera	18h
PARAÍSO	1982	GLOBO	Soap Opera	18h
JERÔNIMO, o HERÓI do SERTÃO	1972	TUPI	Soap Opera	18h
MEU PEDACINHO de CHÃO	1971	GLOBO e CULTURA	Soap Opera	18h

FIGURE 2 – Chart A Saga dos Coronéis  
Source: Pereira (2018), based on Memória Globo (2008)

**IN RENASCER**

The scene from *Renascer* unites Coronel Zé Inocêncio (Antônio Fagundes) and Tião (Osmar Prado). Inocêncio is the protagonist, of origin unknown, who came to the cacao zone of Ilhéus (State of Bahia) at some point during the cacao cycle. Taking possession of a land portion, he eliminates enemies through use of ambushes and thrives over the years. Nicknamed *Coronelzinho* (Little coronel) for being the youngest of the local *mandões*, Inocêncio is considered just. At around his middle-life, legends about him appear, such as that of owning a Cramulhão<sup>15</sup> to whom he owns his prosperity.

Tião on the other hand is an ex-collector of crabs that is transferred to the cacao zone with his family, hoping to improve their lives. He works at the farm of coronel Teodoro (Herson Capri), Inocêncio’s rival. In the region, Tião knows the mystique surrounding the old coronel: during the flowering of cacao, he

<sup>15</sup>Figure of popular culture referring to a devil imprisoned in a bottle, an artifact of protection and prosperity.



rides a black goat that flies and urinates all over the plantings, increasing their productivity. The legend is not mocked by Inocência. Illiterate and labeled as gullible by other plot characters, Tião refers to the intercession of the coronel so that he is lectured by him on how to raise a Cramulhão and, thus, have, in his words, “a little mouthful of land”. This is the scene motto of chapter 25, whose frames are highlighted in Figure 3<sup>16</sup>.



FIGURE 3 – *Renascer*: change of planes and character placement in the scene  
 Source: *Renascer* (1993)

The setting is the room of the *casa-grande* of Inocência’s farm. In the first line we see the change in closed and medium plans showing Tião standing, holding his hat on his chest, in a position of reverence towards the coronel, to whom he listens closely. Zé Inocência, in turn, is sitting in his patriarch chair – we see in the last two frames of the third line a coat of arms embroidered on the backrest of the chair. It is, therefore, an emblem of power. In the course of the dialog, the coronel remains, for the most part, sat down and giving instructions, with the index finger up, denoting a *mando* posture. In the first minute, there is a background (BG), with African percussion instrument sounds that confer the scene with tension and mystical ambience. During the following minutes, the dialog proceeds without BG.

The coronel asserts that the pact is a negotiation whose terms are kept secret. The first recommendation: create a black, virgin chicken who will be impregnated by the devil; thus, on the night of Good Friday, she will lay an egg that cannot touch the ground. Other recommendations: behead the chicken, bleed it around the house and hatch the egg in one’s left armpit for 21 days and 21 nights. At this moment, faithful Tião, expressing amazement, comically looks at his left armpit and says: “Under the armpit? Mas’ié?”

<sup>16</sup>Globo TV owns the copyright of the images used in this article. According to guidelines by Globo Universidade, in Figures 3 and 4 appears the watermark of the TV station and of Viva (channel Globosat), respectively.



Within this visual materiality, the proposition of the pact and its precepts evokes the matrix of marvelous realism, as there is the symbiosis between the demiurgic status of ownership and the political and economic power embodied in the figure of the coronel. Thus, as Inocêncio possesses these powers, he goes on to interfere in the so-called empirical/rational world as an absolute monarch. In other words, the mystical as well as the economic and political powers, the latter two coming from land ownership, coexist, weigh on the local population, and are not questioned by them, being instead accepted.

According to Irlemar Chiampi (1980), in the field of literary studies, marvelous realism has a tradition of consolidated research; however, according to Rocha and Alves (2015: 66), with regard to television studies there is a lack of distinction in use “between this term, fantastic realism<sup>17</sup>, and magical realism”. In literary criticism, marvelous realism differs from the remaining by designating the nondisjunction between natural and the supernatural. In addition, the term expresses a specific stand of novelists (Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, among others) and other Latin American artists (between 1940 and 1970) towards the European realism narrative, transgressing the real without severing ties with it, and the affirmation of a interethnic, heterogeneous, syncretic Latin America. In short, a complex continent where modern and archaic as well as reason and myths exist at the same time.

<sup>17</sup>In Brazil, this term is used to describe the works *O Bem Amado* (1973) and *Saramandaia* (1976) by Dias Gomes.

As the new Latin-American novel is a poetic expression of American realism, it is more fair naming it with an adapted term, both for the most recent and influential literary tradition (realism) as well as the meaning America imposed into the conqueror: at the time of its entry in History, the strangeness and complexity of the New World led it to evoke a marvelous characteristic to resolve the dilemma of naming what went against the rationalist code of European culture. (Chiampi, 1980: 50)

Faced with the absurdity of hatching an egg in the left armpit (the side of the heart, explains Inocêncio, esoterically), Tião does not doubt it, he believes it. The physical and facial expressions of the character and his affective signals function as to denote that the marvelous coexists with the characters in a given space, without them ever finding its manifestation bizarre. Another local legend tells of Inocêncio “planting” a machete at the roots of the *jequitibá-rei* (*Cariniana estrellensis*) and, therefore, he will “neither be killed to death nor die of natural death”. The fact that the coronel survived these ambushes supports the legend. Once again, the existence of the marvelous is observable, classifiable, but not questioned (Ibid.: 19),

which supports the construction of a man who, once acquiring the title of coronel, acts towards the others as a demigod.

So, we believe, in accordance with Martín-Barbero (2009), that the popular survives within the masses through miscegenation. The soap opera *Renascer* depicts several syncretic structures of popular culture (Canclini, 1989) within the plot. We already mentioned the pact with the devil, the machete on the roots of *jequitibá-rei*, but there are still references to *bumba-meu-boi*, the cult of saints, the harvest festivals and the ritual of *beber o defunto*. There are also the oral ways and *modas de viola* through which the mystique of Zé Inocência is passed transgenerationally; in addition to the forms of popular vocabulary in expressions such as “*mas’iê*”, “*pr’a modêque*”, “*desinfeliz*” and “*vosmicê*”, highlighting word formation processes (morphology), by means of juxtaposition and agglutination.

We observe the survival of the popular within the melodrama, since we noticed the presence of four dramatic possibilities based on four fundamental feelings (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 167-172): from *fear* emerges a terrible situation, lead by the archetype of the *betrayed*, typical of novels; from *enthusiasm* stands out an exciting situation, staged by the *pursuer of justice*, typical of epics; from pain comes the reaction of identification and pity towards the victim, typical of tragedies; from laughter emerges the burlesque, the farce and the parody, in the figure of the jester, the fool, or *clown*, typical of comedy.

In *Renascer*, the coronel oscillates – at times he has the structural composition of the *pursuer of justice*, as someone who suffered under the action of enemies, but won against them, always associated by the local population as a friend and loyal man, incapable of injustices and being, thus, admired. However, he also assumes features of *betrayed*, since, at various moments, he expresses few scruples and questionable moral and ethical behaviors, being thus feared, as we see in the scene with Tião. In turn, his interlocutor, facing the coronel, oscillates between feelings of admiration and awe. At times it is possible to observe Tião in the position of victim, several times hollering about the injustice in land distribution, moral harassment during work, stigma, and prejudice; at other times, his characterization allows us to see him as the *clown*, a being not adjusted to his environment, distressed.

In the course of the scene, it is clear that Inocência mocks those who are “people of the rival coronel”. Thus, his objective is not necessarily to ridicule Tião, but his boss. However, to Tião, the instructions of the pact are truths that are adjusted to the objective of “getting rich”. Thus, we have two characters that disagree with each other. The actors’ direction demonstrates this in the expressions that each character assumes in the dialog. Inocência complicates the ritual, however, as Tião demonstrates consent to the terms, the character



thinks, plans and intends on acting. Thus, perhaps in order to stop Tião from doing this, Inocêncio declares with his finger up – now it is not just the coronel who speaks, but the entity that he embodies: “One more thing! At the moment the little devil breaks the egg and goes out to life, one of your sons is going to die. *Cramulhão* is the one who’s gonna make the choice and his soul will be there, in the dark depths!”

The first frame of the second line matches the moment of this sentence, Inocêncio being framed in a closed plane, embodied as “Sir coronel”. The BG returns, this time with string instruments, giving suspense to the climax of the dialog. There’s a transition to Tião, who is clearly framed in the foreground. The words of the *mandão* are printed on Tião’s expressions, his sadness, resignation and desperate hope (in the three following frames), saying, resolved:

TIÃO – I’m going to sacrifice one to save the other and the rest of the sons I’m going to do with my Joana, after we get rich. Sir coronel José Inocêncio, I’m not going to tell anybody, not gonna tell anybody ‘bout what we talked here.

The last frame of the second line and the first frame of the third show Inocêncio in closed plan, while BG progresses, having an expression of perplexity due to the assertive of Tião. The sequence ends, in a plane that still has BG: the coronel rises, ends the conversation and says goodbye to Tião, but, before that, he recommends that Tião removes all pictures of saints so as not to disturb the pact. Inocêncio walks towards the exit, opens the door, and the rural worker goes out of scene – as well as out of any other means of social and economic mobility.

The visual and sound operations of this dialog work in the construction of a mystical ambience which has the protagonist of the plot not only as an owner of productive lands while there being a plague devastating the neighboring farms, but also as someone who strives divinity. It is worth mentioning that, in the image/word/sound compound, in this scene, the figuration of the *mando* ascends. The positioning of the actors in this scene expresses the reverence of the one without possessions before the potentate landlord who, from his throne, decides the destinies of those who can only believe and nothing else.

Despite bearing the nickname of coronel<sup>18</sup>, it is important not to read Zé Inocêncio as an expression of *coronelismo*. In fact, the plot, although set in 1993, references the cacao production cycle of Bahia. The cacao cycle occurred between 1889 and 1930, a period in which this product became a strategic resource for the economy of the First Brazilian Republic. It is precisely in this historical period that Vitor Nunes Leal (1997) and José Murilo de Carvalho (1997) situate *coronelismo* as a specific moment in *mandonismo*.

<sup>18</sup>The term *coronel* derives from the titles of the National Guard, created during the Empire. According to Carvalho (Ibid.), this patrimonial institution was a mechanism of co-opting of landowners who bought their patents and had control of the local population.

That is, *coronelismo* is a historically dated system, it would have began with the federalism deployed by the Republic (1889), as a replacement of the centralism of the Empire, and finished with the implementation of *Estado Novo*. In order to avoid lack of precision, it is, therefore, necessary to distinguish the concepts of *coronelismo*, *mandonismo* and *clientelismo*. According to Leal (1997: 40), *coronelismo* is a “commitment to trade advantages between the public power – progressively strengthened – and the decadent social influence of local oligarchs, notably landowners”; that is, it is related to the Brazilian land power structure and the decline of large monoculture farms<sup>19</sup>.

*Mandonismo*, according to Leal (Ibid.) and Carvalho (1997), refers to the oligarchic and personalized structures of arbitrary power. There are several designations: *mandão*, potentate, boss, *caudilho*, *capo* and *coronel*. In general, it characterizes the individual who possesses some strategic resource for the economic cycle. In the plots listed in Figure 2, this resource is the land. It is around it that a set of power relations gravitates. Historically, *mandonismo* involves the holding of public positions by representatives of the local *mandões*, who had access to the treasury and credit facilities through *voto de cabresto* (rigged vote) and disputes with other *mandões*.

The concept of *clientelismo* refers, according to Leal (1997) and Carvalho (1997), to bilateral exchange relations between social and political actors of unequal power. According to Carvalho, *clientelismo* is a kind of relationship involving granting of public, tax, credit, exemption benefits, and exchange of political support. The authors explain that *clientelismo* and *mandonismo* are phenomena broader than *coronelismo*, but make it clear the undeniability of *coronelismo* involving exchange relations that are of clientelist nature.

It's worth mentioning that, in accordance with Carvalho (Ibid.), that *mandonismo* is not a system, it is rather a long-lived matrix of our political culture that has existed since colonization, and it changes, historically, “according to the resources controlled by political actors, in our case by *mandões* and the government” (Ibid.: 134). According to the author, there is a tendency of *mandonismo* to disappear as civil rights extend to the population within national territory.

We believe that Inocêncio, by being framed with the index finger up, does have a composition based on the matrix of *mandonismo*, but that's not all. There's a mix, a symbiosis with the matrix of marvelous realism. Thus, the “Sir coronel” is this hybrid that aims for the pedestal of deities. Tião, after getting out of scene, will proceed with the plan and will indeed create a black chicken inside a cage, from which he will not get distanced even when sleeping, that is, he will grab the desperate opportunity to remove his family out of poverty. The character starts being known and called as Tião Galinha, carrying the stigma

<sup>19</sup>In Brazil, the progression of a number of factors reduced the power of the coronel structure: population growth, urbanization and industrialization that reorganized social structure, requiring the establishment of public institutions with specialized work. But this occurred unevenly in different regions.



of crazy person, being detached from social circles (being in jail, accused of murder) and the grave will be his only “little mouthful of ground”.

In Tião’s case, at the same time there is credulity characterizing him with the figure of the *clown*, this still compels another dimension related to pity, which leads to the representation of the *victim*. Furthermore, such credulity gains consistency under the analytical perspective of the marvelous, as the *sui generis* reality of Latin America leads us to understand that they exist in it, under equal conditions, the historical event and the mythical. And these aspects could take shape in charming, strange, unusual events; through metaphors that revealed an imaginative richness that much inspired a very characteristic resistance to these people in the face of facts and events, oftentimes absurd. It is a marvelous realism characteristic to avoid contradiction and to distinguish the real from the unreal. Its value is not referential, but metaphorical, as it provides another form of cognition that occurs much less through questioning and inquiry, and much more due to the effect of enchanting. It is therefore constituted within another cultural matrix that supports the drama staged in the scene analyzed.

### **IN O REI DO GADO**

The scene of *O Rei do Gado* unites the farmer Bruno Mezenga (Antônio Fagundes) and Regino (Jackson Antunes). Bruno is the protagonist of the soap opera, a man who owns lands in the Southeast, Central-West and South regions of Brazil. The cattle breeder lives in Ribeirão Preto (SP), being the creator of *gado de corte* (beef cattle), hence the nickname *rei do gado* (Cattle King). Mezenga shows off a capitalist stubbornness for expanding his properties and advocates that a person must win on their own merits, dictate the rules, and not establish dependency with the State, except in terms of tax benefits and credit. The farmer rejects the nickname of *coronel*, nonetheless still possessing a constitution that is based on *mando*. Mezenga has the conciliatory tendency of preserving everything as is. In the plot, when one of his farms is invaded by landless farmworkers, he avoids confrontation and tries to take them away to other settlements.

Regino is the leader of rural landless workers. He is an honest man with propensity for rural work, no party affiliation, and who confronts other leaders of the movement. It was in Regino’s camp that Bruno met his second wife, Luana (Patrícia Pillar), a woman whose true identity is unknown. In return to the care that Regino and his wife Jacira (Ana Beatriz Nogueira) provided the lady, Bruno meets with the landless to propose them a deal. This is the scene motto of chapter 109, shown in a rerun in Canal Viva, whose frames are highlighted in Figure 4.

The setting is the office of Mezenga's house, in Ribeirão Preto. By following this dialog with regards to visuality allowed us to see, at first, the interlocutors under equal positions, sitting face to face, discussing possibilities that are apparently profitable for both. Then, through the blatant posture of the *coronel*, with his finger up, followed by the fraught expressions of Regino, we note that these possibilities were put on hold. Subsequently, no longer under equal positions, but with a total rupture in communication between both, we visualize Regino standing with his back towards Mezenga, with certain expressions, first anguish, then sadness and disappointment; this way, we realize that there was no longer anything in common between the two.

The first frame shows Bruno's neck, a perspective through which we visualize Regino at front. The leader of the landless is in the darkest part of the scenario, with blue shade, relatively distanced from his interlocutor. Both are sitting opposite each other. In the next frame, the joint plane allows to observe more clearly the distinct positions both of them occupy in the scene: Bruno is situated at the most lightened and adorned area.



FIGURE 4 – *O Rei do Gado*: associations between the positioning of actors, scenario and facial expressions

Source: *O Rei...* (1996)

Between the interlocutors there is Bruno's work desk, with papers, folders and envelopes. On the wall in the background, there are paintings with countryside motifs, and the edge of the table (next to Regino), there is a sculpture of a bullock cart. These decorative elements function as expressing the nature of business the protagonist undergoes, the cattle breeding; the volume of paper denoting the extension of these businesses. The table is a suggestive scenic element, it could not only provide a metaphor for the *chasm* that separates the





interlocutors in terms of power, but also the dimension of negotiation between would-be members.

The positioning and facial expressions of the actors in the scene are also elements that express differentiation when compared to the scene analyzed earlier. In Tião's case, the distinction between who is in charge and who obeys is set since the beginning – the worker is not even offered a sit – and his posture is completely subservient. Here, in Regino's case, we have a starting position of dialog, of negotiation, of proposition between members – even if under unequal conditions, which can be noticed by Regino's crestfallen posture while sitting in front of Mezenga.

Regino is visibly restricted to that space. In the frames where he is prominent, in median plane, the background appears dark and blurry, in a scenario that suggests the character is immersed in a universe of doubts. In the fourth frame of the first line, next to the head of the character, a lampshade is the only source of light this framing. Quite often, Regino's sight is directed towards the floor, very rarely facing his interlocutor. The scene continues without BG.

Bruno starts the business proposition by emphasizing the Regino's moral virtues (honesty, sense of justice and his pacifying nature), even in the face of the difficulties in leading the landless to settlements amidst clashes and massacres. It is interesting to note that, in order to formalize the proposal of conceding cattle ranching lands to the cornered Regino, Bruno takes him out the the camp and hosts him, with his wife and son, at the mansion, ensuring them all the comfort possessions allow. The third frame of the first line corresponds to the moment when Bruno makes the proposal in a short-phrased dialog:

REGINO – But how?

BRUNO – How, I fix 'it.

REGINO – But what 'bout the lands?

BRUNO – The lands, I fix 'it.

REGINO – Yes sir, Bruno sir. What 'bout the cattle?

BRUNO – The oxes, I provide 'em, at least until you start. And I also teach how to deal with them.

In the fourth frame, Regino expresses contentment due to the proposal, understanding that there will be, on Bruno Mezenga's part, the donation of an extension of land for him and his people. Regino asks: "Well, then, I want you to tell me, what do we have to do to deserve all'a this good will?". The farmer says, sharply: "It ain't outta good will, not really, Regino. I'm proposing you a deal. I'm not gonna give you no thing for free. Neither the land, nor the



oxes, nor the help you need. Y'all gonna pay me with work". In the second line, at the climax of the dialog, Bruno elucidates the nature of the proposal, involving abandoning the landless cause and work for the farmer a regime of production partnership. Thus, the framing alternates between the foreground and utmost foreground, as the minutiae of the business will be detailed by Bruno, with his finger up.

The third line corresponds to the moment in which we observe the most sensitive change among the interlocutors. Regino listens to the proposal and interrupts the dialog. They are not negotiating on the same grounds. The *price* for entering society is too high to Regino. Here there is no more willingness to dialog, evidenced by the position that Regino assumes in the scene: he stays with his back to the cattle king, who smokes a pipe – another emblem of power. There is no search for consensus, there are instead interests in opposite directions, as can be seen in the second and fourth frames presented in Figure 4. At this moment, Regino, in the foreground, is shown under more light, emphasizing the moment in which it was confirmed: the landless leader cannot take the entire group of rural workers into the new farm.

There is a transition and Regino, once again clearly framed in the foreground, asks: "But what do I do with the others?" The camera then derives to the left and frames Bruno, who responds, without taking the pipe out of his mouth, firmly and sound: "That, you're gonna have to solve, Regino". The camera derives, once more, in reverse movement, framing Regino's sadness in the utmost foreground. The dialog ends with a suspense-inducing BG that contributes to the figuration of the relationship established between both of them. On the one hand, the cattle king, being in a position of power, is able to provide a deal that de-articulates a social movement. On the other, Regino, figuring as the *victim*, facing an ethical and moral dilemma: abandoning his convictions to prosper individually.

In *O Rei do Gado*, the visual materiality analyzed suggests that the debate about lands is based on the matrix of *mandonismo*; however, there is a detachment, a kind of distancing from the matrix of marvelous realism. Unlike the previous scene, referentiality here is more political, economic and social. In this soap opera, the characters speak in favor of land reform, subject of the speeches of senator Caxias that criticize and disqualify governmental actions to solve the problem of land distribution in the country. We believe that this historic moment was timely, because at the time, 1996, the Landless Workers Movement (MST) had representativeness in national press with the actions of settlements and after the massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás (PA)<sup>20</sup>.

In the case of *O Rei do Gado*, the posture and positioning of Regino on the scene expresses certain isolation, something that occurs similarly with

<sup>20</sup> On 17 April 1996, landless rural workers (MST members) were protesting, on highway BR-155, against the delay in the land expropriation of *Fazenda Macaxeira*. The Military Police was tasked with clearing the highway connecting Belém to the south of the state. During the confrontation, nineteen rural workers were killed with gunfire at close range.



another character who claims the land reform, senator Caxias – and both die in the economy of the plot. Based on a political conception on land distribution measures, we can see the concept present in *O Rei do Gado* that land is for producing, compared to the notion that land is for concentrating – hence, once again the matrix of *mandonismo*. Researchers on the land issue in Brazil and Latin America (Janvry; Sadoulet, 2002) observe that most countries in this region have historically experienced unfinished agrarian reforms, as the access to land was not accompanied by a set of institutional reforms capable of ensuring productivity and competitiveness for beneficiaries. For the authors, incomplete reforms translate into one more variable for explaining the poverty and inequality of the region.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Analyzing the framings as well as the visual and sound operations of the two scenes was shown to be important, as it reveals the way how in television and soap operas these resources integrate each other as auxiliary constructs not only of acting in its technical aspect, but also in the subjective and narrative dimension. Each scene refers to characters gathered in a private deal in which it is exposed their difference in terms of power. In both of them, we have two characters with no possessions under an ethical dilemma involving lands: in Tião's case, sacrificing a son to get rich; in Regino's, abandoning the landless leadership for his own advantage.

Both proposals involve a sense of patronage. In Tião's case, this would be the result of an alliance with an entity that would facilitate access to land, given that this worker is disillusioned. In *Renascença*, there is a symbiosis between the matrices of marvelous realism and *mandonismo*, personified in the figure of the coronel, whose power affects the land and the mobility in the structure of social classes. Tião Galinha himself, when inquired by his wife on his stubbornness on getting rich, in a previous scene of the same chapter, says: "But I want to be the boss! When God made the world, Joana, he gave land to no one. The smarter ones took 'em". Again, this is an expression of the marvelous, as the character lives and acts in the world of non-disjunction between the historic and the miraculous, between the rational and the imaginary.

In *O Rei do Gado*, there is a displacement, a change in the approach of the land subject. Here, the *mandonismo* matrix enters the stage. In the clash between Mezenga and Regino, the rural worker is also put under an ethical dilemma, but the cognitive key to resolution is rational. To Regino, the stalemate in land distribution would be solved in knowing how many unclaimed lands in the country there are and how many families can be settled in these areas. Within

Regino, aside from his sense of leadership, there is a sense of collectivity, thus leading him to decline the proposal of Bruno Mezenga – even more: he refuses the said partnership with the cattle king of whom the soap opera is named – which could render this character the structure of *hero/pursuer of justice*.

Although we observe this change in the approach of the land subject in *Renascer* and *O Rei do Gado*, three aspects remain in common: i) the land issue assumes an insolubility character; ii) poverty and few opportunities of mobility in social structure given the concentration of lands; iii) and the complex articulations between tradition and modernity, archaic and modern, continuities and discontinuities that characterize Latin American cultures. This way, the two soap operas by Benedito Ruy Barbosa, if considered at the same time, reveal a *espejo trizado* in which it is possible to observe a complex socio-cultural net that endorses the affirmation by Brunner (1994: 69): “in a society there are distinct societies”<sup>21</sup>.

The importance and the opportunity of analyzing the visual experience offered by television is highlighted, since through the compound image/word/sound slips the history and culture that supports the land issue in the works analyzed. The imbrication, interweaving of these matrices exposes our experience with modernity and the importance of the soap opera as a cultural product in Latin America. In terms of perspective, this research reveals the power the soap opera possesses in interacting with daily sociopolitical subjects, configuring itself as an aesthetic and cultural experience. However, this does not imply, as it seems to prevail in most of the approaches regarding this medium, a submission of television production towards the discourses and analyses whose theoretical references and even ideological positions come before considering materiality itself.

The bias of the land issue varies according to the traits of each work (rural plots, urban plots, historical and contemporary plots). The representations of *mando* and land ownership go through the teledramaturgy of Barbosa and explain how these issues are still valid in our political agenda. Land, in Barbosa’s work, presents an unstable character: it is at times an issue discussed in the characters’ dialogs, at times the scenario for the action of the characters (conflicts, ambushes, massacres, land-grabbing, etc.) and other times handling the condition of almost character of the plots, expressing some relationship of contiguity with human nature. Thus, land and man intertwine within the universal aspect of existence. ■

<sup>21</sup>In the original: “en una sociedad existen sociedades distintas”.

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