Racial Representation in Brazilian Soap Operas (2014 to 2018)

Representação Racial em Novelas Brasileiras (2014 à 2018)

Larissa Goulart[*]

Abstract: This paper aims to investigate racial representation in Brazilian Soap Operas broadcasted by the main TV channel – Globo – in the past 5 years. In order to do so the number of total characters and the number of black characters for each soap opera was counted, as well as the number of black writers and directors. The analyses show that racial representation continues to be an issue in Brazilian soap operas, with just over 15% of all characters in the soap operas analyzed being black. Furthermore, it is possible to see that there is even less representation of black people in the production of soap operas. This study finishes with a discussion of how racial representation affects socialization and acculturation in Brazil.

Keywords: Racial Representation. Soap Operas. Socialization.

Resumo: Esse trabalho busca investigar a representação racial em novelas brasileiras transmitidas pela principal rede de televisão do país – Globo – nos últimos cinco anos. Para cumprir com esse objetivo, o número total e o número de personagens negros foram avaliados, assim como, o número de autores e diretores negros. Essa análise demonstra que a representação racial continua a ser uma questão em novelas brasileiras, com apenas 15% de todos os personagens das novelas analisadas sendo negros. Ademais, é possível perceber que há ainda menos representatividade negra na produção de novelas (com diretores e autores). Esse estudo encerra com uma discussão acerca de como a representação racial afeta a socialização e aculturação no Brasil.

Palavras-Chave: Representação Racial. Novelas. Socialização.

1. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to discuss racial representation of black people[1] in Brazilian soap operas from 2014 to 2018. As van Dijk (1987), Jackson (2014), Ward (2003)

---

[*] PhD student in Applied Linguistics at Northern Arizona University, former Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln.

[1] When talking about racial representation in this paper I am referring to black people, nevertheless I acknowledge the fact that other races are also - sometimes - represented in soap operas, such as native Brazilians and Asian immigrants.

24

and Hill (2007) point out, media has the power to influence our values, traditions and beliefs. Therefore, it is important to discuss how race is portrayed in Brazilian soap operas, since these television programs reach a considerable amount of people in Brazil and in other countries.

In order to illustrate that, in 2012 the Mozambican writer Paulina Chiziane visited Brazil for the First Biennial Festival of Books and Reading in Brasilia. During this visit she talked about how Mozambicans have an image of Brazil that is highly influenced by two things: the Brazilian evangelical churches, which are currently spreading through Mozambique, and the image of Brazil that soap operas give. Regarding this last point she says:

> For us, Mozambicans, the image of Brazil is of a country of whites, or at most, mixed race. The only successful black Brazilian we know is Pelé. In soap operas, which are the responsible for defining the image of Brazil we have, we see black people as loaders or as housekeepers. In the top (of social representation) are the whites. This is the image Brazil is selling to the world.[1] (Chiziane, in interview 2012)

Chiziane highlights the role that soap operas plays in representing Brazilian society outside of Brazil. Later in her interview, she also said that these representations are not only dangerous to the outside world, but also within Brazilian society as these images normalize the way black people are treated. Chiziane (in interview, 2012) said: "after seeing white people calling the shots and black people sweeping, and carrying things, the Mozambican thinks that these situations are normal[2]."

Chiziaine is not the only foreigner to discuss the role of Brazilian soaps in representing Brazilian society. Angela Davis in a visit to Brazil in 2014 said that "every time I come to Brazil, I watch TV to see how the country represents itself. Based on Brazilian television, it would be impossible to imagine that the country's population is

---

[1] This, and all subsequent excerpts in Portuguese, were translated into English by the author. Original: "Para nós, moçambicanos, a imagem do Brasil é a de um país branco ou, no máximo, mestiço. O único negro brasileiro bem-sucedido que reconhecemos como tal é o Pelé. Nas telenovelas, que são as responsáveis por definir a imagem que temos do Brasil, só vemos negros como carregadores ou como empregados domésticos. No topo [da representação social] estão os brancos. Esta é a imagem que o Brasil está vendendo ao mundo" (Chiziane, in interview 2012)

[2] Original: "de tanto ver nas novelas o branco mandando e o negro varrendo e carregando, o moçambicano passa a ver tal situação como aparentemente normal"

mainly black[3]" (Davis, in interview 2014). Davis' point is particularly interesting considering that in the last survey of the country, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)[4] concluded that 54.9% of the population considers itself either black or mixed race.

The viewpoints presented by both Chiziane and Davis illustrate how soap operas play an extensive role in representing Brazilian society. The impact of soap operas is twofold: first, they determine how the outside world views Brazil, arguably, having a greater influence in the image of Brazil than the news; second, they are relevant for ingroups of Brazilian communities who are socialized viewing these stereotypical Brazilian society on television.

Regarding socialization and media, Kramsch (1998, p. 131) states that socialization is "the process by which a person internalizes the conventions and behaviors imposed by a society or social group." In other words, socialization is the negotiation and establishment of the beliefs, values and worldviews accepted by a specific group. Therefore, as Jackson (2014, p. 51) argues, "culture is learned" and it is through socialization that a person learns the traditions of his/her group. Going further into this topic Jackson (2014, p. 58) explains that in primary socialization "elders and the media convey messages about what is expected in various situations and contexts." Thus, if, for instance, the media continuously conveys the message that black people are only apt to work in menial jobs, this might be normalized in society.

Additionally, it is through this primary socialization that "people develop expectations and shared understandings about the most appropriate ways to behave in different situations and contexts" (Jackson, 2014, p. 417). Therefore, when a person sees black characters always being subservient to white characters, or feeling ugly due to their skin color, this might be generalized to this person's interaction with the other members of the community. In a study that took into account specifically the socialization of black children, Stroman (1984, p. 79) suggested that "television might influence their attitudes

---

[3] Original: "sempre que venho ao Brasil, assisto à TV para ver como o país se representa. Pela TV brasileira, nunca seria possível imaginar que sua população é majoritariamente negra"

[4] available at https://ww2.ibge.gov.br/english/disseminacao/eventos/missao/instituicao.shtm

toward their own racial group (...) and compete with Black families socialization by teaching attitudes and behaviors that are not taught at home".

Littlefield (2008, p. 676), when discussing the influence of media on socialization, argues that "the media are the primary agent of socialization in which participants are seduced, educated, and transformed by ideas concerning race, gender, and class on a global level". Therefore, as mentioned above, media contributes as a key factor to define self-identity, especially, for young viewers (Milkie, 1999).

Another point to be considered in the case of Brazil is the amount of exposure to media outlets. According to Faria and Potter (1999, p. 254) "adults watch more than three hours of television per day on average and children watch more than three hours while youth from 14 to 25 watch fewer hours". Thus, members of Brazilian society are being battered by different representations of their society. And, as Stroman (1984, p. 79) suggests, "television is being added to the list of institutions assuming key roles in the socialization process".

Considering this, the goal of this paper is to investigate racial representation in Brazilian soap operas over the past five years. The research questions that will guide this study are:

- What is the proportion of black actors in soap operas?
- What is the proportion of black writers and directors in soap operas?
- What professions are assigned to black characters?

In order to answer these questions this paper is divided in six sections. In the next section, I define the genre of Brazilian soap operas. In the following section, the history of racial representation in Brazilian soap operas is presented. Next, the methodology of this study is described. Then, the results are presented followed by a discussion of the answers to the research questions based on the results. The last section presents the limitations of this study as well as some suggestions for future investigations on this topic.

2. Brazilian Soaps Operas

In this section the differences between the genres of soap operas, *telenovelas* and *novelas* are introduced. In addition, some numbers related to soap opera audiences are discussed and previous research on the impact of soap operas in the national identity are presented.

In this paper I chose to adopt the term "soap opera" as the English translation for the Portuguese *novelas*. However, it is worth highlighting the differences between American soap operas, Latin American *telenovelas* and Brazilian *novelas* as they are used interchangeably by many authors but, actually, constitute different genres.

First, unlike American soap operas, *novelas* are not infinite, they usually have a start and an end date, varying from six to 12 months on air. Their duration can be extended or shortened according to its popularity with the audience (Campos and Feres Junior, 2015). Another difference between *novelas* and soap operas, according to Slade and Beckenham (2005), is that each episode of a *novela* is recorded not long before they air, therefore, the storylines are adapted according to the audience reception. Whereas, soap operas episodes are usually recorded a considerable time before showing on TV. In other words, *novelas* are an "open genre" (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1990, p. 41) that might be influenced by social institutions, such as the church or non-governmental organizations.

Second, *novelas* involve larger numbers of characters than its American counterparts. These characters are part of different narrative settings within the same storyline (Campos and Feres Junior, 2015). In this last point Brazilian *novelas* are similar to the Latin American *telenovelas,* which also have many narratives in one storyline. Nevertheless, Brazilian *novelas* tend to have a higher level of technical and artistic quality, which is a result of the great financial investment made in each episode. According to De Melo (1998) each episode of a *novela* costs around $125,000, this sum is about 15 times more than the investment by the Mexican Televisa, the main producer of *telenovelas* in Latin America. In addition, *telenovelas* have a tendency to be "corny and old fashioned, while *novelas* are better intellectually, and more realistic" (De Melo, 1988). This perception of *telenovelas* as "corny" might be due to their focus on melodramatic and romantic stories, while *novelas* tend to usually focus on political and economic conflicts. Considering this distinction between *telenovelas* and *novelas*, Campos and Feres Junior

(2015, p. 03) state that *telenovelas* focus on the private lives of its characters, while *novelas* are an "instrument of dissemination (and creation) of an understanding of a national identity, and its alleged national characteristics, conundrums and challenges"[5]. Also, in the past few years *novelas* have focused on storylines that "relate to the daily life of Brazilian population - mainly in urban areas" (Faria and Potter, 1999, p. 256).

Finally, the main difference between soap operas, *telenovelas* and *novelas* is that *novelas* are viewed by the "vast majority of the Brazilian population, regardless of social class" (La Ferrara, Chong and Duryea, 2012, p. 01), while *telenovelas* and soap operas tend to be associated with people from lower economic background. La Ferrera, Chong and Duryea (2012, p. 06) attribute the popularity of Brazilian soap operas to the language and the settings chosen. According to these authors

> novelas are set up in easily recognizable locations and deal with the daily life of Brazilians, so that viewers can relate to the story. Second, novelas use a colloquial language, a typical middle-class setup, and often include an element of social mobility that is appealing to viewers. (La Ferrera, Chong and Duryea, 2012, p.06)

Access to television is also a factor that contributes to the success of *novelas* across different social classes. Almost everybody living in urban areas have access to a television, while in rural areas this access reaches at least half of the population (La Ferrara, Chong and Duryea, 2012, p.05; Faria and Potter, 1999, p. 253).

At this point, it is relevant to discuss the audience of Brazilian soap operas. According to The Economist[6], 91 million people tune in everyday to the main Brazilian network, Globo. Considering only the audience of soap operas, 80 percent of the country's audience tune in to the prime-time soap opera. This success in audience also feeds into the quality of soap operas as this attracts the best actors and screenwriters to the productions (Faria and Potter, 1999, 253; Straubhaar, 2012, p.21). One example of the influence soap operas have in Brazilian society is baby-naming patterns. According to La Ferrera, Chong and Duryea (2012, p.03), there is a 33 percent probability of a baby name being the same

---

[5] original: "A telenovela brasileira tornou-se também um instrumento de difusão (e formação) de uma compreensão de identidade nacional, de suas supostas características essenciais, dilemas e desafios."

[6] https://www.economist.com/news/business/21603472-brazils-biggest-media-firm-flourishing-old-fashioned-business-model-globo-domination, access on 25th of April.

𝓛*ittera* 𝓞*nline*
n.17, 2018
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras | Universidade Federal do Maranhão

as one of the main characters of the soap opera aired at the time the baby was born if the area where the parents lived had access to Globo signal, and only 8.5 percent if it did not. Therefore, as Faria and Potter (1999, p.255) argue, "television in Brazil has become the main medium available for society to think about itself, to learn about itself, and to discuss itself. Watching television is almost essential for getting to know what is going on in the country".

La Ferrara, Chong and Duryea (2012, p. 01) emphasize, specifically, the role of soap operas in creating an image of Brazilian society. According to them, "a wide range of messages and values, including important ones for development policy, have the potential to reach households through the screen." Other authors also corroborate this view that soap operas are a major influence in Brazilian societies. Porto (2008, p. 02), for example, argues that "telenovelas have become a central 'mass ceremony' in which images of nationhood have been negotiated in Brazil." Faria and Potter (1999, p. 253) say that novelas present an image of "lifestyles, family values sexuality, and reproductive behaviours, which influence values, often unintentionally, and through a variety of routes". Faria and Fernandes (2007, p. 04) argue that "soap operas are responsible for the elaboration and spread of identity models"[7]. In other words, Brazilian soap operas permeate all levels and instances of Brazilian society, having an impact not only on how Brazilian people view their own society, but also in other aspects such as policy planning, political alignment[8], etc. As Faria and Potter (1999, p. 254) state, there is a link between access to Brazilian television and the "likelihood of this medium of influencing and homogenizing values and preferences". Finally, Hamburger (1999) suggests that while soap operas have been created to discuss the nation, they have actually become the way the nation imagines itself.

The previous paragraphs argue that soap operas influence how Brazilians view and perform their Brazilian identity. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Chiziane's interview, soap operas are also exported to other countries where they are subtitled or dubbed into foreign

---

[7] Original: "A telenovela é responsável por elaborar e propagar modelos identitários que serão referência para o espectador"

[8] Mattos (2016) dissertation argues that the soap opera *Roque Santeiro* had its script altered because it influenced the population to vote to a certain candidate in the presidential elections.

languages, influencing how these other countries perceive Brazilian society. In these countries, soap operas are informing their opinion of an outgroup, Brazilians. In order to understand the extent to which soap operas are widespread worldwide, I present next some of the numbers related to soap opera exportation.

In 1981, Globo, the main Brazilian network, had already sold the rights to their soap operas to 79 countries (Gouvea Neto, 1997). One of the most successful soap operas of all times, *O Clone* (2001), aired in 98 countries and was remade in Spanish with Colombian actors. In total, in the past 40 years Globo has sold 130 soap operas to 170 countries. So, the image of Brazil portrayed in these soap operas are being propagated around the world.

Finally, the purpose of this section was to describe the differences between soap operas, *telenovelas* and *novela*s; to discuss the impact of Brazilian soap operas in the country's society and the spread of soap operas around the world. In the next section, a brief history of Black people representation in Brazilian television is presented.

3. The history of black people in Brazilian television

In this section, I discuss the main milestones of racial representation in Brazilian television since its beginning. The goal of this section is to provide context to the results of this investigation.

When discussing racial representation in Brazilian television, some critics, like Miceli (1972, p.167), have argued that "the products of Brazil's cultural industry never represented a Brazilian mass culture, these cultural expressions represent only a fragment of some social segments, such as an elite, or middle class ideology". This can be noticed by the representation of black characters in soap operas through time. The issue of racial representation in Brazil is somewhat tumultuous due to the belief that a racial democracy has been established in the country. This belief proposes an erasure of the historical past of Black people, while it also presents the population through a white-washed perspective in which most people are of mixed race origins (Giorgi, Almeida and Paiva, 2015).

The history of racial representation in Brazilian soap operas started in 1964, when Isaura Bruno portrayed one of the central roles in *O Direito de Nascer*. Her character was

a black maid, called Maria Dolores, who raised a white boy (the main character) as her own son. This soap opera was a huge success according to press of the time, even religious ceremonies and sessions of the Senate changed their schedule as not to coincide with the soap opera finale (Ortiz, Borelli, & Ramos, 1991, p. 62). Even though, the actress enjoyed a relative moment of fame after the soaps finale and went on to act in other three soap operas, she died as an unknown selling candy on the streets to make a living (Araújo, 2000).

After this first portrayal of a black character in soap operas, one of the most outrageous facts related to racial representation took place. In 1969, for the first time, a soap opera, *A Cabana do Pai Tomás*, would have two black characters in the leading roles. This, however, did not translate into two black actors portraying these main characters. While the leading female role was portrayed by Ruth de Souza, a black actress, the leading male role was portrayed by a white actor, who had his face painted black for the soap opera. According to Araújo (2000) the use of blackface was due to pressures of the main sponsor of the production, Colgate-Palmolive, to have this actor in the main role.

Another case of racial misrepresentation that caused indignation was the soap opera *Escrava Isaura* (1976). While the title character of the soap opera is a mixed race slave called Isaura, the main actress, Lucelia Santos, cast to play the slave, was white. *Escrava Isaura* was a particularly famous soap opera, being the first soap opera to air in former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, which only caused more discussion among black people in Brazil (Araujo, 2000).

A positive milestone in the history of racial representation was the soap opera *Pecado Capital* (1975). This was the first soap to show a black character as part of the middle class. According to Araújo (2000) the actor, Milton Gonçalves, pleaded to the soap opera writer, Janet Clair, to have a character that would wear suits and ties. This soap opera is also an example of how "authors are key and dominant figures in the production and broadcasting process. They decided the whole plot, modifications to the storyline, casting, and even what would be 'merchandised' in their telenovelas." (Farias and Potter, 1999, p.257). In the end, Milton Gonçalves portrayed a therapist who graduated in Harvard and had lived many years in Europe.

One of the negative cases of racial representation were the adaptations of books written by the famous Brazilian author Jorge Amado. While in the books the main characters are mixed race or black, in all three productions *Gabriela* (1975), *Terras do Sem Fim* (1981), and *Tieta (*1989) the leading roles were given to white actors and actresses (Grijo and Souza, 2012).

After showing black characters as part of the middle class, the next step for soap operas was to show interracial relationships. In 1984, the soap *Corpo a Corpo* generated a wave of debate in Brazilian society by presenting an interracial couple composed of the black architect, Sônia Nascimento, who came from a relatively wealthy family, and the engineer Cláudio. In the story, the family of the man was against their relationship due to the woman's race. Outside the screen people protested against the couple with the argument that it was not believable that a white man would be in love with a black woman (Araújo, 2000). It was only in 1995, with the soap opera *A Próxima Vítima*, that another interracial couple would appear on Brazilian television again. In this soap, one of the daughters of a middle class black family started a relationship with a white man. This caused some problems to the couple as the family of the woman did not accept her relationship with a white man.

One of the main achievements in racial representation happened in 1996 with *Xica da Silva*. This was the first time the leading role in a Brazilian soap opera was given to a black actress. Taís Araújo portrayed Xica da Silva, a slave who got romantically involved with a white representative of the Portuguese Crown in Brazil. After this, Taís Araújo has also played the main character in other seven TV shows, followed by other black or mixed-race actress, Camila Pitanga and Juliana Paes, who have also portrayed leading roles in the past ten years (Campos and Feres Júnior, 2015).

This brief history of racial representation in soap operas shows its slow development in these TV shows. Campos and Feres Júnior (2015) studied the racial representation among the main characters of Brazilian soap operas that were broadcasted between the years of 1984 and 2014. Their research analyzed gender relations in racial representation, region and location where the soap opera was set and the era in time that the soap opera should portray. Their findings suggest that, on average, only 8.7% of the

main cast is composed of black actors and actresses. Furthermore, in the soap operas analyzed, some locations and eras are associated to a larger proportion of black actors, for instance, when the soap opera is set in *favelas* (slums) or in poor communities, or when it is set during the Regency times, when Brazilian society still used slave-labor. Hence, even though there is an increase representation of Black people in soap operas, they are only associated to a specific part of society.

The aim of this section was to discuss the history of black characters in Brazilian soap operas in order to provide a background for this study. The next section will present the methodology adopted to collect and analyze the data.

4. Methodology

The goal of this section is to explain the methodology adopted to collect data for this research. As previously mentioned, this paper attempts to explore the amount of black characters in the soap operas broadcasted in the past five years (2014 to 2018). In order to do that I have followed almost the same steps as Campos and Feres Júnior (2015).

First, in the same way as the authors previously mentioned, I analysed only Globo soap operas. The reasons for this is that Globo is the main network in Brazil and the fourth biggest commercial network in the world, after ABC, CBS and NBC (La Ferrara, Chong and Duryea, 2012, p.05). Furthermore, as Faria and Potter (1999, p. 256) state, "although several networks try to emulate Globo soap operas, and eventually make good and successful soap operas, these are Globo's specialty and greatest strength". Finally, it would not be feasible to analyze soap operas produced by other networks due to the lack of information available online about soap operas produced by these networks.

The second step was to select the corpus of soap operas being investigated. As Campos and Feres Júnior (2015) study extended until 2014, I have decided to start collecting data from the point where they stopped until the soap operas that are currently on air. The table below presents the soap operas that are part of the corpus of research. In

the first column is the title of the soap opera, followed by the time it was broadcasted, six, seven or nine pm[9], its duration and the number (N) of episodes aired.

Table 1 - Soap Operas studied

Title	Time	Duration	N[10]
Boogie Oogie	Six	August 4th, 2014 - March 6th, 2015	185
Sete Vidas	Six	March 9th, 2015 - July 10th, 2015	106
Além do Tempo	Six	July 13th, 2015 - January 15th, 2016	161
Êta Mundo Bom	Six	January 18th, 2016 - August 26th, 2016	190
Sol Nascente	Six	August 29th, 2016 - March 21st, 2017	175
Novo Mundo	Six	March 22nd, 2017 - September 25th, 2017	160
Tempo de Amar	Six	September 26th, 2017 - March 19th, 2018	148
Orgulho e Paixão	Six	March 20th, 2018	
Alto Astral	Seven	November 3rd, 2014 - May 9th, 2015	161
Paraisópolis	Seven	May 11th, 2015 - November 7th, 2015	154
Totalmente Demais	Seven	November 9th, 2015 - May 30th, 2016	175
Haja Coração	Seven	May 31st, 2016 - November 8th, 2016	138
Rock Story	Seven	November 9th, 2016 - June 5th, 2017	179
Pega Pega	Seven	June 6th, 2017 - January 8th, 2018	184

---

[9] Three original soap operas are broadcasted everyday: the first one at six tends to have a more romantic theme, usually being set in a time of the past. The second one, broadcasted at seven pm has humorous connotations, and the last one broadcasted at nine shows political and social discussions.

[10] For the soap operas that are still on air the column for the number of episodes was left blank.

Deus Salve o Rei	Seven	January 9th, 2018	
Império	Nine	July 21st, 2014 - March 13th, 2015	203
Babilônia	Nine	March 16th, 2015 - August 28th, 2015	143
A Regra do Jogo	Nine	August 31st, 2015 - March 11th, 2016	167
Velho Chico	Nine	March 14th, 2016 - September 30th, 2016	172
A Lei do Amor	Nine	October 3rd, 2016 - March 31st, 2017	155
Força do Querer	Nine	April 3rd, 2017 - October 20th, 2017	172
O Outro Lado do Paraíso	Nine	October 23rd, 2017	

Source: the author based on information found at

https://gshow.globo.com/novelas

Next, I proceeded with the data collection. As soap operas run for a considerable amount of time, it would be impossible to watch all the episodes of the 22 soap operas analyzed here. Therefore, I relied on the soap opera's official website as a reference for the soap opera's cast. These official websites are available at https://gshow.globo.com/novelas. The information collected from the official websites were: the total number of characters and the name of the actors who portrayed them. Unlike Campos and Feres Júnior (2015), who analysed just the actors in the main storyline, I have decided to analyze all the actors in the soap operas.

The fourth step of this investigation was to determine the number of black actors in each soap opera. As Campos and Feres Júnior (2015, p. 05) state, "race is a social construction that is arbitrarily based on body marks, therefore all classification of subjects based on their images is subject to disagreements". Hence, any type of classification, especially one that attempts to classify race, is bound to have controversies. In order to try to lessen the extent of this problem, I adopted the same approach as Campos and Feres

Júnior (2015). Based on the photos of the actors available online, two researchers[11] have separately classified the actors in black (black or mixed race) or white, and then compared the classification. When an agreement could not be reached, a third person was asked to help in the classification. The same procedure was conducted for the main writers and directors of the soap operas.

Finally, information about the profession of the characters was collected, when available. Many characters did not have this information available, therefore when taking into account the professions of black characters they were divided in four categories: unknown, children, workers and bosses. In the category "workers", housekeepers, drivers, waiters, receptionists, secretaries were included, while in "bosses", the owners of different establishments, managers, lawyers, advertisers, etc were included. This division of professions might be considered simplistic, however it was an attempt to rely on the information of the soap opera's website without having to proceed to a deep analysis of each character. Furthermore, it is common for soap operas to portray social mobility, thus, the professions used for the categorization were the ones the characters had at the beginning of the soap opera. The aim of this section was to present how the data for this study was gathered. In the next section I present the results of this investigation.

5. Results

The purpose of this section is to present and discuss the results of this investigation. Table 2, below, shows in the first column the title of the soap opera, followed by the total amount of characters, the amount of black characters, the percentage of black characters and the two last columns show the writers and directors responsible for the soap opera. The underlined in the last two columns marks the black writers or directors.

Table 2 – Number of Black actors, directors and writers

---

[11] I would like to thank applied linguistics students at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul for helping me with this part of the methodology. All the researchers that classified the actors were Brazilians.

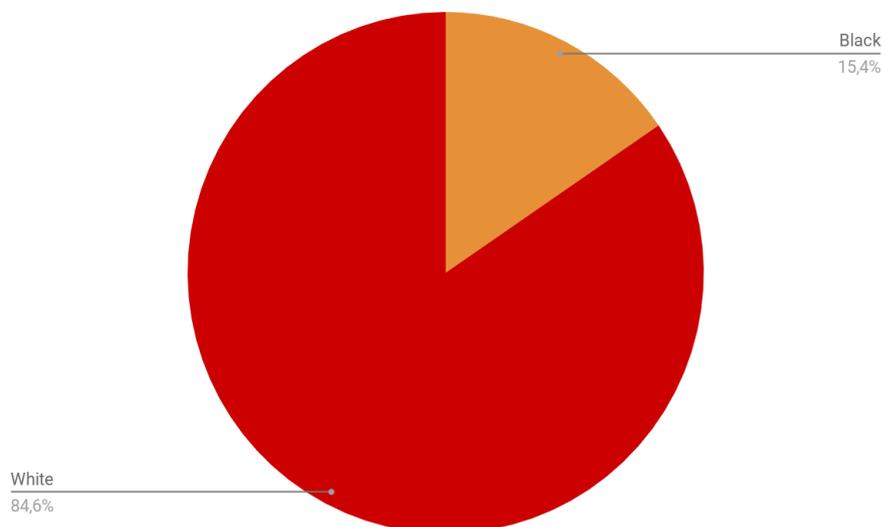| Title	Total	Black	Percentage	Writer	Director
Boogie Oogie	42	3	7.14%	Rui Vilhena	Ricardo Waddington Gustavo Fernandez
Sete Vidas	33	2	6.06%	Lícia Manzo Daniel Adjafre	Jayme Monjardim
Além do Tempo	37	3	8.10%	Elizabeth Jhin	Pedro Vasconcelos
Êta Mundo Bom	42	3	7.14%	Walcyr Carrasco	Jorge Fernando
Sol Nascente	32	7	21.8%	Walther Negrão Julio Fischer Suzana Pires	Leonardo Nogueira
Novo Mundo	50	7	14%	Thereza Falcão Alessandro Marson	Vinicius Coimbra
Tempo de Amar	49	8	16.32%	Alcides Nogueira	Jayme Monjardim
Orgulho e Paixão	37	3	8.10%	Marcos Bernstein	Fred Mayrink
Alto Astral	48	4	8.33%	Daniel Ortiz Silvio de Abreu	Jorge Fernando
Paraisópolis	51	7	13.72%	Alcides Nogueira Mario Teixeira	Wolf Maya Carlos Araujo
Totalmente Demais	49	16	32.65%	Paulo Halm Rosana Svartman	Luiz Henrique Rios
Haja Coração	45	1	2.2%	Daniel Ortiz	Teresa Lampreia Fred Mayrink
Rock Story	43	9	20.9%	Maria Helena Nascimento	Dennis Carvalho Maria de Medicis
Pega Pega	57	11	19.29%	Claudia Souto	Marcus Figueiredo Luiz Henrique Rios

Deus Salve o Rei	20	0	0%	Daniel Adjafre	Fabricio Mamberti
Império	66	8	12.12%	Aguinaldo Silva	Rogerio Gomes
Babilônia	58	13	22.41%	Gilberto Braga Ricardo Linhares João Ximenes Braga	Dennis Carvalho
A Regra do Jogo	55	10	18,18%	João Emanuel Carneiro	Amora Mautner
Velho Chico	38	18	47,36%	Benedito Ruy Barbosa Edmara Barbosa	Luís Fernando Carvalho
A Lei do Amor	61	8	13.11%	Maria Adelaide do Amaral Vincent Villari	Natália Grimberg Denise Saraceni
Força do Querer	46	8	17.39%	Gloria Perez	Pedro Vasconcelos
O outro lado do Paraíso	58	8	13.79%	Walcyr Carrasco	Mauro Mendonça Filho
Total	**1017**	**157**	**15.43%**	**Two**	**One**

Source: the author based on information found at

https://gshow.globo.com/novelas

As we can see from the table above, the average of black people in soap opera in the past five years is 15.43%. This number is bigger than the 8.7% found by Campos and Feres Júnior (2015), but still considerably below the 54.9% encountered in Brazilian society. Furthermore, the increase in the total amount of black characters when compared to Campos and Feres Júnior (2015) might be due to the changes in the methodology. While Campos and Feres Júnior (2015) only analyzed the characters in the main storyline, the investigation described here analyzed all the characters in the soap opera. Therefore, these results might indicate that black actors usually play parts in the supporting storylines of a soap opera, rather than in the main storyline.

Graph 1 - Amount of black characters in Brazilian soap operas

In total, four soap operas had the leading roles portrayed by a black actress: *Velho Chico, Babilônia* (Camila Pitanga), *Força do Querer* (Juliana Paes) and *Eta Mundo Bom* (Débora Nascimento). In addition, in two soap operas the main villain was portrayed by a black actress: *Alto Astral* (Débora Nascimento) and *Totalmente Demais* (Juliana Paes). This shows a development from the research conducted by Campos and Feres Júnior (2015), as in the 20 years analyzed by these authors, only eleven soap operas were headlined by black actors or actresses. Nevertheless, some of the issues perceived by these authors are still present. The first one is the non-representation of male black actors in leading roles, as can be seen, only female actresses were selected to be the main characters. The second one is the repetition of the same actresses. In Campos and Feres Júnior (2015) only three black actresses had portrayed leading roles in soap operas: Juliana Paes, Camila Pitanga and Taís Araújo. While the latter did not appear in any soap opera in the past five years, the former two continue to be recurrently the main characters with the addition of Débora Nascimento. Furthermore, as discussed by Campos and Feres Junior (2015), the race classification adopted on this research is, at least, troublesome as these three actresses might "pass" as white for some people, as it became clear from a recent UN Women

campaign, which had Juliana Paes to representing black women, the actress is not considered black by many Brazilians, especially black Brazilians[12].

The soap opera with the greatest amount of black actors was *Velho Chico*. In this soap opera most of the actors in the main storyline were portrayed by black people. Even though the amount of black characters in this soap opera might be due to the region of Brazil where it is set, in the state of Bahia where most of the population is black, they are from different social and economic background. Therefore, this soap opera does not reinforce the image of black people living only in poverty. The main characters, for example, are a wealthy family of farmers.

Another soap opera with a positive race representation was *Totalmente Demais*, in which the main villain was played by a black actress (Juliana Paes). Besides the villain, this soap opera also shows a family of middle class black people, in which each character is pursuing their own dreams. This might be a small step, but considering the research conducted by Campos and Feres Júnior (2015) and the considerations presented in Araújo (2000) having a depiction of black people as middle class, working in successful positions is a great achievement. It is worth pointing out that this was one of the few soap operas written by a black person.

One of the soap operas, *Deus Salve o Rei*, considered the Brazilian version of the HBO TV show Game of Thrones, does not have any black actors according to the soap's website. Looking deeper into this specific case, some news outlet report that there is one black character in the story who lives in the forest and is a clairvoyant[13], nevertheless she is not in the soap opera's official website. Furthermore, the reason given for not having any black characters is that in European Middle Ages, when the soap opera is set, there were no black people. This shows how soap opera writers and directors favor whiteness, as there
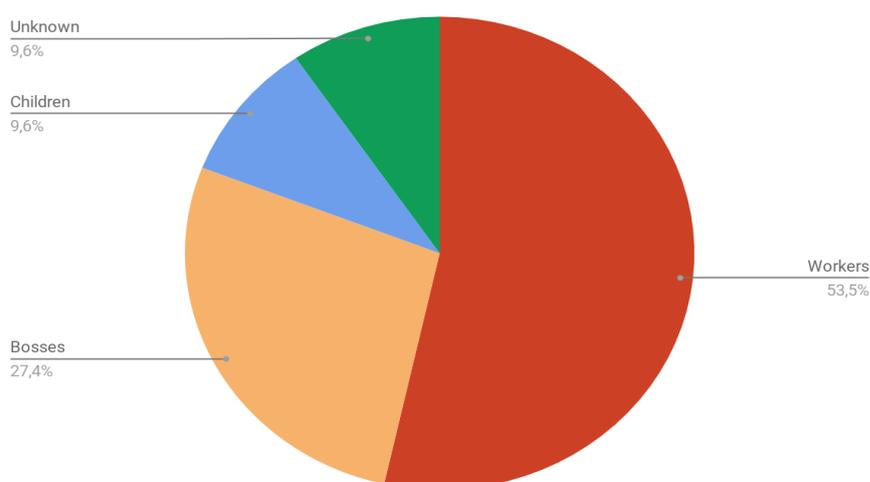
---

[12] https://www.instagram.com/p/BlqEXFtHk5R/?hl=pt-br&taken-by=onumulheresbr

[13]https://f5.folha.uol.com.br/colunistas/tonygoes/2018/01/por-que-quase-nao-ha-negros-no-elenco-de-deus-salve-o-rei.shtml

are cases, like the ones reported in the section above, of black characters being portrayed by white actors.

Taking into account the amount of black writers and directors, only two writers were black and one director was black. Furthermore, in the time span analyzed here each of them has worked in only one soap opera. As previously mentioned, in Brazilian soap operas writers and directors have a great influence in choosing the actors in their soap operas. Based on the data, it seems that the impact of having a black writers is bigger than having a black director, considering that the soap operas written by black authors, *Totalmente Demais* and *Sol Nascente*, were among the ones with the greatest amount of black actors in their cast. Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot be generalized taking into account the fact that only three people fell into this category.

Analyzing the occupation of the black characters in the 22 soap operas analyzed, 84 fall into the category of workers, 43 in the category of bosses, 15 in the children's category and 15 in did not have their profession on the official website. Graph 2, below, shows these results in percentage.

Graph 2 - Occupation of Black characters

Unknown 9,6%
Children 9,6%
Bosses 27,4%
Workers 53,5%

As we can see, the majority of black actors portray characters who are workers. This is due to the high number of housekeepers represented (21 out of 157). Even though this paper does not aim to analyze the relation of gender and professions, the data also show that all housekeepers characters were portrayed by female actresses.

Considering the depiction of black characters in the position of bosses, some soap operas are worth mentioning. Besides *Totalmente Demais* and *Velho Chico* already discussed in the paragraphs above, *Rock Story* and *Babilonia* also depict a great amount of its black characters as bosses. In *Rock Story,* six out of its nine characters are in occupations such as famous musicians, lawyers and physicians. In *Babilonia* five out of its 13 characters were politicians, lawyers or property owners, while six were workers, one is a child, and one is unknown.

The aim of this section was to present the results of the analysis of the racial representation in the soap operas aired in the past five years. The next section will answer the research questions and discuss the results.

6. **Conclusion**

The purpose of this section is to answer the research questions based on the results of the analysis and in the literature review. In view of the fact that almost 55% of the Brazilian population considers itself black or mixed race, it would be expected that soap operas would have the same amount of black actors when depicting Brazilian society. Nevertheless, based on the investigation conducted for this paper, only 15.4% of the characters in a soap opera are portrayed by black actors. Taking into account the history of black actors on soap operas it seems that this depiction is increasing, especially considering that in the last five years six actresses were among the leading roles in soap operas (either as heroines or villains).

Having black actors in soap operas is important if we take into consideration that these TV shows are the basis in which "images of nationhood are negotiated" (Porto, 2008,

p. 02). Furthermore, it is expected that the increase in the number of black actors in soap operas influence in a positive way the view society has of black people.

van Dijk (1987) argues that it is unlikely that a white, middle-class journalist will legitimize other discourse that is not the one reproduced in his or her ingroup. This shows the need for the representation of other races in the newspapers to write the stories through other angles. The same can be seen in Brazilian soap operas, that is, it is unlikely, or difficult, for a white person to write and direct about an experience he or she never lived without stereotyping. Thus, there is a need to have black writers and directors in the process of creating soap operas. Nevertheless, out of the 61 writers and directors involved in these 22 soap operas, only three were considered black in this investigation. Hence, it is difficult to determine if having black writers and directors affects the storylines of black characters. However, the analysis of the two soap operas with black writers suggests that there is an impact in the way black characters are depicted, as in these soap operas black characters are not only in subservient positions.

Finally, Chiziane (2012) and Stroman (1984) talk specifically about the effects that seeing black people in some roles have in socialization. As Littlefield (2008, p. 676) suggests, media representation can influence the way a person views race, among other aspects of identity. According to Milkie (1999), this is particularly true for young viewers who are still defining their self-identity. Therefore, positive role models showing black people in leadership positions, or in positions where they are not subservient to white people are important to the social representation of black people. Nevertheless, in the soap operas studied here the majority of black characters were categorized as "workers" (53.4%), while only half of it was categorized as "bosses" (27.4%). This indicates that even though racial representation is increasing, some work still needs to be done towards achieving equality of representation in the social aspect in soap operas.

The next section presents some of the limitations of this study as well as suggestions for future studies.

7. Limitations and suggestions for future studies

In this section I discuss some of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future studies. Both aspects are presented together as some of the limitations could be addressed in future investigations.

One of the main limitations of this study is the categorization of race, even though I have tried to circumvent this problem using the same methodology as previous investigations. Race is "a social construct arising from the effort to categorize people into different groups" (Samovar et al, 2010, p.156 in Jackson, 2014, p.61) and therefore trying to fit the actors into two categories is due to have some controversies in classification.

Even though in this investigation the issue of occupation was analyzed in deeper levels than in Campos and Feres Júnior (2015), some of the other categories analyzed by these authors were neglected here such as gender relations, region of Brazil where the soap opera is set, different locations of every storyline, and era in Brazilian history. All of which proved to have an impact in the representation of black people, therefore there is still room to analyze these aspects considering the soap operas in this corpus.

While collecting the data some other issues came to my attention, but I decided not to address them in this paper as they did not fit the scope of this investigation. The first one is character naming. In collecting the data I have noticed that usually black characters are only known by their first name, while white characters are known by their first and last name. Furthermore, black children tend not to have names and be known only for their nicknames, such as Estilingue in *Orgulho e Paixão,* Pepito in *Tempo de Amar*, Riscado, Cascudo and Bola in *Totalmente Demais,* and Chico in *Velho Chico*. The second issue that requires further investigation is interracial relationships. Even though the number of black characters is increasing, it is unclear whether interracial relationships are being depicted in soap operas. The third issue relates to the stereotypes of black characters in the media. Araújo (2000) presents some examples of these stereotypes, such as Welfare Queen, Jezebel, Mammy, Sambo, etc. I believe it would be interesting to investigate these

stereotypes in Brazilian soap operas. As shown in the data, 21 out of the 157 characters were housekeepers and many of them conform to the stereotype of the Mammy[14].

Finally, although the findings of this paper suggest that - slowly - race representation in Brazilian media is increasing, this does not guarantee that black and white characters have the same amount of lines, or the same time on screen as white actors. Therefore it is necessary to investigate this issue as well.

References

Araújo, J. Z. (2000). *A negação do Brasil: o negro na telenovela brasileira*. Senac.

Campos, L . & Feres Júnior, J. (2015) *Televisão em cores?* Raça e sexo nas telenovelas "Globais" dos últimos 30 anos. *Textos para discussão GEMAA*, n. 10. pp. 1-23.

Chiziane, P. (2012). *Novelas brasileiras passam imagem de país branco, critica escritora moçambicana*. In Rodrigues, Alex (May, 17th) available at http://memoria.ebc.com.br/agenciabrasil/noticia/2012-04-17/novelas-brasileiras-passam-imagem-de-pais-branco-critica-escritora-mocambicana

Davis, A. (2014) *Racismo na mídia: entre a negação e o reconhecimento.* In Coletivo Intervozes (July, 29th) available at https://www.cartacapital.com.br/blogs/intervozes/racismo-na-midia-entre-a-negacao-e-o-reconhecimento-4304.html
de Melo, J. M. (1988). *As telenovelas da Globo: produção e exportação* (Vol. 28). Summus Editorial.

Dia laranja (2018). ONUMulheres – Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/BlqEXFtHk5R/?hl=pt-br&taken-by=onumulheresbr. Access on 08 Oct. 2018.

Faria, V. E., & Potter, J. E. (1999). 11 Television, Telenovelas, and Fertility Change in North-East Brazil. *Dynamics of values in fertility change*, 252.

---

[14] According to Araujo (2000) the Mammies are portrayed by large black women. Their characteristics are: they work for a white family, usually as the cooker or the housekeeper; they care about the family as if it were their own and they make huge sacrifices for this family.

Faria, M. C. B., & Fernandes, D. (2007). Representação da identidade negra na telenovela brasileira. *Revista da Associação Nacional os Programas de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação*, 9, 2-5.

Giorgi, M. C., Almeida, F. S., & Paiva, M. (2015). A não representação do negro nas telenovelas brasileiras: o caso "Gabriela". *Educere et Educare*, 10(20). p. 573 - 583.

Globo Domination (2014). *The Economist.* Available at: https://www.economist.com/business/2014/06/05/globo-domination. Access on: 08 Oct. 2018.

Goes, T. (2018). *Por que quase não há negros no elenco de 'Deus Salve o Rei'?* – Folha de São Paulo. Available at: < https://f5.folha.uol.com.br/colunistas/tonygoes/2018/01/por-que-quase-nao-ha-negros-no-elenco-de-deus-salve-o-rei.shtml>. Access on: 08 Oct. 2018.

Gouvea Neto, R. D.. (1997). Case study: TV globo–The Brazilian media giant. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 39(2), 255-269.

Grijó, W. P., & Sousa, A. H. F. (2012). O negro na telenovela brasileira: a atualidade das representações. *Estudos em Comunicação*, 11, 185-204.

Hamburger EI (1999) *Politics and intimacy in Brazilian telenovelas.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, Chicago

Hill, J. (2007). Mock Spanish: A site for the indexical reproduction of racism in American English. In Healey, J.F., O'Brien, E. (Eds.) *Race, ethnicity, and gender: selected readings*. (pp. 270-285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

IBGE. *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*. Available at: <https://ww2.ibge.gov.br/english/disseminacao/eventos/missao/instituicao.shtm>. Access on: 08 Oct. 2018

Jackson, J. (2014). *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication.* New York: Routledge.

Kramsch, C. (1998) *Language and Culture,* Oxford: Oxford University Press

La Ferrara, E., Chong, A., & Duryea, S. (2012). Soap operas and fertility: Evidence from Brazil. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 4(4), 1-31.

Littlefield, M. B. (2008). The media as a system of racialization: Exploring images of African American women and the new racism. *American Behavioral Scientist,* 51(5), 675-685.

Mattelart, Mi, and Mattelart, A. (1990). *The Carnival of Images: Brazilian Television Fiction*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Milkie, M.A. (1999) Social comparisons, reflected appraisals, and mass media: the impact of pervasive beauty images on Black and White girls' self-concepts. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 62, 2, 190–210.

Ortiz, R., Borelli, S. H. S., & Ramos, J. M. O. (1991). *Telenovela: História e produção*. São Paulo: Brasiliense.

Porto, M. P. (2008). Telenovelas and national identity in Brazil. In *IX International Congress of the Brazilian Studies Association* (BRASA), New Orleans.

Samovar, L, Porter, R. and McDaniel, E. (2010) *Communication between Cultures*, 7th edn,Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning

Slade, C., & Beckenham, A. (2005). Introduction: Telenovelas and soap operas: Negotiating reality. *Television and New Media*, 6 (4), p. 337 - 341.

Straubhaar, J. (2012). Telenovelas in Brazil: from travelling scripts to a genre and proto-format both national and transnational. *Global television formats: Understanding television across borders*. New York: Routledge, 148-177.

Stroman, C. A. (1984). The socialization influence of television on black children. *Journal of Black Studies*, 15(1), 79-100.

van Dijk, T.A. (1989). Mediating racism: The role of the media in the reproduction of racism. In R. Wodak (Ed.) *Language, Power, and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse*, (pp. 199-222). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Ward, L. M. (2003). Understanding the role of entertainment media in the sexual socialization of American youth: A review of empirical research. *Developmental Review*, 23(3), 347-388