

Article



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SERIALISED TELEVISION FICTION AND THE (UN)CONTESTABLE USE OF STEREOTYPES

*Ficção televisiva seriada e o (in) contestável recurso a estereótipos**La ficción televisiva seriada y el uso (in)discutible de los estereotipos*

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the use of stereotypes in serialized fictional productions in Portugal. The aim of this work is to understand whether this representational tool reproduces or challenges the social patterns present in portuguese territories, exploring the intentions behind its use and its receptiveness. To this end, a content analysis was carried out of the main and secondary characters in the productions “A Serra” (SIC) and “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” (RTP1), and a focus group was held with national viewers. The conclusion of this research exposes the inevitability, but also the growing contestability, of the use of stereotypes in the construction of these television narratives.

Key words: Soap operas, stereotypes, television, reality, identification

RESUMO:

O presente artigo debruça-se sobre o uso de estereótipos nas produções ficcionais seriadas, em Portugal. O objetivo deste trabalho é compreender se esta ferramenta representativa reproduz ou desafia os padrões sociais presentes nos territórios portugueses, explorando quais as intenções do seu uso e a sua receptividade. Para tal, procede-se à análise de conteúdo das personagens principais e secundárias das produções “A Serra” (SIC) e “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” (RTP1) e à aplicação de um grupo de discussão com telespectadores nacionais. A conclusão desta pesquisa expõe a inevitabilidade, mas também a crescente contestabilidade do recurso a estereótipos na construção destas narrativas televisivas.

Palavras-chave: Telenovelas; Estereótipos; Televisão; Realidade; Identificação

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el uso de estereotipos en las producciones de ficción seriada en Portugal. El objetivo de este trabajo es comprender si esta herramienta de representación reproduce o cuestiona los patrones sociales presentes en los territorios portugueses, explorando las intenciones que subyacen a su uso y su receptividad. Para ello, analizamos el contenido de los personajes principales y secundarios de las producciones “A Serra” (SIC) y “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” (RTP1) y realizamos un focus group con espectadores nacionales. La conclusión de esta investigación expone la inevitabilidad, pero también la creciente impugnabilidad, del uso de estereotipos en la construcción de estas narrativas televisivas.

Palabras clave: Telenovelas, Estereotipos, Televisión, Realidad, Identificación

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Introduction

The term “stereotype”¹ derives from the terms “steros” and “typos”, which makes up the motto “solid impression” or “fixed” (FERNANDES, 2019; CABECINHAS, 2012; FREITAS, 2012 & SALVADOR, 2022). This coincides with the rigidity and crystallization of concepts that characterize stereotypes since they are tools of representation that are difficult to modify (stereotypes tend to be passed down from generation to generation).

Stereotypes are also understood as preconceived formulations, impelling diverse meanings and influencing citizens’ beliefs and perspectives. However, Lippmann [1922] (2021) explains that stereotypes not only influence individuals’ beliefs but are also influenced by them. This is because stereotypes result from individuals’ value systems, how they see their surroundings, and the “group of others”. In other words, according to Lippmann [1922] (2021), to speak of stereotypes is to speak of biases in reality—“we do not first see and then define; rather, we first define and then see” (LIPPMANN, [1922] 2021, p. 85, my translation). For the author, reality biases stem from mental images that tend to be more rigid when applied to people or groups with whom one has no direct contact, the so-called “group of others”. An observer’s perception is inherently shaped by their beliefs and value systems, leading them to interpret everything surrounding individuals in the light of what they know.

The stereotyping process is, in most cases, reductive and simplistic. It involves identifying shared characteristics or common denominators among different individuals or realities and generalizing them. Thus, stereotypes are formulated taking into account “model portraits”, or defined “based on psychological or physical aspects, in terms of behaviour and action, or even discussion” (FERNANDES, 2019, p. 72, my translation). For Baccega (1998), stereotypes are linked to conformity, as individuals often seek social acceptance, a sense of direction in life, and a guarantee of success—“they are the accepted types, the current patterns, the standardized visions” (BACCCEGA, 1998, p. 8, my translation).

The simplification and generalization of a particular group’s characteristics are related to the cognitive effort reduction employed by individuals. Lippmann [1922] (2021) suggests that the scarcity of time experienced today hinders the deepening of social relationships, leading to a deficit of intimacy among peers. As a result, individuals increasingly rely on using, encoding and decoding stereotypes.

The tendency to universalize particular characteristics creates to a power dynamic (CABECINHAS, 2005; GOMES & ROSA, 2007; CABECINHAS, 2012; SCHORR, 2011; RUY, 2014 & SALVADOR, 2022) between the dominant faction (whose traits are commonly accepted) and the subordinate faction (whose particularities differ from expected or familiar norms). It should be noted, however, that this social division encourages a homogeneous and superficial view of the “group of others”—often observed with aversion, distance and discredit. Such haughtiness will lead to false, distorted or inaccurate perceptions about this group. Despite the identified drawback, this disadvantage, the existence of an antipode group, a counterpart to the “belonging group” enables the formation of social identity. It helps individuals organize and simplify social information, guides action in appropriate circumstances, protects individuals’ value systems, justifies certain positions, and functions as a positive differentiator for belonging groups (CABECINHAS, 2002, pp. 3-4).

Ultimately, stereotypes constitute either a selective representation or a distortion of reality, originating from preconceived notions or prior judgments. Individuals are exposed to stereotypes from birth and continue to internalize and reinforce them throughout their lives. They serve as a means of simplifying and categorizing people according to their traits or characteristics.

Stereotypes on Television

Television influences its audience’s “visions, objectives, and positions” (FARIA, 2019, p. 107, my translation), as it is the medium that most heavily relies on stereotypes.

It functions as a platform for projection and identification, where “televised media communication projects images to the collective, while the collective simultaneously expects this self-representation created on the screen” (MIRANDA, 2013, my translation). Whether in entertainment programs or informative content, television aims to mirror reality. It reports events, exposing and highlighting situations, and shares life stories. The viewer is the protagonist and the inspirational muse of everything that appears on the “magic box”. In other words, the viewer is the source of inspiration and the recipient, observing and recognizing themselves on the screen.

However, although television tries to portray reality, the reality presented is inevitably filtered. The facts are

¹ The term “stereotype” first appeared in the social sciences in 1922. Lippmann is the father of this concept and first used the term in his book “Public Opinion”.

presented through a selection process known as gatekeeping (according to which the reality presented is shaped by the journalist's perception, the images and words chosen to paint the pieces, the angles approached, and the sources consulted). The stories are conveyed through personal and unique testimonies.

Television serves as a mediator between the real and the imaginary. It uses signs and symbols to represent events in the real world. Miranda (2013) argues that television possesses the eye of the universal and the oracle of reality, making it a simulacrum replicating reality through techniques, filters and selection processes. This situation justifies the almost inevitable reliance on stereotypes within the medium.

The use of stereotypes in television makes it possible to: represent reality (albeit always through filters shaped by the journalist's perspective, the angle used or the camera's framing); contribute to the organization of social roles; promote human identification; and generate recognition of specific traits. Television relies on stereotypes due to the ease with which they simplify the transmission and comprehension of messages—"television only presents stereotypes that the audience can immediately recognize with minimal cognitive effort" (FRANCIS, cited by ABREU & SILVA, 2012, p. 4, my translation). Television uses stereotypes to eliminate them or convey a specific message or idea through them.

Stereotypes in telenovelas

Telenovelas are one of the television formats that most heavily rely on stereotypes to convey their message. The queens of television in Portugal establish and reinforce them. According to Viana and Said (2011), telenovelas use stereotypes to assert themselves and gain recognition, as presenting similarities with reality creates meaning that leads the audience to feel a sense of belonging to a group. Rosa and Gomes (2006) go further and state that telenovelas use stereotypes "as a key element of their creation process, to ensure easy acceptance and avoid provoking overt reflection" (p. 1, my translation). Stereotypes facilitate the work of screenwriters, actors, and directors in terms of writing and character construction. However, the excessive use of this tool can lead to exaggerated and caricatured representations of specific populations or realities.

In terms of the narrative, telenovelas also resort to some "classic" stereotypes: the protagonist couple who fight until the end to stay together; the protagonists as embodiments of good and heroism; the villain, devoid of principles and values, driven by greed, envy, and evil; the comedic characters as agents of tension relief, etc. These narrative choices align with the preferences and expectations of the audience, ensuring they are not disappointed.

In terms of themes, telenovelas commonly rely on stereotypes related to masculinity, femininity, violence, family, or interiority. However, it is clear that this tool, once static, is now evolving into new interpretation. For example, representations of men as strong figures and women as "housewives" are being replaced by different images. The portrayal of men as weak, sensitive, and vulnerable, and women as leaders, independent, and successful, are increasingly featured in telenovelas. Similarly, the depiction of families with new structures and organizations, distinct from the traditional configurations, is becoming more prevalent. New stereotypes are emerging. Of the themes listed, rural life remains most strongly associated with beauty, idyll, tranquility, and a sense of remoteness in both time and space.

Stereotypes are necessary for telenovelas because they are easy and quick to digest, simplify the characterization of the characters, generate alienation and passivity, and rely on generalizations that viewers already know (ROSA & GOMES, 2006, p.12). The symbiosis between the portrayal of universal themes, mass production, and the use of fixed representations, such as stereotypes, fosters the creation of a social, collective, and popular imagination that translates into viewers' identification with what they see.

The use of stereotypes in telenovelas serves to facilitate the creation of characters and behaviors, as well as to simplify the interpretation for the audience. In this sense, stereotypes serve a dual function: they contribute to the cognitive process of the individual and the subsequent formation of social identity, while also metaphorizing existing representations, ideologies, and social images that are recognizable to the audience due to their regular display (ROSA & GOMES, 2006).

Fiction frequently relies on the identity traits and traditional characteristics of different social groups. It is inevitable to resort to typified social representations in a telenovela, as each character and story aims to portray an unavoidable reality. It is through the use of strong traits and markers of a particular social group or context that the portrayal gains vibrancy, facilitates the sharing of values, ensures plausibility with reality, and fosters audience identification. Regardless of the stereotype in question, there are always those who identify with that reality, those who repudiate it or those who, while not belonging to it, recognize it.

Methodology

At this stage, it is important to question whether Portuguese fictional television productions use stereotypes to represent various populations, traditions, realities, or contexts. In which aspects of the narratives is there an undeniable use of this tool? Under what circumstances is there a departure from the use of preconceived mental patterns? Are the representations made through stereotypes believable? Does the population living in Portugal identify with how national productions mirror their experiences, realities, and characteristics? Alongside addressing these questions, it is essential to observe whether the use of stereotypes by screenwriters is the result of a conscious and deliberate process or an unconscious one, deeply rooted in the writing and value system of the writer.

To answer the questions posed and meet the objectives set for this article, two Portuguese telenovelas are analyzed, “A Serra” (SIC)² and “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” (RTP1)³. According to RTP1 and SP Televisão, “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” is a “long-running” television fiction series. However, for the purposes of this research, the narrative will be analyzed as a telenovela, as it contains elements and characteristics that define it as such. Although divided into seasons and with some episodes (especially in the third and fourth seasons) being self-contained, the extensive fixed cast, the ongoing narrative continuity, the broadcast time, and the number of episodes per season (similar to that of a telenovela), bring “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” closer to the format under analysis. It has to be said that “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” does not overlook the typical elements of telenovelas. The production, broadcast by RTP1, also features several secondary intrigues that help mark the passage of time and set the tone for specific episodes. Additionally, there are episodes with “narrative hooks”, a defining feature of a telenovela. In an interview, Miguel Simal and Ana Vasques confirmed that “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” was initially written and conceived as a telenovela. However, as the episodes progressed (in the third and fourth seasons), it moved away from this format (SALVADOR, 2022).

The techniques used to analyze the aforementioned fictions are all part of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are associated with large samples and result from observation, incorporation of sensory data, and interpretations of textual, visual, iconic or behavioral elements (FLICK, 2005). These methods have a certain subjective bias, relying on the researcher’s perspective in interpreting what is being observed. However, they are flexible methods that provide in-depth and extensive data for research. In addition to being descriptive and promoting reflection, qualitative methods function as tools for interpretation, analysis, and the identification of various social dynamics and contexts.

The techniques used are content analysis⁴ and focus groups⁵. The first method is applied to every twentieth episode, as well as to the first and last episode of each telenovela. Among the 52 episodes⁶ that comprise this research’s corpus, the protagonists will be analyzed in greater detail, while secondary characters and representation strategies will be examined more briefly. In addition to the content analysis, a focus group of ten residents from the country’s interior will be conducted (since the narratives occur in this region).

Presentation of results

Telenovelas adhere to a distinct narrative structure that personalizes and differentiates them from other formats. There is always a hero, a villain, and a central couple who must overcome various obstacles to be together. Additionally, telenovelas are expected to deliver a “happy ending,” where good and justice ultimately triumph over evil and corruption. In both productions analyzed, these designs are fulfilled.

In “A Serra,” there is a clear polarization of the protagonists. The heroes are Fátima Neto and Tomás Folgado, and the villains are Carlota and Mariana Pereira Espinho. According to the episodes observed, Fátima Neto, a cheese producer and shepherdess, is portrayed as a just, honest, fearless, and determined individual (episodes one, 20, 60, 80, 120, 140, 160, 180, 240, 260, and 303). Her strong sense of justice is closely tied to the anger she feels over her

2 “A Serra” is a telenovela written by Inês Gomes that SIC aired in 2021. The story takes place in the village of Fraga Pequena in Serra da Estrela. This telenovela features names like Sofia Alves, José Mata, Júlia Palha, and Carolina Carvalho in the leading roles. It tells the story of a shepherdess who fights to avenge her brother’s death but is thwarted by the villains, preventing her from achieving her goal.

3 “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” was a story aired between 2013 and 2016 on RTP1. It was produced by scriptwriters Ana Vasques and Miguel Simal over the course of four seasons. “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” is set in the village of Beirais, in Vila Real. It follows the story of a man who, due to health issues, leaves the chaos of the city to embrace a simpler life in the countryside.

4 Bardin (1977) is the father of this technique. Content analysis aims, above all, to “unveil”, “uncover” and “expose in detail” all the characteristics of a group, reality, document or situation. This technique includes classifying the units of analysis and categorizing and interpreting the data.

5 The focus group is a technique that involves bringing together a certain group of people with some common characteristics. The main aim is for them to reflect, debate and theorize on a particular topic proposed by the researcher. Morgan is the author of reference for this technique.

6 52 episodes: 17 of “A Serra” and 35 of “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”.

brother's murder and the challenges imposed upon her by the Pereira Espinho family. Almost every episode analyzed shows Fátima as sensible, perceptive, and outspoken, reinforcing her character as a principled and resolute figure. Among the protagonists, Fátima Neto is the one most frequently depicted working across various branches of the primary sector in the analyzed episodes. She stands out for her zealous nature (episodes one and 303), particularly in relation to her family (her father and niece) and her herd. Additionally, she is portrayed as cooperative and empathetic (episodes one, 140, 160, 220, 280). However, her prideful, jealous, and confrontational side emerges whenever she encounters the antagonists of the narrative or interacts with those who have wronged her or her family (episodes 40, 60, 80, 180, 200, 240, 260, and 303). Fátima Neto, despite her rough demeanor and blunt speech, is portrayed as deeply sensitive and profoundly grateful. In contrast, Tomás Folgado stands out for his calm and polite nature (episodes one, 20, 40, 120 and 220), as well as his sense of responsibility, protectiveness (episodes one, 80, 100, 140, 200 and 303) and sincerity (episodes 20, 40, 60, 80, 160, 220, and 303). His devotion to those he loves extends to a strong paternal instinct. Additionally, his character is defined by thoughtfulness, cordiality, and an unwaveringly courageous and determined disposition. These traits reinforce Tomás' strong sense of justice and his relentless pursuit of truth through acts of keen perception. In almost all the episodes analyzed, Tomás Folgado shows understanding, responsibility, and conscientiousness. Finally, Carlota Pereira Espinho and Mariana Pereira Espinho share personality traits such as arrogance and haughtiness. Both characters are jealous, calculating, vengeful, provocative, and manipulative—characteristics that are consistently evident across most of the observed episodes. The main differences between mother and daughter lie in that Carlota is a “lioness mother”, domineering and pragmatic, whereas Mariana is more insecure and spoiled.

In “Bem Vindos a Beirais”, Diogo Almada and Clara Rodrigues are the leading couple who, like the previous protagonists, embody the virtuous side of strength and character. Diogo Almada is portrayed as conscientious, caring, and supportive—with a strong sense of social responsibility—and a loyal friend (episodes one and 60 of the first season; episodes one, 20 and 80 of the second season; episodes 100, 120 and 180 of the third season; episodes 20, 60, 180 and 220 of the fourth season). He is empathetic, although he often approaches situations with irony and provocation (episodes one, 20, 60 and 80 of the first season; episode 20 of the second season; episodes one, 80 and 140 of the third season; episodes 100, 180, 220 and 260 of the fourth season). Throughout the telenovela, the protagonist is also portrayed as egocentric and womanizing, as well as proud and inconsistently sincere (episodes one and 40 of the first season; episode one of the second season; episodes one, 20, 140 and 180 of the third season; episode 100 of the fourth season). Playful and observant, Diogo Almada is confident, combative and a fighter (episode 60 of the first season; episodes one, 20 and 40 of the second season; episode 260 of the fourth season). He is the character in “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” who organizes the most initiatives, demonstrating dynamism and promoting the proactivity of the inhabitants of Beirais. At the same time, the protagonist Clara Rodrigues often comes across as rude, mean-spirited, and quarrelsome (episodes one, 40 and 80 of the first season; episodes 20 of the second season), as well as exaggerated (episode one of the first season; episode 80 of the second season). The character played by Oceana Basílio proves to be insecure and inherently very jealous, especially regarding her relationship with Diogo Almada (episode one of the first season; episode one of the second season; episode 80 of the third season). Clara is a helpful woman (episodes 20 and 40 of the first season; episode 40 of the second season), empathetic and friendly (episode 60 of the first season; episodes one, 20, 40, 60, and 180 of the third season). Character traits such as gratitude, sensibility, integrity, irony, stubbornness, and frankness accompany her throughout the narrative. The smile that lights her face and the optimistic and playful attitude she presents do not prevent her from being a rational and conscious woman. In the first two seasons of “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”, another protagonist was added: Teresa Sampaio. In the production aired by RTP1, Fernando Campos Ribeiro appears as the main antagonist in the story, although his presence in the narrative is not as prominent as that of the protagonists.

There is a tendency to associate villains with questionable character traits, with characters with greater financial power. Carlota Pereira Espinho, Mariana Pereira Espinho, Fernando Pereira Espinho, Sebastião Botelho, and Moisés Folgado (“A Serra”), as well as Agostinho Puga, Fernando Campos Ribeiro, Conceição Loureiro, and Leonel Alves (“Bem-Vindos a Beirais”) are examples of this. The Pereira Espinho family owns the Fraga Pequena hotel in the heart of the Serra da Estrela. In addition, Carlota controls the village restaurant and, for part of the storyline, the Neto family's cheese factory. Sebastião is a successful lawyer and the most recognized in the area, earning a salary far beyond his job. Moisés Folgado owns the village burel factory, which exports textiles worldwide. In the case of the characters from “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”, most of them represent local political power and come from wealthy families. The characters mentioned embody traits of arrogance, greed, and villainy. However, three characters defy this trend: Aida Folgado and Tomás Folgado (in “A Serra”) and Viriato Montenegro (in “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”). Although they are wealthy, they prove to be people of integrity.

According to the data collected from the episodes analyzed in “A Serra”, with the exception of the characters above, both the secondary characters and Fátima Neto belong to lower socio-economic classes and hold professions linked to the countryside, the pre-industrial sector or essential businesses. Cheese production, the burel factory, wood-fired bread production, flour milling and shepherding, depicted in the telenovela, are typical of the Serra da Estrela region. Young people, including the protagonist, Fátima Neto, carry out a significant portion of these economic activities. This situation led one of the discussion group participants to state that, in reality, these are not activities typically performed by people in younger age groups today.

In “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”, with the exception of Fernando Campos Ribeiro, Agostinho Puga, Conceição Loureiro, and Leonel Alves, all the characters (including the protagonists) belong to the middle/lower class, working in local businesses or institutions (grocery store, social club, National Republican Guard, car repair shop, parish council, local radio, etc.). Greenhouse farming is also a strong component of this telenovela. It is worth noting that, both in the SIC and RTP1 productions, along with the economic activities described, there are businesses that encourage globalization and the expansion into new markets and realities. These include the hotel and modern bakery in “A Serra”, as well as the rural accommodation in “Bem Vindos a Beirais”.

The interior settings help to understand the socio-economic level and reality of each character and family. In both storylines, the interior décor is generally simple, with uninspired decorations and elements reflecting rural life (wooden doors, wood-burning ovens, stone walls, gas cookers, etc.). In some cases, a minimalist decoration is evident, while in others, there is an abundance of objects and utensils (e.g. plates hanging on the wall, picture frames, landline telephones, etc.). In all interior home designs, the most commonly featured rooms are the kitchen and the living/dining areas, often in an open-plan layout. Examples of this type of interior setting include the homes of Fátima Neto, Domingues Nunes, Elvira Roque Courela, and São Grilo in “A Serra”, as well as those of Diogo Almada, Olga Fontes, Hortense Pedroso, and Marina Marques Jesus in “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”. Once again, the characters and families with higher economic status are the exceptions. The settings where these characters are shown are modern and tidy, and they feature sober, neutral colours with elements reflecting wealth. In “A Serra”, the homes of Pereira Espinho and Sebastião Botelho are examples of this, along with the homes of Fernando Campos Ribeiro and Tiago Nogueira (only in the fourth season) in “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”. The hotel at Fraga Pequena resembles the imagery of a five-star hotel, while the “Casa da Aldeia” evokes the idea of a guest house or local accommodation. This similarity between what is presented and what is imagined appears in the other workplace settings of the two telenovelas analyzed: the grocery store, the burel factory, the mill, the cheese factory, the bakery, the barbershop, the social club, the local radio station, the doctor’s office, the funeral home, the parish council, etc. In these cases, the emphasis is on the details of the activities carried out in each setting. Furthermore, the depiction of stone houses, narrow dirt or cobbled streets, the church square, or the public pond help reinforce the association with the imagery of a rural village.

The costumes also play a significant role in identifying each character’s social classes and personalities. In general, the wealthier characters wear more distinctive clothes: Mariana and Carlota Pereira Espinho frequently wear fur garments, dresses and ensembles, not to mention the constant use of accessories, jewelry, and expensive handbags. Similarly, in “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”, Fernando Pereira Espinho usually wears a suit and tie. In contrast, the other secondary characters and the protagonists not mentioned above opt for simple, practical, and comfortable clothes. Jeans and wool sweaters are the main clothing items featured in both storylines. In “A Serra”, Fátima Neto often wears a scarf and occasionally a hat, as does Tomás Folgado, who also likes bulky snow coats. In “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”, Clara Rodrigues tends to wear casual clothing that alludes to a Lisbon style (since the protagonist is a native of this city). The same can be said for Diogo Almada and Teresa Sampaio. Some characters dress in the clothes inherent to their professional activity, and those who demonstrate certain beliefs or traditions. Examples are wearing long skirts with a rosary around their necks, wearing a doctor’s or barber’s gown or aprons and headscarves.

In another area of analysis, the older characters in both productions, Hortense Rasteiro and Simão from “A Serra”, and Viriato Montenegro, Benjamim Marque, and Hortense Pedroso from “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”, embody local wisdom. There are also stereotypical figures associated with various habits, trends or personality traits. For example, the character of the pious woman is often accompanied by images of busybodies. São Grilo, Zezinha Grilo, and Elvira Roque Courela from “A Serra”, and Olga Fontes and Alzira Pedroso from “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”, are examples of such figures. In turn, Silvério Neto and Domingos Nunes from “A Serra” are comparable to characters Xavier Jesus and Manuel Pedroso from “Bem-Vindos a Beirais”, in terms of their professional lives. These four men present themselves as workers in jobs derived from their own businesses or crafts passed down from generation to generation. The roughness and craftsmanship shaped by their work reflect the stern demeanor of the characters in “A Serra”, yet stand in contrast to the personalities of the two residents of Beirais mentioned. All of them are deeply

concerned with and protective of their families. Meanwhile, Marta and Sebastião Botelho, and São Loureiro and Agostinho Puga, in the SIC and RTP1 productions, respectively, represent ambition.

In terms of habits, most of the characters in the narratives under study regularly visit public places. This socializing, in turn, leads to the dissemination of certain local events. It is evident that, both in Beirais and Fraga Pequena, everyone knows each other and is aware of each other's lives. The lack of a network and religious habits are also recurring themes in these narratives.

The secondary characters are the ones who utter the most typical expressions or regionalisms. Examples include statements like: "abalar" (means "go away" - episode one of "A Serra"), "trincar" (means separate/depart - episode 40 of "A Serra"), "disse-lhe poucas e boas" (the expression means scold - episode 60 of "A Serra"), "baixar a crista" (the expression means to stop being vain and arrogant - episode 140 of "A Serra"), "a morte da bezerra" and "leva-me o couro e o cabelo" (the first expression means not thinking about anything at all and the second means wanting to keep all the money - episode 20 of the first season of "Bem-Vindos a Beirais"), "ele deve ter atirado pedras à cruz" (the expression means to be in big trouble/problems - episode 60 of the second season of "Bem-Vindos a Beirais") or "camioneta" (means bus). In the stories broadcasted by RTP1 and SIC, there is a distinct way in which the inhabitants address each other: "Ti(o) Simão" or "Rosa Labrega", for example.

Fraga Pequena (in Serra da Estrela) and Beirais (in Vila Real) are both fictional villages that serve as the backdrop for the telenovelas "A Serra" (SIC) and "Bem-Vindos a Beirais" (RTP1), respectively. Situated in the country's interior, both of these village settings are portrayed as self-sufficient with a small population, aside from the characters in the telenovelas. Thus, even though the trend towards desertification is a visceral reality in "deep Portugal", it is true that the studied telenovelas focus on self-sustainability, notable economic activity, the significant number of public institutions based in these villages, and the considerable number of children.

According to the data gathered from the content analysis, both fictional serial productions feature only three characters over the age of 65, and, in "Bem-Vindos a Beirais", there are five births throughout four seasons. These data contradict the reality experienced in the interior of Portugal. The lack of opportunities is also a reality that emerges in "A Serra" (albeit to a lesser extent) and "Bem-Vindos a Beirais" (with greater prominence). Guida Grilo from "A Serra" and Sandro Pedroso from "Bem-Vindos a Beirais" represent the dreamer figure, aiming for what seems unattainable for those living in a village. It is also noticeable that the emphasis on cultural initiatives or organizations is disproportionate to reality, especially in "Bem-Vindos a Beirais". In this regard, one of the focus group members emphasizes that, despite everything, no telenovela represents today's villages: depopulated, aged and isolated.

The analysis provided by the focus group members regarding how telenovelas reflect reality is diverse. Participants A⁷, C⁸, G⁹, H¹⁰, I¹¹, and J¹² tend to argue, more or less explicitly, that telenovelas have an obligation to reflect reality as accurately as possible. However, B¹³, E¹⁴, and F¹⁵ consider telenovelas "just fiction" and, although they contribute to forming mental images of certain realities, they do not carry that responsibility. "They are telenovelas, so there can be stereotypes and exaggerations," says person B, later supported by person E, who adds, "we need to understand that a telenovela is not a documentary", therefore, "there will always have to be exaggerations, there will always have to be stereotypical characters, there will always have to be plots that deviate a bit from reality." In the focus group, there are also those who admit that, although telenovelas sometimes portray realities that are either outdated or far removed from current reality, they serve as a form of learning and, above all, entertainment.

Final considerations

Telenovelas are rooted in reality. However, TV series also have a wide margin of freedom to present what is impossible or utopian. In this sense, it is normal for them to often resort to stereotypes and, at other times, to distance themselves from them. Torres (2008) defines stereotypes as the "avatars" of telenovelas. They exist and often go unnoticed, but their function is to facilitate the viewers' understanding of the message or story.

7 Person A is male, 59 years old and a teacher. He comes from the district of Guarda.

8 Person C is female, 69 years old and retired. She is from the district of Guarda.

9 Person G is female, 24 years old and a student. She is from the Castelo Branco district.

10 Person H is male, 21 years old and a student. Although he comes from the Guarda district, he lives in Lisbon.

11 Person I is female, 73 years old and retired. She is from the district of Guarda.

12 Person J is male, 45 years old and an electrical appliance technician. He is from the district of Guarda.

13 Person B is female, 55 years old and a nurse. She is from the district of Guarda.

14 Person E is female, 33 years old and a researcher. Although she was born in the district of Guarda, she lives in Porto.

15 Person F is female, 33 years old and a researcher. Although she was born in the district of Guarda, she lives in Porto.

Our analysis shows that the use of stereotypes in telenovelas is unavoidable. However, as explained, the narratives show exceptions to this trend in various areas.

It is evident that in the analyzed narratives, the opening credits, settings, customs, and use of traditional speech clearly allude to a specific group or region: the interior of Portugal. Furthermore, these elements contribute to the analysis of the characters in terms of their social class, financial power, and professional status. Alongside these elements, there is the use of stereotypes in the portrayal of personality traits and the archetypes described above (stereotypes of hero and villain, femininity and masculinity, hardworking people, beauty, etc.).

In conclusion, both “A Serra” and “Bem-Vindos a Beirais” incorporate stereotypes in their narratives, but they do not overwhelm them as one might initially expect. Stereotypes are simplified representations of reality, and while they are filtered, they still reflect aspects of it. In this sense, the people interviewed in the focus group tended to believe that reality should be respected on screen. However, they acknowledge that fiction allows for exaggerations due to its imaginative and fantastical nature.

The narratological work carried out by scriptwriters and television producers has been one of integrating new forms of representation, distancing the stories from classic pre-existing mental patterns. As a result, while the use of stereotypes remains unavoidable for various reasons, it is becoming increasingly possible to navigate around them.

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