Cultural memory and audiovisual fiction in the era of streaming television. An analysis about *Narcos* (Netflix, 2015) as a transnational memory story

Memoria cultural y ficción audiovisual en la era de la televisión en streaming. Una exploración en torno a la serie Narcos *como relato de memoria transnacional*

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This paper intends to delineate some axes of critical reflection on the potential of television fiction in the construction of cultural memory and in the articulation of memory transference dynamics on a transnational scale. In particular, this issue is addressed through the analysis of *Narcos* (2015), an original production of Netflix, a streaming television company with global reach.

KEYWORDS: Cultural memory, television fiction, prosthetic memories, audiences, transnationalization.

En este trabajo se delinean algunos ejes de reflexión crítica en torno al potencial de la ficción televisiva en la construcción de la memoria cultural y en la articulación de dinámicas de transferencia del recuerdo a escala transnacional. Particularmente, se aborda este asunto a partir de la serie Narcos *(2015), una producción original de Netflix, empresa de televisión en* streaming *de alcance global.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Memoria cultural, ficción televisiva, memorias protésicas, audiencias, transnacionalización.

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In general terms, we understand cultural memory as the construction of socially shared senses about the past. This concept, initially conceived by the cultural historians Jan and Aleida Assmann (1995; 2008), was used to describe a form of collective knowledge about the past, built and objectified into social practices and institutions and shared representations. More recent writings conceive it as "the symbolic order, the media, the institutions and practices by which social groups construct a shared past" (Erll, 2008, p. 5). Beyond the diversity of definitions and variations, cultural memory has become a useful category to establish a perspective of studies on the phenomena of construction of collective memory characterized by its attention to the cultural dimension of these processes. In other words, to the practices of production, circulation and appropriation of senses and representations of the past that are articulated and continuously updated through public acts of remembrance.

An accepted premise in such studies is the inherent mediated character of collective memory. Rigney (2005) states that one of the main contributions of the concept of cultural memory has been to highlight "the extent to which shared memories of the past are the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication". From this perspective, mediation is not an undesirable deviation from the spontaneous memory of witnesses or participants, but rather "a precondition for the production of memories across generations" (p. 14). Cultural memory is a product of shared representations, the result of a dynamic process always reconstructs and represents the past within the guidelines of the concerns, interests, and worries of the present.

The media are central mnemonic agents since they are "the most prevalent and quotidian site of collective recollection in modern national societies" (Neiger, Meyers & Zandberg, 2011, p.11). They work to construct a public agenda of remembrance, not only through genres and formats to which a value of truth is socially attributed, such as news or documentaries but also through fictional products, such as films, TV series or soap operas. Each of these different genres and formats involves the use of specific resources to create representations of the past and therefore represent distinctive ways of constructing cultural memory (Erll, 2008a, p. 390).

The role of the media in the construction of cultural memory has been approached from a perspective fundamentally limited to a national level (Neiger, Myers & Zandberg, 2011, p.11). Erll (2011) says the predominant approach for several decades focused on the analysis of national cultural memories: the Nation-State was assumed "as isomorphic with national culture and national cultural memory," and cultural memory became in practice a synonym for "national memory" (pp. 6-7). However, other more focused approaches to mobility, transfer and exchange of memories across political or geographical borders have progressively opened the way. This theoretical and methodological reorientation is particularly relevant in a context in which their transnational or global orientation characterizes the logic of production and distribution of media content.

Considering these initial observations as a starting point, in this work we propose to define some critical reflection points around the potential of television fiction in the construction of cultural memory and the organization of the dynamics of translation and transfer of memory on a transnational scale. We will discuss this matter starting with *Narcos* (2015), an original production of Netflix, a global streaming television company. The example of *Narcos* allows us to identify some relevant singularities, both regarding the representation of the past and the resources used to do so and regarding their potential implications for the construction of memory among transnational audiences, unfamiliar with the events described in this fictional narrative.

NETFLIX EVERYWHERE: "PLACE AND TELEVISION" IN THE STREAMING AREA

If we assume that media in general, and television in particular, act as central instances in the construction of memory, then it is also pertinent to question what implications have been brought about by the transformations evidenced in the modes of production, distribution, and consumption of television contents; in the dynamics of construction of cultural memory in today's societies. One of the key ideas that allow us to discuss this subject is the idea of space and place, and the way in by which the global logic of production and circulation of television

contents have also implied significant changes in the processes of construction and public circulation of representations of the past.

As Martín-Barbero (2015, p. 61) has emphasized, television "is also a problem of spaces", since it is from there that the meaning and value of what we continue to call television is "disorientating and relocating," in spite of its multiple transformations. The concept of space seems to be "out of place" in a television model that challenges location to assume, instead, the imperative of flow, mobility, and exchange. And yet, it is crucial to understand how, from where, and to where, television today produce images and representations of subjects and social groups of events and realities in space and time. Consequently, Martín-Barbero observes that "primarily, post or hyper-television has not only to do with what the market and the State do or fail to do, but with 'their place' in that triple space: networks, territories, and heterotopias; that is, *relocations, anchors, and outplacements*" (2015, p. 65).

For that matter, we can also understand the historical journey of the television institution as a process of progressive separation from the space of the Nation-State that shaped the origins of the media. Until the decade of the 80s in the 20th century, the predominant television model was built by a structuring communicative relationship between the Nation and the citizens-television (Verón, 2009, p. 237). Television was strongly associated with the development of modernizing projects and the construction of national identities; it was then conceived as "an attribute of sovereignty and broadcasters remained confined within the territorial and ideological frontiers of the nation" (Chalaby, 2003, p. 470). According to Veron, the metaphor that most clearly describes this stage is the following: "television was an open window to the outside world, where national location built the outside world" (2009, p. 237).

Since then, there has been a progressive rupture of the symbiotic bond between television and the geopolitical space of the nation. The causes of this rupture are diverse and complex, but they can be categorized into two fundamental processes: economic globalization and technological change (Chalaby, 2007, 2016). The combination of these two processes would allow the intensification of cross-border media flows and the appearance of a new transnational communicative

order, characterized by a restructuring of "the relationship between the local, the regional, the national and the global through a new and complex network of media corporations, products and audiences" (Chalaby, 2007, p. 79).

This process would materialize thanks, in large part, to the expansion and consolidation of pay TV around the world at the end of the 20th century. Both by cable systems, existing since the 1950s, and by satellite television and multipoint distribution systems, production systems based in developed countries would gradually achieve global distribution. These changes had two major implications regarding what is important to our subject. On the one hand, they would promote the repetitive appearance of narrative proposals about the past that circulated in a vertical axis (north-south), with the consequent possibilities of expansion of senses about the past from a hegemonic center. On the other hand, pay TV began to shape new television formats and genres, which would then be replicated on demand platforms (On Demand), after a period in which the absence of these platforms and the existence of a vast diffusion of forms of content piracy would help another type of transnational television fiction consumption. We should add that pay TV, its success as a form of consumption resulted in the production of the first formats designed for a transnational consumer, from the anchorage of what can be considered as cultural regions.

With the appearance of the Internet and digitalization, the process of television globalization would be faster, and consequently, it would radicalize this reconstitution of the relations between space or place, and the media. Netflix's case can fully illustrate this aspect of spatiality. It is an American company that provides on-demand streaming services over the Internet to around 100 million subscribers in more than 190 countries on all continents (not available only in China, Crimea, North Korea, and Syria, according to the company's data) (Netflix, 2017). It began as an online video club (1997), then became a platform for collecting and distributing streaming content (2007), experiencing a process of international expansion in 2010; in 2016 they self-proclaimed as a "new global network of Internet television" by announcing the incorporation of the service to more than 130 countries (Hastings in Netflix, January 6, 2016, paragraph 2). Since 2012, the company began to generate its

original content. With this new step, it would go from being a mere distribution channel to becoming a production, direction and distribution channel, taking control over the different production phases and processes concerning the audiovisual industry (Cornejo, 2016). It already has an extensive catalog of the original production that includes dramatic series, sitcoms, documentaries, special programs, and films.[3] The important point is that television contents are conceived and made for streaming and oriented towards a transnational or global audience.

Despite its global expansion and the myth of ubiquity built into the company's advertising message, it is in the context of original content production that the idea of "place" seems to make sense again. "To be a successful global service, we need to be more than Hollywood to the world," said Reed Hastings, and for that Netflix should be "a company that shares stories from all around the world" (Hastings in Shaw, January 12th, 2017). The company is investing in "stories that may be local," but are produced "with the conviction that they have the potential to travel," another of its executives has told the press. In other words, "local stories that have global audiences" (Pérez, in Rojas, February 23th, 2017). The question should be: What is the "place" of the main Internet television network in the world? The sense of "place" here refers not only to the relocation of the areas of television production and consumption, but also to the way in which these relocations also assume certain outplacements of narratives and representations concerning the history lived and suffered by certain social groups, or in certain countries. How is a memory narrative constructed under the logic of production, circulation, and reception? What happens when certain narratives based on a national history are relocated or reinserted in the audiovisual, transnational or displaced public space of this platform?

We will describe some theoretical and conceptual arguments that support the analysis, and that may be useful to include these initial notes on relocations, anchors, and outplacements of television narratives in the specific context of studies on cultural memory.

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[3]   In 2016, Netflix produced 126 TV series or films that altogether represent more than 600 hours of original programming, with an investment of nearly 500 million dollars (Shawn, January 12, 2017).

STORIES THAT TRAVEL: TV FICTION AND MEMORY ROUTES

Cultural memory is not the result of direct experience, but rather a "vicarious recollection" (Rigney, 2005, p. 15), subject to complex dynamics of mediation and remediation. Even when different individuals have shared similar experiences or situations, the cultural memory of these experiences is always a construction, objectified in symbolic forms and associated with the public circulation of memories in mediated forms. Representations of the past can (and do) also propagate among individuals and social groups who have no immediate connection to the events or experiences represented and who can learn from and identify themselves with such representations (Rigney, 2005, pp.15-16). It is through these representations that memory circulates, "translates", becomes accessible, "moves", and "travels", between different mnemonic communities.

Memory mobility is the possibility that certain representations of the past may transit and be appropriate beyond the limits of the communities or social groups that created them or were directly involved in the events or experiences recalled; is not a new process, nor can it be attributed exclusively to contemporary media. Erll (2011) says, "since ancient times memory lives in and through its movements", thanks to which mnemonic forms and references are kept alive, expand, and even acquire new meanings in changing social and temporal contexts (p. 11). Since long ago, trade, colonization, or migration have promoted the contact and the exchange between different groups and cultures, as well as the mobility of memory, meaning that "the very fundaments of what we assume to be Western cultural memory are the product of transcultural movements" (Erll, 2011, p. 11).

This is why this author proposes to understand the cultural memory as "an itinerant memory" or "a travelling memory", a metaphorical abbreviation that tries to emphasize the "as the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual 'travels' and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders" (Erll, 2011, p. 11). With a transcultural perspective in mind, the author proposes to consider not only, nor fundamentally, the "memory places", a fundamental category

within the studies marked from a national perspective, but also the "itineraries" or the "movements" of memory, the routes taken by certain stories or memorial practices.

Even though the phenomenon is old, these movements are much more visible and accelerated in the context of contemporary media cultures. The global expansion of communication networks has led to the circulation, in the transnational public sphere, of mnemonic references, stories, and representations about the past of specific groups or communities and contribute to making global and heterogeneous audiences familiar with them. As a result, they promote the articulation of memory transfer processes between different mnemonic communities located in different geographical, cultural or social spaces and contexts.

Allison Landsberg (2004) has coined the term "prosthetic memory" to point out this capacity of media representations of the past "to create shared social frameworks for people who inhabit, literally and figuratively, different social spaces, practices, and beliefs" (Landsberg, 2004, p. 8). According to this author, an unexpected effect of mass culture has been that the specific memories of a group become goods and are open, accessible, and available to a wider and diverse audience. Mass communication technologies and capitalist logic to which the production of memory in the media is exposed, have propitiated the emergence of this new type of portable, fluid and non-essentialist memory that results only from mediated experiences. In this sense "memories have ceased to belong exclusively to a particular group and instead have become part of a common public domain" (p. 11).

These processes of memory transfer and prosthetic memory construction take place through different media, and not only operate through informative and documentary products or genres, but also through fictional genres. For this reason, it is important to recognize that there are different "ways of creating a cultural memory", whose particularity depends not only on the choice and mobilization of different resources for evocation but also on the discursive genres that include specific memory stories. Aesthetic and narrative characteristics mean that fictional products have the potential to "attract and hold the attention of groups without a prior interest in the topic, but with a readiness to enjoy a good story and suspend their disbelief" (Rigney,

2008, p. 347). They tend to be more "mobile" and "exportable" than other forms of the representation of the past. Fictional stories "travel" through media such as literature, film or television, transcend the boundaries of the immediate community and the borders of the national and are key carriers in the "transfer" of memories from one community to another (Rigney, 2005, pp. 25-26).

In other words, fictional representations of the past act as fundamental devices in the relocation of cultural memory, becoming mediators par excellence between the different memory communities. The field of literature and film studies has primarily approached the role of fictional discourses in these processes of transferring memory and constructing prosthetic memories. However, there is not enough work yet on this subject, in the specific area of television fiction.

Most of the television series focused on the recreation or fictionalization of past events, belong to what Erll calls an *experiential rhetorical mode of memory* (Erll 2008a, p. 390). In other words, the events and situations such as events experienced, suffered, and confronted by the characters present in the first person, a cultural model of recollection. Another common characteristic is their devotion to the "melodramatic mode" (Brooks 1995), a form of "moral imagination" and a "performing and narrative mode" that functions "on the basis of highly emotional and highly expressive goals" (Herlinghaus, 2002, p. 27), and that appeals to pathos, meaning, the visceral, intense, and liberated mobilization of the feelings and physical sensations associated with them (Singer, 2001). All these general characteristics contribute to their interest and acceptance by large segments of the audience, as well as the activation of identification mechanisms and the generation of empathy regarding the fictional stories narrated on the screen.

There are, at least, two fundamental dimensions in which the study of *Narcos* makes possible to explore some thoughts about the dynamics of the transnational memory transfer:

1. Regarding the conception of the TV series and its discursive construction of memory; and
2. Regarding the readings that the audiences have made of them.

We will explain more precisely each of these dimensions below.

NARCOS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF
A TRANSNATIONAL MEMORY PROPOSAL

The world premiere of *Narcos* was on August 28, 2015. It is a two-season series with ten chapters each. Created by Chris Brancato, Doug Miro and Carlo Bernard; directed by Brazilians José Padilha and Fernando Coimbra, Mexican Guillermo Navarro and Colombian Andrés Baiz, and starred by Wagner Moura (Pablo Escobar) and Boyd Holbrook (Steve Murphy). From the beginning, it was conceived as a transnational product, for a worldwide audience, with a production team and a group of actors from different countries in Latin America and the United States. The TV series broadcast in two languages: Spanish and English; and was filmed in locations of Colombia and North America. Besides the casting, the production team, the locations, and the language, other aspects such as the thematic selection and the framing of the narrative plot acted as principles for the construction of a transnational narrative.

The choice of the theme of drug trafficking and the figure of Pablo Escobar as one of the main characters of the TV series is consistent with the purpose of achieving a worldwide television hit. It had a growing and proven success among Latin American audiences, the so-called narco-telenovelas. Specifically, the TV series had an important precedent in commercial terms, the soap opera: *Pablo Escobar, el Patrón del mal*, a 2012 Caracol TV production that not only broke historical audience records in Colombia but was also successfully exported to 30 other countries and is also part of the Spanish content menu offered by Netflix.

The characters, as communicatively constructed devices, represent one of the main resources for the audience involvement. A common feature in many television series, in the context of what Mittel (2015) calls "complex television", is the prominent role of unfriendly, morally questionable or villainous figures, all but male; antiheroes, characters whose behavior and beliefs generate an ambiguous, conflictive or negative moral relationship with the receivers (Mittel, 2015). The most famous drug lord in history, a worldwide recognized (or at least recognizable) figure of organized crime in Latin America, guaranteed, at first, the interest of a large audience and the possibility of engaging

a complex character, matching the most popular antiheroes and villains typical of current TV fiction.

It is obvious that Pablo Escobar "sells," and he sells very well. If we look at the number of books and films that in the last 20 years someone produced something about the drug lord, we can confirm that this character has become a powerful reference for the media industry, a figure susceptible to growing remediation processes. Just to mention a few examples, in cinema, films like *Blow* (2001), *Escobar: Paradise Lost* (2014), and two other upcoming productions like *Mena* (starring Tom Cruise) and *Escobar* (with Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz) show the growing fascination of the media industry with the figure of the drug trafficker. Netflix was betting on this "revival" of the interest in the drug lord.

According to Ted Sarandos, Netflix Content Director (Beauregard, October 16 th, 2015, para. 4) who contradictorily promoted *Narcos* as a narrative "inspired by real events" but at the same time portrayed a version of "Escobar's saga will not resemble anything seen before." One of its promotional trailers was: "The true story like you've never seen before." In the words of José Padilha, the intention was "to tell the true story of how cocaine became a huge problem in the United States and Europe and how it all began in Medellín" (Beauregard, October 16 th, 2015, para. 4). First of all, in this description of the general concept of the TV series, the argument is quite clear: it placed the narrative plot in a transnational location, like the drug business itself. They presented it as the "true story", but not of a series of events located in Colombia, but of a storyline whose proportions and consequences also concerned American and European audiences. The TV series promised a re-play between history and fiction, not only as a way of making it attractive to audiences but as a central element where the central narrative plotted the past.

The series was a bet to reconstruct, through fiction, the origin of the Colombian drug trafficking and the process that made it a global business. Based on the central figure of drug trafficker Pablo Escobar and the violence that set Colombia on fire, he rewrites the history of a series of events and characters from the recent history of that country and introduces elements that make possible to place it in the broad

context of the geopolitical relations and tensions of the American continent. It describes the period from the 1970s to the 1990s but is explicitly narrated from the viewer's present, in other words, the future of that past it describes.

Although Escobar's figure is the centerpiece of the TV show's narrative, the voice of the DEA agent, Steve Murphy (Boyd Holbrook), is the one that directly narrates, describes, and explains the events plotted in the story. Through the character, whose mission is to bring down the drug business and go after the Medellín Cartel, the limits of the position from which it is presented are established. *Narcos* is a version of the history of Colombian drug trafficking told by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency.

An evident fundamental opposition structures the police story. On the one hand, Murphy personifies, together with his collaborators Javier Peña, DEA agent, and Coronel Carrillo, of the Colombian Bloque de Búsqueda, the police perspective, the positive pole who tells the story. On the other hand, there are the drug traffickers, basically personified by Pablo Escobar. This melodramatic game of opposites also works as a resource of representation of international strategic relations, which explains, contextualizes and legitimizes the role of the United States in the drug war in Latin America.

Manichaeism in the representation, works as a setting in which *Narcos* rewrites, through fiction, some traumatic events in the recent history of Colombia. Events like the assassinations of the Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, and the presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento; the kidnapping of the journalist Diana Turbay and the attack against Avianca flight 203 where 110 people died and the terrorist attacks that occurred in Bogotá during the first months of 1993, just to name a few. The first season describes most of these violent events. It is not a historical series, but a police series, historically inspired, which corrects and redefines historical events and junctures, with the license provided by fiction. The TV show's narrative plays with the historical past, but it does not submit to it, nor does it claim to be faithful to it.

However, and this aspect is important, it is a fictional narrative that seeks to create a truthful effect on the events narrated. The interaction between reality and fiction, between history (as a fictional narrative)

and "true history" (past events) was not only a commercial and promotional resource but also the events described in *Narcos* built one of the fundamental characteristics of the memory. Therefore, it is possible to recognize three fundamental resources used in the series to establish the narrative with an "aura of authenticity" and enhance the memory effect it builds.

First, the resource of the omniscient narrator, through the narrative identity of DEA agent Steve Murphy. Murphy's voice, situated in the future of the plot, enables alternating temporal transitions (between the present, past and future of the narration), complementary explanations and digressions to the central plot. He is not only the principal actor but also a witness and an informed expert. The dialogic style that constantly calls the attention of its audiences allows the insertion of data, statistics and diverse references that expand the disposition of contents, make transcendent and connect the events, allowing at the same time to glimpse the consequences that go beyond the narrated plot. The agent's role is essential to build a vision of the drug trafficking from the United States; as Paul Ricoeur (1996) proposed, it seems to allow inscribing, through the role of the individual in the narrative (historical time), the times lived in natural time.

Another resource used to create this aura of authenticity is the reuse of archival images. The TV series includes pictures of the real people represented (Pablo Escobar, the "real" agent Murphy), police records, images from the press of those years, visual fragments of television reports on police operations, television speeches by former presidents and Colombian and North American political figures. These "real" images, coming from the audiovisual archive of the time, are introduced as resources to set, illustrate or reinforce the descriptions and explanations introduced by Murphy, and operate as "evidence", as proof of the veracity of his "history".

The remediation takes place in a direct and almost evident way: with Murphy's fictional story, the idea of continuity between the images that were once part of an informative discourse, is reinforced; also, to establish a direct continuity relationship with the reused archival images they recreate fictional scenes. In *Narcos*, this remediation process has at least three evident characteristics: the use of archival images that

support, contextualize, and/or expand the narratives and explanations of agent Murphy; the recreation of historical images as visual continuity between the narrative of the series and the History; and the images as a direct resource to tell "from within" the fictional story. It is important to remember that cultural memory is based on processes of reuse, through which previous media memorials are incorporated, criticized and remodeled (Erll, 2009, p. 5).

The combination of these two resources: an omniscient narrator and the reuse of archive images, allows us to simulate the construction of a pseudo-documentary discourse, that is, to introduce, in the fictional plot, some typical conventions of the genres of reality, such as the documentary. Therefore, the TV series takes to the limit the hybridization between genders, one of the typical practices of the so-called second golden age of television. In addition, the use of these conventions blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, between history and History, and builds the illusion that it is a "unmediated memory" (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 4), and even more, that it is a memory without "fictional" mediation; which increases the feeling that there is nothing to mediate between the facts and their recollection.

As a result, *Narcos* not only acts as a mediating narrative in the "transfer of memory" (Rigney, 2005, p. 26) through distant mnemonic communities but also operates in the apparent explanation and documentation of "historical truth" for transnational audiences unfamiliar with the events described.

Absolute reality or insulting grotesque? the opinions,
the conflicts, and the controversies concerning the memory

Speaking of ratings, *Narcos* has been one of Netflix's most successful original productions. In 2015 it became the second most popular series on online television platforms in the United States and the United Kingdom, second only to HBO's *Game of Thrones* (Parrot Analytics, 2015). A recent study places it in third place among the most viewed content on Netflix worldwide, ahead of other productions such as House of Cards and in first place of ratings in countries as unlike as Cyprus, Kuwait, Guatemala, Morocco, and Spain (Oaks, 2017).

In addition to these data, the debate on the implications of this type of memory story invites us to examine the context of production and the discursive context of the TV series; trying to explore, at least in general terms, how this memory narrative has been seen and interpreted by the transnational audiences for which it was conceived. An alternative to try to understand how this dimension of the process might be operating is to get the feedback that Netflix users share on the platform. It is only an exercise, and although it cannot, nor it is intended to replace a more in-depth study of the reception or appropriation of the TV series, it allows us to point out some interesting questions about how the audiences have positioned themselves about *Narcos*.

Many of the reviews of the TV show's viewers are just ratings about the quality, generally rated as excellent, interesting, entertaining, exciting, and highlight aspects such as production, photography or acting. On the other hand, one of the most criticized aspects -especially among Latin American viewers- is the lack of the "paisa" and Colombian identity that they recognize in the mixture of accents, and the fact that Pablo Escobar's character was personified by a Brazilian actor, which in the opinion of many people, diminishes the character's credibility.

However, in addition to these general comments and observations about *Narcos*, a considerable number of reviews focus on controversial issues that particularly concern its nature as a memory story. The fundamental discussion areas are: 1) *the TV series' adherence (or not) to the "true history" of the facts described*; 2) *the questioning about the place "and the approach from which the story is told*; 3) *the legitimacy of the story told*. It is possible to identify different stands around these fundamental areas, which are closely related to the "place" of reading of the series' viewers. An important mediation seems to be the previous knowledge about the topic, as well as the closeness and the involvement with the story.

In the first area of discussion, part of the audience emphasizes the fidelity of the historical representation as an important value of the TV series. The audience's comments emphasize *Narcos'* attachment to the "real history" as one of its positive characteristics:

- Recommended. The "script", in other words, *the absolute reality*,[4] is impressive, the facts of our recent past are both exciting and unfortunate, what they explain is unbelievable, and at the same time, it is real.
- Another excellent thing about the TV series is that *it shows you how things were in those times, they did not invent anything, everything happened*.
- It's fantastic; *sometimes it seems that you see absolute fiction* when you see the atrocities and madness that this guy did. They avoid the prototype of the good and the bad, *they objectively focus on the facts*, without exaggerating any feature of the main characters.
- Well, to tell the truth, I forgot about the accent, for that we have Pablo Escobar's series: El Patrón del Mal which is very good and is like a longer version of the series; *this tv show is a series and at the same time a documentary that tells the story from another angle*.

This kind of comments clearly show that, at least for a significant group of viewers, the TV series has acted as a mediating narrative in the approach and recognition of a "strange" or unknown past, in the incorporation of certain representations of that past that, also, are assumed as "real" or "true", at least in part. From this perspective, they consider "true" the narrative of *Narcos*; the description of reality is so incredible that it looks like fiction. The TV series explains, shows and is considered an objective narrative of the facts. The viewers' difficulty in establishing clear distinctions between the fictional script and the story to which it refers, or to place it within the conventions of realistic or fictional genres, show the effect of truth that it achieves in them. Not only does *Narcos* act as a mediating narrative in the "transfer of memory" (Rigney, 2005, p. 26) through distant mnemonic communities, but it also operates in the alleged explanation and documentation of the "historical truth" for transnational audiences unfamiliar with the events described.

Other recipients even give it an educational value, they claim to have learned from it and recommend it to others who wish to know the history of drug trafficking in Colombia:

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[4]   The italics in the reviews were added by the authors.

- I loved the TV show; I highly recommended it *to know what happened* in Colombia.
- This TV series is a crazy thing; sincerely, leaves speechless *those who know nothing about Pablo Escobar*. It fanaticizes*. After the TV series, I began to investigate him...*
- *Excellent for those who want to know the stories of the narcos in Colombia briefly.* It is not a Colombian novel but made in Colombia and based on events that happened in Colombia; it is different.
- It is a very good *dramatization, like a documentary*; although from the beginning I saw it as a fiction television series based on real facts*, I learned a lot from this story* that marked our country and the whole world.
- I love this TV show. The magical, mean thing that history can be, but I like it because of the script and because *it is part of the Colombian history that is now our history.*

Therefore, a part of the audience can affirm that *Narcos* has facilitated the approach to the story told and the access to a certain type of knowledge about it. Fiction, as a model or memorial form (Rigney, 2005), has stimulated their interest in this part of the past as triggered processes of searching for complementary information about it, has made it intelligible, and has even incorporated it significantly as part of what they now consider to be their *history*. In other words, it has promoted the construction of prosthetic memories, derived from the coupling or identification of the receivers with the mediated representation proposed in the TV series.

On the other hand, another group strongly criticizes *Narcos'* fidelity to real history in its reviews, and this is the fundamental argument for its negative criticisms:

- This TV show sends a *very distorted* message about what it's like to be a criminal and what happened in Pablo Escobar's life. If they wanted to make a fictional series, they could invent a character and *not try to make this TV series to look like a true story.*
- A real story behind the scenes of a *mediocre investigation, a TV show full of anachronisms, incoherencies and inconsistencies*, I

took the time to see it to give this critique, I deeply regret having wasted my time.
- It is very bad; it seems to me that, if you want to tell the story of Pablo Escobar at least, *you should take the time to investigate the facts fully*.
- A story that marked a country, that left suffering and pain, therefore, deserves respect and *this TV series only shows the desire to be a popular TV show, without caring and above all, without taking the time to investigate well how things happened*.

These viewers refute the TV series' claim to truth, its supposed attachment to real history, its lack of research, and its disrespect for what they consider to be sensitive moments in recent Colombian history. For them, the TV show is questionable not only because it distorts the facts described, but also because it is presented and promoted as a true narrative, because it takes advantage of the licenses of fiction to misrepresent history, and even more, because they recognize in this historic game a resource to commercialize it, to profit from it. Although it is not explicit in their reviews, it is possible to assume that these viewers had previous knowledge of the figure of Escobar and the moments reconstructed in *Narcos*, from which they contrast and construct their critiques. An interesting fact is that one of the references of contrast or previous knowledge on the subject most referred to by the viewers is the telenovela *El Patrón del Mal*. Within the parameters established by it, viewers evaluate the veracity of history and its capacity to produce empathy:

- There is no comparison between *Narcos* and *El Patrón del Mal*, *El Patrón del Mal makes you vibrate, excites you and you can see that they tried to keep up with the real story*. This version of *Narcos* is very poor, in every sense, *in history, in emotion*. It is missing a lot.
- I saw this TV show first and then *El Patrón del Mal*, unlike *Narcos*, is very well done, but the stories are very different. *Narcos* is very pro "gringos", and in *El Patrón del Mal you can feel the pain that the Colombians experienced no matter if the consequences are not good, but you get the feeling of what they experienced*.

- After watching *El Patrón del Mal*, *this one seems poor to me*. From *the lack of historical details* to the principal actor, who is Brazilian and can't hide his accent.

- Sincerely I do not recommend it; it is better *El Patrón del Mal*, *it is the closest thing to the reality we lived many years ago*.

The fact that they take as a reference and source of legitimate knowledge the media memorial and a speech that also fictionalizes and melodramatizes the figure of the drug lord only confirms the power of television fiction as a way of constructing cultural memory. It also shows the need to think a little beyond the use of Pablo Escobar's character as a simple commercial catch. To consider that all this cultural production around him is acting to form a canon (Erll, 2008), a recognizable pattern, a way of representing the drug lord and re-creating the events associated with his figure and, therefore, of re-describing the recent history of Colombia.

Another important point of discussion is the questioning of the approach and the place that builds the history. For these viewers, the TV show creates a narrative that is tendentious and justifies the meddling stance of the United States in Latin America:

- The finale is terrible, I already knew Pablo Escobar's story from time ago, and that he died, and his empire fell, *but making the Americans the key piece in his search doesn't seem right to me. The story is very different* because they put Murphy as the one who shot Pablo Escobar down. They significantly changed the original history.

- Everything is good, and it is a nice TV show*, the only bad thing is that the fucking "gringo," who is not even in the plot of the TV show is the hero:* thanks to him everything was solved. That was the only bad thing*; it is enough that they want to be those who save the world. Do things as they happened*.

- I saw the entire TV show, but I think it has a lot of "gringo" style; like in many TV series, movies or programs where they try to sell the idea *that Americans do justice and that it's good for society that they intervene* to bring peace to others. I don't think the TV show

is bad, the special effects and the actors are very good, but in the end, it has a lot of "gringo" elements. Americans are the kind ones, even though I don't doubt that there are so many good people on both sides, but *in my opinion, they shouldn't violate a country with a flag of justice. I hope that Netflix has a more neutral point of view in its future TV shows*.

- *A wrong perspective from the U.S. on a delicate history for Colombia.* It's a pity that they make such big productions without taking into consideration the direct relationship with reality.
- *Colombia, according to the U.S., again.* The most important character is not Pablo Escobar but an American. It is *a very tendentious TV show because it presents only one version of a complicated situation that was happening in Colombia in the 80s*. Americans, as always, are the "good guys" who must go to another country to save the people from the "bad guys".

From this perspective, viewers can appreciate and value the TV show in a positive way regarding aesthetics and the quality of its production but focus their comments on the biases of the story told. Murphy's character is considered a synecdoche of the United States, and a resource for telling the story from a partial and deformed perspective. In moral terms, they questioned his status as hero and protagonist: telling the story from this perspective is "incorrect" and "indelicate". The TV series is considered to be a narrative built from polarization and otherness; on the one hand, Americans as "good people", and on the other, "those people" who need salvation. They judged it as another narrative with Hollywood style, another argument that distorts history to legitimize the U.S. intervention in the internal affairs and conflicts of other countries.

Finally, another important group of comments comes from the Colombian viewers who, from their participation, experience or knowledge of the history described, are critically positioned:

- Unfortunately, I cannot rate it with fewer stars: Pablo Escobar (what a surprise!). What else can we expect from a society where only a few people read? *As a Colombian I feel totally ashamed*, I've

never watched it, and I will not watch it; *the lack of imagination of writers it is very boring, talking about a character who died more than 23 years ago*. The morbidity of the people who watch this TV series has me amazed. Also, *they are destroying the image of a country*, did you know that? Or don't you think about it because the TV series doesn't tell you? (...) Please be aware, it could be your image, it could be your country; and most importantly, *take a history book, don't believe everything they told you*. If you're watching this TV series because you think the production is very good, please support real talent, support imaginative writers and directors. DO NOT SUPPORT GARBAGE, SUPPORT INNOVATION.[5]

- I liked it, although they went a long way from reality. *I'm Colombian, and I'm also from Medellín; the story is far from reality*, and I think that it intends to recognize the U.S. as the great heroes, when *it was thanks to the blood of us Colombians, that we were able to find Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria*.

- It is very bad, *an insult to those of us who are from Colombia, who know the reality of the country and how the events were*, it is even more insulting that the actor is Brazilian and tries to imitate the "paisa" accent, something that he does not achieve...

- *I am a good person, like most Colombians, and I don't agree with the concept, nor with the "great" idea to sell this outrageous as something original, this doesn't represent us either as citizens or as a society*. I wrote to the leading actor but, like all Hollywood actors, he is an entity that only lives for profit. I hope there won't be another season of the TV series. I invite the concept's owners to Medellin, the most beautiful city on the planet.

A common feature in these reviews is that the viewers make explicit their "place" of speech, their position concerning history. They recognize themselves as Colombians, and from this perspective, assumed as a criterion of authority, they judge a narrative of memory that involves them and that they criticize both for its distortion of history and for its lack of originality. *Narcos* is considered an abomination, a deformed

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5   The capital letters of the original reviews were kept.

story that represents neither the Colombians nor the history they lived and that the TV series pretends to tell accurately. In their reviews, they mention feelings such as embarrassment, insult, or humiliation that describe their emotional position regarding the TV series. These feelings, although described personally, are also related and attributed to the imagined community of the nation: the TV series is considered an outrage to the memory and representation of the national.

The use of Pablo Escobar and the proliferation of stories associated with his figure and drug trafficking is also strongly criticized by Colombian viewers. Besides complaining about the lack of originality of narratives of this type, which talk about "a character who died more than 23 years ago", they condemn how they trivialize, commercialize, and export these recent events in the national and international history.

- I kindly ask that they *stop producing TV series about war wounds that we in Colombia want to forget*; I would appreciate if the integrity of the country were respected and they show the good things about it.
- Please stop releasing TV series and movies about Colombian drug traffickers as if they are the only inhabitants of the country.
- LET ESCOBAR DIE! I'm sick and tired that the only TV series that talk about our country portrays us as drug traffickers and murderers. Where is a TV show about our culture, folklore, people, or at least a good Colombian character?
- WE DON'T WANT ANY MORE TELENOVELAS ABOUT DRUG TRAFFICKERS! We want to dignify Colombia NOT humiliate it. *Just another Colombian who feels that this TV series is a lack of respect*.
- *Please stop hurting an entire country*.

As a demand or a plea, many of the reviews claim "the right to forget" on the part of those who lived and suffered the recreated events, the demand to close the past that they consider contributed building a deforming, stereotyped and easily exportable representation of what is national.

CONCLUSIONS

The potential of audio and video media as one of the main promoters of meaningful proposals about the past is becoming increasingly evident. Television is one of them, due to its scope and consolidation as a cultural industry and has a central place, and it has been well known and studied for a while now. However, the last decades have brought important transformations to the media. Thanks to technology, the capacity to produce historical narratives has increased and, consequently, their space for action.

Therefore, the studies analyzing the relationship between these plots and their capacity to transform memory have made an effort to follow the change. Based on this context of interest, we have approached *Netflix* as a model case to think about two relevant aspects: the relocation of the senses over the past, previously considered analytically from a national perspective, and the internationalization of memory proposals, as a central element in the creation of these relocated memories.

The reflections about the TV series *Narcos* are the basis of this article, detailed by previous analyses of specific chapters; the article also tries to explain the relations between space (the place), the logic of production and circulation of contents, as well as the transformations in the national representations of the past. There are three specific core ideas: the conception and production of narrative, the basic elements for the discursive construction of memory in a product thought as transnational and, in very general lines, the readings by audiences in different locations.

The decision to present certain facts of Colombia's recent history, related to the actions of specific characters, in a polarized and Manichean narrative that plays with the past, generated an effect of truth. Conceived from a context of transnational production and circulation, contributed to creating an effect of prosthetic memory for distant audiences, culturally and geographically of the narrated history. As a result, *Narcos* was a good example of the creation of proposals from the past that no longer represent national ideas or question local audiences.

A game between reality and fiction is the basis of this kind of fiction; between the known historical speech and its potential to appeal to transnational receivers, to make the stories commercially viable in a present that is assumed to be the result of these explanations, while at the same time distancing itself temporally and spatially from the events described. *Narcos* reused original speeches as a way of making obvious the aspiration for truth in the narrative but gave them an evident point of view. Murphy's voice, the true central character of the TV series, talks to us from a situated present, the one of the American Drug Enforcement Agency. The TV series precisely create the essential elements to make the past speak from the present. The play between reality and fiction is also an articulation of multiple temporalities that seem to tie the context of the audiences as part of the explanation of the Colombian drug trafficking phenomenon.

This way of telling the past is why audiences make different readings of History that have to do with their place about the process described. Three key points articulate the readings that have to do with the narrative's attachment to the "historical truth", the relationship between the story hatched, how they hatch the proposed point of view and the place and, about the two previous points, the legitimacy that the historical explanation acquires.

The potential of an analysis of *Narcos* from the relations between television fiction and memory in a moment of re-enunciation of the ways of producing television at a global level is revealed when all these elements are at stake. The discussion of the viewers and their different positions regarding the TV series as a story or narrative of memory, not only makes clear the potential of television fiction in the construction of prosthetic memories among transnational audiences, also allows us to glimpse the ethical implications and the conflictive character of this type of fictional representation operations of the past. Around it, a series of tensions arise concerning the "right to memory". The critical points of this debate are, on the one hand, the questioning of who has the legitimate right to tell stories, from what perspectives and how they should be told. On the other hand, they also question the right to the legitimate representation of experience and the right to forget by a society that resists the oversimplified representation of a painful and recent past.

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