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**In what way are the new Argentinean *telenovelas* used
as a refuge against globalisation?**

The case study: *Gasoleros*

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1998 a new trend in Argentinean *telenovelas* has begun to be part of the television schedule, and they have become the most popular programmes in the country.

Different to traditional soap operas, where the main story is based on a stereotypical love affair with stereotypical characters and a predictable end, the new *telenovela* has a lot of characteristics that make it different to the ones that Argentines had been accustomed to.

Firstly, the new *telenovelas* are transmitted at night, after the news, so that they taken in a broader audience. As a consequence, their audience is not composed of only women, the traditional target audience of these programmes. There has also been – as we shall see - a change in the presentation of the role of the woman. Women are not presented as they used to be in previous Latin American soap operas: weak, and in a subordinate position in relation to the men, who naturally portrayed the stereotypical ‘macho’ males. On the contrary, in these new *telenovelas*, women are presented as strong characters fighting to resolve every day life problems. Secondly, social and political issues have been incorporated into the themes that are treated in the *telenovelas*. All the problems presented on them are real problems, daily issues, the concerns that common people – the *pueblo* – have to deal with everyday. The realism not only of the topics but also of the characters - that are not either all good-looking, in their thirties, or rich - were new features that made these *telenovelas* very popular.

It is important to note that these stories traditionally take place in a *barrio*, or neighbourhood, and all of relationships that typically form the structure of this kind

of social community are presented to the viewer. The neighbourhood is still part of Argentinean life, especially in the countryside and in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. The neighbour is part of the family, because it is still very common for the Argentineans to be born, grow up and to die in the same neighbourhood.

So why have these *telenovelas* become so popular? Why have they been watched by millions of people, with an audience that includes high middle, middle, and working class men and women, and young and old viewers, without any differentiation?

Is it the realism of the topics? Is it that the characters are not young and models but 'common' actors? Is it the simplicity of the story? Is it that each Argentinean can see his or her own life in the *telenovela*? Or is it, maybe, that the local community showed in the *telenovela* – present in the family, in the home and in the neighbourhood – can offer to the audience comfort and security, the very things that the global world cannot give? Is the fictional locality of the *telenovela*, the refuge from which audience escape the 'real', the global issues prevalent everywhere? After all, do characters in *telenovela* wonder, 'what is this notorious globalisation we keep hearing about? Well, whatever it is, it is not going to attack us. We are very safe'...

But are we?

Maybe not.

This essay will try to answer some of these questions, and to that end I will use one of these *telenovelas*, *Gasoleros*, as a case study.

A CASE STUDY

Gasoleros

Gasoleros was a *telenovela* that began in 1998, and was on Channel 13 until 2000. It was produced by the Argentinean private production company, Polka. Since its beginning, the programme had high ratings, that grew steadily, not only in Argentina but in Uruguay as well (see: <http://www.brecha.com.uy/numeros/n658/lupa.html>. Accessed 20th March 2002).

Gasoleros is the name used in Argentina for cars that run on gas oil, which is 60 per cent cheaper than the petrol oil. But it is also used to characterise those persons that know how to manage their money so that they spend only '*lo justo y necesario*', that is, only what can be justified and is necessary.

Gasoleros is the story of Roxi, who is in her forties and Panigassi, a widower of fifty who works in a mechanic's workshop. Roxi is a single mother, who later married an intellectual man, called Jorge. Even though this is the core of the story, which does not seem to be very original, *Gasoleros* incorporated a series of factors into the programme that began a new trend in Argentinean television, a recipe followed by other channels: *Buenos Vecinos* was transmitted on Channel Telefé, PH on Channel 9 and *El Soderó de mi vida*, which was launched on Channel 13 in 2001. In *Gasoleros* rich people did not exist. All the characters were either working or middle class, whose lives revolved around the peace of the neighbourhood. The home is a very important factor in *Gasoleros*, especially for Panigassi, who inherited his house from his father, an Italian immigrant. The kitchen is the place where the family gathers, and where they share their feelings, problems and successes.

Panigassi has a teenage son and also takes care of another teenager who was abandoned by his parents. Panigassi's sister is a doctor, and she is the pride of the family and of the neighbourhood as well.

Roxi drives a taxi and she has to sustain her family economically because her husband does not like to work. Her son is also a teenager, who has had the opportunity to travel to the United States in order to meet his father, and he comes back fascinated with the country.

There are other characters and places in the *telenovela* that recreate the life of a traditional Argentinean neighbourhood: the café, the street, the shops, the club, the local nut, the workers, the music band, and so on.

This is, briefly, the background of *Gasoleros*.

And now silence, because the show has to begin.

1-INT/KITCHEN/NIGHT

Elba is in the kitchen, and Roxi comes into it. They are sitting around the table. They begin to share the *mate*, the traditional Argentinean tea.

ELBA

Good evening Roxi! It is a very nice surprise to see you again! Thanks a lot for coming. I have been expecting for you for many days.

ROXI

Hi Elba. I could not come before because, you know, your neighbour called me last week and I have been visiting her every day this week. She is having some problems with her husband. Poor Susanne! Anyway, How are you?

ELBA

Worried. But first, are you going to have dinner with us? I am going to prepare pasta, Susana is coming as well and we can watch *Gasoleros* together.

ROXI

That sounds really good. I accept.

Hugo, Elba's husband, comes into the kitchen

ROXI

Hello Hugo, How are you?

HUGO

Hi Roxi, nice to see you again. Tired. I have been in a queue handing in application forms for different jobs and interviewing, but nothing... Anyway, I have to congratulate you. The last programme was more than excellent. You really love Panigassi, but ... do you think that you are doing the correct thing? Have you decided what you're going to do? You have to take into account that Jorge is suffering a lot.

ELBA

Don't listen to Hugo. He is speaking from a macho's point of view. Do whatever you want and whatever you feel. We, the women, support you.

HUGO

Oh! It is nine o'clock. It is about to start. Turn on the television, Elba!

ELBA

What happens with your legs! You turn on the television. I am cooking.

The doorbell rings. Susana arrives. The show is going to begin.

Silence in the kitchen.

Roxi and Elba

Roxi does not exist. She is the character that Mercedes Morán played in *Gasoleros* during its run from 1998-2000.

Elba does exist. She is my neighbour in Junín, a town in the middle of the countryside in Argentina. Elba is 45 years old, and she feels that nothing relevant has happened in her life. Sometimes she feels that the most important day of her life was when she had her daughter. This happens on her positive days. And they are not a lot. Her life is her shop, similar to a drugstore, and she also prepares homemade meals to make some extra money. She is very conservative, and she has always followed the ‘correct’ political and social behaviours that have been expected from her as a working class woman. That’s is the main reason why she decided, many years ago, not to ask her husband for a divorce, even though she does not love Hugo any more.

Women

As I stated in the introduction of this paper, there has been a change in the presentation of the role of the women in the new Argentinean *telenovelas*. Many authors in this area (Mazziotti, 1993, 1996; Barbero, 1993a) argue that there is a new trend in *telenovelas* where the stereotype of the fragile and weak woman, dominated by her husband or partner has been replaced by another type of woman, closer to reality. The Argentinean author Nora Mazziotti (1996) – who has studied *telenovelas* in Latin America, especially in Argentina – states that in the 90s there was a new tendency to show a progressive heroine, one that dared to defy conventional social rules that had been taken for granted for a long time; for example, the idea of marriage lasting forever, no matter the consequences, or the idea that housework was something solely reserved for the woman. This trend has taken place in relation with

the incorporation of women into the labour market, where in some cases they provide the principal means of economic support for the house. Rosales (2001) agrees with Mazziotti, stating that the women in the new soap operas are presented without as many inhibitions as had been presented in the traditional soap operas. She says that the lives of these women are not reduced to the family sphere. Moreover, because women have branched out from the home and have increased their personal potential, family and marriage are not their only concerns or means of reaching personal goals and satisfaction (Rosales, 2001; Mazziotti, 1993, 1996).

Men are also presented in a different way in these *telenovelas*: they can be tender, they can wash the dishes, and they can cry. Rosales (2001) says that the new man-characters in these television programmes are not machos – at least not extremely so- and that the stereotype of the man that dominates the woman has disappeared completely from these *telenovelas*.

Rosales (2001) believes that in the new Latin America *telenovelas* there has also been a change in the portrayal of relationships: now, there is not necessarily only one man in a woman's life, and the relationship does not have to last forever. The relationships portrayed are more similar to the romantic relationships that real women have to face in their lives: failure can be an option and happiness can be achieved through a wide range of options. Love is not everything in the new *telenovelas*.

This is probably one of the reasons explains why these *telenovelas* are not watched only by housewives (Mazziotti 1993), but also by teenagers, students, and professionals, among others (see: <http://www.brecha.com.uy/numeros/n658/lupa.html>).

This may explicate why Elba feels that she is Roxi, or in other words, why Elba would like to be Roxi. Because, even though women are presented as more liberal in the *telenovelas*, for Elba this liberalization has yet to arrive and she is not

very sure that it will arrive at all. For Elba, it is not very easy to take decisions in the conservative and catholic society she was born into, raised and educated in, and where she is currently living. Definitely, she would like to be Roxi. And she is Roxi. Every night, at 21.00 , she is Roxi, and for one hour she has the courage to tell her husband that she loves another man.

For Mazziotti (1993) this projection is part of the *telenovelas*, where the story recreates ideas that are part of the collective imaginary. Buckingham (1987) believes that, in a way, the viewer helps to construct the character, who at the end is a result of the interaction between the viewer and the script. In relation with this topic, García Riera (1974) states that the idea of performance is transcended by the relationship between the character and the viewer, and for Spence (1995) this relation becomes a friendship between them, where the person can feel that he/she knows the character better than his/her own friends or relatives. Spence (1995) believes that, as a result, the performance becomes real because it speaks about our feelings and our fantasies – it becomes real because it is familiar. Hence, Spence (1995) states that narrative is a social transaction and fiction and reality are not opposite, but coexist in parallel. Along the same lines of thought, Cantor Magnani (1984: 175) states: “It is not in the representation of the specific events and details that the sense of reality is created in fiction, but in certain generality that looks in both directions and gives consistency to the specific events of reality as well as to the world of fiction”.

2-INT/KITCHEN/NIGHT

ELBA

As I told you, I am worried, and sad.
What is going to happen if my husband
doesn't get a job?

ROXI

I don't know. I am in the same situation.

ELBA

He has been doing some part time jobs. But it is impossible to live with his salary. I don't know what I'm going to do. It is very difficult to get a job in this town, I mean, in this country. And what I earn depends on the economic situation. People used to buy my homemade food, but nowadays, they prefer to by the goods and cook by their own. It is cheaper.

ROXI

I understand you so well. Jorge has begun to work, but his boss did not pay him. I am so sad. I had been so hopeful with his work.

ELBA

And even though my daughter María has studied, and she is a lawyer, she cannot find a job either. I am so sad.

ROXI

In this case, my situation is worse: Nicolás does not want to work. He can help me, but he doesn't want to. But what I can do? The only thing that he wants to do is to be the manager of the music band of the neighbourhood. But this is not a job, this

is a hobby. I am so upset. But... he needs a father, but his father is in USA, and Jorge... Jorge is a ghost in the house, and he doesn't want to give me a divorce.

ELBA

That is very unfair. But, Have you told him that you love Panigassi?

ROXI

No. I can't. I feel guilty. And on the other hand, Panigassi wants me to solve this problem as soon as possible. He wants to get married.

ELBA

Congratulations!!! I am so happy with this news.

Realism

For Barbero (1993b) *telenovelas* represent a dramatization of everyday life, where social demands are transformed into the primary goods with which the cultural industry works. Consequently he thinks that it is not useful to study only the effects of the message, but to build an integral analysis of the consumption of the goods, because it is within the consumption where the production of the meaning is made, and where the use of the goods – in this case, the *telenovela* - can be understood. Along the same lines, González (1993) states that it is necessary to study the different kinds of social appropriation of the *telenovela*; it is worthy to study how the audience watches, interprets and appropriates the *telenovelas* within its familiar

nucleus, its neighbourhood and society. For him, the popularity of the new *telenovelas* is based on the real and human situations that they show.

The incorporation of social and political issues in the *telenovela* is a phenomenon that is occurring not only in Latin American – such as Colombia, Brazil and the new *telenovelas* produced by Television Azteca in Mexico – (Peñamarín and López Díez, 1995) but also in European countries, i.e. the United Kingdom.¹

Spence (1995) believes that in *telenovelas* the audience can find familiar places and landscapes with real people who have real problems, living ordinary and common lives. Within this context, the viewer knows what the characters are talking about. For example, they can identify with the situation when Roxi and Paniggassi talk about the problems they face because they cannot afford to change the stove that does not work properly. The viewer can understand without explanation why Roxi complains about the queues in the hospitals, where the only way to get to see a doctor is to get up at 4.00, take the bus, and queue for more than six hours. It is not Roxi who is talking -it is Elba, who does not have a prepaid medical service, but who is dependent on the state health service to treat her gastritis, the consequence of her stress and sadness.

Spence (1995) states that even though *telenovelas* are fiction they never leave the real world completely. “Soaps are fiction and yet are about the world” (Spence, 1995: 187). And, on the other hand, the viewer makes the fiction his / her own fiction when he / she lives, transforms and uses the *telenovelas* according to their own needs (Spence, 1995, Verón, 1993).

For Fiallo (1995) and Verón (1993) the *telenovela* shows what happens in the every day life of common women and men, who feel that the *telenovela* reflects their

¹ Coronation Street and East Enders are the British examples where it is possible to see how the social, cultural and political concerns are introduced into the narrative of the soap opera (Buckingham, 1987; Dyer et al., 1981; Geraghty, 1995)

problems. However, for Rosales (2001) this is a new tendency in the *telenovelas*, where the social is not only used as background- as in the traditional Latin America soap operas, where topics such as poverty and social mobility were presented as secondary to the stereotypical romantic relationship – but is also part of the main story.

In this new trend of *telenovela*, more social issues are introduced into the programme: drugs, unemployment, divorce, alcoholism, racism, and so on. Moreover, depending on varying situations, other social and cultural concerns have begun to play an important role in the *telenovela*. In Argentina, topics such as political corruption, personal safety, the relationship between society and the police, the lack of opportunity available to the younger generations, among others, have been also included. For Rosales (2001) this new trend not only includes a wider audience, but one that also demands this type of media product.

The family and the neighbourhood

Within this context - where real problems invade fiction, and the audience feels that on the other side of the communicational and cultural process there is a *telenovela*, with characters / persons that speak as they speak, suffer and laugh because of the same reasons – the family plays a prominent role.

In our case study, as it has been stated in the introduction, Panigassi lives with his sister – a doctor, the pride of the family - and his two sons. Everything is solved around the core of the family: love, relationships, concerns. Dinner and lunch times are the moments where they all come together around the table to chat about their lives.

On the other hand, Roxi lives with her son and her husband, and in the second year her mother began to live with them as well.

The importance of the family in the Argentinean culture has been very well reproduced in this new kind of *telenovela*. The significance of the kitchen in working and middle class families as a place of meeting and gathering, in which the viewer can recognize his / her own house, habits and traditions has been faithfully recreated (Sodre, 1996). In this context, where the viewer is in front of the television with his / her family watching *Gasoleros* – and the audience organizes its timetable in relation with the time of the *telenovela* (Sodre, 1996)- the importance of the family, as the first place where the person reveals his / her anxieties and frustrations, is consolidated (Durham, 1980). It is for this reason that Barbero (1993a: 216) states that “the mediation the daily life of the family exerts on television is not, however, limited to reception. It is present in the discourse itself”.

In Latin America, according to Barbero, the family is still considered the basic audience unit as the family is the principal source of recognition of socio cultural identity (1993b).

However the family is not the only source of socio cultural identity recognition and socialization in Latin America. According to many authors in this field (Barbero, 1993a, 1993b, Tufte, 1999, Mazzioti, 1993, 1996; Romero, 1982) the neighbourhood also plays a role in the socialization of an individual.

For Romero (1984a, 1984b) the neighbourhood transmits loyalties and brings together the community in places such as the café, the club, the main street and the shops. These loyalties drive to a new kind of social relationships and they become not only the core of a new pattern of solidarity (Matos del Mar, 1984) but also the place where identities are formed (Barbero, 1993a).

According to Barbero (1993a) the private universe of the home and the public world of the city are mediated by the *barrio* - or neighbourhood - which provides basic behavioural guidelines that lead to a construction of an ‘us’, that is, a sense of belonging (Cantor Magnani, 1984). However it is important to take into account that

the idea of the *barrio* - as it has been described - is one which forms part of the working and middle class environments, while upper class neighbour relationships are more often based on professional qualifications “rather than neighbourhood ties, belonging to a neighbourhood means, for the popular classes, to have a recognized identity under any circumstances” (Barbero, 1993a)

In *Gasoleros*, the story happens in a neighbourhood in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. The café plays an important role, because it is where many of the characters meet to chat and to share their stories. The café is managed by a woman, Emilia, who, like Roxi, has a strong personality and has to deal with many familiar and business problems on her own because her husband abandoned her a long time ago, and left her with two daughters.

The authors who have been studied the importance of the neighbourhood in Latin America and its role in the *telenovelas* (Alfaro, 1985a; Barbero, 1993a; Mazziotti, 1993, 1996; Tufte, 1999) agree that women often play a central role in the life of the neighbourhood:

“Women are the centre of the neighbourhood. Their power is based on the force of daily existence. They are the neighbourhood and define it. Women define the neighbourhoods from a perception of daily life for the most part configured on the basis of maternity. It is a social maternity that instead of closing in around the family connects the whole neighbourhood” (Barbero, 1993a: 199)

3-INT/KITCHEN/NIGHT

ROXI

I am sad.

ELBA

Yes, I can imagine. If it is difficult enough to accept that a son prefers to move to another house. It would be even more so for a mother to understand that her son wants to live in another country. Even though I have other problems with my daughter, she loves this place.

ROXI

I cannot understand why, I cannot understand his reasons. Why? If I love him, he has everything here: his family, his home, his friends, his neighbourhood, where he knows all the people. He lives with comfort. Yes, of course it is not a paradise. But here, he knows the language, the people, the codes of behaviour. He knows that we are here.

ELBA

But what are his motives?

ROXI

He told that he wants to know the world.
The world!!!!!! What world? This is our
world! And he doesn't want to understand
that. He says that he doesn't feel that this
is his place. But, why? His history, his life
is here. Where was my mistake in his
upbringing? I am so upset.

ELBA

You know, the same happened to
Cristina, have you met her? She lives in
front of Susana's house. Her daughter
Belén saved money to do a Masters in
Paris. And last year she moved there.
Cristina is still suffering. And the most
terrible thing is that Belén is more than
happy. She has done a course in trans...
trans transnational, I think,
communications. Do you know what is
trans... transnational?

ROXI

No. But I think that it has to do with
globalisation

ELBA

With what?

The local and the global

According to Appadurai (1996) the neighbourhood is the social forum where the idea of locality is formed through different practices where particular rites of passages play an significant role. “In the first instance, a great deal of what have been termed rites of passage is concerned with the production of what we might call local subjects, actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbours, friends and enemies” (Appadurai, 1996: 179)

Hannerz (2000) states that what is termed local has to do with everyday life, with the real, with face-to-face and long-term relationships which have a strong emotional content. Certau (1984) asserts that is not the space – a street plan – which makes a neighbourhood a ‘neighbourhood’ but the movements and the relationships that are established through and around it.

For many authors in this field (Bachelard 1994, Halbwachs 1992), collective memory is the means of integration within a community – that is, what nurtures the idea of ‘belonging’ to a community.

For Appadurai (1996), local knowledge is the knowledge to produce and reproduce locality. That is why Roxi feels that she has failed: she has not been able to transmit the idea of locality to her son. That it is why Elba can understand her feelings, and feels that she has the perfect daughter: she does not want to move, she prefers to live in the same place where she was born and was brought up.

Appadurai (1996) states that local knowledge depends on local neighbourhoods within which local subjects can be organized and recognized. Moreover, as we have seen, Barbero (1993a) also affirms that it is in the neighbourhood where the subject is able to recognize him/herself and where his/her actions have meaning. Similarly, Hannerz (2000) believes that local relationships affect the meanings that are built up in them and also the consequences of these meanings to the neighbourhood. Appadurai (1996) affirms that the neighbourhood is

a multiple interpretative site, where meaningful social behaviour can be generated and interpreted as well.

“That is, existing places and spaces, within a historically produced spatiotemporal neighbourhood and with a series of localized rituals, social categories, expert practitioners, and informed audiences, are required in order for few members (babies, strangers, slaves, prisoners, guests, affines) to be made temporary or permanent local subjects”
(Appadurai, 1996: 185)

It is in this place, inside the neighbourhood, where the local subject feels comfortable and safe. It is within this environment where the local subject is a local subject for the other, who is also a local subject and is recognized as such. For Augé (2000: 45) the group -in this case the neighbourhood- “is established, assembled and united by the identity of the place”, and the group works as a whole so as to defend itself against internal and external threats – this is done so that the community, can maintain its identity. Moreover, this author states that between this zone of recognized identity and the external world, there is a “world of absolute foreignness” (2000: 50).

ROXI

No. But I think that it has to do with
globalisation

ELBA

With what?

ROXI

With globalisation

ELBA

Ah! Yes, I think that the other day, in the news a journalist said that word. Many times.

And also, it is important to take into account that the neighbourhood is situated in a place, which for Augé (2000) has three characteristics: identity, relations and history. In addition to this, Roggoff (2000) affirms that space constitutes invisible boundaries that determine inclusions and exclusions. Because as Sennett (1996) points out in a community anything that is different is often excluded because there is a desire of coherence and of an internal sameness, where the local subject can enjoy a sort of safety (Dejevsky, quoted in Morley, 2000: 139). In his/her mind at least, the local subject feels protected from hostile and threatening images that the media brings into his/her home on a daily basis (Morley, 2000).

For Appadurai, the production of locality within the neighbourhood is affected by a new phenomenon in which the world has become deterritorialized (2000). Within this context, the media is central in the construction of a new kind of neighbourhood, the “virtual neighbourhood” as Appadurai calls it (1996: 195), which Delany refers to as “deterritorialized transnational communities” (2000: 60-61).

At this point it is relevant to introduce the concept of “mediascape” that Appadurai created (2000: 299). The term defines all the information and the images of the world that are disseminated by the media and are essential in the formation of this “virtual neighbourhood” where the face-to-face links, the spatial contiguity and the social interaction, which are the main characteristics of the ‘real’ neighborhood

do not exist anymore (Appadurai, 1996). In this global context “local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice-versa” (Giddens 1990: 64) and this process embodies a “transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions” (Held et al. 2000: 54-55).

Morley also speaks about deterritorialisation. He states that “given the extent of mobility of both populations and media flows across national boundaries in the contemporary world, any model of culture and communications that operates solely within the assumptions of a national framework is inadequate” (Morley 2000: 154). Therefore, he consigns the current audiences as “deterritorialised spectators” (Morley, 2000: 154).

As a consequence, Appadurai (1996) believes that the production of locality – as a dimension of social life - that is the core of the neighbourhood is indeed being threatened “by contradictions, destabilized by human motion and displaced by the formation of new kinds of virtual neighbourhoods” (Appadurai 1996: 198).

CONCLUSION

ELBA

I can only imagine how life is in Paris or in the United States. Honestly, I don't really want to know. I feel very well and safe here. There are no terrorists; all of us speak the same language.

ROXI

The same happens to me. I know all my neighbors. They are my family. I can count on them. We understand each other. And you are right, Elba, we are safe here. But, in the media, the journalists and the politicians are saying that we are suffering the consequences of the war in Afghanistan.

ELBA

But they lie. Journalists and politicians always lie. How can it be? Afghanistan is so far away.

As many authors have stated (Featherstone, 1990, 1996; Hannerz, 1996; Morley, 2000), the images that television brings to our home of distant people, and remote and unknown events broaden local experiences. Appadurai affirms (1996) this phenomenon affects the production of locality, that is, the locality produced in

consequence is no longer wholly dependent on the collective memory for creation and transference (Bachelard 1994, Halbwachs 1992)

On the other hand, Elias (1987) states that for many people around the world the awareness of the process of globalisation may be limited, absent or occur occasionally. So, even though the images that enter in our local homes from the global world are complex; it is the local which filters the perception of the images so that the subjects in the 'neighbourhood' can understand them – on their own terms (Ekholm – Friedman and Friedman, 1995). In relation to this, Castells (1997) states that in an increasingly global world, it is in the known places – the neighbourhood, the home - where the meaning and the identity are produced. He says that this phenomenon is a reaction, a defensive behaviour “against the unpredictability of the unknown and the uncontrollable” (Castells, 1997: 61).

In his book, Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World, Ang (1996) states: “Global media do affect, but cannot control local meanings” (151). Going back to Barbero, (1993a) it is in the core of the family and in the core of the neighbourhood where the meaning is produced.

As I have stated before, *Gasoleros* was transmitted after the news, on one of the main channels of Argentina. Currently other *telenovelas* with the same characteristics than *Gasoleros* – such as *Son Amores*, *El profe* among others - are still transmitted in this time slot. The world, the images, 'the Other', the unknown, the global, the Goliath – as García Canclini calls the globalisation process (1999) - the hazard is presented on one side. And the local, the familiar, the calm, the secure, the comfortable, the known, and the 'us' is presented on the other.

I would argue that the popularity of these new *telenovelas* is based, basically on two pillars: first, the realism of the topics and the change in the presentation of the role of the women. Second, and more important but less evident in the first approach to this phenomenon, is that the audience could reinforce its feeling of safety that it

feels at home and in its neighbourhood where the home is situated, where things are “simply and straightforward”, “a comfortable place of familiar faces” and “where one’s competence is undisputed and where one does not have to prove it to either oneself or others” (Hannerz, 1996: 110)².

These *telenovelas* are fictional but speak about real and contemporary problems and situations and the characters emulate what the audience feels: safe and secure at home (Morley, 2000), in an “ever more insecure and uncertain world” (Baumann, 1998: 117).

² Even though Hannerz (1996) uses in a past tense all of these adjectives so as to qualify the home, I use them in a present tense, because I think that home, at least in Argentina, still represents what was stated in the paragraph.

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