



Telenovelas in Brazil: From Traveling Scripts to a Genre and Proto-Format both National and Transnational¹

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Abstract

In this paper, we argue that there are several layers of genre, proto-format commercialization of program elements, and current commercially licensed formats. Some genre traditions, like melodrama, tend to be large, over-arching categories that already have a long history before television (Martín-Barbero 1993). Specific genres of television production, like the U.S. soap opera or the Latin American telenovela can develop within that larger tradition. Even more specific genres, like the Brazilian socially engaged or historical telenovelas, versus the romantic Mexican Cinderella story telenovela (Hernandez 2001), develop or emerge over time within those genre traditions.

Keywords: Brazil, telenovelas, national-transnational formats

The global creation and flow of television genres and formats should be thought of as a complexly articulated, fluid process of hybridity whose integrative effects do not necessarily eliminate cultural difference and diversity but rather provide the context and boundaries for the production of new cultural forms marked by local specificity. In this respect, Ang (1996) observed,

What becomes increasingly "globalized" is not so much concrete cultural contents, but, more importantly and more structurally, the parameters and infrastructure which determine the conditions of existence for local cultures. It can be understood, for example, as the dissemination of a limited set of economic, political, ideological and pragmatic conventions and principles which govern and mould the accepted ways in which media production, circulation and consumption are organized throughout the modern world. (pp. 153-154)

Genre and Format

In this paper, we argue that there are several layers of genre, proto-format commercialization of program elements, and current commercially licensed formats. Some genre traditions, like melodrama, tend to be large, over-arching categories that already have a long history before television (Martín-Barbero 1993). Specific genres of

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television production, like the U.S. soap opera or the Latin American telenovela can develop within that larger tradition. Even more specific genres, like the Brazilian socially engaged or historical telenovelas, versus the romantic Mexican Cinderella story telenovela (Hernandez 2001), develop or emerge over time within those genre traditions.

Television formats are now often distinguished as a parallel category which looks at forms of television that are packaged for licensing, transfer across cultures, and localized adaptation or implementation by regional, national or local networks. Specific formats are often imported and adopted. They can feed into genre development, grafted in to older traditions.

In this study, I will tend to define a format very narrowly as a specific production package that is transferred from one television production entity to another to be adapted into a local version. This narrow definition is designed to make it easier to distinguish formats and genres. The arrangement is most often commercial, sold or licensed for specific fees or a share of profits (Moran, 2004). However, non-commercial stations or networks can also share formats, as when Nordic national public networks obtain formats from the BBC.

Reality TV formats or game formats are among the most prevalent current and widely traded examples of formats. Some authors, like Sharaf, see specific implementations of formats into certain kinds of genres, such as the music competition genre within reality shows, like Pop Stars or American Idol. So specific formats can arise, like reality television competitions, which form specific genres within it, like the song contest or the dance contest (Sharraf, 2008). These genres retain characteristics common to major formats, like the song contest genre, that eliminates contestants in successive rounds, like other genres typical of the reality show.

Genres represent long-term development, the national or cross-cultural, hybrid development of well-understood, widely accepted categories over time. Schatz (1981) made a distinction about film that we can apply to television. He compared the deep structure of a film genre, as a sort of social contract between industry and audience, and a genre film, a specific enactment or production of the genre. Analogous might be the deep structure of melodrama as a sort of global meta-genre, the soap opera as a 20th Century adaptation of that tradition, the telenovela as a region-specific deep structure of television genre, and ABC's Ugly Betty as a particularly popular licensed format



adaptation to the USA of the Latin American genre based on a specific production, *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, produced in Colombia, exported widely (Mato 2005), and remade in the United States (Bielby and Harrington 2005).

Moran (2004) argued that there is a widespread push toward local production that can use locally originated concepts, program ideas from coproduction, and imported program format adaptation. Moran (2004) observed that producers have been informally borrowing formats for a while, increasing coproduction, and particularly increasing the formal licensing of formats. The first two of these, along with substantial trade in telenovela scripts, have been true of the telenovela industry in Latin America since the early 1950s but formal trade in complete program packages is much more recent,

In Moran's (2004) terms, the telenovela was introduced as a sort of genre localization or coproduction between the outside sponsor, usually one of the multinational soap companies, like Colgate-Palmolive, which had sponsored or even coproduced soap operas in the USA or elsewhere, who brought in considerable genre and production knowledge, and local producers, who adapted or localized it to their circumstances and culture, also building on other serial or melodramatic traditions that came to Latin America from a variety of sources (Mazziotti 1993). The original genre pattern of radio soap opera passed indirectly from the United States to Brazil via prior cultural adaptations to more reconfigured and culturally proximate forms in Cuba, Argentina, and elsewhere in Latin America.

Some new genres have become the focus for a global form of flow and adaptation, the licensed format trade. *Format*, in this sense, is a more specific framework for production than *genre*. According to Moran (1998), "a television format is that set of invariable elements in a program out of which the variable elements of an individual episode are produced" (p. 13). So a melodrama or prime-time serial is a genre. The concept, script, and production guidelines of *Desperate Housewives* constitute a specific format. This is so even if it is subtly transformed from the U.S. style of prime-time serial to, say, the distinctive Latin American telenovela, which most would argue is now a different genre (La Pastina, Regô, & Straubhaar, 2003). Moran (1998, 2004) observed that the two main kinds of formats are (1) drama, situation comedy, or scripted entertainment, and (2) reality shows, including game shows, talk shows, and live dramatic situations, such as MTV's *Real World*. Those represent several



different genres.

This paper argues that one part of what became the telenovela genre originally came from the localization in Cuba of a distinctly American genre, the soap operation, pushed by the agency of the Colgate Palmolive and other American advertisers. However, what eventually took place in Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America was the hybridization of that localization effort together with other traditions of serial fiction, under the agency and efforts of producers and entrepreneurs like Goar-Mestre. Even more profound was a diaspora of the new telenovela genre and further glocalization of it across Latin America, as it was further adapted by local cultural industries. This was visible in two particularly important ways: the dispersion of telenovela writers, directors and entrepreneurs across Latin America, and a strong regional traffic in telenovela scripts that began in the 1950s. This traffic of scripts and professional is an important precedent for the current global trade in television formats, based on scripts, licensed production books or packages, and consultants. This paper concentrates on the impacts of that diaspora of genre, scripts and professionals and adaptation of those genre traditions in Brazil.

Genres

Mittell (2004) argued that genres should account for the particularities of the medium (TV versus film), negotiate between specificity and generality, develop from discursive genealogies (such as the examination of telenovelas below), be understood in cultural practice, and be situated within larger systems of cultural hierarchies and power relations. Different groups, such as critics, producers, advertisers, distributors, programmers, and audiences, very often structure genre categories quite differently (Feuer, 1992). For example, critics are usually aiming for theoretical understanding, either of cultural/textual forms in themselves (Mittell, 2004) or of the complex practices between industry and audiences. Feuer (1992) called the first focus aesthetic and sees the second as focusing on cultural ritual, producing common understandings between audiences and producers. Being trained more as a social scientist than a literary scholar, I tend to lean toward the second definition. In contrast to either of these academic goals, producers use genre categories to try to figure out what institutional structures, such as network managers and advertisers, will let them produce the programs that interest them, while also generally trying to please audiences. Some recent work by Havens



(2006) and Bielby (2005) seeks to examine more of the role of producers and programmers as industrial middlemen in genre and program development and flow. Understanding the growth of these common understandings between audiences and producers, while finding larger genre and format patterns in them, is the overall goal here.

In particular, here we want to look at the way a new television genre, the telenovela, was developed in an interplay between a base genre, the America soap opera; a first round of hybrid genre development in Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America; and the national particularization of the new regional genre in places like Brazil. We want to look at the interplay between sponsors, television industry producers, the evolving genre texts or scripts, and the evolving regional and national audiences.

Precedents to the Format Trade in the Latin American Telenovela Industry

The primary question of this essay is whether the practices of telenovela industry that built up in Latin America can be seen as a precedent for the emergence of the format trade as it is currently being theorized and understood. In general, this examination of the case of telenovelas will help establish the general importance of several needs that also drive practices of the format trade. First, perhaps, is that audiences prefer local faces on screen (Straubhaar 1991) to the extent that a local version of a game or reality show that might be more cheaply imported whole will actually make more money despite its higher local production costs (Moran 2004). Second, television producers can lower the risks of expanding into new genres by adapting programs that have worked well elsewhere, as telenovela producers do when they produce their version of a show or script that has been a hit elsewhere in Latin America. Third, however, television producers, particularly working in a genre that is new to them, will often be missing forms of expertise, like script-writing in the early days of the telenovela, which can be imported and adapted. Fourth, all of these things also make it cheaper to produce a new program by importing a script, if not a whole format, despite the cost of acquiring it. Fifth, all of these things may over time permit development of a new “local” genre and a supporting cultural industry to emerge from these kinds of glocalization or hybridization processes. So in the long run, we might see more fully localized cultural industries in nations and regions, producing variations on what might then be a



distinctive Latin American form of the soap opera (Straubhaar 1982) or a new Arabic form of the song contest reality (see Kraidy, forthcoming).

It will help to understand some of the specific practices that emerged early in the 1950s, like the sale and licensing of telenovela scripts between writers and companies across Latin American borders, or the flow of business and production personnel between countries, or the borrowing and adaptation of commercial television practices related to telenovela production and programming. Taken together these and more recent practices show how a transnational but culturally- and linguistically-specific set of conventions and practices spread and were adapted in a way that anticipates some of the current spread and adaptation of formats for game or reality shows.

We see the enactment and adaptation of a general genre, melodrama, into a more specific commercial form that is transnational across the Latin American region. The commercial nature of the spread and adaptation is one of the interesting precedents, how cultural industries can perceive a commercial advantage in acquiring program elements to produce their own versions or adaptation. The creation of a routine trade in those elements also anticipates the current format trade. The cultural-linguistic specificity of this trade in Latin America may also anticipate some of the regional specificities I think we are beginning to see in the format trade, as certain kinds of formats find pathways or barriers created by cultural practices in some markets and regions, even as some seem to find almost global forms of adaptation.

This study focuses first on the emergence of what we call here the meta-genre of melodrama. Then it examines the various cultural influences and inputs into the specific Latin American genres of the radionovela and the telenovela. One of the important inputs was sale of scripts between countries for both radio and television, as well as the migration of key writers, entrepreneurs, etc. between countries. We examine that briefly as a precedent for the current format trade. We then examine genre development in Brazil within the larger Latin American telenovela tradition and the interplay it has with old and new forms of commercialization, that anticipate the format trade.

The Melodrama Tradition

Telenovelas in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America most clearly evolved from earlier, similar programs on radio. However, they did not develop only from the radio matrix. Other traditions in serialized fiction affected the development of the telenovela genre in



the Latin American region as well. From the serial fiction *feuilletons* in France and the centuries-old *cordel* (chapbook) literature in Brazil, the genre evolved in each country within Latin America with certain peculiarities (Martin-Barbero, 1993; Ortiz & Borelli, 1988), again reflecting the complexity of both telenovela origins and adaptations.

Martin-Barbero (1993) shows that telenovelas are based on what this study calls a meta-genre of melodrama that came to Latin America from long term roots in a number of earlier forms in print, circuses and traveling shows, folk poetry performed orally, folk and professional drama, and radio theater and novelas. Different forms of these are found in various parts of Latin America but Martin-Barbero and others like Nora Mazziotti (1993) find the gradual evolution of a set of melodramatic roots for the subsequent development of first radionovelas and then telenovelas.

The *feuilleton*, *foletin*, or *folhetim* tradition was central, according to many scholars (Hernandez, 2001; Martin-Barbero, 1988; Rowe and Schelling, 1991). Authors like Balzac and Dickens published widely read, very popular works as serials in periodicals in the 1800s. Many of the famous serious novels and stories of the era had a sense of melodrama in their genre appeal. They helped begin to build a mass audience for the melodrama genre that laid both bases and boundaries for the telenovela genre (Straubhaar, 2007). Some argue that print serials helped create a mass audience for newspapers, radio and television in turn (Hernandez 2001). This shows how one side of the genre development equation (Feuer, 1992), audience expectations, was being developed or prepared by earlier forms of melodrama in ways that telenovelas could draw on.

Serial melodramas in print also contributed key specific dramatic genre-related tropes and narrative forms, like the cliff hanger ending at the end of an episode that brings the reader, listener or viewer back for the next episode to see what happened. Serial novels and serial stories in newspapers, like the popular French stories of Eugène Sue also opened a key current characteristic, the systematic absorption of reader feedback in the writing process, which Martin-Barbero calls the telenovela's "permeability to the transformations of modern life" (cited in Hernandez, 2001:56).

Martin-Barbero also emphasizes the local roots of melodrama in Latin American folk poetry and drama, although those roots are also hybridized between European literary and dramatic traditions, such as the popular theater of the French Revolution, and indigenous and African roots from their early beginnings (1987). In Brazil, these



were very visible in the *literatura de cordel*, literally stories on a string, chapbooks or cheaply printed pamphlets strung over strings for sale in marketplaces (Slater 1982). These cheap, popular booklets frequently told classic melodramatic stories, which were both read directly by audiences and chanted or performed by singers or story-tellers, which provided a tradition of oral performance of stories that fed into radionovelas in Brazil, Cuba and other places (Hernandez 2001).

Melodrama in film circulated widely in the region, particularly in films from the golden age of Mexican cinema in the 1940s and 1950s (Martin-Barbero 1995). These melodramas helped create an urban culture that saw the genre as normal, as one of the first grand narratives of modern life and development that they had been exposed to. They helped create a region-wide appreciation of the genre and its narrative forms.

Radio Novelas

As radio developed in Latin America in the 1920s, the *fueilletons*, or *folhetins* in Brazil and *folletines* in Spanish-speaking Latin America, were having a period of great popularity among readers. In Cuba, for example, books and *folletines* were read out loud to tobacco rollers in factories, which developed styles of reading that influenced radio theater and radio novelas (Hernandez 2001). The popularity of that tended to carry the serial genre into radio as a form of radio theater. Indeed, in Argentina and elsewhere, *rádionovelas* were simply called radio theater for quite a while until the *rádionovela* name became attached to a more specific genre of radio melodrama.

Rádionovelas were developed in a number of countries, drawing on both national and regional Latin American ideas. National radio dramas in Argentina and Cuba are seen as particularly important sources of ideas by Hernandez (2001), but many countries, including Brazil had important local drama traditions and industries that provided ideas, writers, actors, etc. to radio drama and *rádionovelas*.

However, Cuba was a particularly important source of the *radionovela* scripts that circulated throughout the region. C.M.Q., the leading Havana commercial radio station of the 1940s and 1950s “flooded” Latin America with exported scripts (Sinclair 1999), influencing the radio productions of Azcárraga, who started and owned Televisa, which created the dominant telenovelas of Mexico (Fernández and Paxman 2001). In Brazil, the first *rádionovela* of 1941 was an adaptation of a Cuban script (Morreira 1991).



Many of the major Latin American common ideas about radio- and telenovelas that were imported from Cuba into other Latin American countries also represented an indirect American influence on the Latin American genre. The specific commercial form of rádionovelas was first developed in pre-Castro Cuba at the behest of Colgate-Palmolive, an American corporation that wanted to sell soap. Seeing how soap operas reached the targeted U.S. female consumer market for their products, these corporations then introduced the genre first in Cuba, later in the rest of Latin America. Audience response was strong and ensured that advertisers would supply the economic resources for continued and expanded production of telenovelas in an increasing number of countries.

Colgate and the Sidney Ross Co. helped invent the radionovela and later the telenovela in a pioneering operation in pre-Castro Cuba, where “the American soap opera” was “translated and exported” (Katz, 1977:117).

Some say that the telenovela is merely the U.S. radio soap-opera transposed. But not only had Latin American radio long used the serial story format, so also had Latin American newspapers. Any search for cheap programming to build audience loyalty could scarcely fail to arrive at the formula of a serial drama with a tiny cast and minimal studio set. The key point about the telenovela is that it originates from a need to fill time (including daytime) cheaply... (Tunstall, 1977:176)

The commercial form clearly built on other narrative traditions and oral drama traditions, but the package of the specific radio genre that we think of as the Latin American regional rádionovelas was clearly shaped by the interaction of advertiser desires expressed by Colgate-Palmolive, the emerging business model of Cuban radio station entrepreneurs which also built closely on U.S. models (Schwoch 1990), and the narrative genre shaped by Cuban writers and actors, working within the larger tradition of Latin American melodrama (Mazziotti 1993).

In Moran's (2004) terms, the radionovela and, later, the telenovela, were introduced as a sort of genre localization or co-production between the outside sponsor, who brought in considerable genre and production knowledge, and local producers, who adapted or localized it to their circumstances and culture. The original genre pattern of radio soap opera passed indirectly from the United States to Brazil via prior cultural adaptations to more reconfigured and culturally proximate (Straubhaar, 1991) forms in Cuba, Argentina, and elsewhere in Latin America.



Foreign influences on the telenovela were pronounced at first. American soap operas on radio and television provided models for the rádionovelas and later telenovelas which developed throughout Latin America. American advertisers often encouraged Latin American broadcasters to produce these programs because they were effective in reaching mass audiences.

The original American influences were diluted as the basic novela form spread throughout Latin America. Cuban and Mexican writers and producers who had worked for the Cuban stations moved on to Brazil and Argentina after Castro's takeover (Sanchez, interview, 1978). Brazilian television stations imported scripts and even finished telenovelas (to be dubbed into Portuguese) from Argentina and Mexico up through 1964.

American corporate advertisers also did continue to have some direct influence on the Brazilian telenovela programs, funding their development and training writers, producers, and technicians. Florisbal (interview, 1979) observed that advertisers sometimes paid technicians and actors when television stations could not or did not.

For example, in the early 1960s Colgate-Palmolive hired Brazilian writers to adapt Argentine telenovela scripts as well as writing their own (Walter Durst, Jornal da Tarde, Oct. 14, 1970). This illustrates the degree to which continuing American influences on the telenovela were mixed with other Latin American influences and indigenous Brazilian creations.

Florisbal estimated that the influence of American advertisers continued until the late 1960's. After that, TV Globo and, later, TV Tupi acquired sufficient market strength and financial stability to be independent of advertisers' "suggestions" (interview, 1979).

The Common Genre Roots of Latin American Telenovelas

The economic and commercial structure of Latin American television, including Brazil, was strongly affected by the models and direct actions of U.S. companies (Fox 1997). However, the development of programming, including the telenovelas, was more complexly hybrid. It developed in a Latin American cultural matrix that emphasized certain themes, that then began to vary considerably as national telenovela genre variations developed.



"The telenovela exploits personalization-the individualization of the social world-as an epistemology. It ceaselessly offers the audience dramas of recognition and re-cognition by locating social and political issues in personal and familial terms and thus making sense of an increasingly complex world" (Lopez, 1995, p. 258). The Latin American telenovela, in almost all its variations, focuses on several central themes that were not central to American soap opera (Straubhaar, 2007), so it represents considerable adaptation (Moran, 2004). These new themes include class roles and conflicts-for example, maids versus housewives as well as social mobility out of poverty. They also include themes that were once more prevalent in film and early television in U.S. television, such as the hardships faced by people moving from the countryside to the city to take industrial jobs, but are much more common and relevant now in Latin America.

Audience feedback shaped the productions away from elite-focused dramas toward a mass culture form that resonated more with a variety of traditions and plot devices and that could involve both men and women, peasants, urban workers, and the middle classes (Martín-Barbero, 1993). This cultural formation spread all over Latin America, with distinct adaptations, so that Brazilian telenovelas are quite different from those of Mexico (Hernandez, 2001).

National variations on the telenovela

Across Latin America, the telenovela as a genre has a common history, as noted above. However, different countries' television networks and producers have employed quite varied themes, narrative styles, and production values that have become more differentiated or nationalized over time.

According to Lopez (1995), for example, Mexican telenovelas, particularly those from Televisa, tend to be more openly emotional, very dramatic weepers, and most often are ahistorical telenovelas with no social context provided, although some recent productions have begun to show very generalized differences between rich and poor neighborhoods. Hernandez calls these "blandas," or bland telenovelas (2001), compared with Brazilian or Colombian novelas, which are more hard-edged and social, which he calls "dura" or tough (2001).

Colombian telenovelas tend to have more comedy and irony along with a greater concern for context. Venezuelan productions are more emotional but do not have the



"baroque" of Mexican sets. Brazilian telenovelas are the most realistic, with historically based narratives that have a clear temporal and spatial contextualization (Lopez, 1995). However, as Hernandez (2001) notes, the number two stations or networks in several countries have started to compete with dominant national networks by borrowing tricks from the networks of other countries. So when TV Azteca wants to contrast its programming in Mexico from that of Televisa, it could borrow more social and issue oriented telenovela genre conventions from Brazil. These variations show how the common history, from European melodrama to Colgate-Palmolive soaps, has been adapted and reconfigured by producers interacting with distinct national cultures and audiences, as well as by national competitors who try to both imitate and distinguish themselves within national cultural market frameworks. These telenovela genres reflect considerable national adaptation of the regional genre, but all are faithful to the melodramatic roots of the genre.

Brazilian rádionovelas and telenovelas

The radionovela reached Brazil in 1941. Rádionovelas were first imported into Brazil in the 1940's in the form of scripts from Mexico, Argentina and Cuba, translated into Portuguese from Spanish (Sanchez, interview, 1978). The success of the genre on Brazilian radio stations led to an increasing amount of time and resources devoted to it. The leap from radio to television in Brazil took only a decade, 1941-1951. Brazilian producers initially mostly adapted foreign literary works, following the melodramatic genre formula established by the Cuban rádionovelas of rather bland, not particularly culture specific stories. They were in fact often based on imported scripts. One of the first major Brazilian telenovelas for example was *Eu compro esta mulher* (I will buy this woman), based on a Cuban script. This pattern of Brazilian reliance on internationalized scripts, either directly imported or written in the pattern common across Latin America of bland, deterritorialized romances, persisted into the 1960s.

Rádionovelas and early serialized TV shows had a fundamental role as a breeding ground for the genre, creating a Brazilian television adaptation of melodrama that is hybrid but which gradually became distinctive. Scriptwriters were trained in the melodramatic conventions and gradually adapted them to fit Brazil, reconfiguring both the U.S. and Latin American genres.



Brazilian radio produced also copied, reworked and “Brazilianized” American variety shows, comedies, and radio theatre and drama shows (Raoul, 1975: Porto e Silva, interview, 1979). These program formats changed even more as they were adapted for use on television. Raoul (1975:16) also observed that the television industry in the U.S. could draw on experience from the film industry, which Brazil did not have to anything like the same degree. Therefore Brazilian television leaned particularly heavily on the experience of commercial radio in both programming and financing. It also leaned on traditions of national theater, film, circus and a national version of cabaret theater, like vaudeville (Sodre 1972).

While emphasizing radio's program content in his own analysis, Milanesi (1979:79) observed that “before television existed or while it was still restricted to a few urban centers, radio was, above all else, the principal vehicle for advertising and selling, or if you will, the principal stimulus to the growth of the internal market.” The commercial structures of radio, such as hiring artists, producing programs and advertisements, buying recorded programming, selling advertising time, and campaigning for listenership, were applied directly to television. The men who started commercial television broadcasting in Brazil had been successful with a commercial approach in radio and applied it directly to television.

The Economics of the Rise of Brazilian Telenovelas in the 1950s-1960s

The rádionovelas were also adapted for television, beginning in 1951. They were not initially dominant, as television was a much more elite medium in the 1950s, with an audience that was more interested in musical variety and original dramas. Telenovelas were (and are) more oriented toward mass audiences, which began to direct programming choices as television and sets became more widely distributed in the 1960s (Mattos 2000).

Furthermore, industrial factors favored a move away from original one-off dramas toward serials. Porto e Silva observed that costs of producing original television dramas in Brazil got excessive (interview, 1979). In contrast, a 1950s telenovela would have 15-20 episodes using the same actors, story line and props, so it offered producers a considerable financial advantage over individual television dramas, for which producers had to do and re-do sets, scripts, etc. The economic attraction of imported,



“canned” U.S. programs also began to increase for the same reasons. Porto e Silva also noted their role in replacing live dramatic and musical productions (interview, 1979).

The combination of telenovelas, imported films and series, and shows de auditório emerged as the television broadcasters' response to the changes in audience demand in the 1950s. The change in demand was, itself, due to changes in the supply of sets and the increase in demand for them. Those increased dramatically after 1964, when the military government decided to install telecommunications infrastructure to carry signals further across Brazil and subsidized credit to enable TV set purchases, since the military saw improved communications with the Brazilian population as a matter of national security (Mattos 2000). These changed factors of supply and demand also shaped the actions of the advertisers and advertising agencies, the other major components of the television industry.

These commercial media structures, indeed the entire market economy of Brazil, were reinforced by foreign commercial interests. Besides such enduring systemic influences, there were many specific American influences on the pre-television Brazilian radio and press empires. They included advertising sales of equipment and technology, financing, sales of recorded music, and the supply of news items by AP and UPI. When television developed in the 1960s, it suffered the additional influences of direct American investment and the borrowing of American network management ideas, particularly at TV Globo, which was started in a joint venture in 1964 with Time-Life, Inc (Hertz 1987).

Beyond American influence on the general Brazilian commercial system and on specific techniques of the advertising industry, I also found examples of influence on individual television programs by American advertisers and advertising agencies, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s:

In the past, between 1950 and 1967, before the TV Globo Network became so powerful, programming was decided half by directors and half by the wishes of advertisers. For example, GESSY-LEVER bought the series “Bonanza” in the U.S. and brought it to TV Tupi in São Paulo to sponsor in 1956. It was the first foreign series to be imported. In domestic productions such as telenovelas, the role of advertisers was strong also. For example, the [British] advertising agency LINTAS, representing the [U.S.] UNILEVER group, wanted to reach housewives through telenovelas, which are a more economical vehicle than theatre [the major program form at the time] and has greater mass appeal. Up until 1965, LINTAS was involved in all aspects of the telenovelas: selecting cast and script, paying the actors when the station was low on money, etc. Various advertisers would say to stations that they wanted this or that and get their way. (Florisbal, interview, 1979).



The telenovela itself presents an interesting example of American influence. Although the telenovela, as noted above, was originally created by Latin American producers for an American corporation, the program form has developed far beyond the circumstances in which it was begun, i.e. as a gambit to sell soap. The telenovela is a program form that captivates the Brazilian audience more thoroughly than any comparable medium or art form. It is a commercial product of a cultural industry but it now is a medium for Brazilian, not foreign, popular culture.

The telenovela was embraced early by advertisers who became more interested in television as a means of promoting mass consumption items like soap, food products, soft drinks, beer, household items, etc. This shift in advertising was, nevertheless, restrained by the still limited purchasing power of lower class incomes (do Prado 1973:61).

Paradoxically, do Prado noted that “the small capacity for non-essential spending by the population” works to create a larger television audience by restricting the leisure possibilities available to Brazilians (1973:51).

To a certain extent, this made television advertising and programming decisions problematic. The broad mass of the audience had limited purchasing power, so programmers had to decide if they wanted to aim their material at them or at a more restricted audience with higher purchasing power. The decision was not virtually automatic, as it was in the U.S., where the broad audience had purchasing power. A few broadcasters in São Paulo have, in fact, enjoyed reasonable success in deliberately programming to selected higher class audiences in the 1970s. Most broadcasters chose to program to the mass audience and rely on advertising that sold mass interest products, particularly during the rapid expansion years of the 1960s.

In 1971, 70% of the audience in Rio was made up of classes C and D³, so programming had to respond to the popular culture, the symbols and interests of the new audience classes. These tended to be folklore and entertainment from the interior of the country, not the high culture favored by the elites of Rio and São Paulo... But the new programming was not planned and imposed by experts, either Brazilian or American. It came from the market forces. The logic of the market was to grab the advertising money that was being offered by providing the programming which would draw in the mass audience. (Muniz Sodré, interview, 1978).

Brazilian Telenovelas in the 1960s

³ In the categories of Brazilian market research, Class C is the lower middle class and Class D are the working class and working poor.



The same programming formats that emerged in the 1950s, telenovelas and shows de auditório, remained popular in the 1960s. By the end of the 1960s, the systems of production for these programs constituted thriving, autonomous “cultural industries” within the Brazilian television industry. In his study of the “massification” of television programming by the Brazilian cultural industry, Sodré (interview, 1978) emphasized the importance of these nationally-produced formats, the telenovela and show de auditório. He noted that the auditório show of Chacrinha, the most famous of the genre, “was financed by a Brazilian supermarket chain, Casas da Banha, which wanted to sell common products like fish and soap to classes C and D. These ‘grotesque’⁴ popular shows were financed by advertisements for common products.”

Two Brazilian program forms not only held their own against American and other imported programs but grew quickly and steadily in their shares of audience hours throughout the 1960s. Those were telenovelas and shows de auditório or live variety shows. Musical programming did not increase its audience hour share but it held a strong third place among Brazilian program forms and also received strong critical support.

Telenovelas and shows de auditório have been singled out by academic and newspaper critics (Sodre, 1972:36; da Távola, O Globo, March 26, 1974) as the most important popular culture entertainment forms in recent Brazilian history. They rose in popularity because they were good vehicles for Brazilian popular culture. They were widely produced because they were both popular and economical. Tunstall (1977:176) noted that these two basic formats, the telenovela and the marathon variety show, were the “authentic local programming” which developed throughout Latin America “before the flood of U.S. television imports began,” around 1960.

The telenovela and the show de auditório both evolved considerably during the 1960s. Their elaboration as program forms and the growth of their popularity reflected an essentially “Brazilian” vision of the mass audience and the mass culture that audience wanted for entertainment.

Telenovelas grew particularly rapidly in importance in the 1960s. By the end of the decade, they were the paramount Brazilian television programming form, in terms of the

⁴ Sodré (1972) defined his concept of “grotesque” as a deliberately outrageous combination of traditional, even archaic popular culture with mass media such as magazines and television, the cultural industry, in an exploitative



representativeness of their cultural content, their economic importance within the television industry and their probable impact upon the audience.

Here is an example of how Brazilian TV programmers were thinking about the role of the telenovela. Mercado Global (Jan., 1976) quoted José Bonifácio, TV Globo Production Director, who worked for TV Rio then:

“TV Rio did not think that its comedy shows were competitive so Walter Clark, then Director of the station, and I decided to try telenovelas to reach the public. We launched ‘Renúncia,’ which had been a success in radio. It was fairly successful but I was already looking at ‘O Direito de Nascer.’ [This novela was an adaptation of a classic Cuba telenovela called El Derecho de Nascer—The Right to Know Who Your Parents Were.] It was an interesting episode. No one wanted the idea, except Clark and me... In transmitting the finished work, it was the same fight: TV Record was the leader of the group that TV Rio belonged to and Record did not want to produce it because they were afraid of the production costs and afraid it might fail... TV Rio and TV Tupi joined to broadcast it.”

In the 1960s, all of the major stations had contributed something to the growth of the mass-appeal program formats. TV Excelsior, TV Tupi and TV Globo produced telenovelas. For the stations that could afford to produce them, the telenovela became the dominant Brazilian television entertainment and probably the most important product of Brazilian mass culture and the Brazilian cultural industry. TV Tupi produced telenovelas throughout the decade and TV Bandeirantes began to do so in 1979, when it had begun to become a network. Nevertheless, as Rohter (1978:57) observed, "the emergence, growth and continued success of the telenovela is inextricably linked with the rise of TV Globo." VEJA (Oct. G, 1976) noted that, "Globo did not invent the novela but from its studios came the decisive contribution in the novela's transformation into an almost cinematic genre of Hollywood dimensions and yet [a genre] most typically Brazilian in its language, plots and rhythm of production."

Another demonstration of the development of telenovelas' popularity can be seen by listing the most popular program in Rio de Janeiro of each year in the 1960s:

- 1960- [variety show] "Noite de Gala," TV Rio
- 1961- [variety show] "Noites Cariocas," TV Rio
- 1962- [comedy] "O Riso e o Limite," TV Rio
- 1963- [variety show] "Noites Cariocas," TV Rio
- 1964- [imported series] "Peter Gunn," TV Rio
- 1965- [telenovela] "O Direito de Nascer," TV Rio
- 1966- [show de auditório] "Discoteca de Chacrinha," TV Excelsior
- 1967- [game show] "Telecatch," TV Globo
- 1968- [telenovela] "O Homen Proibido," TV Globo
- 1969- [telenovela] "A Rosa Rebelde," TV Globo
- 1970- [telenovela] "Irmãos Coragem," TV Globo



(Source: Artur da Távola, O Globo, April 9, 1977)

The highpoint of influence on Brazilian telenovelas by other Latin American programs came with “O Direito de Nascer,” a romantic, even melodramatic story about a young lawyer trying to find out who his parents were. One of the major Cuban rádionovelas, it was adapted in Brazil as a radionovela in 1959. While it had good success on radio, the same plot was a smashing success on television in 1964-65, pulling together the romantic plot elements, visual and mass culture appeal that “consecrated the popular success of ttle telenovela” (Porto e Silva, interview, 1979).

In 1964, Brazilian television producers at TV Excelsior examined the success of the regular, nightly telenovelas in Argentina and decided to increase their production to that level. (For the first few years of the 1960s, telenovelas were broadcast, like their radionovela predecessors, on non-daily schedules.)

The telenovela increased its share of total audience hours in São Paulo rapidly from 2% in 1963 to 12% in 1965, 13% in 1967 and 18% in 1969. After a plateau at 17% in 1971, the telenovela climbed into complete domination over all other program forms, domestic and imported, in the 1970s.

Brazilian television producers also began to increase the length of a typical telenovela's duration from four to six weeks to nine to ten months, enabling them to build up considerable audiences but preserving the necessity to have a plot which builds to a climax. This stands in sharp contrast to American soap operas where a given show and basic plot line, such as “As the World Turns,” can continue for 20 plus years.⁵

By the late 1960s, at least, the telenovela was fast becoming a very distinctive national program format in Brazil. The telenovelas seemed to suffer remarkably little American influence in their content or substance. And no critic that I am aware of has noted lasting Argentine, Cuban or Mexican influence, either, at least after the 1960s.

Comments by telenovela writers indicate that they feel the essential elements of their plots have remained fairly constant throughout the years: the likeable young hero, the repressed woman wanting to break out of her societal bonds, the young lovers, the search for the: protagonist's true identity, the guilty secret, the villain, tragedies,

⁵ Rohter (1978:58) quoted Brazilian telenovela author Daniel Filho about the difference between telenovelas and American soap operas. “They're not the same... If I am in competition with anything on American television, it's the dramatic series and the kind of things that Paddy Chayefsky and Rod Serling used to do... I could continue [my plots] indefinitely [like U.S. soaps] but... when you do that... the quality falls.”



suspense and the final happy ending (Bráulio Pedroso, Walter Durst, Jornal da Tarde, Oct. 14, 1970; Plínio Marcos, Isto É, Feb. 28, 1979). This is the stuff of romantic fiction all over the Western world.

The details of the story line or manifest content of some telenovela plots were usually borrowed from foreign works of fiction in the 1950s and early 1960s, and occasionally after that in the 1970s. But these plots were nearly always adapted for the medium by Brazilian authors. Borrowed foreign plots were increasingly displaced⁶ by purely Brazilian themes: current life in both lower and middle classes, historical and regional themes, and some current issues, such as ecology or Indian acculturation to outside life.

One telenovela in particular marked a shift away from the melodramatic telenovela tradition which Brazil had shared with other Latin American countries, exemplified by the imported “O Direito de Nascer” (Isto É, Feb. 28, 1979). The 1968 telenovela by Brazilian writer Bráulio Pedroso, “Beto Rockefeller,” came out of a strain of mass mass culture that was very distinctly Brazilian, despite the protagonist's last name.

Beto Rockefeller was a classic Rio “rounder” (boa vida), a “classic Brazilian.” The show was popular because it was very satiric and treated real national issues directly. It crystalized a moment of transition, raising our consciousness about treating our own national reality... After “Beto Rockefeller,” the system of adapting foreign material diminished and the amount of national content in themes, plots and characterizations grew steadily (Porto e Silva, interview, 1979)

The telenovela that started the redefinition of the genre in Brazil was Beto Rockefeller, aired by Rede Tupi in 1968 and 1969 (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1990; Ortiz & Borelli, 1988; Straubhaar, 1982). Beto Rockefeller escaped the traditional Latin American artificial dramatic attitudes and speech patterns.

It used colloquial dialogue typical of Rio de Janeiro. The dramatic structure, narrative strategies, and production values were also modified. Beto Rockefeller was the

⁶ According to the archives available, the following foreign plots were used during the 1960s:
1960- Anna Karenina, The Prince and the Pauper; 1962- “Cleopatra”
1963- “Scrooge,” Snow White, The Prince and the Pauper, Treasure Island; “Toulouse Latrec”;
1964- Oscar Wilde stories, The Maltese Falcon, The Count of Suffolk;
1966- “Corsican Brothers,” Anna Karenina;
1967- “The Trapp Family,” Les Misérables;
1968- The Prince and the Pauper;
1969- Heidi; Uncle Tom's Cabin;
1970- Simplesmente Maria (Mexican, about an upwardly mob maid)
(Source: Archives of TV Cultura, São Paulo, 1979)
After a 1963-1964 peak, the number of foreign plots declined to one or two per year out of ten to twelve total telenovelas.



story of a middle-class young man who worked for a shoe store but, with charm and wit, got himself mixed up with the upper class, passing himself off as a millionaire. The telenovela got very high audience ratings, leading the network to stretch it to almost 13 months, much longer than the usual 6 to 8 months (Fernandes, 1987).

TV Globo, which up to that point had followed a traditional style of telenovelas with exotic settings and plots, saw the audience interest in Beto Rockfeller and championed the style. In this process, the genre was reshaped, distancing the Brazilian telenovela from the Latin America model.

Gradually certain Brazilian authors, such as Daniel Filho, Janete Clair and Dias Gomes, became nationally famous for writing original telenovela scripts. Together with other writers who adapted Brazilian historical and fictional works for telenovelas, these Brazilian writers slowly pushed out the Argentine and Mexican scripts and writers, steadily “Brazilianizing” the medium (Sanchez, interview, 1978).

Some critics, like Miceli (1972:162-167), argued that despite the popularity and mass appeal of a Brazilian production like “Beto Rockefeller,” none of the products of Brazil's cultural industry really represented a Brazilian mass culture. He felt that cultural expressions or symbols on Brazilian television reflected only fragmented societal segments, such an elite ideology very much penetrated by foreign ideas, a middle class ideology of self-contradictory elements dominated by reflected upper class ideas, and folk or “rustic” expressions, which, when articulated, were typically repressed by the other groups. He saw no room for a mass culture in Brazil that was even relatively coherent or indigenous.

Miceli's analysis was intended to be polemic, to raise questions. It succeeds well at that, but with it, I find that he and like-minded critics miss a crucial point. That is that there are, in fact, Brazilian television productions like telenovelas and shows de auditório which are distinctly not high culture, which appeal to a mass audience of both the middle and lower classes (as defined by education and consumption habits) and which were consistently produced in industrial scale by Brazilian broadcasters, even though their basic forms as commercial entertainment reflect some residual foreign sources and influences.

Another analyst of Brazilian mass culture, Muniz Sodré, felt that telenovelas were a genuine, even valuable expression of Brazilian mass culture.

I conclude the telenovela in the genre of mass literature. I don't agree with those who complain that the telenovela is “low level.” I think it is the folhetim (“chap book” style



mass literature of the 19th century) of today... Janete Clair (one of the most popular telenovela authors) has the flair for mass culture (talento folhetinesco). She does not complicate language; she acts within the limits of the folhetim of today. She “familiarizes” the language, since the telenovela is aimed at the family group. (Folha de São Paulo, July 8, 1978).

Although “Beto Rockefeller” was produced by TV Tupi and several other outstanding telenovelas were produced by TV Excelsior and TV Tupi in the mid-1960s, the consolidation of the telenovela as a successful (in audience popularity) expression of Brazilian mass culture took place at TV Globo. According to VEJA (Oct. 6, 1976), TV Globo made “the decisive contribution in the telenovela's transformation into an almost cinematic genre of Hollywood dimensions, and yet one most typically Brazilian in its language, plots and rhythm of production.”

TV Globo paid well enough in the late 1960s to attract the best actors, writers and directors in Brazilian cinema and theatre to work in telenovelas instead (Rohter, 1978:57). It was common practice for Brazilian actors and playwrights to work in telenovelas, movies and theatre all in any given year. This led to a remarkably high level of telenovela quality, which was financially rewarding to the artists and writers as well to TV Globo, since it drew in fairly overwhelming audience and advertiser interest.

By the end of the 1960s, the production of telenovelas by TV Globo and TV Tupi, which maintained a small but respectable audience, was becoming a very stable, self-contained cultural industry. It no longer needed the kind of infrastructural support that American advertisers had given to telenovela production in the early and mid-1960s (Floribal, interview, 1979) or the kind of guidance about audience tastes and interests that advertising agency research departments had provided to them (Dualibi, interview, 1979).

The telenovela industry was only beginning to set up a consistent set of values and symbols to guide and characterize the content of its products by the end of the 1960s. But telenovelas were criticized several times in 1964-1968 for showing too much violence at times when children were watching (O Estado de São Paulo, Aug. 22, 1964; Sept., 9, 1964; Aug. 15, 1967). Telenovelas were also seen as promoting materialism and consumer values (Artur da Tavola, O Globo, Sept. 3, 1974). Interestingly, these were not seen as foreign or foreign-influenced values, but as Brazilian values deserving question.



Brazilianization of the Telenovela in the 1970s

By 1969, all the major Brazilian television broadcasters of the time, the national networks TV Globo and TV Tupi and the independent São Paulo stations TV Record, TV Excelsior and TV Bandeirantes, perceived that telenovelas were the program form most preferred by the Brazilian mass audience. In 1969, all of them produced at least four telenovelas each.

There were not enough audience or advertisers in the market to support this level of production. By 1970, TV Excelsior had been dissolved and TV Bandeirantes stopped making telenovelas. By 1974, TV Record also stopped making them, leaving only the networks, TV Tupi and TV Globo, which had national economic bases to support them. In light of this, they went to the “easy solution” of substituting imported programs for their attempts to create their own telenovelas.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Brazilian telenovela has slowly evolved away from the general Latin American model. Straubhaar (1982, 1984) described a "Brazilianization" of the genre in two senses: a significant amount of national production, as the telenovela came to fill 3 hours of prime time 6 nights a week, and an equally significant adaptation of the genre to reflect national culture. The TV Globo network, in particular, invested heavily in production values, such as the use of external shots that had previously been avoided due to production costs. Globo also promoted a modernization of the telenovela's themes to include current issues and appropriated texts produced by Brazilian writers, novelists, and playwrights.

In this process, Globo created what it termed, in its own publicity, the "Padrão Globo de Qualidade" [The Globo Pattern of Quality] (Herold, 1986; Lopez, 1995; Straubhaar, 1982). This high level of production quality began to differentiate Brazilian telenovelas, particularly those of TV Globo, from others in the region and even more from the American soap opera. This shows a reconfiguration of the Brazilian telenovela in not only genre form but production quality as well.

In a major stylistic departure from some other forms of telenovela, Brazilian telenovelas are "open works" or an "open genre" (Mattelart, 1990, p. 41). During production, creators receive direct and indirect input from viewers and fans, theatrical productions, commercials, elite and popular press, institutional networks, audience and marketing research organizations, and other social forces in society, such as the Catholic Church, the government, and activist groups (Hamburger, 1999). This responsiveness to



audience input is stronger in Latin American telenovelas than in many other global forms of melodrama, and it is particularly notable in Brazil, where TV Globo has extensively developed its methods of researching, anticipating, and tracking audience preferences and reactions (Straubhaar, 1984).

This mode of production was influenced by the military regime's censorship practices, which slowly forced many writers to leave the theater and the feature film industry and find refuge in television. Television became a space in which, even if censored, writers managed to stretch the limits of what was acceptable in the repressive atmosphere of the 1970s. Telenovelas did not break completely with their melodramatic roots but rather incorporated a national voice. They introduced a popular language, using colloquialisms and characters rooted in the daily life of the Brazilian metropolis. But this process was limited by what was perceived to be the targeted audience's expectations. Klagsbrunn (1993) felt the incorporation of reality into Brazilian telenovelas was but a superficial image of the actual problems affecting the nation: The telenovela reflects social aspects and problems faced by Brazilian society superficially, not conclusively, as usually occurs in genres adopted to entertain the masses. Since social criticism and suggestions regarding the path to be taken are not the main target of telenovelas, as this would alienate a significant number of viewers, social and political problems are merely included in a secondary role. (p. 19, my translation)

In the 1970s, the telenovela overtook the show de auditório as the archetypal "Brazilian" television entertainment but the shows de auditório did not disappear. Through most of the 1970s, Sunday afternoons and evenings were dominated by a pre-recorded, slickly produced variation of the show de auditório produced by a veteran of the genre, Silvio Santos, and called "Fantastico." "Fantastico" was very illustrative of how TV Globo approached programming. First, it was well organized and handsomely produced. Second, it featured a wide variety of expensive talent and a diversity of subjects. Third, although it contained news and even public affairs-type documentary very apolitical. Fourth, it was nationally-oriented not parochially centered on either Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo.

The networks were increasingly able to reach a national mass audience and to supply it with a larger percentage of nationally-produced programming, if that was what it wanted. As far as demand was concerned, the audience wanted Brazilian popular or mass culture (telenovelas, shows de auditório, comedies, soccer and music) and they



increasingly constituted a mass of consumers who could support advertisers who paid for the programming the audience preferred.

The fact that a typical telenovela lasted eight to nine months also permitted their authors to incorporate audience feedback into the writing and production process after the initial planning of the program. Some feared that this would increase the influence of marketing considerations in adjusting programs to audience tastes. But some Brazilian critics saw this as a positive development and noted that this particular quality set the telenovela apart from other dramatic forms, allowing a more genuine interchange between writer and public (da Távola, O Globo, Sept. 2, 1974).

By the mid 1970s, Globo had differential profiles of the audiences for its various telenovelas at 6, 7, 8 and 10 p.m. (Rohter, 1977:58) ⁷. The telenovelas were definitely crafted to appeal to the particular audience of the various evening prime time hours. Writers were guided by research departments of the broadcasters and advertising agencies in selecting themes and characters of greatest appeal. This integratinn of research into production was greatest at TV Globo (Sanchez, interview, 1978; VEJA, Oct. 6, 1976). This helps TV Globo keep its high relative independence in programming judgment.

Rohter (1977:5g) quotes TV Globo Research Director Homero Sanchez:

"The average viewer of novelas in Brazil is a woman under forty. She is married, Catholic, has two children and is a member of the lower middle class... We start off at six p.m. with something that will make a woman think of the time of her grandparents, something that is pure and full of romanticism. Then at seven we come with something a bit lighter ana more juvenile [to also appeal to the large numbers of children watching then]. We break for a bit of action at nine... by then the man has eaten, read the paper and relaxed a bit so we hit him with 'Kojak' or 'S.W.A.T.' and then at ten switch to something very adult so we can attract both man and wife. That is when we get a chance to experiment with our novelas a bit."

Competing with Imported Programs: Brazilian Telenovelas

Although the basic form of the Brazilian telenovela was set in the 1960s, the decade of the 1970s was the period when the telenovela really flowered as Brazil's paramount mass culture entertainment form. Outside influence on them dwindled and they became, as Sodré (Folha de São Paulo, July 8, 1978) described, the "mass literature" of Brazil.

The most popular telenovelas were those of TV Globo. TV Globo consolidated telenovela production on an industrial scale, usually giving viewers four different, well-produced programs each night except Sunday.



The percentage of São Paulo audience hours drawn by telenovelas was more than double the percentage of any other Brazilian program form and almost equal in 1975-1977 to the audience hours drawn by imported series and feature films combined (Table 15). Telenovelas had 17% in 1971, 22% in 1973, 20% in 1975 and 22% again in 1977 (Table 16).

Although TV Globo definitely dominated telenovelas in the 1970s, all these various telenovela experiments were important. Both Moya (interview, 1979) and Porto e Silva (interview, 1979) observed that TV Globo had copied many of its techniques from earlier producers, particularly TV Excelsior. TV Globo successfully synthesized many elements of style and put a firm production line under them. As Porto e Silva noted, the difference in quality between a TV Globo telenovela and one on TV Tupi was obvious.

In 1979, TV Tupi was staggered by economic problems but it still produced three or four nightly telenovelas, some of them introducing controversial themes such as Indian problems or environmental concerns and drawing a certain audience. After a decade of building up its economic base and production capacity, TV Bandeirantes re-entered the telenovela competition in 1979 with two nightly programs, which met with fair audience success.

By the mid-1970s, a number of Brazilian critics began to praise the telenovela for its representation of Brazilian culture and its relatively high quality in comparison to other television program forms. In 1974, Artur da Távola (O Globo, March 25, 1974) wrote:

In the future, telenovelas such as "Beto Rockefeller," "As Bruxas," "Nino, o Italianinho," "Selva da Pedra," "Bandeira 2," "Vitória Bonelli," "O Bem Amado" and "Os Ossos do Barão," will be analysed as the consolidation of television theatre in Brazil, as a cultural and artistic expression mixed with popular level diversion. The telenovela is a totally new genre in the history of dramaturgy.

Non-Brazilian communications researchers were inclined to agree. Katz (1977:196) noted that TV Globo's late evening telenovela "is now a serious affair, relating to real-life people and contemporary social issues." Read (1976:91) and Tunstall (1977:176) also noted that telenovela or "serial" programs are among the most popular and representative of non-American productions.

The creativity of telenovela authors, directors and actors did suffer serious outside influences. But these seemed to relate more to the industrial pattern of the Brazilian television system than to any observable foreign influence. This was a change from the 1960s when American advertisers and Argentine scripts had detectable influence.



It seems to me that Brazilian telenovelas are the products of a unique, distinctively Brazilian cultural industry. They seem to have become, in the view of credible Brazilian critics such as Artur da Távola and Muniz Sodré (see his comments on telenovelas, p. 270), a unique Brazilian form of mass drama or mass “literature.” While telenovelas do suffer commercial influences from the industry that makes them, the processes of that industry also seem to be essentially “Brazilian.”

More Political Telenovelas in the 1980s

Beginning in the late 1980s, as a result of the political abertura (opening) that started with the transition from military to civilian government (Straubhaar, 1989a), and continuing now, telenovela writers have increased the visibility of their social agendas and included national political debates in their narratives (Porto, 2005). The commercial nature of telenovelas also evolved; these texts were used to sell not only products targeting housewives, but sports cars, services, and many other products targeted to different audience segments. Although they still have some room for creativity in plot lines, telenovela writers must now also bow to commercial imperatives and write such product placements into their scripts, in cooperation with network commercial departments. Even the commercial form of the soap opera has been reconfigured to exploit Brazilian culture and rules.

Intentionally or not, Globo transformed the Brazilian telenovela into a forum for the discussion of Brazilian reality. Globo has brought into the majority of the Brazilian households current issues in the social and political arena. In a historical analysis of the development of telenovelas in Brazil, Hamburger (1999) argued that these texts have created a space to discuss the nation. They have become the way the nation is currently imagined (Anderson, 1983).

These changes in style led Brazilian telenovelas to become more dynamic and more closely associated with current events in the life of the nation (e.g., thematic inclusion of elections, strikes, and scandals that were happening in “real” life). Attention to social events and issues, such as the 1995 telenovela about landless people, “The Cattle King” [O Rei do Gado], is one major development that differentiates Brazilian telenovelas from others in Latin America.

The “melodramatic glue” maintaining these texts’ popularity with audiences has modernized. Still, these melodramas have remained loyal to traditional topics such as



romantic desire and conflict, social mobility, and the expected happy ending. The genre structure of the telenovela constrains writers within the commercial and genre conventions, but also gives them resources with which to reach the audience with a message. This is reminiscent of Giddens's (1984) theories of how structure provides both constraints or limits and resources to social actors. One of the more socially minded telenovela authors, Benedito Rui Barbosa, who wrote *O Rei do Gado* in 1994-95, maximized that space and resources to discuss land reform. One of the latest Globo telenovelas in 2008, *Duas Caras*, uses the space of the telenovela script to *Duas Caras* (*Two Faces*) is the “specific cultural instance” or telenovela under study. This telenovela highlights the story of a young man’s corrupt and “two-faced” ascendancy to wealth and credibility, for which he ultimately pays through a three-year prison sentence. Intertwined with the main story line are subplots featuring a powerful favela or slum leader and his god-like reign, a local politician’s turbulent campaign and a drama-ridden university administration headed by a powerful woman.

Duas Caras has been selected for study for a number of reasons. One is this telenovela’s potential for content overlap with news; its chief author, Aguinaldo Silva

The new regional marketplace for telenovelas, and beyond?

The increasingly political and social commentary oriented direction of many of the TV Globo telenovelas marked a new wave of differentiation of the Brazilian form of the telenovela from directions in the genre taken elsewhere in Latin America. Hernandez (2001) observed the development of what he saw as two forms of the telenovela genre, the *duro* (strong, more political or social-commentary oriented) and the *blanda* (milder, more romantic, less political). He noted that among the top Latin American producers, Mexico and Venezuela tend to make blander, more romantic telenovelas, while Brazil and Colombia tend to make more openly political or social ones. He further noted, however, that with the development of new competing networks in the 1980s and 1990s, if the dominant network, like Globo in Brazil, made strong novelas, then a competing network might either import or make blander ones, as did SBT (Sistema Brasileira de Televisão). Conversely, when Azteca wished to challenge Televisa in Mexico, it initially hired a production company, Argos, to make stronger, more political or social telenovelas (Hernandez, 2001).



This added a new layer to an already rapidly evolving market. By the 1990s, the Latin American market had stratified and grown. Roncagliolo(1995) described it as having three layers. At top were net exporters, particularly of telenovelas, but also variety shows, comedies, music and sports, like Mexico and Brazil. Next were new exporters, like Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Venezuela, which both imported and exported, but were increasingly self sufficient in key genres like telenovelas. Last were a number of smaller, poorer countries, like the Dominican Republic, which imported most of their programming from larger Latin American producers. More recently there are new forms of operation based in Mexico that focus on exports to the Hispanic market in the USA (Piñón López 2007) or in Miami, which aim to be more transnational, creating material largely for export (Mato 2005).

It is becoming harder to characterize Latin American television by country, although countries often tended to be branded together with key export genres, like Mexico and Brazil, which are branded in global marketplaces as primary producers of telenovelas (Havens 2006). According to Harrington and Bielby (2005, p. 911)

In the context of global TV trade fairs, the two main strategies for constructing brand identities are programming genre and national identity. “Programming genres and subgenres form the primary product in international television, around which many distributors build their corporate identities” (Havens, 2003a, p. 29). So Brazil gets a reputation for its telenovelas, Scandinavian countries for reality shows, Japan for its anime, and Germany for its action shows. National images are used by some distributors as a marketing tool; we say *some* and not *all* because building a nation-based brand is expensive and not all sellers can afford to do so (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2000). National images can also be used by buyers as another piece of (albeit unreliable) data on which to make purchasing decisions (Havens, 2003a, p. 31), as well as by local schedulers in promoting imported programming.⁷

However, seen at a less global, more nuanced level, within the region, Brazil has aspiring networks creating more romantic telenovelas and Mexico has Azteca creating, at least initially more social ones. To do this, they can use direct program imports, but increasingly turn to importing less tangible genre and format resources.

For example, SBT in Brazil began to compete with TV Globo in the early 1990s in telenovelas by importing them from Mexico and dubbing them. Since the imported Mexican programs were notably different from the dominant form on TV Globo, they found an audience that wanted lighter, more romantic telenovelas (La Pastina 1999). SBT did relatively well, holding on the second place in the Brazilian market, with simply importing and dubbing Mexican telenovelas at relatively low cost for a decade.



However, they began to get more competition from a third network, TV Record, and found that to maintain their audience for Mexican-style telenovelas, they had to import the scripts and adapt them to the expectations of Brazilian audiences, using Brazilian actors, starting in 2001. So in theoretical terms, a demand by the audience, forced by increased competition, led to a need for greater localization of the Mexican-style telenovelas in Brazil.

Other Latin American networks also began to find it more advantageous in national market competitions to import scripts and produce localized versions of regionally successful programs than to simply import canned programs, a logic that Moran (2000) has observed in Asia and elsewhere with game shows and reality TV shows. Hit telenovelas, like *Betty la fea* (Ugly Betty) also can drive both imports and format-style adaptations.

The Colombian hit *Betty la fea* (Ugly Betty) was simply imported into a number of countries, including most all of Latin America and the Hispanic U.S. market, and was dubbed into other languages for several other markets (Rivero 2003). It was also exported as a script or format to a number of other markets and remade or adapted into local versions. Perhaps the two most notable adaptations for our purposes were an adaptation in Mexico as a localized telenovela called *La Fea Más Bella* (The most beautiful ugly girl) in 2006-2007 by Televisa, and an adaptation not as a telenovela but as a serial comedy in the USA as *Ugly Betty* by ABC, 2006 to date. The Televisa production adapted it to their style with a well known popular cast. They kept some of the main original plot elements, like Betty's support by her group of friends, the Uglies, but discarded others. The American producers originally intended it to look more like a telenovela with a daily serial approach, but ended up making it look much more like a conventional sitcom, with weekly episodes that do build somewhat in a serial fashion, but also work as stand-alone episodes. They also dropped more of the original plot elements, such as the group of friends, and centered it more on her own nuclear family.

Conclusion

So to conclude, we note several things about genre and format in telenovelas. First and foremost, the flow of telenovela scripts in Latin America, dating from the 1950s, shows that to some degree the idea of exporting key format elements, such as scripts, as well as writers, entrepreneurs and consultations has been around a long time, predating the



export explosion of canned American television programs in the 1960s. This shows that the idea of borrowing, buying and adapting key elements of production, but then doing national versions is a key form of culturally hybrid production (Kraidy 2005) that again pre-dates, to some degree, the predominance of U.S. cultural product exports noted by studies starting with Nordenstreng and Varis (1974). So localization and adaptation of imported television format elements has been part of the hybridity of transnational television, at least in Latin America, since the 1950s.

Second, perhaps most interesting, is the historical evolution of the telenovela genre in Latin America as a dialogue between regional and national cultural traditions. Almost all countries, including the current dominant producers in Brazil and Mexico, imported format elements, scripts and writers, from Cuba or elsewhere in crucial beginning stages. However, almost all those countries in Latin America that were large enough or rich enough to eventually produce telenovelas (Straubhaar, 2007) ingrained those imported elements into their own cultural matrices, adapting genre and even formatted scripts to their own specific cultural histories (Rowe and Schelling 1991), as we see in the example of SBT in Brazil eventually deciding that to be more competitive for the audience it had to import scripts rather than programs from Mexico. This shows that imported genres and formats can be very important in guiding the development of cultural industry and its genre forms, but that in the medium to long run, seeing the history of globalization as hybridity, cultural adaptation of imported forms is necessary, maybe inevitable.

Third, telenovelas still have large global circulation as exported programs, primarily in Latin America, but also dubbed into a variety of other languages. This export circulation can be large, particularly with a hit like *Ugly Betty*, but at some of the counter-flow literature, such as Biltereyst and Meers (2000), notes, the volume of their actual exports peaked in the 1990s and still pales compared to the export flow of U.S. programs.

Fourth, in line with point two about the long run tendency toward adaptation of outside television genres and formats as part of the long run flow of hybrid cultural development (Kraidy, 2005; Pieterse, 2004), telenovelas are now increasingly exported as formats and scripts, not just as cheap canned programs. That may be a new form of counter-flow (Thussu 2007), perhaps a more far-reaching one, since the U.S. has consistently shown itself resistant to the inflow of canned programs, but open to the



import of genre ideas and formats. That has been most visible with non-scripted programs like reality shows, which are heavily imported everywhere including the U.S. But it seems to be increasing with scripted formats like *Ugly Betty* as well.

The U.S. appetite for scripted format imports increased considerably in 2008, following its longer appetite for imported reality formats. That is a current example of how far up the spectrum of producers the flow of scripted formats may go. But perhaps it is even more interesting to look backwards at almost 60 years of the flow and adaptation of scripts for the telenovela genre in Latin America for a sense of how deeply the transnational flow of scripted genres might work into national and regional television, as well as how those flows will be localized and hybridized.

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