

## Transcending Cultural Borders: The Impact of Mexican Telenovelas in Brazil

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### Abstract

This study explores the significant cultural and societal impact of Mexican telenovelas on Brazilian audiences, examining how these shows influence reception, adaptation, and cultural exchange between both nations. It traces the historical evolution of telenovelas, originating from melodramatic theater to their broadcast on television screens, investigating how these Mexican narratives resonate within Brazil. Themes of cultural familiarity, audience reception, adaptation strategies, and societal influences are analyzed to understand why Mexican telenovelas have become integral to Brazilian media consumption and social discussions. By examining narrative styles, cultural references, and audience preferences, this research sheds light on how these transnational soap operas persistently shape collective perceptions, fostering cultural interconnectedness between Mexico and Brazil. Additionally, it investigates how Brazilian audiences' perceptions and interpretations of Mexican telenovelas contribute to cross-cultural understanding and the formation of cultural stereotypes or misconceptions between the two nations.

Keywords: Telenovelas; Cultural Exchange; Audience Reception; Societal Impact; Transnational Narratives.

According to Pastina, Rego & Straubhaar (2003), the French "vaudeville" theater and other melodramatically based popular theatrical forms are predecessors of *telenovelas*, albeit they predate radio soap operas. They originate from "the forms and styles of entertainment in the popular fairs and in the oral story-telling traditions [of the 19th century] that emphasized fear, mystery, and terror," which drew a mostly, if not wholly, illiterate audience (apud BARBERO, 1993, p. 112). Cuba's 1930s *radionovelas* (radio dramas) were precursors to *telenovelas*, which are now regarded as artistic productions. Latin American nations began producing their own *radionovelas* after being inspired by those in Cuba (ADRIAENS; BILTEREYST, 2011, p. 3). The English term 'soap opera' originates from the fact that these shows- initially radio shows, and eventually television shows-were typically sponsored by soap and home goods companies. (DÍAS; JESUS, 2020, p. 2). *Sua vida me pertence* (*Your Life Belongs to Me*), broadcast by the Brazilian TUPI channel in 1951, was the first soap opera that was shown not only in Brazil but also worldwide. Contrary to the American perception of soap operas, which run for years, Latin American productions typically air for a few months and have a beginning and an end. Furthermore, Latin American networks produce multiple *telenovelas* simultaneously to fill their schedules with the shows.

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While Latin American *telenovelas* from countries such as Colombia, Argentina, and Venezuela have aired in Brazil to great success—for example, *Café con aroma de mujer* (The Scent of Passion - 2001), *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (I am Betty, the Ugly One - 2002/2003), *Lalola* (2008), and *Kassandra* (2000)—it is important to note that TELEVISA<sup>2</sup>, Mexico's leading network, produces most of the *telenovelas* exported to Brazil. The ratings of the Mexican soap operas in the nation do not equal those of the Brazilian productions aired by GLOBO<sup>3</sup>, the number one network in the country, which means that the *telenovela* ratings are not comparable due to the networks' uneven audiences. According to Sigelmann:

The Brazilian soap opera industry, exemplified by Rede Globo, competes globally, with SBT occasionally achieving success in broadcasting Mexican soap operas. Despite some foreign initiatives showing promise in terms of viewership, they have not matched the commercial success of domestic productions. Outsourcing in service and support roles could be a potential solution in this context. (2000, p. 52, our translation).

SBT<sup>4</sup>, branded as *TV Povo* (TV for the masses, MIRA, 1995, p. 128, our translation), is the second-largest Brazilian television channel purchased and broadcasted several Mexican soap operas. Most viewers from the middle class gravitate towards *telenovelas* as their main source of entertainment, with a significant proportion of them watching shows on Globo, a network whose audience is largely composed of class C<sup>5</sup> individuals (CODONER, 2010, p. 14). SBT's prime time television broadcast the Mexican soap operas with the highest ratings. Some of them were in direct competition with the news and GLOBO productions that were shown at the same time, for instance, the soap operas "Marimar" and "Maria la del Bairro," starring the actress and singer Thalía, are the two most popular and globally rerun ones. Upon their initial airing on SBT in Brazil, "Maria do Bairro" (Maria la del Barrio) experienced significant popularity, diverting the audience's attention from the "Jornal Nacional" (National News). It stands out as one of the Mexican soap operas most fondly remembered by Brazilian viewers. (FIGUEIREDO, DAMACENA, 2014, pp. 13-14, our translation).

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<sup>2</sup> The name *Televisa* is, indeed, derived from the fusion of *Televisión vía Satélite*, and as its name suggests, Televisa has harnessed satellite technology to extend its dominance from the largest Spanish-speaking domestic market in the world to the broader Spanish-speaking global audience" (SINCLAIR, 2012, p. 419).

<sup>3</sup> TV Globo is a Brazilian television network established by Roberto Marinho in 1965 and ranks as the fourth most extensive TV network globally, trailing behind the American channels ABC, NBC, and CBS. (2010, CODONER, pp. 10-11)

<sup>4</sup> SBT (Brazilian Television System) was founded in 1981, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil by Silvio Santos. (GALHARDI, 2017, p. 4, our translation). According to Galhardi, The SBT owner, with a dedicated viewership, swiftly secures the second spot in TV ratings, challenging the leading network, Rede Globo de Televisão. (apud BRITTO, 2002; BOLAÑO, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Household's gross monthly income by IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics): Class A: above BRL 15.760 / Class B: above BRL 7.880 / Class C: above BRL 3.152 / Class D: above BRL 1.576 / Class E: below BRL 1.576 (NESS, 2016).

*Los Ricos Tambien Lloran* (The Rich Also Cry - 1979/1980), starring Verónica Castro, was the first Mexican *telenovela* to air in Brazil, and it did so through SBT (Brazilian Television System) in 1982. As a result of its success, Mexican productions have been seen with increasing frequency on Brazilian television. The 1990s was a decade of glory for *telenovelas* in Brazil. *Carrusel* (Carousel - 1991), *Maria Mercedes and Marimar* (1996), *Maria la del Barrio* (Humble Maria - 1997), *La Usurpadora* (The Usurper - 1999) and *El Privilegio de Amar* (The Right to Love - 1999) were some of the most-watched series that were rebroadcast on the SBT network. The success of these soap operas was enormous that Ariadna Thalía Sodi Miranda, more popularly known as Thalía, the main protagonist in the so-called “trilogy of Marias,” visited Brazil multiple times to promote not only her *telenovelas* but also her singing career, ensuring her the gold record for her album *En Éxtasis*. It is imperative to mention that it might be challenging for a Hispanic performer to occasionally have their music aired on Brazilian radio stations. Thalía's career as an actress and singer in the nation was made possible by the soap operas that helped her promote her music. Gabriela Spanic, who portrayed both the good and evil twins in *La Usurpadora*, stands as another example of a protagonist triumph warmly received in Brazil. Her portrayal launched her to global stardom in Brazil, much like Thalía.

SBT had invested in the adaptation of Mexican writings into Brazilian versions. Examples of these versions are *Pícara Sonhadora* (2001), which is a remake of *La Pícara Soñadora* (1991); *Amigas e Rivais* (2007), which is a remake of *Amigas y Rivales* (2001); and *Carrossel* (2012), which is a remake of *Carrusel* (1989). (GUEDES, 2021, p. 305)<sup>6</sup>. Besides showcasing its ability to hold viewers' attention with compelling storytelling, SBT's commitment to these cross-cultural adaptations highlights the network's recognition of the universal appeal these Mexican stories possess. Due to the adaption of characters who fit Brazilian cultural stereotypes, SBT has been effective in bringing an element of Mexican culture to Brazilian television, providing the Brazilian audience with a distinctive viewing experience. Because of this customization, the characters seem more realistic in the Brazilian setting to the audience by showing recognizable characteristics and mannerisms.

Mexico and Brazil, the leading global markets for *telenovelas*, create numerous soap operas that explore various societal themes. According to screenwriter Vitor de Oliveira, the melodramas are filmed in Mexico after the productions' scriptwriters complete the writing

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<sup>6</sup> Additional scripts were written and performed for Mexican productions, followed by Brazilian ones. Among them are *Complices de un Rescate* (Cúmplices de um Resgate), *Maria Mercedes* (Maria Esperança), *Esmeralda*, and *El Privilegio de Amar* (Cristal).

process. However, in Brazil, the script might be modified depending on whether the audience likes it or not. As a result, the screenplay is regarded as an unfinished work in which the story's plot and character development can evolve (apud DÍAS & JESUS, 2020), implying that the audience takes part in the development of the narrative in some way, primarily by evaluating the events as they happen. Additionally, even though characters in both Brazilian and Mexican soap operas can be either nice or bad, with good being exceedingly good and bad being incredibly bad, morals and conduct corruption are present in both societies.

According to Douglas Kellner "Culture provides the material with which many people construct their sense of class, ethnicity and race, nationality, sexuality, 'us' and 'them'" (2001, p. 9, our translation). However, *telenovelas'* influence extends beyond these theoretical ideas. They faced unique challenges in terms of influence in Mexico, a country with deep links to traditional beliefs. These dramatic narratives, which explore the complexities of love, deceit, and familial ties, were included into the complex choreography of cultural awareness. It became clear how difficult it was to reconcile representations of modern relationships with traditional ideals, reflecting the greater tension in society between embracing change and defending traditional norms. Due to the country's conservative nature, Mexican culture was not ready to be exposed to sex scenes that went against its morals in the 1990s and 2000s. Approximately 87.9% of Mexicans identified as Catholics<sup>7</sup> in 2000 (AGUILAR, 2020), compared to 76% of Brazilians in 1996, (REX, 1998, p. 133). It is noticeable how religion affects morality when it comes to media outcomes in Mexican society. Brazilian screenwriters started seeing Mexican soap operas as "melodrama/big dramas" that were gentler than Brazilian ones. This was due in part to Brazilian soap operas' tendency to be more pragmatic when it comes to the acting and the issues they present, whereas Mexican soap operas tend to the tragicomedy, with elements that involve passion, despair, and irony. In regard to religion, the Mexican anthology drama series *La Rosa de Guadalupe* (The Rose of Guadalupe - 2008) is an illustration of not only the power of Catholicism in Mexico with protagonists' devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe while they are dealing with issues like bullying, domestic violence, love stories, drug addiction, prostitution, hope, and conspiracy, but also how miracles might happen to the characters if they have faith. Between 2019 and 2020, the series was shown in Brazil in two parts under the names *A Rosa dos Milagres* (The Rose of Miracles) and *Milagres de Nossa Senhora* (Miracles of Our Lady). Despite Brazil having a

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<sup>7</sup> According to Latinobarómetro's 2017 report, 54% of Brazilians identify as Catholics, while a larger percentage, 80%, of Mexicans consider themselves Catholics (ZILLA, 2020), indicating a decline in the practice of Catholicism in Latin American countries.

sizable Catholic population, the series' ratings have had ups and downs. According to Trejo Silva:

Family comes before all else. Religion (Catholic, obviously) constitutes a fundamental pillar of society not subject to doubt; the Virgin Mary always helps her children, and if, on occasion, she does not answer their prayers, it is surely because she is testing them. True love will overcome all adversities. Sexuality should only be linked to a purely reproductive purpose. Women should be good, honest, submissive, enduring, and have an infinite capacity for suffering. Men should not let their role as providers be taken from them, and their mistakes and shortcomings will be forgiven as long as they repent. Poverty is associated with goodness, honesty, and true happiness (...). For men, work may offer the possibility of some economic advancement, but not significantly. Motherhood is sacred, and children must show respect and obedience to their parents and their ideas; otherwise, they will pay for it with suffering. (2011, p. 49, our translation).

The *telenovela* productions from both nations show people's living situations and the realities of everyday life. According to Martin-Barbero:

The television constitutes a decisive realm of sociocultural recognition, the unraveling and remaking of collective identities, both of peoples and groups. The best demonstration of these intersections between memory and format, between the logics of globalization and cultural dynamics, is undoubtedly the soap opera (2001, p. 4, our translation).

Although their primary purpose is to amuse their viewers, time has clarified just how influential they are. Viewers pay attention to various things, such as fashion, technology, and décor, when watching daily and follow soap opera trends when it comes to characters' behavior or public advertisements for goods. According to Professor Esther Império Hamburger, "The soap operas serve as consumer showcases, updating fashion, home appliances, automobile models, and available technologies with each new episode." (apud DÍAZ; JESUS, 2020, p. 8). *Rebelde* (Rebel - 2005/2006), a TELEVISA network production portraying the daily lives of teens in a private school, is a great representation of the soap opera popularity in the Brazilian market. For instance, the musical group RBD, which is based on the *Rebelde* soap opera, recorded three Portuguese-language versions of their albums for its' market. Due to the production's enormous success, other products, such as dolls that resemble the main characters, school supplies, and lipsticks, have been produced.

According to critic Maria Lopes "Television-narrated stories are significant primarily because of their cultural relevance. Television fiction shapes and provides invaluable information for understanding the culture and society of which it is an expression, as the vein of international studies reveals". (2004, p. 125). Examples include some archetypes such as heroes, villains, virgins, and mothers, as well as a universal sentimental language that introduces some symbolisms like the tears for sorrow or the storm for a catastrophe. Hence, in

addition to issues such as crime, money, madness, seduction, marriage, injustice, and prejudice, Mexican fiction also impacts the Brazilian audience through universal emotional expressions. Due to the realism in most everyday situations, the audience sees its own reflection in such themes, such as a rich man willing to help a poor girl in a low-income neighborhood. We are presented with what Cristiane Costa refers to as “The Cinderella Myth”:

The myth is still used in soap operas today because it combines two fantasies—love and social ascent despite its historical impossibility. It implies, subtly, that all it would take for the lower class to “conquer” the dominant class would be for them to exhibit the symbolic differences of that class, perfected for consumption in society (2000, p. 28).

Other examples would be a colleague who tries to make someone's life hell at work, the rage of a woman who has been deceived, the impoverished man or woman selling goods in a jury demonstrating the failure of the law.

When discussing the Brazilian context when thinking about or watching Mexican *telenovelas*, some elements stand out, such as exaggeration in acting; for example, tormented cries from sadness or vengeance, which occasionally exceed the bounds of common sense. While there has been a slight easing in the portrayal of men and women on television compared to earlier years, the majority still conforms to conventional and stereotypical norms. This perpetuates the segregation of gender roles. Traits like emotionality, caution, cooperation, communal values, and obedience continue to be commonly associated with femininity. In contrast, attributes such as ruthlessness, efficiency, competition, individuality, and reason relate to masculinity (AHMED, 2012, p. 2). Mexican soap operas often immerse themselves in a sentimental and fictional world. In contrast, Brazilian soap operas lean towards realism, tackling societal issues such as social inequalities, as well as controversial topics like sex and homosexuality. This divergence highlights a distinction between the two, with Mexican dramas embracing a sentimental and often considered kitschy approach, while Brazilian counterparts delve into more realistic and socially relevant themes. Nonetheless, the Mexican product became popular in a nation that has many cultural similarities to Mexico, including Christianity, close-knit families, and perspectives on socioeconomic status. Stuart Hall defines the term “popular” as:

In any era, the forms, and activities whose roots lie in the social and material conditions of specific classes, which have been incorporated into popular traditions and practices. In this sense, the definition retains what the descriptive definition holds in value. However, it goes further, insisting that the essence of a definition of popular

culture lies in the relationships that place "popular culture" in tension (of relationship influence, and antagonisms) with the dominant culture (2003, p. 257, our translation).

It is important to note that because conflicts and romanticism are expressions of human emotions, they affect individuals from every aspect of life. *Telenovela* audiences will perceive these components differently based on their cultural values, and they will engage with the narratives even when they find them peculiar. According to anthropologist Jesús Martín-Barbero:

Extravagance is the ultimate outcome of everything in melodrama. From staging that increases both auditory and visual contrasts to dramatic structure and performance that express emotions honestly and effectively, demanding a reaction from the audience in the form of laughter, tears, sweat, and always trembling. Although this excess is viewed as degrading by any educated mind, it nonetheless represents a victory over repression and a determined economy of discipline, preservation, and permanence (1997, p. 166, our translation).

An illustration of one exaggerated scene is featured in the popular Mexican drama *María la del Barrio*, in which the cruel character Soraya Montenegro (played by actress Itatí Cantoral) lives with and torments her stepdaughter, who uses a wheelchair. Soraya catches her stepdaughter kissing Nandito, the son of her arch-enemy nicknamed Mara la del Barrio. In a highly dramatic and almost comedic manner, Soraya reacts by striking her stepdaughter, causing her to fall from her wheelchair, all while yelling 'damn cripple' at her. She also slaps Nandito and causes him to fall, beats Alicia's caregiver's head against the wall until she passes out and curses and threatens everyone. This moment has been referenced in internet memes throughout the years and is seen as a darkly humorous overacting performance. The series titles, which might also be seen as tacky by some viewers, are another aspect that attract Brazilian audiences' interest. Some peculiar examples are *Yo compro esa mujer* (I Buy This Woman - 1990 - Brazil: 1992/1993), *De pocas, pocas pulgas* (literally A Few Fleas - 2003 - Brazil: 2003/2004), *Destilando amor* (Distilling Love - 2007), *La fea más bella* (The Prettiest Ugly Girl - 2006/2007), and *Las tontas no van al cielo* (Dumb Girls Don't Go to Heaven - 2008 - Brazil: 2010), which not only arouse audience interest but also occasionally become topics of conversation among friends or a funny title-and-scene joke among Brazilian TV comedians and shows<sup>8</sup>. It is noteworthy that among those eye-catching titles SBT produced

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<sup>8</sup> According to some interviews conducted by Santos (2014) with the population of the city of Aracaju in the state of Sergipe, Brazil, one of the interviewees, a 21-year-old, masculine student, states that "Mexican telenovelas have their own identity. They are extremely exaggerated, especially the performance of the character actors, as well as the dubbing, since SBT constantly airs these telenovelas in its programming and selects the voice actors. And that's what I like the most about Mexican soap operas: the humor and the exaggeration. I have fun" (INTERVIEWEE 5, Jan. 2014, our translation).

adaptations of some Mexican soap operas, some of which had their titles changed for the Brazilian market, including the 2007 production *Maria Esperança* (Maria Mercedes -1992), the 2006 version *Cristal* (El Privilegio de Amar / The Right to Love - 1999), and the 2010 production *Corações Feridos* (La Mentira/ Twisted Lies - 1998).

Due to its excesses, Mexican melodramas still have an adverse image in the Brazilian market even if they deal with the emotions of the audience and touch on some aspects of Latino families' everyday lives. The year 1996 saw the release of *María la del Barrio*. We wonder if the fight/violent scene described earlier could be written, produced, and broadcast today without being labeled as inappropriate and violent to the audience of an open transmission channel, even though the scene in question is remembered as simultaneously cruel and comical. It's likely that the network could classify the soap opera as R-Rating (restricted), warning viewers that some scenes may include violent content and harsh language. The soap opera was last rebroadcast on SBT Network in 2015, and it aired in 2021 on GLOBOPLAY, a digital streaming platform, and in 2022 on Viva Channel, a private cable network-both of which are owned by the GLOBO corporation. Despite their strong ratings, not everyone had the same ease of access to the show as they would have had it been broadcast on open TV.

Mexican *telenovelas* feature more limited narrative components than GLOBO's Brazilian soap operas, which provide their audience with more realistic content, such as topics of gender identity, human trafficking, missing children, and gambling addiction. Themes of morality, chastity, and religion have consistently been present in conservative Mexican productions. Although some *telenovela* protagonists, like Paola Bracho from *La Usurpadora* or *Rubi* and *Teresa* from the self-titled soap operas, expose and explore their female bodies while trying to seduce their lovers or even in a typical pool or beach scene, Mexican melodramas attempt to soften such scenes by not exploring them for prolonged periods or by reducing some explicit erotic scenes. In contrast, GLOBO productions might feature explicit sex and nudity, which attract large segments of Brazilian viewers; however, a significant percentage continues to appreciate watching the antagonistic conflict between the heroine and the villain, the rich and the poor, regardless of the dichotomies that are demonstrated throughout the story, but always anticipating a successful conclusion.

According to scholar Jesús Galindo, soap operas have unrestricted narratives that communicate universal stories: “It is an ethnography of the social environment.” (apud HERRERA, 2019, p. 171). While there are numerous similar *telenovela* topics in Mexican and Brazilian societies, others are distinct due to national identities and cultural expressions.



For instance, while Our Lady of Aparecida is highly regarded in Brazil, the Virgin of Guadalupe is a major symbol in Mexican melodramas. Another example is the presence of music and dance. While mariachis are featured in Mexican soap operas, samba is more prevalent in Brazil. Additionally, Brazilian taxis, specifically those in Rio de Janeiro, were known as “Fuscas Taxis” (a beetle-like vehicle made in Brazil), rather than the green and white “vochos” taxis used in Mexico. While a character may be shown sipping tequila by a pool in a Mexican *telenovela*, a draft beer on the beach would be more typical in a Brazilian soap opera.

A further example would be the presence of indigenous people who work as maids in the domiciles of the bosses, although in Brazilian narratives this issue is more applicable to low-income characters from the country's inland areas, as both are tied to poverty. A poignant exemplification of this dynamic is discernible in the initial airing of the Mexican *telenovela* *Maria Isabel* in 1966, featuring actress Silvia Derbez and having a remake in 1997 with the protagonist Adela Noriega. In this rendition, the central character, an indigenous maid, is portrayed as ultimately marrying her employer, thereby assuming the role of the household's "mistress." Regrettably, the indigenous protagonist is often depicted as possessing limited education and a perceived lack of refinement (PIRES, 2009, p. 104). This portrayal is emblematic of a broader trend wherein indigenous individuals, migrating from rural locales to urban centers, find themselves relegated to low-wage occupations such as domestic service. The perpetuation of racial and social class stereotypes in these soap operas is evident in the portrayal of indigenous characters. According to Orozco:

The soap opera has induced identity recognitions in multiple audience segments, while also constructing, reproducing, and recreating prototypes of class, gender, race, and age, including ancestral ones. It has petrified and perpetuated undesirable cultural traits and characteristics, such as *machismo* (2006, p. 14, our translation).

These stereotypes are communicated through depictions of their cultural identity, linguistic attributes, and behavioral mannerisms. Two examples of indigenous characters in Brazilian *telenovelas* are 'Serena'<sup>9</sup> in *Alma Gêmea* (Soul Mate - Globo, 2005), portrayed by actress Priscila Fantin, and 'Ana'<sup>10</sup> in *Desejo Proibido* (Forbidden Desire - Globo, 2007), featuring actress Letícia Sabatella. It's noteworthy to mention that in both Mexican and Brazilian soap operas, indigenous women are often portrayed with fair or white skin. In the

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<sup>9</sup> *Serena* embarks on a journey to the city of São Paulo, Brazil. Eventually, she finds herself working as a maid in the house of a wealthy family (CARVALHO, 2015, p. 67).

<sup>10</sup> *Ana* is the daughter of an indigenous woman named Iraci, who will work as a domestic worker in the house of her daughter and her husband (p. 67).

Brazilian context, the character "Serena" is portrayed with green eyes, and Letícia Sabatella had to darken her skin to play the role of "Ana." This suggests that when choosing an actress for an indigenous character, skin color is considered. In some cases, this results in the necessity to alter the actor's skin tone to make the portrayal more believable for the audience. This prompts reflection on the importance of authentic casting for roles tied to identity, emphasizing the significance of respecting cultural and racial representation through a diverse range of actors.

To further illustrate how cultural identities can affect differences between countries, here's another example: Characters in Mexican shows are sometimes renamed for Brazilian viewers. This is because certain names are uncommon in Brazil and might seem unfamiliar or odd to the Brazilian audience. Examples include the *telenovela* *Mística* (1992 - Brazil: 1996), in which *Mística* is referred to as *Miriam*, and *Marimar* (1994 - Brazil: 1996/1997), in which *Papá Pancho* is referred to as *Papai Tito*. The Brazilian name translation of *La Usurpadora* (1998 - Brazil: 1999) renamed *Gema* to *Leda*. The protagonist of *Gotinha de Amor* (*Gotita de Amor/ Droplet of Love* 1998 - Brazil: 2001), is known as *Chabelita* in Mexico and *Belinha* in Brazil. In *Rosalinda* (1999 - Brazil: 2001), *Vera* was the Brazilian name for the character *Fedra*, whereas *Malu* is the Brazilian name for *Marichuy*, the lead character in *Cuidado com o Anjo* (*Cuidado con el Ángel / Don't Mess with an Angel's* - 2008/2009 - Brazil: 2013). For the Brazilian audience, several *telenovelas* changed character names as well as some of their opening songs. Examples include the 1979/1980 soap opera *Los Ricos Tambien Lloran* (Brazil: 1982/1983), featuring actress Verónica Castro, and *Chispita* (1982/1983 - Brazil: 1984), starring actress Lucero. "Sombras" (Shadows), sung by Sarah Regina, is the Brazilian opening song selected *Chispita*. "Anjo Bom" (Good Angel), again sung by Sarah Regina, was the opening song for the 1992 rerun of *Chispita*. In 1991, the band Super Feliz's song "Carro-Céu" featured on the *telenovela* *Carrusel* (*Carrousel* - 1989/1980). The self-titled theme song for the 1992 Mexican *telenovela* *El Abuelo y Yo*, (*Grandfather and I* - Brazil: 1992) sung by singer Kelly, is another opening music. The song "O amor sabe o que faz" (Love knows what it does) by Marcelo Augusto served as the opening theme for *El Privilegio de Amar*. Bruno & Marrone sing "Vivendo de Passado" (Living in the Past), which serves as the show's introductory song, in the Brazilian opening version of *La Mentira* (Brazil: 2000). Chris Durán sang the theme song "Ela é um Anjo" (She is an Angel) for the soap drama *Esmeralda* (1997 - Brazil: 2000/2001). The opening track for the soap opera *La Otra* (*A Outra / The Other Woman* - 2001 - Brazil: 2004) was "A Outra" by Michael Sullivan & Anayle among others.

It is essential to highlight that Brazilian broadcasts of Mexican *telenovelas* require dubbing, which makes it more appealing to the public. Language is essential to a society's collective identity, so it is key for a viewer to understand the language of a *telenovela* to relate to the plot and its peculiarities and experience the emotions. Interestingly, because Spanish and Portuguese are closely related linguistically, actors' lip movements often mask pronunciation issues because so many words in the two languages are similar. The viewer can feel sympathy for or hostility toward the characters and the situations they encounter because the dub conveys the characters' emotions. Therefore, it's logical to understand that for Mexican productions to thrive in Brazil, having a Portuguese dub is essential. If a Brazilian network aired a Mexican soap opera with subtitles instead of dubbing, it would pose difficulties for viewers to follow, impacting the network's ratings and diminishing the audience's engagement with the stories due to a lack of language or cultural familiarity. SBT doesn't merely translate Mexican stories; it localizes them to resonate with the Brazilian audience. This involves incorporating Brazilian cultural nuances, social dynamics, and regional flavors into the narratives. In most cases the same Brazilian professionals who dub the Mexican soap operas voices work on different soap operas. Hence, it's not uncommon to identify those same voices giving life to different characters, which does not interfere in the seriousness and verity of the roles played by the characters.

In conclusion, examining the intricate relationship between Mexican *telenovelas* and Brazilian society, this study reveals a multifaceted tapestry of cultural exchange and societal resonance. The evolution of *telenovelas*, from their historical theatrical roots to their contemporary television adaptations, serves as a conduit for cross-cultural transmission. The enduring popularity of Mexican productions in Brazil, exemplified by the success of iconic soap operas like *Marimar* and *Maria la del Barrio*, underscores the shared emotional connections and cultural parallels between the nations. Furthermore, the adaptation strategies employed by Brazilian networks, such as dubbing and localization, not only facilitate accessibility but also contribute to a nuanced understanding and acceptance of Mexican narratives within the Brazilian context. The analysis of thematic differences between Mexican and Brazilian soap operas highlights contrasting approaches in storytelling, ranging from sentimental melodrama to realistic social commentary. Despite these disparities, the appeal of Mexican *telenovelas* lies in their ability to resonate with Brazilian audiences, transcending cultural boundaries and fostering a sense of familiarity. This cultural exchange extends beyond entertainment, encompassing shared values, familial bonds, and societal perceptions. As Mexican *telenovelas* continue to find resonance in Brazilian households, their enduring

influence underscores the power of transnational media in shaping cultural identities and fostering cross-border connections. The insights gleaned from this exploration pave the way for deeper understandings of cultural exchange, media impact, and societal perceptions in an increasingly interconnected global landscape. Ultimately, the enduring allure of Mexican *telenovelas* in Brazil reflects the profound impact of storytelling in forging cultural bonds and shaping collective imaginations across borders.

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## Transcendendo Fronteiras Culturais: O Impacto das Telenovelas Mexicanas no Brasil

### Resumo

Este estudo explora o significativo impacto cultural e social das telenovelas mexicanas nas audiências brasileiras, examinando como esses programas influenciam a recepção, adaptação e intercâmbio cultural entre ambas as nações. Ele traça a evolução histórica das telenovelas, desde sua origem no teatro melodramático até sua transmissão nas telas de televisão, investigando como essas narrativas mexicanas ressoam no Brasil. Temas de familiaridade cultural, recepção da audiência, estratégias de adaptação e influências sociais são analisados para compreender por que as telenovelas mexicanas se tornaram parte integral do consumo midiático brasileiro e das discussões sociais. Ao examinar estilos narrativos, referências culturais e preferências da audiência, esta pesquisa lança luz sobre como essas telenovelas transnacionais persistentemente moldam as percepções coletivas, promovendo a interconexão cultural entre México e Brasil. Além disso, investiga como as percepções e interpretações das audiências brasileiras sobre as telenovelas mexicanas contribuem para a compreensão intercultural e para a formação de estereótipos culturais ou conceitos equivocados entre as duas nações.

Palavras-chave: Telenovelas; Troca Cultural; Recepção da Audiência; Impacto Societal; Narrativas Transnacionais.

## Trascendiendo Fronteras Culturales: El Impacto de las Telenovelas Mexicanas en Brasil

### Resumen

Este estudio explora el significativo impacto cultural y social de las telenovelas mexicanas en la audiencia brasileña, examinando cómo estos programas influyen en la recepción, adaptación e intercambio cultural entre ambas naciones. Se rastrea la evolución histórica de las telenovelas, desde su origen en el teatro melodramático hasta su emisión en las pantallas de televisión, investigando cómo resuenan estas narrativas mexicanas en Brasil. Se analizan temas de familiaridad cultural, recepción por parte de la audiencia, estrategias de adaptación e influencias sociales para comprender por qué las telenovelas mexicanas se han vuelto integrales para el consumo mediático brasileño y las discusiones sociales. Al examinar estilos narrativos, referencias culturales y preferencias de la audiencia, esta investigación arroja luz sobre cómo estas telenovelas transnacionales moldean persistentemente las percepciones colectivas, fomentando la interconexión cultural entre México y Brasil. Además, investiga cómo las percepciones e interpretaciones de las audiencias brasileñas sobre las telenovelas mexicanas contribuyen a la comprensión intercultural y a la formación de estereotipos culturales o conceptos erróneos entre ambas naciones.

Palabras clave: Telenovelas; Intercambio Cultural; Recepción de la Audiencia; Impacto Social; Narrativas Transnacionales.

## Franchir les Frontières Culturelles : L'Impact des Telenovelas Mexicaines au Brésil

### Résumé

Cette étude explore l'impact culturel et social significatif des telenovelas mexicaines sur les publics brésiliens, examinant comment ces émissions influent sur la réception, l'adaptation et l'échange culturel entre les deux nations. Elle retrace l'évolution historique des telenovelas, de leur origine dans le théâtre mélodramatique à leur diffusion sur les écrans de télévision, en examinant comment ces récits mexicains résonnent au Brésil. Des thèmes tels que la familiarité culturelle, la réception du public, les stratégies d'adaptation et les influences sociales sont analysés pour comprendre pourquoi les telenovelas mexicaines sont devenues essentielles à la consommation médiatique brésilienne et aux débats sociaux. En examinant les styles narratifs, les références culturelles et les préférences du public, cette recherche éclaire la manière dont ces feuilletons transnationaux façonnent de manière persistante les perceptions collectives, favorisant l'interconnexion culturelle entre le Mexique et le Brésil. De plus, elle explore comment les perceptions et interprétations des publics brésiliens sur

les telenovelas mexicaines contribuent à la compréhension interculturelle et à la formation de stéréotypes culturels ou de concepts erronés entre les deux nations.

Mots-clés : Telenovelas ; Échange culturel ; Réception du public ; Impact social ; Récits transnationaux.