

Brazilian telenovelas in West Germany: a new type of programme in a changing television culture and a programme market in transition

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RESUMO

As telenovelas brasileiras invadiram a programação televisiva da Alemanha. O artigo de Gerlinde Frey-Vor analisa o comportamento dos telespectadores alemães e dos críticos em relação às telenovelas. Além disso, investiga as raízes culturais e institucionais e a estrutura de programas da televisão alemã, que optou por introduzir séries como "Sinhá Moça" no país.

ABSTRACT

The Brazilian soap operas have invaded the German television programme schedule. Gerlinde Frey-Vor's article analyses the behaviour of the viewers and the critic towards the soap operas. Furthermore, it investigates the cultural and institutional roots and the programme structure of German television, which made the option to introduce serials like "Sinhá Moça" in the country.

The Brazilian telenovela has reached West Germany comparatively late and up to now only two novelas could be followed through by the television audience of the Federal Republic, though a third one is being shown at the moment starting from January 1990.

This article proposes to investigate the cultural and institutional background and the programme structure of West German television into which the telenovela was introduced as a new type of programme. It also endeavours to throw some light on the market strategic considerations which made programme planners choose this option. Furthermore, the attempt is made to provide some information on the reception of the Brazilian serials by viewers and media critics.

In February 1984 the media critic Peter Figlestahler informed the readers of the renowned *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (with a conservative editorial line) that there existed a television genre largely unknown to German viewers that had set out from Brazil to conquer programme markets all around the world. In reference to Ismael Fernandes' book *Memoria da telenovela brasileira* he drew the attention on the cultural and social significance of the Brazilian telenovela for its country of origin. Figlestahler acknowledged the 'sofisticação artística' of the telenovela if compared to the assembly line character of US-American soap operas¹. A similar suggestion is made by the writer of an article in *Der Spiegel* - one of the most important political magazines in the Federal Republic - in September 1986. The article which mainly focusses on the rise of Globo and its then recent purchase of major shares in *TV-Monte Carlo*, explains to the politically minded readership of the magazine what the most successful Globo product is. The *Spiegel* readers who are likely to be still oblivious of the telenovela, learn that while the US-American television industry can only attract actors whose star is sinking in the cinema, Brazilian telenovelas are written, produced and acted by top people. "Top achievements in technique, authors and performers and a breath-taking production rhythm constitute the classical Globo-novela".² But the *Spiegel's* silent warning is that Globo, the fourth largest television company in the world, was eager to expand further into Europe through shareholding (following its alleged principle 'to swallow up what can be swallowed') and programme productions in places closer to the market. According to the article, one of Globo's strategy could be to seek a participation in the private satellite channel *RTL Plus*, which could also be the key to a future lucrative - but at that time only slowly deregulating West German television market. For, *RTL Plus* which in 1986 was still operating from Luxemburg but transferred its German headquarter to Cologne in 1987, showed signs of a promising development in the private television sector.

GLOBO'S ADVENT ON THE GERMAN PROGRAMME MARKET

However, Globo made its debut in the West German programme market in late 1986 via the first public channel *ARD* (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rundfunkanstalten in Deutschland* = Working Association of Public Broadcasting Corporations in the Federal Republic of Germany). At that time *ARD* had decided to give more concern to its afternoon programming, in the face of competition, not only from the second public channel *ZDF* (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*), but from also previously not existing private competitors, such as *RTL Plus* and *SAT 1*. A shortened version of

Iscrava Isaura (40 episodes) seemed to be the right tool to test the afternoon audience which up to then was believed to be potentially very low. But the Brazilian telenovela, which was shown between 4 p.m. and 4 30 p.m. (after it had been rejected as evening programme by the department responsible), proved that the audience before 5 p.m. could be increased considerably.

THE PROGRAMME STRUCTURE OF WEST GERMAN TELEVISION

Before, the programme day itself in West German public television had started in the early evening while the programme supply earlier in the day was rather thin. Although in 1981 **ARD** and **ZDF** started a joint morning programme mainly with repeats of the previous day, there still existed gaps after midday where viewers were confronted with nothing but the test-card when they happened to switch on their television sets. In the course of the last three years, however, both **ARD** and **ZDF** have gradually given their afternoon programme a more coherent structure. **ARD** has broadcast a fully restructured afternoon programme since summer 1988 and the novela *Sinhá Moça*, which started in September 1988, was seen as a vital part of that renewed structure. Finally, also the programme gap during the lunch hour was filled. For that purpose **ARD** and **ZDF** started a jointly broadcast lunch-time magazine in autumn 1989. This programme is produced alternatively by the two public channels in a weekly rota.

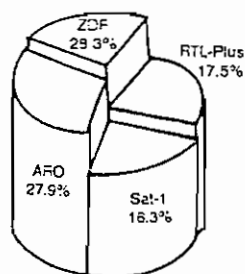
The gradual introduction of an unbroken programme structure from nine o'clock in the morning until about twelve thirty in the night (at weekends longer) has to be mainly seen in connection with the advent of **RTL Plus** and **SAT 1**, which for the first time in Germany offered television from breakfast television at six o'clock in the morning until late at night.

RTL Plus and **SAT 1** emerged as the strongest private channels in the small number of commercial channels (in 1989 there were only two other nation-wide commercial channels: **Pro 7** and **Tele 5**) which were set up after the transformation of the German broadcasting system, from an exclusively public one into a dual system with public - and private television channels in the 1980s.

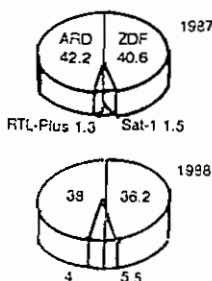
Like all other commercial channels, **RTL Plus** and **SAT 1** started as mere satellite programmes, which could only be received by households with satellite dishes or access to the cable infra-structure (there are presently about 20% households with cable). But in 1988 **RTL Plus** and **SAT 1** succeeded in pressing for access to free terrestrial frequencies. Since then they have proved to be serious competitors for the two public channels, not only in cable - of satellite households but also in those households with terrestrial television. The following diagrams illustrate this development.

DIAG. 1

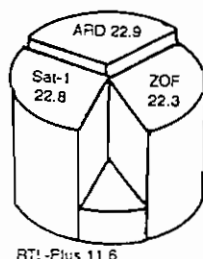
Audience Share
where RTL-Plus
and Sat-1 are
received off-air



Market Share (%) -
all TV households



Market Share (%) -
cabled households
February 1988

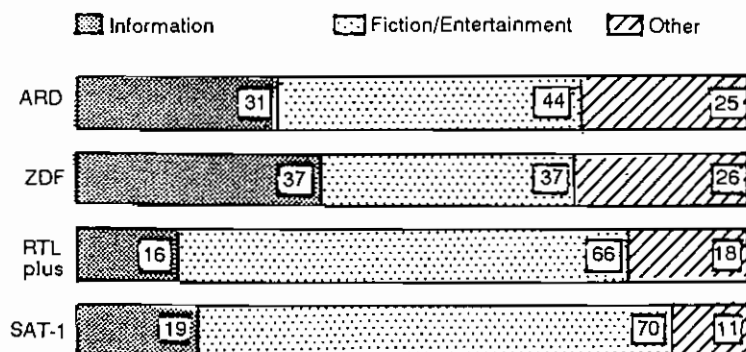


In 1987 ARD held a market share of 42,2% in all households and ZDF a market share of 40,6%. In 1988, however, the picture is different with those households where RTL Plus and SAT 1 can be received off-air. Among those households ARD achieved only 27,9% and ZDF 28,3%, while the shares of RTL Plus and SAT 1 amounted to 17,5% and 16,3%.³

The programme structures of the two commercial networks are marked by a dominance of entertainment - over information programmes. This can be seen from the following diagram:

DIAG. 2:

The Programme Structures of the Public Channels and The Two Main Private Channels in 1987



ARD and ZDF devoted on average 34% of their programme time to information programmes (eg. news, current affairs, political magazines) and 40% to fiction - and entertainment programmes. The programme structures of RTL Plus and SAT 1, however, consisted on average of only 17% information

programmes but of 68% fiction - and entertainment.⁴ The rest falls under the category 'Other' (Sonstiges).

Since it is evidently their steady supply of entertainment which has brought about the increasing success of the two private channels with German audiences, it is not surprising that ARD chose the entertainment serial *Iscrava Isaura* for their programme strategical coup.

Since the Brazilian serial proved to be successful, it was repeated in autumn 1989. But from autumn 1988 until summer 1989 German viewers had already had a revista with Lucélia Santos, as heroine in the - with 170 episodes unshortened - telenovela *Sinhá Moça*. The start of that novela did not only fall into a time when ARD had finally restructured its afternoon programme, but also into the time of the 100th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Brazil. Alongside *Sinhá Moça* ARD commemorated that event in a documentary on slavery and its background and on the conditions of black people in Brazil today.

The popularity of *Iscrava Isaura* towards the end of the first transmission expressed itself in a storm of protest and some harsh critique of the public channel ARD by the popular press and TV magazines⁵ because of the unannounced rescheduling of the long-awaited last episode of the serial. ARD saw themselves in the position of having to broadcast two repeats of the last episode in February 1987.

For part of the transmission period of the two telenovelas, ARD programme planners tried to enhance their strategical quest for the afternoon audience by linking several documentary serials, some of them on women-related subjects, to the 25-minute-long episodes of *Iscrava Isaura* and *Sinhá Moça*. Those documentary serials with five to ten short episodes of 20 minutes length portrayed their topics in a light and entertaining style but not without critical angles. One such documentary *Ariadne's Thread* was linked to *Iscrava Isaura* also through its content. Since it traced the origins and cultural history of some of the elements which were portrayed in the telenovela, such as the style and material of clothes, hairstyles, beverages or the sources of artificial light.

As Gert Müntefering, the head of the department of daytime programming in the Westdeutsche Rundfunk (WDR is the largest of the nine ARD regional stations and responsible for the purchase of the Brazilian telenovelas⁶) told me in an interview that ARD is planning to show one telenovela per year, starting in winter and terminating in the following summer or autumn. According to that plan, the new television year 1990 started on the 2nd of January with Rosalia's first ball on New Year's Eve 1899 in *El Dereite de Amare*. The novela of the year 1991 will be *Vale Tudo*, if Müntefering's plans become true. Müntefering who usually travels to Brazil personally, inferred that he secured an exclusive contract with Globo for ARD. By now all ARD stations endorse Müntefering's Brazilian purchase, since their success with the audience was convincing. However, this consent could not be reached for the first telenovela. Instead, it had to be bought by the solitary effort of the WDR.

THE WEST GERMAN TELEVISION MARKET

ARD's deal with Globo has to be also seen in the context of the power structure in the West German television market. This market has for a long-

time been dominated by the Munich film merchant Leo Kirch who with his **Beta/Taurus Group** and a host of cover firms which are assumed to be under his influence. He is one of the mightiest men in the West German television business, who dictates prices and is hard to circumvent. For, Kirch does not only own large archives filled with old feature films and serials, which he accumulated over the years in expectation of the great hunger for programmes from an increasing number of channels, but he is also well vested in the programme trade with US-American dealers. Besides, Kirch, who does not like public questions on his TV empire, is a major indirect shareholder and naturally the main programme supplier of **SAT 1** and another newly established smaller private channel **Pro 7**.

In contrast to **ZDF**, **ARD** has made major efforts to evade Kirch's products. This has especially been the case since 1983 when Kirch tried to impede a major direct deal between **ARD** and **Metro-Goldwyn Mayer**.⁷ The purchase of Brazilian telenovelas has to be seen as part of **ARD's** quest for alternative - and less expensive programme sources.

The following two tables which illustrate the results of a 1987 study by Michael Krüger, display the countries of origin of all feature films and serials/series shown by **ARD**, **ZDF**, **SAT 1** and **RTL Plus** (and **3SAT** and **Eins Plus**, the two satellite programmes owned by the two public channels which emphasize cultural programming).

DIAG. 3

The Countries of origin of All Feature Films Shown in The two Test-Weeks from 9 - 22 February 1987

	Gesamt	ARD	ZDF	SAT 1	RTL Plus	3SAT	EINS PLUS
1. USA	30	6	6	5	5	4	4
2. West Germany	17	4	-	4	4	2	3
3. France	10	1	2	4	2	-	1
4. Great Britain	8	1	2	5	-	-	-
5. Italy	5	-	-	-	5	-	-
(6. Japan)	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
7. Austria	1	-	-	1	-	-	-
8. Hungary	1	-	1	-	-	-	-
9. New Zealand	1	-	1	-	-	-	-
(10. China)	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
11. India	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total Number	77	12	12	19	16	6	12

**The Countries of Origin of All TV Serials/Series
Shown In The two Test-Weeks From 9. - 22. February 1987**

	Gesamt	ARD	ZDF	SAT 1	RTL Plus	3SAT	EINS PLUS
1. USA	92	7	12	51	22	-	-
2. West/ Germany	43	21	16	-	-	5	1
3. Great Britain	17	3	-	4	10	-	-
4. Australia	4	4	-	-	-	-	-
5. Austria	2	-	-	-	2	-	-
6. Italy	2	2	-	-	-	-	-
7. Japan	1	-	-	1	-	-	-
8. Brazil	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
9. n.n.	2	-	2	-	-	-	-
Total Transmissions	164	38	30	56	34	5	1

It is obvious that if all channels are taken together, the vast majority of fictional programmes originate from the United States. The only Brazilian programme listed is *Iscrava Isaura* which was being shown by ARD during the two weeks chosen for the study. Krüger suggests that SAT 1, which like RTL Plus is a company with very few in-house productions, fills more than half of its total programme with US imports. ARD and ZDF likewise showed more American - than German feature films during the period investigated. But the programme of the two public channels contained more home-produced series/serials than series/serials bought in the United States or elsewhere.⁸

The German - and Austrian feature films listed for SAT 1 and RTL Plus are likely to originate from the 1950s or 1960s and (particularly with SAT 1) from Leo Kirch's archives. Many of those old films which prevail among the German language films on the two private channels, can be grouped under the genres of *Heimatfilm* (marked by a glorification of attractive landscapes and romantic presentations of regional folklore) and *Arztfilm* (films about authoritarian, trustworthy doctors who have romantic liaisons with nurses). Those two genres which either have a comic - or melodramatic tone and are marked by a lack of reference to the socio/political climate of the time when they were made, have had also an influence on the serial/series production of the two public television channels in the 1980s.

The Tradition of Serial Production in The Federal Republic of Germany

It is, for instance, no coincidence that the name *Heimat* was chosen for an eleven-episode mini-serial directed and produced by Edgar Reitz between 1980

and 1985 on commission from the *Westdeutsche Rundfunk*. Reitz' production deliberately drew on elements of the *Heimatfilm*, a genre which has traditionally been very popular with German audiences. The antecedents of that genre, which is based on the emotionally loaded German concept of 'Heimat' (the place where a person belongs and where his/her roots and identity are) can already be found in the popular literature of the 19th century. One of the most famous authors of *Heimat* novels was the Bavarian writer Ludwig Ganghofer (1855-1920). Almost all of Ganghofer's novels, which have a conservative, naive-romantic outlook were made into films, quite a number during the **Third Reich** when the concept of 'Heimat' was ideologically exploited. Reitz transformed the genre of the *Heimatfilm* with its lack of historical - and social realism by using it as a framework to tell the story of the rise and fall of German fascism and the coming about of post-war society with its economic miracle, from the perspective of 'small folk' living in a village in the 'Hunsrück', a backward area in the hills between Rhine and Moselle. But Reitz' *Heimat* did not only draw on elements of the indigenous *Heimatfilm* but also on US-American productions such as *Holocaust* and *Roots* which use the devices of the Hollywood melodrama to dramatize historical developments. The two American mini-series were shown with great success in West Germany at the end of the 1970s. Alessandro Silj et al. claim that they were a major influence on German programme maker's changing attitude to television drama. "And certainly, after *Holocaust*, productions dabbling in Brechtian dramatic techniques were to vanish from prime-time television."⁹

Experimenting with Brechtian realism had been a particular feature of the television drama production of the *Westdeutsche Rundfunk* in the early - and mid-seventies.¹⁰ Those productions were informed by the educational impetus of raising the social consciousness of a mass audience. A frequently cited example is Rainer Werner Fassbinder's serial *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag* (*Eight Hours Are not A Day*). The serial was set in a working-class milieu and did not - as is often the case - portray only the private lives of its protagonists but focussed also on conflicts at the place of work. Those conflicts were more or less explicitly referred to as a part of the class struggle. Fassbinder's serial, however, was discontinued after only five episodes. That happened despite the fact that Fassbinder had also adapted some elements of the Hollywood melodrama, to liven up the drab Social Realism and increase the popular appeal of the programme.

Heimat which came about more than ten years after *Eight Hours Are not A Day*, is seen by Silj et al. as much more marked by concessions to the popular taste and the entertainment prerogative of the television medium than earlier ARD drama productions.

For a number of reasons it is not adequate to compare *Heimat* to a telenovela, though its duration of more than 920 minutes which is unusually long for a German mini-serial, seems to allow a comparison with some telenovelas shown in Brazil. Besides, since 1987 director Edgar Reitz has been working on a follow-up of *Heimat* of about the same length, which is due to be completed sometime in 1990.

Nevertheless, an important difference between *Heimat* and a telenovela seems to be the way in which its dramatic development works, namely governed more by external political forces than the private destiny of its protagonists. But

the most important differences are its production time and - standards. As has already been indicated, it lasted almost five years until the first serial was completed. As a matter of fact, *Heimat* was filmed with film cameras and also shown in the cinema and its particular strength is a great concern for authenticity as regards the historical - and regional background of the epos. Yet, it certainly constituted a step towards a creative use of popular elements in West German television drama production and a loosening of the strong educational impetus of public television, from which also some categories of telenovela may benefit if more are imported in the future.

Silj et al., who between 1984 and 1987 conducted a cross-cultural research project on the television drama of five West-European countries, state: "Among all the countries covered, it is in West Germany that television has to the greatest extent been assigned the role of educating the public and of cultural leadership. (...) It may also be the country in which prejudice against popular television serials has survived longest."¹¹

It should be noted that this prejudice, which is also reflected in the responses to the Brazilian telenovelas, is expressed mainly by academic media critics and programme makers, but not by the majority of the audience. But the at times almost dramatic sense of the identity and responsibility of public television which has long informed the attitudes of those responsible for programmes (Silj et al. p. 141) in Germany, has to be seen also in connection with the traumatic historical experience of the Nazi propaganda machine.

Despite that strong sense of the educational - and cultural role of public television, **ARD** and **ZDF** have always produced also series/serials, which were mainly entertainment oriented, especially for the early-evening programme slot. For, the early-evening slot (between 6 pm and 8 p.m.) on weekdays is the time when the two public television channels have traditionally shown block advertisement. Although this may be changed in the future, up to now a maximum of 20 minutes block advertisement during the early evening is the only form of advertisement allowed to **ARD** and **ZDF**. By that relatively restricted form of advertising, they have to draw between 30% and 40% of their revenues (the rest comes from viewers' licence fees). In order to be able to guarantee a maximum audience for commercials to their advertising customers, **ARD** and **ZDF** have framed the block advertisement by popular series.

The most frequently used format in that - or other time-slot has been the series of 13 - or 6 episodes with self-contained episodes. For until the advent of *Dallas* and *Dynasty* and subsequent indigenous productions in the 1980s, long-running serials with narratively open episodes like the telenovela were virtually unknown on German television. Likewise, there is no tradition of a radionovela or a radio soap opera in Germany. What there existed, however, were family series with self-contained episodes, such as the **ARD** series *Familie Hesselbach*, which started on the radio in the early 1950s and were later transferred to television, where over the years they kept on reappearing in new sets. The total number of episodes of a few very popular series amounted to well over a hundred, which, however, is little in comparison with many telenovelas.

Another type of series has for a long time been a corner-stone of West German public television, particularly with **ZDF**. This is the police series, which traditionally has been shown during prime time. The most famous examples are the **ZDF** productions *Der Kommissar*, *Derrick* and *Der Alte* (mostly shown on

Friday nights) but **ARD's** *Tatort* (often shown on a Sunday night) is equally renowned. The production of such series which occurred from the late 1960s onwards, was inspired by the US-American crime series. But over the years they developed their own distinct images. According to Silj et al., this idiosyncrasy is brought about, for instance, by "the stress placed on the inner workings of characters' minds rather than the action" and a tendency to resort to melodramatic motifs.¹² The above-named series, which have also been successfully exported to other countries, are produced in sets of not more than 15 episodes¹³ but over the years all of them have reached a total number of over a hundred episodes, some more than hundred and fifty.

From about the middle of the 1980s onwards, programme makers, of both **ARD** and **ZDF** felt the necessity to put some effort in the development of new formats for home-produced popular serials. This occurred partially in response to the enormous success of the US-imports *Dallas* (shown since 1981 on **ARD**) and *Dynasty* (shown since 1983 on **ZDF**) but partially also in anticipation of future competition from commercial rivals.

There are two key productions in **ARD** and **ZDF** which are significant in that development. These are the **ARD** serial *Lindenstrasse* and the **ZDF** series *Schwarzwaldklinik* (Black Forest Hospital). Both programmes started to be broadcast in late 1985.

Lindenstrasse is modelled on the British Social Realist type of soap opera à la *Coronation Street* (though **ARD's** own tradition in realist drama productions established in the 1970s may also be of some significance) but is also marked by some ingredients from the more melodramatic American soap opera. Nevertheless, it is implanted into a quite authentic German milieu, using an apartment house in a Munich street as its central setting. Often stories in *Lindenstrasse* reflect on topical social problems, such as AIDS, the recent reappearance of right-wing parties and their ideas in the political landscape, ecological problems etc.. The serial is not only the first long-running serial with open-ended episodes produced in West Germany but also the first that is co-produced by all nine **ARD** stations. Up to now the only co-produced programmes have been news programmes and other information services. The actual production work is, however, taken over by the **Westdeutsche Rundfunk** and the private production company *Geissendörfer Film und Fernseh GmbH*, *Lindenstrasse* which is shown once a week for half an hour, was right from the start designed to last for more than 200 episodes. Although it does not achieve stunningly high audience figures (mostly ratings of around 30%) it is likely to last for much longer, at least until 1992 when the present contract of the producer/director Hans-Werner Geissendörfer with the **WDR** expires. *Lindenstrasse* is the first serial in the Federal Republic that is subject to the tight and streamlined production schedule of a continuous programme, though only one episode per week is produced, which is little an international comparison.

Schwarzwaldklinik, **ZDF's** answer to the demand for new types of popular series/serials, was broadcasted once a week in blocks of 24 episodes of 45 minutes length. Unlike *Lindenstrasse*, *Schwarzwaldklinik* did not consist of narratively open episodes but of self-contained episodes, though the central setting remained the same and a number of loose overall storylines were employed. Stylistically, it synthesizes a number of well-known, popular elements

from the *Heimatfilm* and *Arzofilm* and also elements from the typical German family series of the 1960s à la *Familie Hesselbach* with its implicit praise of the patriarchal family. Unlike *Heimat*, *Schwarzwaldklinik* does not reflect any attempt of an artistic transformation of those elements. But due to the straight forward application of tried and tested ingredients, *Schwarzwaldklinik* achieved a popularity (audience shares of 60% and more) which is unparalleled by both *Lindenstrasse* and the imported American serials. Unlike *Lindenstrasse*, the series was not meant to last indefinitely and thus was terminated in spring 1989 after 72 episodes, though some sets of the series have been repeated. There have been also a number of other shorter series produced by ZDF, which followed *Schwarzwaldklinik* or were shown in alternation with it. Some examples are *Das Erbe der Guldenburgs* (the Heritage of the Guldenburgs) and *Rivalen der Rennbahn* (Rivals of the Race Course), which are set among the very rich and bear a great resemblance with *Dallas*.

A GERMAN TELENVELA?

Similar to American - and British serial formats before, the Brazilian telenovela may also leave its stamp on future home-produced serials in West Germany. According to Gert Müntefering, the *Westdeutsche Rundfunk* has plans to further develop the space for an afternoon drama which has been opened up by the telenovelas, through the production of an in-house serial. This serial, which like the telenovelas is to be shown four times a week, is being designed to consist of about 52 openended episodes. But unlike *Lindenstrasse*, it is to have a finite narrative structure with a happy-ending like the Brazilian telenovelas. Unlike *Lindenstrasse*, the new serial is to have also a greater emotional appeal.

But Müntefering stresses that the new serial will not endeavour to be an imitation of the *Globo* telenovelas, which he sees as product of a very specific cultural background and organisational network. According to him, any attempt in that way could have only an awkward result. He and his colleague Alexander von Kube (who will be responsible for the serial in planning) think that the German literary tradition does hardly provide stories which have the same emotional quality and the direct mode of narration, with a potential for dialogues in an unatificial language, as the Brazilian novels on which telenovelas such as *Isgrava Isaura* or *El Dereite de Amare* are based. Furthermore, Müntefering inferred that he considers the German mentality and sensibility as very different from the romantic temperament of the Brazilians. He conceded that it even was difficult to dub the telenovelas purchased from *Globo* into the German language because of the slightly excessive emotionality in speech and gestures. Likewise, he expressed the opinion that the time structure operating in the Brazilian telenovelas is different from that of US-American - or European serials. He underlined this impression by a reference to Claude Lévi-Strauss' *La Triste Tropique*.

As to the production of a 'German telenovela', he thinks that apart from cultural reasons there are also a number of organisational reasons which would impede such a venture. The greatest obstacle was that nobody in German television would find it desirable - or would even be allowed - to work with such high speed, great pressure and always a close eye on the ratings, which is so characteristic of the novela production in Brazil.¹⁴

THE RECEPTION OF THE BRAZILIAN TELENOVelas IN WEST GERMANY

Press Reviews

An investigation of the numerous press reviews which have been diligently collected in the WDR press archives, suggest that the direct responses of media critics when confronted with the new type of serial in West Germany, was not all too enthusiastic. Rather the responses ranged from cautiously positive to rather negative.

One focus of a number of reviews is discontent with ARD's strategy to further increase its output of popular serials in competition with the private channels. In that context Rolf Risehe, the media critic of the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, suggests "*Isaura* is an obvious example of the shallowness of German television in pursuit of ratings." (St.Z., 25-11-86). Dietrich Leder of the media information service *Funk-Korrespondenz* thinks that television increasingly demands 'olimpic efforts' of its viewers to follow all the endless storylines of the serials. His ironic conclusion is: "Perhaps one day the history of the public broadcasting companies can be written in form of a soap opera, in which strong emotions and good people struggle for the best but are in reality only part of a game which we call history." (F.-K., Nr.38, 23-9-88).

More positive is the media critic of the *Lübecker Nachrichten*. He thinks it is very sensible programme planning to start the transmission of *Isaura* in the grey days of the month of November when German viewers need some comfort from a morally intact serial (*Lübecker Nachrichten*, 26-11-86). The media critic of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (of 10 September 88) thinks that despite many clichés which mark the telenovelas, they constitute an elementary contrast to other 'everyday-life serials' of ARD (eg. *Lindenstrasse*). Other more positive or neutral articles on the two novelas simply summarize the stories and refer to their historical background and their success with Latin American audiences.

Some critics also discuss the similarity (*Berliner Zeitung* 28-11-86) or dissimilarity ("the issue of slavery is too serious to be dealt with in such clichés and kitsch" *Frankfurter Neue Presse* 28-11-86) with *Roots* or Uncle Tom's Cabin.

The role of the telenovela in Latin American countries is made the focus of an article in a mocking - but not too critical tone in the left-wing Berlin *Tageszeitung*. The writer of that article had watched *Sinha Moça* for the first time during a journey to Nicaragua where its potential for entertaining the people with at least some social critical impetus in a difficult national situation, was even appreciated by the Sandinistas. She suggests that in Nicaragua "Lucélia Santos - alias Nina Moza - is a symbol" and describes how the people - men included - try to beat the chronic lack of electricity to ensure that their television sets work during the hour of the telenovela (*Hildegard Kriwet* in the TAZ. of 12-9-88). More critical is Günter Maschuff of *Unsere Zeit*, a mouthpiece of the German Communist Party, he criticizes the ambiguous image of bourgeois magnanimity which *Sinha Moça* conveyed, despite the historical fact that the rising capitalist economy in 19th century Brazil had an interest in the

liberated slaves as cheap labour force. "Today", he goes on to suggest, "Telenovelas are the television diet of the poor, the descendents of the slaves". (UZ,9-9-88)

A major focus for press critics in connection with the telenovelas are the visits of Lucélia Santos and Maria Fernandes, the author of the novel on which *Sinha Moça* is based, in Cologne. The articles which deal with those events, attribute to both women a genuine social concern for the poor and the oppressed (cf. *Kölner Stadtanzeiger* of 22-11-88 on Maria Fernandes). Especially, the delicate, talented, hardworking actress Lucélia Santos is portrayed as a passionate political fighter for socially disadvantaged groups and ecological issues in various organisations. This image of the private person Lucélia Santos, which becomes an extension of her serial identity, remains consistent throughout the whole spectrum of newspapers which cover her visit. That spectrum ranges from the Cologne tabloid *Express* (21-7-88) over the glossy women's magazine *Neue Revue* (4-11-88), to the conservative quality paper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (publishes a long interview with the actress in its week-end magazine of 22-7-88).

Hardly any of those articles forget to refer to the stressful, exploitive conditions of the novela production (some create an analogy with the conditions of slavery) under which Lucélia Santos had to work before she terminated her contract with Globo. But some articles mention that even there she could successfully fight for some improvements. Thus, even though Lucélia Santos did not succeed in engendering a 'Isaura fever' in Germany as in other countries, some aspects of her mythic, heroic personality seem to work also in this country. Her immaculate image as actress and personality remains untouched even if the telenovelas are depreciated.

Apart from the reproach that the novelas make ample use of clichés, the other frequently expressed critique addresses the filmic style. Especially, the combination of frequent close-up and extreme low - or high camera angles with a scarcity of camera are criticized (*Die Zeit* 13-10-88). One critic talks about 'stone age television' when he refers to wobbling pictures in some of the jungle scenes in *Sinha Moça* (*Stuttgarter Zeitung* 9-11-88).

The Audience's Reception of the Brazilian Telenovelas and other Serials

The unease of many television critics with the Brazilian serials, does not keep a substantial proportion of the audience from enjoying the telenovelas.

In order to put the following information into perspective, it is useful to recall some figures and information on the West German television audience.

There are over 23 million households in West Germany with at least one television set. In 1987 the average viewing time in those households was two hours per day, which is relatively low in an international comparison. But recent studies on cable households where more channels can be received, show an average increase of the daily viewing time of between 10% and 20%. This increase seems to go hand in hand with a bias to entertainment programmes.¹⁵ Despite those recent trends it seems still justified to suggest that in West Germany television has not yet acquired the same function as a background medium which remains switched on for a large part of the day but is not watched with concentration for most of the time as, for instance, in the United States and also in Great Britain.¹⁶ Rather, in West Germany the typical background

medium which is switched on during the day is radio. This is partially the reason why for the time being it seems right to assume that long-running TV serials in West Germany cannot be considered as low-involvement programmes to the extent as this has been indicated in some recent studies conducted in Britain and the United States.¹⁷

This assumption is further illustrated by the results of a pilot study on the reception of *Dallas* in West Germany and the United States, which Herta Herzog conducted between 1982 and 1985 and from which she concludes that there exists a more flexible, less deep approach to the US-serial among American viewers than among German spectators. One of Herzog's findings suggests that "U.S. viewers decode *Dallas* as a seamy soap opera which permits them to fantasize and to exercise their creative ingenuity and attitudinal predilections."¹⁸ Although Herzog finds some indications among young German viewers of a more playful use of *Dallas*, the majority of the German interviewees seemed to be deeper involved with a genre, which in 1982 was largely unfamiliar to them. Herzog states: "For the German viewer the projection and temporary release of subjective psychological needs is a major reason for program enjoyment."¹⁹ That is why Herzog suggests that there exists a cathartic element in the reception of *Dallas* in West Germany, which is largely missing among American viewers.

On the reception of *Iscrava Isaura* and *Sinha Moça*, Wolfgang Wegmann who is the editor responsible for the adaptation of the telenovelas, says the following:

"Although it could be assumed that the subject of 'slavery in 19th century Brazil' did not arouse much interest among German viewers, the feed-back we are getting from spectators, points to the contrary: We receive many letters from viewers, who so far did not know anything about South American history and who have watched the serials because of that information."²⁰

The official GfK ratings suggest that the serial (86/87) was watched on average by 12% of all television households.²¹ Almost two years later (88/89), *Sinha Moça*, which was shown between 3 p.m. and 3.25 p.m., one hour earlier than the first Brazilian novela, was on average seen in 6% of the television households. The lower ratings of *Sinha Moça* can be mainly attributed to the earlier time-slot (that is why *El Dereite de Amare* is being shown in the 4 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. time slot again). Some official WDR material suggests that a further reason for the lower ratings of the second telenovela could also be that viewers became tired of the complicated, meandering plots which were spread out over 170 episodes, whereas the plots of *Iscrava Isaura* were tightened to only 40 episodes.²² Another reason seems to be the fact that RTL PLUS and SAT 1 could be received by more households when *Sinha Moça* was on, than during the transmission period of *Iscrava Isaura*.

Although the two programmes did not evoke such an overwhelming response as in other countries, considering the time of day which previously was not an accepted part of the average TV day in West Germany, both novelas were successful. The analysis of the data of the WDR audience research department reveals that both serials helped to secure ARD an advantage over their competitors in those afternoon time slots. After all, *Iscrava Isaura* achieved more than double the rating of previous programmes in that time slot.

ZDF achieved only an average rating of 3% during the showing of both novelas.

In the eyes of **ARD** programme officials the success of the novelas is, however, impaired by the facts that they did not create a strong channel loyalty and that in households where **SAT 1** and **RTL Plus** could be received viewers' responses to the novelas were significantly lower.²³

In order to investigate the reception of *Iscrava Isaura* further, the **Westdeutsche Rundfunk** commissioned a qualitative study to the researcher Jan-uwe Rogge. Rogge's survey consists of three steps (the first two steps were conducted between December 1986 and January 1987, the third step in February/March 1987):²⁴

1. 15-minutes telephone interviews with a random sample of 451 potential afternoon viewers (mostly retired people, housewives, shift-workers, students and children)

2. Three viewer's discussions with a total number of 20 regular viewers of *Iscrava Isaura*

3. Follow-up telephone interviews with 45 of the 89 regular viewers of the serial elicited in step one.

20% (89 in absolute numbers) of Rogge's panel of 451 potential afternoon viewers watched the Brazilian serial more or less regularly. But the majority of the panel said that they had not seen the serial because they were not used to watching television before 6 p.m.. Rogge relates this to the traditional programme structure, on which long-established habits of work and leisure in the daily routine have been built. Even two third of those panel members who watched the serial regularly, indicated that they had similar viewing habits before *Iscrava Isaura* was shown but had changed their habits because of the novela. That is why Rogge concludes:

"(In contrast to previous programmes shown during the afternoon) *Iscrava Isaura* appeared to the viewers as a worthwhile reason to rearrange their daily time schedules, Predominantly because of its emotional appeal"²⁵

The study reveals that 85% of those who watched regularly had to postpone, for instance, their habitual shopping hour, speed up their way home from work, re-schedule housework or school homework or the afternoon coffee break because of the serial. Quite a number of older women said that they had invited friends or neighbours round for coffee and cake to watch *Iscrava Isaura* and talk about it afterwards.

In Rogge's sample the majority of *Iscrava Isaura* viewers (80.9%) were women, while a considerable number of the men interviewed expressed their dislike for the serial because of its emotional character. Furthermore, 49.8% of the regular *Isaura* viewers were above 59 years of age (28.8% were even older than 70). Not surprisingly, 41.6% of the regular viewers named 'pensioner' as their occupation, while 19.1% said they were housewives and 16% were students, pupils or young people in other types of training. The majority of the regular viewers had left school with no - or the lowest formal qualification (47.2 %). Among those with a higher formal qualification regular viewing of the telenovela was less frequent.²⁶

Most of the regular viewers gave a positive assessment of the telenovela. Especially, the actress Lucélia Santos appealed to most viewers. According to Rogge, "she aroused and bound feelings."²⁷ Rogge quotes several viewers who

said that they found the serial exciting, moving and interesting because of its historical background of the struggle against slavery. One viewer contended: "It was entertainment programme with a strong relation to reality. It was not mere entertainment. (...) Afterall there still is South Africa which one could compare. There people also use violence against black people."²⁷

Even those viewers who had watched the serial initially but had then stopped, did so mostly because of duties which could not be postponed. Rarely, did anybody stop watching because of duties which could not be postponed. Rarely, did anybody stop watching because s/he disliked the telenovela. The only criticism was that the episodes were too short²⁸ with their 25 minutes. On the other hand the shortness of the episodes seemed to guarantee that they did not conflict too much with long-established habits.

But Rogge's study also found out that the first telenovela did not yet evoke a permanent change of viewing habits. The follow-up interviews with 45 - of the 89 regular viewers revealed that almost all interviewees had returned to their previous daily routines after the termination of *Iscrava Isaura*.

Notwithstanding this, Rogge concludes that *Iscrava Isaura* managed to give the previously undistinguished ARD afternoon programme a regular character and a specific colour.

FUTURE BRAZILIAN TELENVELAS: HISTORICAL OR CONTEMPORARY?

So far the preference of the WDR programme officials has remained with the historical telenovelas, though a few academic researchers²⁹ and media critics have informed the public that the genre of the telenovela in Brazil is marked by a great variation in content and style. Thus, the existence of telenovelas in Brazil with contemporary settings and reference to present social and political conditions is recently focussed upon by Stephan Brendle in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (a paper with a liberal editorial line and a reputation for its media criticism). The article describes the novela *O Salvador da Pátria* by Lauro Cesar Muniz and speculates on its possible political relevance in the 1989 presidential election in Brazil. But it closes with the suggestion that Globo owner Roberto Marinho who had always consolidated his interest with those of military and political power centres were unlikely to allow that the views of the popular hero Sassá had too much of a PT outlook.³⁰

Such references to topical events in Brazil, however, are seen as major obstacles for the telenovelas' success in West Germany. Thus, WDR programme official Gert Münterfering thinks that many of the contemporary telenovelas - especially those which employ comical elements or use persiflage - would not be fully understood by German audiences. Nevertheless, he decided to test the contemporary telenovelas and chose *Vale Tudo* to be shown on ARD in 1991.

At all events, more research seems to be required on the reception of the telenovela in West Germany, especially if different types of novelas are shown.

Shortly, it will be interesting to learn more about the reception of *El Dereite de Amare* with its elegant, entertaining but kitschy synthesis of elements from Realism, Melodrama, Romance, the fairy-tale, the Gothic Novel, Character Comedy and music hall performances.

More than the world of large land-owners and their slaves in 19th century Brazil, the milieu and the central conflict (romantic love versus an arranged marriage in the material interest of the family) *El Dereite de Amare* is likely to generate familiar images from the German viewer's own cultural tradition. Some such images may be derived from the novels of the Bourgeois Realist writers, ranging from Theodor Fontane (1819-1898) to the early Thomas Mann (1975-1955), or more likely from the serializations of their works on television. But those images are likely to be blended by images from another kind of 19th century fiction with a much wider popular appeal, such as the romances set in aristocratic - or upper-middle class milieus and written in great numbers by authors like Eugenie Marlitt (1825-1887) or Hedwig Courths-Mahler (1967-1950).

Nevertheless, more than perhaps for the viewer from a Mediterranean country, *El Dereite de Amare* still conveys many cultural differences in the eyes of the average German viewer. This is likely to provide her/him with the pleasurable experience of combining the known with the unknown to explore the popular sensibility of a still distant world.

At all events, it will be interesting to pursue how this pleasurable experience interacts with the complex forces of a programme market in transition.

Notas

1. Peter Figlesthler, "Besser als amerikanische Seifenopern: Brasilianische Telenovelas". *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 1.2. 1984.
2. "Schlucken, was man schlucken kann: Brasiliens 'Globo' - der viertgrößte Fernsehkonzern der Welt". *Der Spiegel* 15.9. 1986.
3. The figures and the diagrams were taken from the journal *Forecast* May 1989.
4. The diagram is taken from: Klaus Wenger, *Kommunikation und Medien in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, (Munich, 1988), S. 103.
5. Through an affiliation of their publishers with the new commercial channels a number of those papers have become increasingly strident in their critique of the two public channels which are described as too bureaucratic and inefficient.
6. Analogous to the political structure of the Federal Republic of Germany, the first public channel **ARD** relies on the cooperation of nine regional stations, which produce a joint network programme, as well as regionally differentiated programmes in the early evening. The *Westdeutsche Rundfunk* which is situated in Cologne contributes approximately 25% of the network programme. Apart from the first public channel, the five largest **ARD** stations also offer a regionally differentiated **Third Channel** with a strong emphasis on cultural and educational programmes.
7. cf. the article "In Deutschland bin ich es". *Der Spiegel* (November 1987) and the article "Im Reich der wilden Tiere: Spiegel Report über die dunklen Millionengeschäfte des Filmgroßhändlers Leo Kirch". *Der Spiegel* 18 December 1989.
8. cf. Udo Michael Krüger, "Qualitätsschere im Fernsehangebot: Ergebnisse eines Programmvergleichs zwischen ARD, ZDF, SAT 1, RTL Plus, 3SAT und EINS Plus". *Media Perspektiven*, 9 1987.

9. cf. Alessandro Silj et al., **East of Dallas: The European Challenge to American Television** (BFI London, 1988), p. 160.
10. cf. Richard Collins and Vincent Porter, **Television Monograph: WDR and The Arbeiterfilm - Fassbinder, Ziewer and others**, BFI Publication / Londond, 1981).
11. Alessandro Silj et al., op. cit., p. 141.
12. *ibid.*, p. 154.
13. With Tatort the situation is slightly different, since all **ARD** stations and the Austrian broadcasting network **ORF** take turns in producing one episode of Tatort. This gives the series a distinct regional flavour, since the episodes are set in different cities with different police officers as central characters.
14. The information was elicited in a personal interview on the 1 st of September 1989 and a telephone interview on the 28th of December 1989. Confer also the following three issues of **ARD Extra**: 47/86, 36/88 and 1/90.
15. cf. Klaus Wenger, **Kommunikation und Medien** op. cit., pp. 106-108.
16. cf. for instance T.P. Barwise and A.S.C. Ehrenberg, **Television and Its Audience**, (London, 1988).
17. cf. for instance Michael Svennevig, **Viewers Are People Too: A Fresh Look At The Audience**. Paper held At The Seminar: The Application of Research To Broadcasting Decisions, Amsterdam 1987.
18. Herta Herzog Massing, **Decoding Dallas: Comparing American and German Viewers**. In: Arthur Asa Berger (ed.), **Television in Society** (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1987), p. 101.
19. *ibid.*
20. This quote of Wolfgang Wegmann is contained in an official **WDR** press release of 27. June 1989.
21. The **GfK** ratings are elicited on the basis of 2,600 representative TV households.
22. according to an official press release by the **WDR** press office of 1.8.89.
23. cf. letters by the head of the **WDR** audience research department Uwe Magnus to Stephan Piltz of 14-12-88 and to the **WDR** director general Friedrich Nowotny of 21-4-89.
24. Jan-Uwe Rogge, **Die Sklavin Isaura: Ergebnisse einer Zuschauerbefragung**, 1987.
25. *ibid.*, p. 7.
26. *ibid.* p. 9.
27. *ibid.* appendix 4, p. 2.
28. Note that before the advent of **Lindenstrasse** in 1985 West German viewers were not used to serials with very short, open-ended episodes.
29. for example: Claudius Armbruster, "Endloses, alltägliches Erzählen in der brasilianischen Telenovela". **Rundfunk und Fernsehen** 34, 3 1986.
30. Stephan Brendle, "Unendliche Geschichten aus der Wirklichkeit: Zum erstenmal orientiert sich eine brasilianische Telenovela an der aktuellen Politik". **Süddeutsche Zeitung** 8.8. 1989.