

From Social Merchandising to Social Spectacle: Portrayals of Domestic Violence in TV Globo’s Prime-Time Telenovelas

SAMANTHA NOGUEIRA JOYCE
Saint Mary’s College of California, USA

MONICA MARTINEZ
Universidade de Sorocaba, Brazil

This article addresses the representation of domestic violence in two Brazilian prime-time TV Globo telenovelas—*Mulheres Apaixonadas* and *A Regra do Jogo*—through the use of social merchandising about domestic violence. We conclude that, although the story lines in these two programs might seem progressive and empowering to women who seek to leave their abusers, ultimately they fall short in one important aspect: Women’s way out is usually through a new romantic relationship. We also note that a recent insertion of domestic violence social merchandising has failed, turning the depiction of domestic violence, instead, into a spectacle. Another interesting finding is that domestic violence is portrayed solely as a women’s issue and not a domestic one involving power.

Keywords: telenovelas, TV Globo, social merchandising, portrayal of domestic violence, spectacle

In most of Latin America, telenovelas play a huge cultural role in people’s day-to-day experiences. They also mean big business, with some of the programs having been exported to more than 140 countries worldwide (Telles, 2004). But they are more than just lucrative love stories. Telenovelas are a complex site of mediations and representations. The hour-long melodramatic narratives are broadcast daily (Monday–Saturday) and last from six months to one year. They have been the staple of TV programming in Brazil for more than six decades. Audiences closely follow the programs for several months, and the programs have become an integral part of Brazilian culture (Hamburger, 2005; La Pastina, 2004; Porto, 2012).

The genre is popular not only in Brazil. For example, in 2005, TV Globo sold 44,000 hours of its programming to 53 countries. TV Globo’s telenovela *Terra Nostra* (Our Land), based on the Italian migration to Brazil, was sold to 87 countries. Furthermore, it has been reported that TV Globo charges up to U.S.\$100,000 per episode shown overseas, with a profit margin of 50%. These numbers suggest that the audience for the genre and its marketability is large not just nationally but also internationally, and in

Samantha Nogueira Joyce: samanthanjoyce@yahoo.com

Monica Martinez: martinez.monica@uol.com.br

Date submitted: 2016–05–28

Copyright © 2017 (Samantha Nogueira Joyce & Monica Martinez). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

the TV industry, this means that it attracts a large audience. The programs present great marketing possibilities and profitability for the genre, such as through merchandising (Bellos, 2007). As O'Donnell (2007) has pointed out, "ratings are used as references for negotiations for the price of advertising," and "because ratings determine how much the advertisers pay for commercials, the larger the audience, the higher the cost of the commercials" (p. 40).

Telenovelas' commercial character, indicated by their early sponsors (soaps and beauty products) have been a staple of Brazilian TV from its inception. It is important to note that the television industry in Brazil was greatly influenced by the United States not only in regard to its production aspects; more importantly, the very notion of commercial media embedded within a capitalist economy has been a key characteristic of the industry. From the beginning, Brazilian elites accepted a role for Brazil in the world economy and structures and an explicitly capitalist model of development in which TV and advertising were to create consumer demand to fuel growth (Straubhaar, 1991).

However, as Martín-Barbero (2001) explains, telenovelas are not simply a commercial phenomenon, nor are they purely a phenomenon of ideological manipulation. Telenovelas are a cultural phenomenon through which people constitute and reconstitute their identities.

In addition to traditional merchandising, a distinguishing characteristic of Brazilian telenovelas is the continuing inclusion of social merchandising (La Pastina, Patel, & Schiavo, 2003) into its narratives. Traditionally, the inclusion of socially relevant subplots was the result of a writer's social and political agenda, but starting in the 1990s, the Globo network began to actively articulate strategies for the insertion of social merchandising content in tandem with the writers, allowing the impact of the prosocial message to reach its full potential (La Pastina et al., 2003). Themes have included racism, homophobia, organ transplants, human trafficking, family planning, and domestic violence (Joyce, 2012).

Social merchandising goes hand in hand with TV Globo telenovelas and with TV Globo's overall (public) production philosophy for the network. As Schiavo (2006) suggests, there is within the network an overall culture of adopting a critical social approach at all programming levels, with a clear educational intentionality to its portrayals, and this has been an integral part of the programming strategy. The vice president of Globo, José Roberto Marinho, values the importance of social merchandising to the Brazilian media:

The media is an essential aspect in the process of social mobilization. However, it is necessary to innovate and to seek ever more effective ways to get the message to reach its target audience. In this context, Brazilian television pioneered the practice of social merchandising, i.e., the systematic and voluntary inclusion of issues of public interest in the soap opera plot and other entertainment programs, with well-defined educational purposes. This is a good example of how a media company can contribute to social development without giving up the playfulness of its entertainment programs. (quoted in Schiavo, 2006, p. 1)

Telenovelas offer an optimum vehicle for such insertions, because they are a key component of Brazilians's everyday lives. As Martín-Barbero (2001) reminds us, in Brazil, this type of programming has gained a privileged prominent space in society—particularly in Brazilian families' daily activities, because it fulfills many roles: leisure space, forum for debate, and the construction of a national identity. Martín-Barbero adds that the family is still the basic audience of TV, and a place where it recognizes itself. Brazilians still watch television. And a lot of it. According to a 2015 Brazilian media survey, 95% of respondents said they watch TV, and 73% of them do so every day. The report also found that, on average, Brazilians spend more than four hours daily exposed to the TV set (Secretaria de Comunicação Social, 2014).

These numbers point to the importance of understanding how specific issues are portrayed on TV—especially sensitive issues through social merchandising. We recognize, as suggested by Joyce (2012), that some Brazilian telenovela writers use the narratives and popularity of telenovelas as a public sphere for social change by introducing prosocial topics for discussion and debate. We acknowledge the usefulness of the strategy and previous successful insertions of social merchandising by TV Globo. We also consider some of its flaws, especially in regard to its efficacy, which we discuss below. For the present analysis, we judge the social merchandising insertion by looking at the telenovela text itself—in other words, the way in which it portrays domestic violence as a social problem worth addressing.

Social merchandising is a type of marketing that uses the Brazilian telenovela to promote awareness of issues that are deemed important by its writers and TV executives (La Pastina et al., 2003). It is a type of entertainment–education with its own logic and characteristics, perhaps the most important one being that it aims to be commercially successful (Joyce, 2012; La Pastina et al., 2003; Reginatto, 2007). Thus, while social merchandising programs aim to educate the audience—as they often do—the network's first priority is to profit from the entertainment–education message.

An example of successful social merchandising insertion was in the telenovela *Laços de Família* (Family Ties; June 2000–February 2001), which had a social merchandising plot about bone marrow transplants. Scenes from the telenovela—such as when the character Camila is shown shaving her head while undergoing treatment for leukemia—were later used in a Globo campaign to encourage marrow donation. The campaign earned the top prize of social responsibility in the Business in the Community Awards for Excellence 2001 (BITC Awards) in the global leadership category. After the episode aired, in January 2001, the average number of registrations on the *Registro Nacional de Doadores de Medula Óssea* (National Register of Bone Marrow Donors) increased from 20 to 900 per month, a significant increase of about 4,400%. This campaign has had a long-term and ongoing effect: Studies show that the numbers of registered donors have been increasing since the broadcast, and by October 2007, 525,000 people had registered (Abreu, Pires, Alves, & Costa, 2010).

Another successful example of a social merchandising insertion can be found in the telenovela *Explode Coração* (Exploding Hearts; by writer Gloria Perez which aired from 1995–1996). In one of the story lines, the character Odaísa's son Gugu disappears without a trace. This premise enables the writer to tell the real-life drama of mothers of missing children. For example, in one of the scenes that aired on March 9, 1996, audiences saw a real picture of a boy who had been missing for 10 years. Thanks to this

photo, the boy was reunited with his mother just six days later. After seeing the photo, audiences began contacting TV Globo with tips about his location. And the network, which had far more resources at its disposal than the local police, acted as intermediary between the family and their son (Hamburger, 2005).

One way to measure the efficacy of social merchandising insertions is through immediate responses, but much is still unknown about their long-term efficacy. However, when it comes to TV Globo's telenovelas, since the early 1990s, a more concrete effort to track and record such insertions and their efficacy has been made through Comunicarte, a social marketing office that has worked with the network to, among other things, increase writers' awareness of the potential of using social merchandising for social change. According to Comunicarte's website (<http://www.comunicarte.com.br/ms.htm>):

Since it began its activities in 1990, Comunicarte has worked with the production of 72 telenovelas, totaling more than 9,500 hours of programming. It is estimated that it has directly influenced over 8,000 educational scenes regarding sexuality, reproductive health, gender relations, the rights of the elderly, children and adolescents, education, drug prevention, environmental protection and promoting social volunteer work, among many other topics. (para. 3; translated from Portuguese)

Much of the criticism regarding the short-term effect of social merchandising has propelled TV Globo to adapt its telenovela-driven strategy. As Nicolosi (2009) notes, this has been done in several ways: through the continuity of social merchandising themes in different programs by the same author; through dialogue with TV Globo's health campaigns and insertions similar to public service announcements; and through continuous dialogue with other formats such as the journalistic program *Globo Repórter*, thereby prolonging the pedagogical character of the social merchandising insertion to other time slots on the weekly grid. The turn toward prolonging the effects and pedagogical nature of social merchandising was also highlighted by Schiavo (2006), who notes that *Domingão do Faustão*, a variety program that airs on Sunday afternoons—a slot that is considered prime time and that targets family viewing—is one of the programs with the highest number of social merchandising insertions in Brazil, working in tandem with the telenovelas. Moreover, TV Globo's Sunday evening news magazine show *Fantástico* has also started using stand-alone social merchandising insertions in addition to those supporting telenovelas' plots. This is the case of the miniseries within *Fantástico* titled *Os Filhos Deste Solo* (The Children of This Soil), which lasted eight weeks. Led by renowned doctor Dráuzio Varela, the miniseries dealt with issues such as sexuality, teen/tween pregnancy, and gender roles.

Debord, Social Merchandising, and Spectacle

Although various social merchandising insertions have worked well in the past (as described earlier), we argue that a recent domestic violence plot, in *A Regra do Jogo* (Rules of the Game; 2015–2016, by João Emanuel Carneiro) did not disrupt the Latin American culture of machismo and, moreover, did not offer women informative and educational tools about how to deal with such issues. Instead, we argue that domestic violence served as spectacle and that the social merchandising effort failed.

Domestic violence is an ideal topic for social merchandising insertions because it is a pressing matter in Brazil. According to the Brazilian senate, it is estimated that more than 13.5 million Brazilian women have suffered some kind of aggression (19% of the female population aged 16 or older). In addition, 31% of these women still live with the abuser. And of those living with their abuser, 14% still suffer some kind of violence. This result implies that 700,000 Brazilian women are victims of abuse (Senado Federal, 2015).

As defined earlier, social merchandising stems from commercial merchandising. The two techniques use the same commercial strategies to sell prosocial messages while promoting other concrete commodities—whether a lipstick, a brand, the telenovela itself, or the ideology of a socially responsible network that aims to profit from its production. As Fernandes and Dos Santos (2008) have pointed out, it is not clear what TV Globo's particular interest is in disseminating prosocial messages via social merchandising. After all, this type of marketing does not bring the company revenue in a direct way. But Fernandes and Dos Santos question whether this may be a tricky way to garner a captive audience due to the network's social responsibility.

TV Globo launched its social merchandising department in the late 1990s. This was a time when the neoliberalist guidelines were consolidated in Brazil; in other words, it was a time marked by the emptiness of the notion of the state and by the transfer of the task of social justice to private companies, including broadcast stations such as TV Globo. Thus, telenovelas and social merchandising's high profitability are disguised as a public service by a business that is supposedly socially responsible (Reginatto, 2007).

There is a fine line between presenting audiences with a social merchandising insertion about domestic violence and turning domestic violence into something satirical, justifiable, and, at times, erotic. Furthermore, the ethical issues revolving around a strategy for social change that has its roots in a capitalistic mode of production that aims to sell products have been raised in the past. As Trindade (1999) points out:

Social merchandising can be used to educate the public, but it can be a dangerous tool of societal manipulation and control. Its persuasive speech leads the viewer to have an opinion or acquire a behavior, caused by interests other than his or her own. The goal of merchandising is to stimulate the empathic identificatory mechanism with reality displayed in the soap opera, which provides a form of manipulation of public opinion, as the public begins to believe and make use of the values transmitted by the television series, incorporating them in their everyday lives. From these considerations, it appears that the merchandising has implications for the creative processes of the author as well as ethical issues as all forms of advertising, which strives to make an impact and stimulate sales. (p. 160)

Debord (1977) states that the spectacle is a stage when commodities have succeeded in colonizing social life completely; in other words, the world we see is the world of the commodity, where alienated consumption becomes as much a duty for the masses as alienated production. Behind the glitter

of spectacular distractions, there is a tendency toward banalization dominating modern society. In the case of *A Regra do Jogo*, by trivializing and turning domestic violence into something banal, and even comic, we argue that TV Globo offers exploitation and spectacle instead of social merchandising.

Maria da Penha Law (Lei Maria da Penha) Gives Greater Visibility to the Issue of Domestic Violence

In the late 1980s, there was a greater effort to criminalize and punish those responsible for domestic violence against women in Brazil. In 1986, the first *Delegacias de Defesa da Mulher* (Women's Defense Police Stations) were created in the state of São Paulo, and they can now be found in almost every Brazilian state (Debert & Gregori, 2002). In 1988, the new Brazilian constitution included the issue of equal treatment of women in Article 5, which begins:

All are equal before the law, without distinction of any kind, this guarantees that Brazilians and foreigners residing in the country inviolable rights to life, liberty, equality, security and property, as follows:

I – men and women have equal rights and obligations under this Constitution.
(*Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil*, 1988; translated from Portuguese)

Until the 2000s, public shelters and the *Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento à Mulher* (Special Police Stations for Women's Assistance) were the main responses from governments (federal, state, and municipal) to the question of violence against women. But since 2003, with the creation of the *Secretaria de Políticas para as Mulheres* (Secretariat on Policies for Women), public policies for combating violence against women have been extended to include prevention, guaranteeing victims' rights, and accountability for perpetrators.

In 2005, the *Secretaria de Políticas para as Mulheres da Presidência da República* (Presidency's Secretariat of Policies for Women) created *Central de Atendimento à Mulher* (Women's Assistance Central)—best known as *Ligue 180* (Dial 180), a free telephone number providing guidance on public rights and services for girls and women. In 2006, the *Lei Maria da Penha* (Maria da Penha Law; 11.340/06) gave great visibility to the issue and was put in place with the intent of reducing domestic violence. The law is named after pharmacist Maria da Penha Fernandes who became paraplegic because of two attempted murders committed against her by her husband—crimes for which he had not been punished and from which he was about to benefit because the statute of limitations was about to expire. The law was sanctioned on August 7, 2006, by then president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and was put into practice on September 22, 2006. The law states that aggressors are no longer to be punished with alternative sentences, such as buying food for the needy; increased the maximum sentence from one to three years; and provided measures such as removing the abuser from the home and offering restraining orders to the victims.

In 2011, the *Rede de enfrentamento à violência contra as mulheres* (Network for Confronting Violence Against Women) was created in an attempt to unite reference centers, public defenders,

prosecutors' offices, courts, Ligue 180, and gender centers in the public ministries that specialize in domestic violence (Secretaria de Políticas para as Mulheres Presidência da República, 2011). Despite all these efforts, Brazilian women are still in a socially vulnerable position. In 2015, the theme for the essay portion of the national secondary education exit examination developed by the Ministry of Education to assess the competence and skills of students who complete high school was titled, "The Persistence of Violence Against Women in Brazilian Society."

***Mulheres Apaixonadas* (February–October 2003): Raquel and Marcos**

The first TV Globo production to begin showing the topic of domestic violence in depth was the 1982 miniseries *Quem Ama Não Mata* (He Who Loves Does Not Kill), directed by Daniel Filho and Dennis Carvalho. The program told the story of five couples experiencing problems in their marriages. Almost a decade later, in 1990, the series *Delegacia de Mulheres* (Women's Police Station), by writer Maria Carmen Barbosa, aired on TV Globo and addressed the issue once again. The narrative, directed by Wolf Maya, Denise Saraceni, and Del Rangel, depicted the daily life of a women's police station dealing with cases of violence against women. Although the show helped bring the issue to the public sphere, it was also plagued with criticism about the portrayal of domestic violence, similar to our criticism of *A Regra do Jogo*. *Delegacia de Mulheres* was not very well received and sparked protests by some employees of Rio de Janeiro's and São Paulo's police stations, which found that the program addressed some stories with a comedic tone, highly unsuitable for the subject matter (Trigo, 2011).

The same comedic manner in which this devastating issue was portrayed in the recent telenovela *A Regra do Jogo* obliterates the liberating potential of the social merchandising approach, and, furthermore, instead of potentially empowering women, it ultimately subjugates them to the ideal that romantic (heterosexual) love is what will liberate them. Our analysis reveals several stereotypes in the portrayals of domestic violence, but the main lingering problem points to the fact that women are not represented as subjects who are able to seek help and escape the situation. The two narratives we have analyzed contain the persistent image of a savior-man who enters the women's lives to love and to save them. The image of the knight in shining armor is present in *Mulheres Apaixonadas* (Women in Love), with Fred representing a new and innocent love interest; it is also an obvious plot in *A Regra do Jogo*, when a handsome stranger—César—who cooks, cleans, and, above all, loves—shows up to save the day, and to save Domingas.

Mulheres Apaixonadas takes place in Rio de Janeiro, in the posh neighborhood of Leblon, as do most of Manuel Carlos's narratives. The plot revolves around a main character, Helena who has been married to a musician—Téo—for about 15 years. She is a history teacher at an upscale private high school owned by her sister-in-law, Lorena. The character Raquel, who drives the domestic violence plot, is hired by the school as a physical education teacher in the first few episodes of the program. The school is also the place where a new romantic interest will appear for Raquel: Fred, a young student who, like Raquel, enjoys biking and swimming.

When the audience meets Raquel, she is a bit mysterious, but seems to be unmarried. Little by little, we learn that she is running away from her abusive husband, Marcos, and is trying to start a new

life in Rio. Marcos is a rich and powerful lawyer, and the two had been married for eight years in the neighboring state of São Paulo. This narrative arc is familiar to the audience and can be seen in many mainstream narratives about domestic violence, such as in the movies *Sleeping With the Enemy* (1991) with Julia Roberts, *Enough* (2002) with Jennifer Lopez, and *Safe Haven* (2013) with Julianne Hough.

Similar to the abusers in other movies about domestic violence, Marcos seems to be gentle, charming, seductive, and handsome (he is also White and has blue eyes and blond hair) to those around Raquel, and sometimes to Raquel herself: He sends her flowers, buys her expensive gifts, and publicly professes his love for Raquel. Meanwhile, in the privacy of their home, and even in the locker room at the school where Raquel works, Marcos reveals his true colors. The audience also learns through conversations between Raquel and her old friend/housekeeper, Ivone, that Marcos beats Raquel and that he raped one of Raquel's former male students in a fit of jealousy.

The plot does realistically illuminate certain aspects of domestic violence. It clearly shows that, contrary to the stigma that attaches domestic violence to the lower, uneducated social class, with its inevitable ties to race (as the two are highly connected in Brazil), this is a problem that potentially affects all social classes and races. It also does a good job of illustrating the cycle of domestic violence and the psychological power that the aggressor has over the victim.

For example, when Marcos discovers where Raquel's safe haven is, he starts calling her, and, without saying a word, he plays a song he used to play for her when they were married. The first time we see Raquel and Marcos in the same physical space is when he shows up unannounced in the teacher's lounge. He approaches her from behind and covers her eyes, saying nothing. Raquel touches his hands and opens her eyes; she stares blankly at his hands, recognizing them and hinting to the audience that there is a history of violence between the two. While a petrified Raquel asks Marcos how he found her, he tells her how much he missed her and starts kissing her.

After this first encounter, Marcos shows up unannounced at Raquel's home and workplace, offering gifts, love notes, apologies, and promises that he is a changed man. She finally gives in, and the two start living together again; and for a while, they live in a "honeymoon stage." After a while, though, Marcos becomes jealous of Raquel's relationship with Fred, which had begun as a mentoring relationship, but soon develops into a romance.

Marcos threatens Raquel and Fred and starts beating her again. Marcos tells Raquel that she does not "behave like a married woman" and that if she cannot understand him, then he will *make* her understand him. He closes the bedroom door, and from this moment on, the audience does not see the physical violence taking place. Instead, we hear slapping sounds and Raquel's screams of "no, please stop" and her painful cries and moans. We also see Ivone, the housekeeper, come close to the door, where she hears everything and sobs profusely. Moments later, we see Raquel crying in bed while Marcos showers. The audience also has Ivone's point of view of the locked bedroom door as she walks away.

In addition to Ivone, Raquel confides in Helena, the main character of the telenovela and Raquel's boss. Both Ivone and Helena try several times in vain to convince Raquel to file a complaint against

Marcos. Raquel makes it clear that she fears him too much, and she is embarrassed in front of her family members and friends. Most of all, she fears for her life and for Fred's life. The audience can sympathize with her plight, because Marcos is extremely cruel. He usually hits Raquel with a tennis racket and takes his time before hitting her to psychologically threaten her by mimicking the sound of balls hitting the racket while waving it in the air as if playing a tennis match.

The audience witnesses Raquel as she pleads with Marcos and says she will call the police, to which Marcos responds that he is "*morrendo de medo*" (dying of fear), an expression akin to "shaking in my boots." It should be noted that at the time of the broadcast, the Maria da Penha Law was nonexistent. Raquel suffers for months in the hands of her aggressor, as she had done for the past eight years, but it is not until Marcos starts physically and psychologically abusing Fred that she decides to put an end to the situation.

Raquel finally goes to the women's police station hand in hand with Helena. As she sees other battered women in the waiting room, Raquel doubts herself and says she does not feel good and wants to go home. Helena convinces Raquel to file a complaint, saying that all those women are in the same boat as she is. The police station is presented as a clean, safe place. The woman police clerk assures Raquel that the staff is highly qualified and will make her feel as comfortable as possible. She adds that right next door there is a *Centro Integrado de Atendimento à Mulher* (Women's Care Integrated Center), which provides legal and psychological care for women victims of domestic violence.

While waiting for an officer to file her complaint, Raquel asks Helena, "How did I let things get to this?" Helena responds in a calm, nonjudgmental tone that she is not sure why some women allow themselves to stay in situations such as Raquel's, but that the important thing is that Raquel took charge of the situation and is filing the complaint. During the week when this episode aired, real-life police recorded a 25% increase in the number of women who sought the authorities to denounce their abusers of domestic violence (Arraes, 2014).

When the police subpoena Marcos, he tricks Fred into getting in a car with him. He warns Fred that if Raquel cannot be his, she will not be anyone else's. Marcos also makes sure Raquel is present to witness the moment when he drives off a cliff, killing himself and Fred. At the time of the broadcast, author Manuel Carlos explained why he chose this ending:

The ending for Marcos's character had to be his tragic death due to the Brazilian judicial system. For him, the penalties given to this type of crime would have been very soft, and eventually encourage other violent husbands to continue their atrocities, as impunity reigns in the country. So his death was the only way I had to meet the desire of Brazilian society, which does not accept this kind of violence. (quoted in Abreu et al., 2010, p. 11)

Although Raquel's "savior" and abuser both die in a tragic way, the social merchandising of domestic violence in *Mulheres Apaixonadas* worked as predicted by research: For example, as Joyce (2012) stated, although a "direct effect" is not credited by the Sabido methodology (Entertainment-

Education for social change), it does work as a two-step flow. It was clear that the topic portrayed in the broadcast had spillover effects in the audience, who was made aware of the topic, discussed it, and was appalled by it, to say the least. Trigo (2011) highlights actor Dan Stulbach's experience of the repercussions of playing Marcos:

The weight of living this aggressor character was made even greater since he was a rookie actor on TV and the public did not have previous references to former characters. According to him [Dan], the hardest part was dealing with the public in simple everyday situations after the most brutal scenes were aired. "Once I went to have breakfast at a hotel restaurant and all the women got up from their tables and left. People started to not wait on me at restaurants, at shops, people treated me badly. They did not sit next to me on the plane. But I won 14 awards with this character," he recalls. (para. 8)

The final episode of the telenovela takes place a few days later. During the school's graduation ceremony Raquel is awarded the school's medal of honor on Fred's behalf. Fred was supposed to deliver the valediction, which is read post mortem by Raquel. After the speech, Raquel says that Fred was the sweetest, gentlest, most determined boy she had ever met and that she was qualified to say that because the two had lived a great love story. She also announces that she is "carrying the fruit of that love in her belly," as she is pregnant with his child. She adds that "Fred left behind more than good memories, he also left a son."¹ Her announcement elicits tears of joy and applause from the entire audience. In this sense, Brazilian telenovelas are akin to Hollywood productions in that, as Green (1998) suggested, they have a tendency to disseminate the patriarchal ideology and to reiterate the "centrality of 'family' one way or another" (p. 19).

***A Regra do Jogo* (August 2015–March 2016):
Juca and Domingas, Indira and Oziel, Tina and Rui**

A Regra do Jogo was written by João Emanuel Carneiro, who is internationally recognized for the success of his previous prime-time telenovela *Avenida Brasil*, one of the most popular and profitable telenovelas of recent times. Although not as popular as *Avenida Brasil*, *A Regra do Jogo* also had high ratings according to the *Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística* (Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics), which measures the size of the audience in Brazil. In the week of September 28 to October 4, 2015, the program was the most watched show in Brazil, with more than 8 million viewers (Kantar Media, 2016).

The main plot of this telenovela revolves around Romero Rômulo. Well known as a sort of hero of the people, Romero is the head of a nonprofit organization that gives jobs to former convicts. But Romero leads a double life as a member of the biggest criminal organization in Rio de Janeiro, participating in several robberies and scams. Romero's mother, along with a few other minor characters, lives in a favela

¹ The unethical teacher–student relationship is not addressed because Fred is seen as Raquel's savior in the sense that he is a catalyst who ignites in Raquel the will and courage to leave her long-time aggressor and to turn him in to the authorities.

called *Morro da Macaca*. This is where Juca and Domingas, the main couple driving the domestic violence plot, also live. A love quadrangle between four other characters (Tina and Rui and Oziel and Indira) also involves domestic abuse. Although it is spectacular, the domestic abuse is not labeled as such.

In contrast to Raquel and Marcos, Juca and Domingas are poor, of mixed raced, and uneducated. But Domingas and Raquel have a few things in common: They have low self-esteem, and they have been married to their aggressor for many years. Like Raquel, Domingas also has a best friend, Indira in whom she confides and who at times encourages her to go to a police station to put Juca in prison. As with Raquel, the last straw and the one thing that motivates Domingas to get out of the cycle of violence is a very handsome man, a new heterosexual romantic love interest.

A significant turn with this (attempted) social merchandising insertion is the conflicting ways in which domestic violence is portrayed. This is different (and problematic) in various ways. First, in *A Regra do Jogo*, the violent scenes are much more graphic—spectacular—than the ones in *Mulheres Apaixonadas*, in which the audience only heard the abuse behind closed doors. In addition, there is an escalation of the physical representation of violence. We see Juca hitting Domingas several times. The portrayal is turned into a spectacle with dramatic scenes that are filled with tears, screams, and coordinated music to heightened emotional responses as well as sound effects of slaps. Second, in *A Regra do Jogo*, violence against women becomes spectacular eroticism, akin to Swiffen's (2010) description of Debord's (1997) term, through the erotic and comedic way in which it is represented through Tina, Rui, Oziel, and Indira's story line—where violence, sex, and eroticism become interwoven into the fabric of life rendered as "just representation" (Debord, 1997, p. 95).

In *A Regra do Jogo*, domestic violence is trivialized, rationalized, and, at times, gendered and justified as something that women can do to men, but that men should not do to women. For example, when Domingas is beaten by her husband, Juca, the scenes are very dramatic and emotionally intense, as they should be. However, they are often immediately followed by a scene depicting Domingas's best friend, Indira, hitting her husband and proudly professing that when her husband does something she does not agree with, he "feels the weight of my hand." Such scenes are usually comic and trivialize violence into a media spectacle.

In the episode that aired on November 26, 2015, when Indira's new lover/partner Rui is beaten by her former husband Oziel, she suggests that Rui should be a "real man" and just beat him back. When Rui replies that he does not condone violence and that he is, in fact, a pacifist, Indira insists that he should be a real man, beat him up, and buy her some eggs while he is out, or she will "slap you in the face" and then he will see what a "real swollen face looks like." This justification of violence occurs once again when Rui finds out that his ex-wife (Tina) had been cheating on him with Oziel (the former husband of Indira, Rui's current lover). In this scene, Tina pleads with him several times to "slap me on the face, because I deserve it." The messages about domestic violence are mixed, to say the least, and trivialized to an extreme that reveals the failure of the social merchandising approach in this instance.

The spectacle of violence, not the issue of domestic violence, is what is highlighted in *A Regra do Jogo*. Random, banal acts of violence are used as excusable, comedic props. This portrayal is akin to

Debord's (1997) definition of spectacle, defined as a media and consumer society organized around the production and consumption of images, commodities, and staged events. Another aspect of the spectacle of domestic violence created by *A Regra do Jogo* is its association with eroticism. In the scenes where Tina begs to be beaten because she "deserves it" and "needs to learn a lesson," she displays her body sexually and exposes herself physically in a posture that is open and willing to receive her beating while scantily dressed in cropped shirts and shorts, as the camera travels around her body revealing her "looked-at-ness," akin to Laura Mulvey's (1999) description.

On the topic of spectacle and eroticism, Kellner (2004) reminds us that

Eroticism has frequently permeated the spectacles of Western culture, and is prominently on display in Hollywood film, as well as popular forms such as burlesque, vaudeville, and pornography. Long a major component of advertising, eroticized sexuality has been used to sell every conceivable product. The spectacle of sex is also one of the staples of media culture, permeating all cultural forms and creating its own genres. (para. 39)

Furthermore, Kellner (2012) reminds us that our experiences are inextricably connected, shaped, and mediated by the spectacles of media culture and the consumer society. As Kellner (2012) points out, "for Debord, the spectacle is a tool of pacification and depoliticization; it is a 'permanent opium war'" (p. 44). We conclude that *A Regra do Jogo's* portrayal of domestic violence, instead of working as a social merchandising insertion, acts as spectacle. As Kellner (2004) discussed:

In our current capitalist system, where workers are disconnected from the fruits of their labor, and where art is separated from life, we are encouraged to inertly observe the spectacles of social life from within the privacy of homes instead of actively engaging in it. (p. xvi)

It is not hard to see that in such an environment, the highly profitable telenovela becomes the ideal vehicle for the creation of such spectacles.

Beyond spectacle, another lingering aspect of the problematic representation of domestic violence in *Mulheres Apaixonadas* and *A Regra do Jogo* is the fact that a new romantic love is what propels the battered women to leave their abusive relationships. In *A Regra do Jogo*, a handsome stranger—César—who is White, green-eyed, and educated shows up at Domingas's doorstep, sweeps her off her feet, and beats up Juca, who leaves Domingas. After a few telenovela turns and complications, Domingas goes through a physical transformation due to her falling in love: She is dolled up, wearing lipstick, flowers in her hair, and dresses. She is also pregnant with César's child at the end of the narrative. It seems that in telenovelas, the only way out of an abusive relationship is to fall in love with a handsome stranger.

Domestic Violence as a Women's Issue

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence clearly states that domestic violence is, above all, an issue that relates to power and control. According to the organization's website (<http://www.ncadv.org>), domestic violence is defined as

The willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other. Domestic violence is an epidemic affecting individuals in every community, regardless of age, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or nationality. (paras. 2-3)

In the United States, research shows that women are three times more likely to be killed or seriously injured by their male partner than vice versa, but it is also possible that men can be victims of domestic violence. More than 830,000 men fall victim to domestic violence every year. A man is the victim of domestic abuse every 37.8 seconds in the United States (Rhymes, 2014).

One interesting aspect of this analysis is the revelation that in Brazil, domestic violence is discursively taken as a woman's issue involving a man and a woman in a heterosexual relationship. Although we do not deny that this seems to be the most common case, we suggest a few reasons for this gendering in Brazil. First, there are lingering narratives in mainstream production that address the issue in this way, such as the ones discussed in this article; second, there is the history behind the Maria da Penha Law and its association with a woman's name; and third, there are the inevitable cultural and mediatic references to *delegacias da mulher* (women's police stations) to deal with matters of domestic violence.

Conclusion

Telenovelas are among the key mediated meaning-making devices in Brazilian society today and have been for quite some time now. As Martín-Barbero (2001) has argued, although melodramas may function as an ideological opiate, they also retain the traces of a popular culture that has resisted the direct imposition of dominant forms. Thus, examining portrayals of key issues such as domestic violence is a fruitful research endeavor.

The present analysis examined two recent portrayals of domestic violence in TV Globo telenovelas and revealed an ultimate failure in the social merchandising of domestic violence in its most recent occurrence, in the prime-time telenovela *A Regra do Jogo*. As Julie D'Acci (1994) has pointed out, "the tight, interweaving of institutional constraints and women's lived experience of prime time TV's construction of femininity and women's understanding of themselves as women, are impossible to pick apart" (p. 204). According to TV Globo's narratives, women who are victims of domestic violence have

been traditionally represented as victims who ultimately rely on a savior, a handsome stranger, to rescue them from their aggressor.

In this research we have pointed out that, although one way to measure the efficacy of social merchandising insertions is through immediate responses, one problem persists: Much is still unknown about the long-term efficacy of this type of social merchandising. We have also pointed out that, in order to deal with criticism regarding the short-term effect of social merchandising, TV Globo has adapted the once specifically telenovela-driven strategy to other genres and formats. However, in reading the current text (visual and narrative) about domestic violence in *A Regra do Jogo*, we conclude that the social merchandising insertion failed.

Our analysis of the text of the representation of domestic violence in *A Regra do Jogo* reveals that the portrayal of the violence suffered by the character Domingas was much more visually graphic and spectacular than that suffered by Raquel in *Mulheres Apaixonadas*. In the latter, audiences never saw the brutality Raquel suffered, but were led to fill in the blanks through production elements such as a cut and a closed door. In *A Regra do Jogo*, in addition to sound effects of slaps, punches, and broken furniture, the escalation of physical violence was heightened by dramatic scenes that clearly and visually showed the abuse, and tears, screams, and music were strategically used to heighten the visual spectacle and the audience's emotional responses to it.

In *A Regra do Jogo*, violence against women also became what Debord (cited in Kellner, 2012) deemed "spectacular eroticism" through the erotic way in which it was represented by the improbable love quadrangle portrayed by Tina, Rui, Oziel, and Indira—where violence, sex, and eroticism become interwoven into the fabric of life rendered as "just representation" (p. 95).

Our analysis indicates that in the current capitalist era, the domestic violence social merchandising that took place in *A Regra do Jogo* was removed from its prosocial function and made into a spectacle. Ultimately, telenovelas, the most profitable type of program in Brazil and in most of Latin America, become key players in the society of spectacle. As Debord (1977) stated, the society that rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally "spectaclist"; in other words, the spectacle is the main production of present-day society.

Our research also found that in Brazilian mediatic portrayals of domestic violence, the issue is discursively taken as a woman's issue involving a heterosexual man and woman in a romantic relationship. Finally, we point to the fact that the comedic and spectacular manner in which this devastating issue was portrayed in the telenovela obliterated the liberating and educational potential of the social merchandising approach. In the current spectacular stage, we are left with this question: Will the portrayal of domestic violence in telenovelas work again as social merchandising? Only time will tell. We will stay tuned.

References

- Abreu, P., Pires, C., Alves, V., & Costa, R. (2010). *Uma abordagem dos temas sociais e cotidianos em telenovelas e a influência destes na sociedade* [An approach to social and everyday themes in telenovelas and their influence in society]. Retrieved from <http://www.intercom.org.br/papers/regionais/nordeste2010/resumos/R23-1520-2.pdf>
- Arraes, J. (2014). *Estupro coletivo na novela Em Família e o desempoderamento das vítimas* [Gang rape in the telenovela Family Ties and the disempowerment of victims]. Retrieved from <http://www.revistaforum.com.br/questaodegenero/2014/02/12/estupro-coletivo-na-novela-em-familia-e-o-desempoderamento-das-vitimas/>
- Bellos, A. (2007, January 7). Telenovelas: The story so far. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3662430/Telenovelas-the-story-so-far.html>
- Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil* [Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil]. (1988).
- D'Acci, J. (1994). *Defining women: Television and the case of Cagney and Lacey*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Debert, G. G., & Gregori, M. F. (2002). As delegacias especiais de polícia e o projeto Gênero e Cidadania [Special police stations and the genre and citizenship project]. In M. Correa (Ed.), *Gêneros e Cidadania* [Gender and citizenship] (pp. 9–20). Campinas, Brazil: Pagu/Núcleo de Estudos de Gênero da Unicamp.
- Debord, G. (1977). *Society of the spectacle*. Detroit, MI: Black and Red.
- Debord, G. (1998). *Comments on the society of the spectacle*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso.
- Fernandes, M. V., & Dos Santos, S. (2008). *Merchandising: A sua relevância nas telenovelas brasileiras, com ênfase na Rede* [Merchandising: Relevance in telenovelas and on the Internet]. Paper presented at Intercom—Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação, VII Congresso de Ciências da Comunicação na Região Norte, Boa Vista, Brazil.
- Green, P. (1998). *Cracks in the pedestal: Ideology and gender in Hollywood*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Hamburger, E. (2005). *O Brasil antenado. A sociedade na novela* [An antennaed Brazil. Society in the telenovela]. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Jorge Zahar.
- Joyce, S. N. (2012). *Brazilian telenovelas and the myth of racial democracy*. Washington, DC: Lexington.

- Kantar Media. (2016). Ranking semanal—15 mercados—28/09 a 04/10/2015 [Weekly ranking—15 markets—9/28 to 10/4/2015]. Retrieved from <https://www.kantaribopemedia.com/15-mercados-2809-a-04102015/>
- Kellner, D. (2004). Media culture and the triumph of the spectacle. *Razón y Palabra*, 39. Retrieved from <http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx/anteriores/n39/dkelner.html>
- Kellner, D. (2012). *Media spectacle and insurrection, 2011: From the Arab uprisings to Occupy everything*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.
- La Pastina, A. (2004). Selling political integrity: Telenovelas, intertextuality, and local elections in rural Brazil. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 48(2), 302–325.
- La Pastina, A., Patel, D., & Schiavo, M. (2003). Social merchandising in Brazilian telenovelas. In A. Singhal, M. J. Cody, E. M. Rogers, & M. Sabido (Eds.), *Entertainment-education and social change: History, research and practice* (pp. 261–279). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Martín-Barbero, J. (2001). *Dos meios às mediações: Comunicação, cultura e hegemonia* [From media to mediations: Communication, culture and hegemony]. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: UFRJ.
- Mulvey, L. (1999). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In L. Braudy & M. Cohen (Eds.), *Film theory and criticism: Introductory readings* (pp. 833–844). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Nicolosi, A. P. (2009). *Merchandising social na telenovela brasileira. Um diálogo possível entre ficção e realidade* [Social merchandising in the Brazilian telenovela. A possible dialogue between fiction and reality] (Masters thesis). University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. Retrieved from http://bdtd.ibict.br/vufind/Record/USP_baeddfee4c4c120220ae28f903637919
- O'Donnell, V. (2007). *Television criticism*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Porto, M. (2012). *Media power and democratization in Brazil: TV Globo and the dilemmas of political accountability*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Reginatto, G. R. A. (2007). *O Mercado social na TV Globo: O outro espetáculo do horário nobre* [Social marketing on TV Globo: The other prime-time spectacle] (Master's thesis). Faculdade Cásper Líbero, São Paulo, Brazil.
- Rhymes, E. (2014, September 19). Woman as aggressor: The unspoken truth of domestic violence. *MintPress News*. Retrieved from <http://www.mintpressnews.com/woman-aggressor-unspoken-truth-domestic-violence/196746/>

- Schiavo, M. R. (2006). Dez anos de merchandising social [Ten years of social merchandising]. *Intercom—Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação*. Retrieved from <http://www.intercom.org.br/papers/nacionais/2006/resumos/R1820-1.pdf>
- Secretaria de comunicação social da Presidencia da Republica. (2014). *Pesquisa Brasileira de Mídia 2015: Hábitos de consumo de mídia pela população brasileira* [Brazilian media research 2015: Media consumption habits of the Brazilian population]. Brasília, Brazil: Secom. Retrieved from <http://www.secom.gov.br/atuacao/pesquisa/lista-de-pesquisas-quantitativas-e-qualitativas-de-contratos-atuais/pesquisa-brasileira-de-midia-pbm-2015.pdf>
- Secretaria de Políticas para as Mulheres Presidência da República. (2011). *Rede de enfrentamento à violência contra as mulheres* [Network for confronting violence against women]. Brasília, Brazil: Author.
- Senado Federal, Secretaria de Transparência. (2015, August). *Violência doméstica e familiar contra a mulher* [Domestic and familial violence against women]. Retrieved from <https://www12.senado.leg.br/senado/procuradoria/publicacao/pesquisa-violencia-domestica-e-familiar-contra-as-mulheres>
- Straubhaar, J. D. (1991). Beyond media imperialism: Asymmetrical interdependence and cultural proximity. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8, 39–59.
- Swiffen, T. (2010). *Spectacular sacrifice: Death in images*. (Master's thesis). University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Retrieved from <http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1057&context=etd>
- Telles, L. (2004). *Teledramaturgia ganha caráter científico com trabalho do Núcleo de Telenovelas* [Teledramas gain scientific character with the work of the telenovelas group]. Retrieved from <http://www.usp.br/agenciausp/repgs/2004/pags/007.htm>
- Trigo, M. (2011, August 26). Novelas se inspiram na realidade e mostram a violência contra a mulher [Telenovelas are inspired by real life and show violence against women]. *Terra*. Retrieved from <https://diversao.terra.com.br/tv/novelas-se-inspiram-na-realidade-e-mostram-a-violencia-contra-a-mulher,96b9507c7255a310VgnCLD200000bbccceb0aRCRD.html>
- Trindade, E. (1999). *Merchandising social em telenovelas: A estrutura de um discurso* [Social merchandising in telenovelas: The structure of discourse]. Retrieved from <http://shasu.yolasite.com/resources/Merchandising%20em%20telenovelas.pdf>