

Research Article

Women and Telenovelas: Married Life and Child-rearing Under Scrutiny

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Abstract

Television is a major source of communication and entertainment in communities, and telenovelas hold a special place within it. These television series, very popular among women in Porto-Novo, offer much more than a simple means of relaxation. Their influence extends beyond entertainment and profoundly affects family dynamics and social structures. This research aims to analyze the effects of women in Porto-Novo's attachment to telenovelas. Based on interviews conducted with 30 women from diverse backgrounds, the study highlights both positive and negative aspects of these programs. Telenovelas enrich women by offering them alternative role models and practical lessons in human relationships. However, they also introduce significant disruptions within households. The results show that prolonged exposure to telenovelas leads to marital conflicts, often linked to behavioral changes inspired by the female characters in these series. Women adopt attitudes perceived as disrespectful towards their husbands, sometimes neglecting their domestic responsibilities and imitating the clothing styles presented on screen. There is also a noticeable acculturation of children, who abandon indigenous languages and traditions to conform to Western norms. These phenomena contribute to a gradual erosion of local sociocultural values, exacerbating tensions between modernity and tradition.

Keywords

Telenovelas, Sociocultural Values, Acculturation, Media, Porto-Novo

1. Introduction

Television is a form of entertainment worldwide, and it is within this framework that [13] states that "television constitutes, in the Western world and beyond, the principal cultural leisure activity." Philippe helps us understand that television is present on every continent. Therefore, Africans are not exempt from this observation. Television, through its numerous

programs, particularly telenovelas, provides individuals around the world with pleasure and relaxation, and helps reduce stress levels.

Indeed, since the advent of Novelas TV in Africa in 2015, telenovelas have occupied a significant place in television programming schedules, particularly in Benin. They have become

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integrated into the daily lives of Beninese people, and it is observed that women, men, children, literate or illiterate, find time, whatever their occupation, to watch telenovelas. These are mostly of Brazilian, Mexican, Venezuelan, American, Argentinian, Colombian, Mexican-American, Peruvian, or Indian origin and are also broadcast on national television channels. Right after the first news broadcast, that is, starting at 8:30 PM, we are treated to a flurry of soap operas on our TV channels. This flurry, it must be said, creates a real dilemma for the viewer, as these telenovelas are shown almost simultaneously. It should also be noted that women are the fondest of this genre of cinema, [6]. It is clear that among the telenovelas broadcast or currently being broadcast on any television channel in Benin or the sub-region, such as "El-diablo," "Fatmagoul," "Rubi," "Madrasta," "The Gardener's Daughter," and "The Two Faces of Anna," "Between Justice and Vengeance," "Catalina," "The Strength of the Heart," "Land of Passion," "In the Skin of Another Land," etc. The scenarios and stories are similar, and the ending is often known to everyone. They tell stories related to love and family life, as [3] states: "Telenovelas tell stories within society, businesses, and specific groups, portraying characters driven by impulses and feelings who experience joy and sorrow." From this author, we can understand that telenovelas depict all that is human and thus attract the attention of viewers, especially women, who are sensitive beings. We also understand that telenovelas, through the stories of other societies, introduce women to other cultures that are not always compatible with their own. In Dakar, in 2002, telenovelas ranked second in terms of audience share, just behind the 8 PM French-language news broadcast, and their audience was 90% young women [15]. While their success is undeniable, opinions on their usefulness are diverse. We observe that telenovelas broadcast in African cities, through national and private television channels, run counter to African culture in general and Beninese culture in particular. By watching these soap operas, women internalize the customs portrayed, creating a form of acculturation. Thus, the values and social norms that individuals have accumulated in relation to their culture erode as they become integrated into the dynamics of these telenovelas [3]. Indeed, these telenovelas have significant consequences for viewers and those around them. Housewives' attachment to telenovelas can be the cause of many conflicts between them and their husbands. We observe that during telenovela broadcast times, there is a battle for viewing time. This is due to the fact that women want to watch telenovelas, unlike men who want to watch football matches or the news. Women also want to "live exactly the realities portrayed in these series" [1]. Furthermore, they imitate the characters in these telenovelas in their lifestyles. It is from this perspective that [14] states that viewers "believe they are in these soap operas even in their daily lives." Indeed, these telenovelas change their outlook on life and thus influence children's upbringing. Moreover, regarding the influence of women's attachment to telenovelas on children's education, we can say that because of telenovelas,

women abandon their native languages in favor of foreign ones, which they teach their children. They do not teach their own culture to their children. The question then arises: what are the factors associated with women's attachment to telenovelas and their influence on their family life?

2. Methodology

Given that this research focuses on a social phenomenon, we believe it is essential to emphasize the qualitative aspect. It aims, firstly, to identify the factors associated with women's attachment to telenovelas and, secondly, to determine the effects of telenovelas on couples' lives and the upbringing of their children.

The research population comprises all individuals potentially relevant to the investigations required by this research. The different target groups selected for the survey are:

- 1) housewives;
- 2) fathers;
- 3) young people aged between 15 and 20.

These groups were selected based on our research objectives.

The research takes place in the municipality of Porto-Novo. A non-probability sampling method was used. The rational selection technique was employed for sampling in this research. This technique allowed us to obtain reliable and accurate information from the subjects within the scope of our research. Furthermore, this choice was made due to the nature of our research and the available resources and space of the individuals we would be interviewing. This technique is also known as the non-probabilistic method, which is based on the principle of reasoned choice.

Our research sample comprises several target groups. Given time constraints, financial resources, and field limitations, the total sample size is 30 individuals. It consists of 15 women, 10 men, and 5 young people.

To collect information in the municipality of Porto-Novo, two techniques were used: documentary research and interviews. For documentary research, we consulted several documentation centers, including the library of the National Institute of Youth, Physical Education, and Sport (INJEPS) and the Benin Educational Activity Council (CAEB). Other sources of information were also consulted through search engines such as Google, Firefox, and Google Scholar. The interview, as the English word "interview" refers to an investigative process that uses verbal communication to gather information related to a specific objective [8]. Therefore, in this study, a structured interview was used. To compare theoretical information with field data, interviews were conducted in Porto-Novo. The aim was to gather information about women's engagement with telenovelas. The data collected for this research were transcribed after careful listening. Word software and a smartphone were used for this purpose.

3. Telenovelas as a Factor Influencing Housewives

Television series, particularly telenovelas, encourage housewives to become more attached to television. Therefore, it is crucial to define the term "telenovela."

Box 1: Telenovelas as a Form of Entertainment

"It's a program created by white people, which allows us to be entertained, to discover their way of life, and to talk about what we consider taboo in our country." A. K., hairdresser

In this excerpt, the interviewee defines telenovelas by focusing on the skin color of the actors, whom she describes as "white." She sees it as a way for Westerners to better market their culture to a wider audience. This is justified by her use of the phrase "discovering their way of life." Furthermore, she asserts that telenovelas teach about subjects that are not often discussed, that is to say, "taboo" topics.

Box 2: Telenovelas as a means of information

"It's a Western-centric narrative through which we entertain ourselves, relax, and which offers advice that allows us to learn a few things from others." E. H., teacher

From this excerpt, the interviewee defines telenovelas as a form of entertainment, a channel for transmitting Western cultures. For her, telenovelas also contribute to education, as evidenced by the use of expressions such as "offering advice, allowing one to learn something from others."

In light of these comments, we can say that telenovelas are useful for women because they facilitate globalization and allow them, while being entertained, to learn about realities in other countries around the world. It is in this vein that Werner states that "Telenovelas deal with sensitive subjects such as drug use among young people or homosexuality..." [15].

But what is it that attracts housewives to these telenovelas?

Box 3: Uses of telenovelas for women

"It's often housewives who watch this because it's based on love stories. Plus, it's interesting; it gives us advice and also talks about married life. It helps us understand that there are no boundaries between human beings." M. Y., seamstress

From this excerpt, the interviewee states that telenovelas are particularly appealing to housewives because they address matters of the heart, such as love stories, and educate them by offering advice. She also asserts that telenovelas make the world a global village, as expressed in the passage, "It makes us understand that there are no borders between human beings."

Through this comment, we can deduce that housewives' attachment to telenovelas stems from the fact that these soap operas provide them with entertainment. This attachment is also due to the types of stories they tell, which are mostly love stories from which they draw advice that helps them resolve their relationship problems. Werner concurs, stating that

"Women enjoy watching telenovelas because they learn something about others and about themselves" [15].

Our analysis allows us to state with certainty that our hypothesis that telenovelas provide women with entertainment and information is confirmed.

However, these telenovelas also have negative influences on women.

Box 4: Negative influence of telenovelas

"Women love telenovelas because they love wasting their time doing nothing." K. D., Accountant

In this excerpt, the interviewee asserts that telenovelas negatively influence women because they lead them to laziness. According to him, they bring nothing good to women; the word "waste," used here, shows that the time lost watching telenovelas could be used for other things. [4] emphasizes that the effects of television are numerous. He cites: "wasted time, a harmful influence on behavior, competition with family and school, a distortion of public debate, and an excessive inflation of myths and celebrity culture." He continues, revealing that television presents a distorted image of the world. Condry thus shows us that television, in reality, brings nothing good to the viewer. Through these programs, it contributes to distracting viewers from their activities; activities considered important for families are often dismissed out of hand.

Box 5: Telenovelas as a means of female daydreaming

"Women love telenovelas because they allow them to dream of everything beautiful and luxurious, and to copy European actresses in terms of their style of dress and behavior." A. A., student

From this excerpt, the interviewee also states that telenovelas negatively influence women because they present a picture of a happy life, leading them to adopt Western customs, including their clothing styles and behaviors.

Among the negative effects of telenovelas on women mentioned by this target group comprising fathers, young people, and housewives are: wasted time, laziness, neglect of household chores, excessive ambition, and conflict. It is in this context that [3] asserts that "religious practices and educational activities take a back seat as the time for telenovela broadcasts approaches."

Furthermore, television is a passive medium; it does not encourage reflection, and viewers are subject to progressive dumbing-down because they no longer think critically. It homogenizes our leisure activities and negatively influences our way of thinking. Every individual, if they do not take a step back from what they see, is then "influenced, even molded" by television. [12] argues that television influences viewers through its programming if they are unable to distinguish between television reality and real life, and also to choose what is necessary for their development and adapt it to their cultural realities.

Based on these observations, we can say that telenovelas have more negative than positive impacts; they prevent

women from having time to take care of their families and steer them towards embracing Western culture.

4. Effects of Telenovelas on Married Life and Child-rearing

Box 6: Changes in women's behavior

«"Telenovelas are helping housewives develop rebellious behaviors within their families. They want to behave like the women in telenovelas." L. A. Nurse

From this excerpt, the interviewee asserts that telenovelas lead to changes in women's behavior, participating in their "rebellions." Women want to act like the actresses in telenovelas by standing up to their husbands. This is what [2] modeling theory explains in the third stage, which is the process of motor reproduction, consisting of reproducing symbolic representations in action. The correspondence between the stored representation and reality is rarely correct on the first attempt and will be adjusted gradually. Women reproduce the actresses' behaviors by disrespecting their husbands because they have seen this in telenovelas. They forget that these are staged events and that the education they received differs from that presented in telenovelas. [7] tells us that "the media contribute significantly to shaping ways of thinking, largely determining ideas, habits, and customs." They have become, in a way, the judges of truth; they decide and dictate fashion, consumption, and lifestyles. They establish what is right and wrong, and decide which events are important and significant in the world. He thus shows us that the mass media, particularly television through its programming, influences how everyone behaves in society.

Minoun stated that it is undeniable that the impact of a film, the ideological codes that permeate it, and the effects it produces, all point to the ongoing question of the complex relationship between cinema and ideology [12]. Cinema, in effect, distorts reality through dreams, imagination, and escapism. It assumes an ideological function within a society and suggests behavioral models. Furthermore, it reconstructs events and people in an ideological way [15].

Laroche and *al.*, emphasize that the television viewer is subject to progressive stupefaction, [10]. It is from this perspective that Minoun asserts that the unconscious viewer thinks he is watching entertainment or worse, learning something, when in fact he is only watching disguised propaganda; he is a slave who is literally being brainwashed, [12].

Telenovelas instill negative thoughts and new behaviors in women that are not always in line with the socio-cultural realities of their environment. For example, some people don't hesitate to name their children after their favorite actor or actress. Soap operas are at the root of many ills in our society today [5]. It is from this perspective that Bendre asserts that religious practices and educational activities are relegated to

the background when the time for telenovela broadcasts approaches, [3].

Box 7: Harmful effects of telenovelas

"Through telenovelas featuring foul language, they develop skills contrary to those of our societies." A. C., Student

From this excerpt, the interviewee asserts that telenovelas lead to changes in women's behavior and language, resulting in the use of the expression "filthy language." Women use expressions that offend modesty. In doing so, they trivialize the rules of social life in Africa.

When asked if there is a link between telenovelas and changes in the behavior of housewives, several responses were received. It was noted that yes, there is a link between telenovelas and changes in the behavior of housewives. Furthermore, telenovelas are one of the channels that convey depravity through the characters portrayed by the female actresses in telenovelas, for example. Following discussions with the interviewees, some admitted that the change in women's language is influenced by what they have seen on television. Of course, other factors must be taken into account: the environment, education... It is in this perspective that Condry cites as effects "wasted time, a harmful influence on behavior, competition with family, an excessive inflation of myths and celebrity", [4].

Watching a film, as [9] stated, is like immersing oneself in a world populated by caricatured characters caught up in multiple, interwoven plots. A soap opera (from the English word for telenovela or serial) always features characters who desire something or someone. They act to achieve their goals but encounter opposition from others, which generates conflicts. These conflicts establish relationships between the protagonists and construct the story, whose realism is built upon the construction of a psychological reality. One could say, as Leroy did, that watching a telenovela is like entering the story, sharing the characters' feelings. In doing so, the illusory world becomes an ideal to strive for in the viewer. Thus, women seek to connect the fabricated world with the real world.

Diakité in research conducted for a thesis in Information and Communication Sciences and Technologies at the University of Ouagadougou on the influence of telenovelas on viewers, concluded that "telenovelas exert a significant influence on viewers" [5]. Indeed, telenovelas tell the stories of societies and families in their daily lives, featuring characters driven by feelings and evoking emotions, and we end up becoming interested in them. These stories ultimately create empathy within us, which motivates women to want to experience these stories in real life.

Machado-Borges in research conducted at the Higher Teacher Training College/University of Maroua, IUDI of Moko (Cameroon) on television series and their socio-cultural impact in Cameroon, concluded that: "the impact of Latin American television series is significant in Cameroon and has a cascading effect" [11].

Box 8: Abandonment of Family Responsibilities by Women

"Women tend to want to neglect their family responsibilities in favor of the scenes they see in telenovelas." H. J., Secretary

From this excerpt, the interviewee asserts that telenovelas encourage women to shirk their family responsibilities. He demonstrates this through his use of the verb "abandon," which implies women's abdication of family responsibility. From this comment, we can deduce that housewives imitate telenovela actresses by neglecting domestic tasks assigned to them because they saw them in telenovelas. This can lead to arguments and fights between them and their partners. It is within this framework that Gallot argues that telenovelas are at the root of many ills in our societies today, [7].

This situation has repercussions on children's education.

Box 9: Effects of Telenovelas on Children's Education

"Telenovelas influence children's upbringing from the moment they cause conflict between parents. A child's education is already threatened because a child cannot be raised in a conflictual environment. Women also tend to want to replicate the parenting styles seen in telenovelas with their own children. They also tend to reject African parenting in favor of Western parenting." I. S., Student

In this excerpt, the interviewee asserts that telenovelas are the root cause of the poor upbringing of children today. According to her, telenovelas create "a conflictual environment" because parents argue over these programs. She also claims that women are instilling Western values in their children at the expense of African values.

During the investigation, it was observed that children from families whose mothers are addicted to telenovelas exhibit behaviors contrary to African culture and the values of their communities (respect for elders, good behavior both within and outside their families). These children prefer Western clothing to African styles. They also rarely speak indigenous languages. These children appreciate the Western lifestyle more than the African one because of the upbringing they receive from their mothers. These women no longer teach their children how to cook and lead lives of laziness and debauchery.

5. The Effects of Telenovelas on Sociocultural Values

Box 10: Telenovelas and Skin Lightening

"Telenovelas teach housewives about skin lightening." D. G. Police Officer

From this excerpt, the interviewee asserts that telenovelas are the root cause of the growing rate of skin lightening among women. He claims that women desperately want to look like the actresses, even to the point of having the same complexion, which leads them to damage their skin by bleaching it to achieve a lighter, even white, complexion.

Box 11: Telenovelas and Women's Clothing Style

"Housewives who watch telenovelas dress in a depraved manner." E. D., Journalist

From this excerpt, the interviewee states that telenovelas negatively influence women's clothing; they want to imitate the clothing styles seen in telenovelas, wearing clothes that expose parts of their bodies.

Through these remarks we observe that the attachment of housewives to telenovelas leads them to imitate the fashions and clothing styles of the actresses and also to want to have the same physical appearance as the latter, which leads them to destroy their natural complexion by depigmenting themselves and to dress in a depraved manner like the actresses, which negatively impacts African socio-cultural values. It is in this sense that Machado-Borges states that:

"The bodies that are presented in telenovelas as being naturally linked to particular statuses of race, class, and sex, the continuous flow of telenovela also depicts other types of bodies and practices to which the viewer can have access provided they purchase the appropriate goods: consumer products targeting the body (styles, clothing, accessories, food, diet products, exercise equipment, cosmetic surgery) are presented to the viewer as concrete and immediate means of positioning themselves in society within the hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race, and class" [11].

Box 12: Telenovelas and endogenous values

"Housewives lead their children to act like Westerners through their clothing styles, language, and behavior." J. H. Merchant

From this excerpt, the interviewee asserts that telenovelas lead women to neglect teaching their children indigenous languages and African customs.

Box 13: Telenovelas and Acculturation

"Women's attachment to the home means they don't instill traditional values in their children." L. G. Hairdresser

From this excerpt, the interviewee asserts that traditional values are relegated to a secondary position, even denied or rejected in favor of Western values by women. This same view is passed on to their children. They have a poor understanding of African culture.

During our investigations, we observed that housewives who are addicted to telenovelas copy the clothing styles seen in the series about their children. It should be noted that realities differ from one social group to another, and these women forget this. They turn their backs on the traditional clothing styles of their own culture and abandon their national languages in favor of foreign ones. It is within this framework that Sissoko asserts that "these soap operas have become a real societal ill and a cultural danger" [14]. This is what Laroche explain in their initial paradigm of the acculturation process, which is based on a unidimensional model stipulating that, gradually, consumers acquire the values of another culture at the expense of their own cultural identity, [10]. In this case, we speak of an assimilation model. The women blindly imitate

the stars of the television series without realizing that these are staged performances and pure advertising. They acquire the values of foreign countries through telenovelas, to the detriment of their own communities. They assimilate the behaviors, ways of acting within families, and methods of raising children presented in these telenovelas. Telenovelas thus lead to the acculturation of women and their children.

6. Conclusion

The media, particularly television, is a means of conveying information to a community. It is also a means of leisure through television programs, especially telenovelas, which educate viewers in the areas of education and culture. However, the majority of those who watch these telenovelas are women. With the aim of contributing to the development of our country, and especially the city of Porto-Novo, we first conducted a study to identify the factors associated with the attachment of women in Porto-Novo to these television programs.

The diagnosis revealed that these women enjoy telenovelas not only for pure pleasure and entertainment, but also because they provide information about Western realities, offer advice, offer life lessons, and, above all, teach them a great deal about love and married life. These shows influence their relationships and the upbringing of their children, generating conflicts due to changes in the women's behavior and the acculturation of their children. Indeed, it was noted that the women imitate the behavior of the telenovela actresses to the point of defying their husbands and disrespecting them. It was also observed that the women neglect their assigned household chores in favor of watching telenovelas. Furthermore, through telenovelas, the women copy the clothing styles presented in these shows. They encourage their children to abandon their native languages, thereby pushing them to turn their backs on their cultures. This analysis led us, in a second step, to determine the effects of telenovelas on couple life and the education of children.

To achieve these objectives, we used an interview guide as a data collection tool for a sample of 30 people divided into three different categories. The various analyses of the recorded results allowed us to confirm our first research hypothesis mentioned above, concerning the city of Porto Novo. Similarly, our investigations revealed that telenovelas encourage women to abandon their sociocultural values. Another negative effect is the decline of indigenous languages in favor of Western languages. The results of our investigations also allowed us to confirm our second research hypothesis, namely: telenovelas contribute to the loss of sociocultural values among women and children from these families. To enable women to fully benefit from their leisure activity, which is telenovelas, we formulated suggestions for all categories of stakeholders involved in this study.

Our wish is that studies of this kind be carried out in other municipalities to raise greater awareness among authorities at

various levels in charge of telecommunications, in order to find and implement appropriate large-scale solutions to the problems of the influence of telenovelas.

Abbreviations

CAEB	Educational Activity Council
INJEPS	The National Institute of Youth, Physical Education, and Sport and the Benin
TV	Television

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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