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Studying Soap Operas

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Studying Soap Operas

1. Introduction

Soap operas have held a place of interest both in popular broadcasting and in communication research for over 70 years. A genre begun in the United States and spread throughout the world (Cox, 2005, p. 3), the soap started on the radio in the early 1930s and proved itself quite an enduring and popular kind of programming—radio soap operas continued broadcasting in the United States until 1960 (p. 14) and remain on the air in some countries to this day. But with the development of television in United States, the genre transferred to the new medium, with many of the same programs adapted for television. Soap operas occupy an important part of scheduled television programming on both terrestrial and satellite distribution around the world.

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS last reviewed research on soap operas over 25 year ago (Frey-Vor, 1990a, 1990b) in Volume 10, Number 1 and Number 2. The first essay offered a lengthy definition of soap operas and telenovelas and then looked at studies focused on the content of the soap operas, on the generic qualities of the soap operas, and on the ways soap operas resembled myth or folktale. Frey-Vor (1990a) then reviewed the research that examined motivations for viewing soap operas in the uses and gratifications tradition and their effects in the cultivation tradition. She described audience characteristics, particularly of women, students, and young people. Reviewing some studies that used ethnographic methods, she then described female viewers of soap operas based on detailed descriptions of home viewing. Finally, she summarized work on how audiences interpreted soap operas, appealing to early reception analysis. The second part (Frey-Vor, 1990b) reviewed work on production processes, national and international media culture, and soap operas for development and education. Three years later TRENDS (Volume 13, No. 4) returned with an update on soap operas and telenovelas (Mazziotti, 1993). That brief note focused mostly on reception studies and added material on soap operas from different countries and on the varied production models at work.

This present issue of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS will focus on research about soap operas published in the last 15 years, that is, from the year 2000 to

the present. This more recent research shows one key difference: the interest in soap opera has become worldwide. This appears in the programs that people listen to or watch and in communication researchers who themselves come from different countries.

A. Some characteristics of soap operas

Scholars describe the soap operas in a number of different ways: they represent a serial format with programs continuing from one day to the next; they may take the form of a series of programs; they tend to feature similar plot lines. Each of the formats includes continuing characters and a continuing story. Soap operas themselves often feature melodramatic storylines, with the additional focus on the home and family, and appeal primarily to female viewers. Cox describes 10 storylines, beginning in the radio world that still mark soap operas:

1. The woman who struggles to maintain orderliness and provide for her [family] against imposing odds . . .
2. The woman who faces staggering career challenges pitted against the heartrending tug of being a wife and/or mother or sweetheart . . .
3. The woman who hails from a nondescript background and marries several rungs above her social strata . . .
4. The woman, while married, who is thrust into a romantic triangle . . .
5. A woman who attempts to successfully moderate intergenerational or second spouse conflicts that arise within a family . . .
6. A male or female protagonist who is generally recognized as a helping-hand figure, to whom everyone else appeals for problem solving, preferring good-natured tips and sage advice and occasionally even assisting in bringing wrongdoers to justice—all of this while processing acute doses of personal adversity . . .
7. Family stories in which life experiences seem to be plausible, nearer reality than in most soap operas . . .
8. Ethnic dramas with experiences, actions, and dialects favoring one sect . . .
9. A man is placed in family dilemmas normally encountered by a feminine figure, becoming the

chapter play's hero . . .

10. Characters operate against a backdrop of real-time action . . . (pp. 7–8)

Program episodes often feature overlapping stories, with multiple characters relating in overlapping ways. Wittebols (2004) offers a brief summary of five storytelling techniques that define soap operas:

- Seriality: A soap's most distinguishing characteristic is its continuity from one program to the next. Suspension of stories until the next episode is a primary element in developing audience loyalty.
- Real-time orientation: Soaps reflect an everyday world in which events flow as seamlessly as possible to create an air of realism. This is designed to give the audience a sense of immediacy. As they reflect the larger culture's calendar they provide a parallel to the viewer's own world.
- Seeming intimacy: This element fosters a sense of involvement or spectatorship for the audience without actually being there. . . .
- Story exposition: The manner in which stories are presented to audiences allows them to gain a sense of omniscience by grasping the overall set of relationships in the story. . . .
- Characteristics of the soap stories: Three sub-elements help define the types of themes found in soap operas: conflict and/or chaos/good and evil characters/and generally presenting a materially comfortable upper middle-class existence. (p. 3)

Each of these becomes part of the genre conventions, which make the soap opera both easy to produce and easy to follow.

Because the original programs in the United States found sponsorship with household goods companies—oftentimes selling cleaning products—the serial dramas received the somewhat derogatory title of a soap opera. In the early days of radio, the advertisers or their agencies produced the shows, hiring the writers and the actors and delivering the final product to the radio networks. In 1937 Proctor & Gamble, a leading company, alone spent \$4.5 million on radio advertising (Cox, 2005, p. 11). The form proved wildly successful. By the early 1940s approximately 75% of all daytime radio programming, that is programming between 9 AM and 6 PM, consisted of soap operas of one kind or another. On the various networks these numbered about 66 different daily soap opera programs. The soap operas themselves accounted for over one third of the income of radio stations in the U.S. during World War II (Horten, 2002, p. 147). Advertisers liked soap operas

(and this remains part of their success even today) for three key reasons: “Soaps are cheap to produce; soaps are effective in building audience loyalty; [and] soaps are profitable for networks” (Wittebols, 2004, p. 40).

The format itself has succeeded well in many countries, with, as we shall see, soap opera production in over 40 countries, representing every region of the world. The program properties and characteristics described above appear (with adaptation) in almost every country. The dominant form today is the televised soap opera, though some countries continue with radio soap operas. The programs take different titles (soap opera, telenovela, musalsal-s) in different countries and, in fact, have different features although the primary idea of a ongoing storyline, a melodramatic focus on emotion, and a focus on family issues seems to cut across all the different soap opera performances.

B. Studying soap opera

Communication researchers begin examining soap operas in the 1940s. Those early researchers, associated with Paul Lazarsfeld in the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University in New York, focused on the audiences for soap operas, with attention paid to the characteristics of the audiences, to the rationales for people's listening to and following soap operas, and to the advertising potential of soap operas. This research set the tone and agenda for much of what followed. Brunsdon (2000) maintains “For many years, Herta Herzog's 1944 article ‘What Do We Really Know about Daytime Serial Listeners?’, which was published with other articles on daytime serials by Rudolf Arnheim and Helen Kaufman in *Radio Research*, 42-3, remained the single most significant study of the (radio) soap opera audience” (p. 44). In that article she not only describes the audience characteristics but key motivations for following soap opera: “opportunities for wishful thinking . . . [filling] in the gaps in [the listeners'] own lives . . . [compensating] for their own failures” (Spence, 2005, p. 3). We will return to the research tradition she began later in this essay.

Other early communication researchers seemed to regard soap operas as a curiosity; a few offered theories to account for the intense audience involvement; many included them only within larger studies of other kinds of communication behavior. Most others found more interesting topics within mass communication. “Soap opera,” for example, does not appear in the index to the revised and extended edition of Schramm and Roberts' influential *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (1977).

The situation changed in the 1980s and 1990s, the period reviewed in the TRENDS issues cited above. In that time, the British cultural studies tradition regarded soap operas as a key part of mass culture; more importantly, feminist scholars identified soap operas as a “women’s genre” with a clear audience and format (Götz, 2004).

C. Soap opera in popular usage

The term “soap opera” appears frequently in English as a metaphor for certain kinds of events, experiences, or practices. Something that people perceive as overly dramatic, melodramatic, emotional, unpredictable, or in some ways out of control quickly gains the label of a soap opera. Often used in a dismissive manner, the term’s very use indicates how deeply this radio and television genre has permeated the culture.

Four examples from the period under review illustrate this. Both Catmur (2000) and Thussu (2009), discussing how we have turned the truly horrible into something mundane, something to be viewed, apply “soap opera” to war and terrorism. For example,

Thussu titles an introduction to news coverage, “Turning terrorism into a soap opera” (2009, p. 13). Stojanova (2005) finds current Russian films evolving into “soap opera glorifications” (p. 23) and Finkle (2005) uses the term to describe a new American talk show on money matters, asking: “Will Orman’s ‘financial soap opera’ work?” (p. 56).

D. Plan

This review will give a brief summary of the history of soap operas based on studies published in the last 15 years and then describe some current trends in soap operas. Next, the review will consider the soap opera audience and the fan culture connected with soap operas. Third, it considers studies of soap operas, grouping published research by broad themes. Fourth it will look at one particularly important type of soap opera: the education-education production. The next section examines how other communication researchers include soap operas in their work. Finally, the review will offer an impressionistic look at soap operas around the world.

2. The Life of Soap Operas

Scholars with an interest in soap opera have traced the history and antecedents of the genre, described the development of the form, and examined its changing environment. While some parts of the historical record—producers, commercial decisions, economic data, and even scripts—remain relatively available, actual program recordings prove more elusive, though the rise of radio and television archives has made it easier to locate these. Within these limitations a number of communication scholars have tried to provide the background to this genre.

A. History

The soap opera genre began on the U.S. radio networks of the 1930s and moved from there to Latin America, to Argentina and Brazil in the early 1940s (Rêgo, 2011). Cox (2005) covers the early years and provides a valuable reference history to radio soap operas in the U.S. in a “dictionary of radio soap opera” format. Absher (2002) fills in more detail with brief summary of the careers of Frank and Anne Hummert, the team behind over 30 soap operas and other radio programs in the U.S. Wittebols (2004) briefly high-

lights the role of another important writer: “Irna Phillips saw the potential of radio dramas not only to bring products to housewives’ attention but to generate the whole idea of the ‘American dream’ or the ‘American way of life’” (p. 31). As part of a large overview of radio broadcasting in the U.S., Nachman (2000) includes soap operas as one aspect of his history of popular culture in the United States.

Great Britain came later to the soap opera format. Hilmes (2007) recounts the history of *Front Line Family*, a 1949s British soap opera aired not in the UK but on the North American service as a propaganda attempt to bring the U.S. into the war. Warren (2005) and Liddiment (2010) describe the growth and success of the hugely popular television soap operas, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, tracing them from their beginnings to their respective 50th and 25th anniversaries on the air in 2010. MacDonnell (2013) adds a bit or more contemporary history to the British soap opera, discussing the trend to live episodes and the work of the production teams behind them.

Moran (2000) provides a comparative history, examining how the Australian program *The Restless*

Years, the Dutch *Goede Tijden, Slechte Tijden* and the German *Gute Zeiten, Schlechte Zeiten* developed across borders from shared antecedents. He concludes, “they stand in a complex relationship to the social order, both receiving but also constructing the representations through which citizens might articulate themselves. The Australianness, Dutchness, and Germanness of these artifacts are always both obvious and banal, yet subtle and elusive, conservative and petrified, yet progressive and challenging” (p. 92).

Scholars in both the U.S. and the UK paid attention to soap opera, with American studies in the 1940s examining audience characteristics and motivations. Later studies, particularly in Britain, considered how audiences made sense of the programming. Brunsdon (2000) and Schulz (2000) give overviews of this research history, with Brunsdon paying particular attention to feminist concerns. She also reports on changes in British terrestrial broadcast programming in the 1990s and the development of hybrid formats, some of which further the reach of the soap operas (Brunsdon, 2001).

With the established U.S. broadcasting networks struggling to develop their new television properties with daytime programming, they adapted their radio schedule for television after the Second World War. A few studies examine the history of particular television soap operas as, for example, *The Edge of Night* in the 1960s (Ford, De Kosnik, & Harrington, 2011a) or, more recently, *Queer as Folk* (Johnson, 2004). More researchers pay attention to the shifting fortunes of the U.S. soap opera later on. Turner (2000) charts the impact of the changing broadcast standards for television content by the Federal Communications Commission in the 1970s. Among other things, this resulted in more depictions of sexual content (Greenberg & Hofschild, 2000). Murphy (2013) traces the impact of that decision in one prime-time soap opera, *Peyton Place*, which, despite the FCC ruling, had to wrestle with the ABC network’s censorship guidelines. Mock (2013) adds to the picture of the move to prime-time soap operas with the story behind *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. Jordan (2007) looks at how the deregulation of ownership rules under the Reagan administration in the 1980s affected soap opera content and production practices (and profitability). Levine (2009) examines other forces that had an opposite effect on profitability in the 1980s and 1990s: the increase of viewing options, more working women, different program formats, and so on.

A number of researchers examine the trajectory of the soap opera outside of the English-speaking world. In addition to Rêgo’s (2011) work on the Brazilian radio soap opera, Maronna and Sánchez Vilela (2001) provide background on the tradition and role of serialized fiction, including the soap opera, in Uruguay between 1930 and 1970. Straubhaar (2009) offers a broader history of the soap opera genre over 60 years in the Latin American world, concentrating on Brazil and Mexico. Reimão (2011) carried the Brazilian history forward, calling attention to the role of the TV Globo networks in marketing not only soap operas, but scripts, recordings, and books. Ribke (2010) identifies at least one problem in writing the history of the soap opera in Brazil: the censorship of the military government from 1964–1985. He does note, however, that the censorship reports themselves may give indirect evidence of program content and policies. Da Silva Castro (2012) offers evidence of more recent TV Globo history in her analysis of the network’s marketing strategies to lower middle-class workers. Mato (2005) presents a case study of the more recent transnational approach to soap operas, studying how Spanish-language programming has adapted to include a U.S. audience, with, for example, references to Miami and changing understandings of the Hispanic identity. Communication researchers do not pay as much attention to the economic history of the soap opera; Medina and Barrón (2010) offer an introduction to this aspect of the Latin American soap opera industry.

Asia offers another window onto the historical development of soap operas. Dissanayake (2012) summarizes historical work on the soap opera in Japan and India. Both Gokulsing (2004) and Munshi (2010) include material on the history of the genre in India. Chakrabarti (2014) offers some background to a change in the family focus on Indian soap opera around the turn of the millennium, arguing that the convergence of three historical forces led the industry to adapt its programming: “(1) in marketing, a radical ‘bottom-of-the-pyramid’ approach; (2) in TV, the industry’s attempts to find audiences in large numbers, mediated by the structure of the Indian audience measurement system; and (3) Hindu nationalists’ focus on ‘middle-class’ audiences” (p. 473).

B. Challenges

The last 10 years have witnessed tremendous pressure on the soap opera format, particularly in the U.S., Britain, Australia, and Europe. Long regarded as

an inexpensive kind of production, soap operas have seen costs rise, particularly in comparison to reality television genres, which demand fewer writers or established stars (Ault, 2001). A strike by the Writers Guild of America in 2007–2008 led to non-union writers and protests, which affected viewership in the U.S. (Consoli, 2008). The move away from soap operas appears in lower program ratings in the U.S. (Consoli, 2004, 2007; Jacobs, 2005). Proctor & Gamble Co., a leading and long-time advertiser, has found the ratings decrease so disappointing as to cut its advertising budget (Steinberg, 2008). Steinberg (2010) also points to the shrinking daytime audience due to the increased number of women working outside the home. The ABC and CBS networks in the U.S. replaced their leading soap operas *All My Children* and *Guiding Light* with talk shows, reducing network production costs by 35–40% (Albiniak, 2011). In Australia, soap opera production budgets have dropped by 36% and program hours by 80% (Bosanquet, 2006).

Soap operas continue to face pressure from other programming formats. In addition to the producers' search for cheaper programming, audiences have a preference for reality television, which can combine the soap opera dramatic style with a voyeuristic sense of watching "real people" in dramatic settings (Roscoe, 2001). Meyers (2015) recognizes these struggles of the soap opera genre, but rather than bemoaning its loss of influence on American popular culture sees instead a greater resilience in a "convergence culture." Dhoest (2005) marks a similar rise of hybrid reality programming across the world, in programs like *The Osbournes* in America and *The Pfaffs* in Belgium. Like soap opera exports these program formats prove popular for their adaptation to local cultures.

C. Following soap operas

A number of writers, both academic and in the popular press, specialize in tracking soap operas. For example, Consoli (2000) reports on U.S. soap operas, noting which have faced cancellation due to low ratings. Feuer (2002) offers commentary on the U.S. show, *Guiding Light*; Albiniak (2004) does something similar for a number of programs, but from a critical stance in light of the Federal Communications Commissions relaxed guidelines for all programming, particularly in terms of violence or sexual material. Leppert and Wilson (2008) focus on Lauren Conrad, an actor appearing on several reality soap operas, analyzing how the producers have "created" a celebrity in order to develop greater viewer identification. Sergi

and Dodds (2003) comment on how to "read" the Australian *Neighbours*, suggesting that audiences should take production constraints into account.

D. Moving forward

With a certain amount of turmoil in the soap opera world, the industry and soap opera scholars have attempted to diagnose and repair the problem. Rios and Castañeda (2011) offer a collection of essays, which discuss the state of soap operas around the world. They divide the book into four sections: Contextualizing the historical, industrial, and cultural flow of telenovelas and soap opera productions; Global case studies of serial television dramas and the emergence of new audiences; Sexuality and gender as powerful forces in telenovelas and soap operas; and Enduring issues for television in the era of global hybridity. Individual essays address the challenges to the soap opera genre in different parts of the world and, particularly in the case studies, track how different producers have responded.

Ford, De Kosnik, and Harrington (2011b) combine academic essays with interviews of soap opera producers and researchers to offer a "state of the soap opera." In their introduction, they identify three possible opportunities for the soap opera: to build on its history, taking advantage of familiar narratives and narrative forms and of beloved characters; to experiment with new forms of production and distribution; and to learn from their diverse audiences (pp. 16–20).

In the face of the challengers to soap operas, producers and broadcasters will, as Ford, De Kosnik, and Harrington point out, look for ways to revitalize the genre. Merayo (2011) argues from the development of the soap opera genre in Latin America and its export to other countries that this adaptation to national audiences will work in its favor. Both Garrett (2004) and Primera (2012) see possibilities in similar strategies for British and Venezuelan soap operas, respectively. Turner (2005) takes a similar approach, holding that keeping the local audience in mind will strengthen the genre, even in hybrid forms. Using examples from Australian soap opera and reality television, he examines how the "local" works to supplement the formal structures of the soap opera genre. Dunleavy (2005), drawing on exports from Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, considers how the localization of international content has extended the genre.

For some national producers this possibility of adapting existing programming to other local audiences and increasing their exports provides a lifeline. Slade (2003), after noting this pattern, suggests ways to

assess such exports on their own terms. Bielby and Harrington (2005) encourage a similar shift for U.S. media scholars: rather than a focus on U.S. exports, they should look at the more complex global flow of programming. This, they argue, will also require a re-thinking of the cultural imperialism model.

Sometimes national broadcasters develop programming strategies that draw on the genre. Pjajcíková and Szczepanik, (2014) offer a case study of the Czech public broadcaster's attempts to compete with commercial operators for audience share by introducing soap opera-like elements in *The First Republic*, an historical crime drama. An ethnography of the production illustrates how the various stakeholders redefined "post-socialist production culture."

A number of writers identify strategies that broadcast networks have embraced in order to shore up the soap opera genre. Becker (2008) reports on how Disney-ABC in the U.S. enhances advertising by product placement in its three soap operas. Albiniak (2013) notes that both ABC and CBS cross-promote their soap operas. Several cable channels in the U.S., with narrower market segmentation, have increased soap opera production (Lafayette, 2012; Benson, 2006b). Others see a benefit of importing and "translating" successful soap operas from other countries to the U.S. market, with *Yo Soy Better, la Fea* a leading example (Albiniak, 2012). Still others will market Spanish-language telenovelas to the U.S. Spanish-speaking audience (Albiniak (2006) or increase the number of Hispanic characters on English-language soap operas (Martin, 2004).

The U.S. networks also take advantage of the online world. Almost all shows have a web presence, with some developing a social media strategy (Albiniak, 2013) and others, online networks of soap operas, moving shows from broadcast or cable to online distribution (Becker, 2008; Benson, 2006a). Zanatta and Zoppeddu (2015) outline a similar multi-platform strategy of the Italian broadcaster RAI and its subsidiary Rainet. One of their case studies deals with the Italian soap opera *Un posto al sole* (A Place in the Sun). Oikawa, John, and Avancini (2012) attempt to measure the online circulation of soap operas. Tracking two Rede Globo productions in Brazil, they estimate viewership, note audience responses on social media, and the network's reactions. In particular, the study "covers two main areas: the strategies adopted by Rede Globo to make these telenovelas circulate in different platforms, and the flows of co-production work developed by the receivers/consumers" (p. 106).

The digital world provides other opportunities as well. Lynch (2009) describes a development project called MISSI (Multi-agent Interactive Storytelling Software Initiative). This software uses artificial intelligence agents to generate story episodes that could appear in soap operas or in formats modeled on that genre. Rincón (2011) expresses a certain skepticism about the future of broadcast soap opera while noting the opportunities for the genre presented online. He points out the possibilities for "narrative experiments," new producers, different aesthetics, and so on through the use of a platform like YouTube (p. 43).

In order to raise advertising revenues, soap opera producers more frequently engage in product placement of various kinds: an episode of *All My Children* served as the product launch venue for the perfume Enchantment (Albiniak, 2005); Telemundo's *Dame Chocolate* features the cleaning products of Clorox (Wentz, 2007); and Ford automobiles feature prominently in other Telemundo programs, even to the point where Ford market research guides the writers in character development (Wentz, 2010). Lisboa Filho, Petermann, and Lopes (2013) propose a theoretical model for such placement, tested with a content analysis of a Brazilian soap opera. They found "that the merchandising makes a play of approach and shuffling between fantasy and reality and that, in some cases, with subtlety, offers brands, products, services and a soundtrack with the intention of approaching the viewer, causing consumer desires" (p. 222). This has led to a noticeable shift in the ways products appear on Brazilian programs (Marques Carriço Ferreira & Oliveira Santana, 2013).

Several producers have more fully embraced education-entertainment programming (Miller, 2004). One non-profit, the Population Media Center, has even produced its own web-streamed soap opera, *East Los Angeles*, to educate teens about issues of sexuality (Redmon & Averett, 2013).

In another demonstration of the narrative and culture reach of the soap opera genre, video game designers have embraced a number of soap opera features to make that medium more compelling to gamers. Lucas (2015), following Brown (1987) identifies four: the serial form, the use of time, multiple plots and characters, and a focus on dialogue. Lucas points out the parallels in games:

- [serial form]: "Characterized by endings which are left ambiguous and open to interpretation; often coupled with nonlinear game goals; in many

cases, endings are designed to pave the way for sequel installments”

- [time parallels actual time]: Characterized by interactive periods of time in gameplay, such as time limits, day/night distinctions, seasonal and calendar-based changes, and internal clock progression; all of which can affect gameplay and story experience”
- [plot and character]: “Characterized by the presence of many different characters who will provide insights, depth, and even challenges to the players and plotlines”
- [dialogue]: Characterized by character development and balancing personalities and building relationships throughout the video game progression” (Lucas, 2015, p. 94).

Lucas argues that these factors lead to greater immersion into the game world and function to bring the

gamer back much as the soap opera genre built up the loyalty of viewers.

Meyers (2015) presents a cautionary note as a coda to the industry discourse that “has labeled soaps as outdated casualties of convergence that must be sacrificed in order to align television with its ‘new’ future.” She argues that “such a view ignores the role the soap opera has played throughout the social and technological transitions that have shaped television culture. By looking closely at industry discourses surrounding the American soap opera from its inception to the contemporary moment of crisis, this essay advocates for a historical approach to convergence” (p. 333). The old may not disappear, though it will change, perhaps in directions that some of the other articles reviewed here have pointed out.

3. Watching Soap Opera Viewers

Communication researchers, as noted in the introduction to this essay, have long studied the audiences for soap operas. In the 1940s the initial research done by Herzog attempted both to describe the soap opera listeners and to indicate some of their motivations for extended listening to soap operas. This began a long tradition in which the audience (first of the radio soap operas then of the television ones) captured the interest of communication researchers. In the larger, but later, tradition of audience research, soap opera held a kind of privileged place, partly because of the intense audience devotion to soap operas and partly because of the size of that audience. Insights from soap operas might be applied to other audience segments; or, on the other hand, more general audience findings might also apply to the soap operas. Among the theories that researchers have proposed to explain audience engagement with soap operas include parasocial interaction, uses and gratifications, psychological motivation, and feminist theory.

Many of the researchers whose work appears here begin with an acknowledgment of the tradition (Baym, 2000; Brunsdon, 2000; Götz, 2004; Munshi, 2010; Quin, 2004; Scodari, 2004; Spence, 2005; von Felizzen, 2004b).

Götz (2004) offers this summary of viewers’ and listeners’ motivations:

In a 1944 study, entertainment, emotional stimulation, and realism were found to be the principal motives for regular listening to soaps on the radio (Herzog, 1944). Uses-and-gratification studies conducted since the 1980s have added the motives of avoidance/escape, social status gains, and the search for information (cf., Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Lemish, 1985; Rubin, 1985).

To understand the enthusiasm for soaps, it is very important to understand that it is a women’s genre. In soaps, women characters appear much more frequently and in roles that carry more weight in terms of the plot than they do in other television programs (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998, p. 167; Brown, 1994, p. 49). The contents of soaps revolve around themes that, due to socialization, occupy women’s thoughts—themes such as relationships and personal and social problems. The central strategy for solving problems in this genre is person-centered conversation (Brown, 1994). This is the form of women’s communication that developed historically in a civilization dominated by men. (pp. 65–66).

Quin (2004) adds this on how audience members understand what they watch or hear:

Since the mid-80s, research into media audiences has fundamentally changed the way we view textual meaning and the audience itself. In 1980 Stuart Hall said: “there seems some ground for thinking that a new and exciting phase in so-called audience research, of a quite new kind, may be opening up” (Hall, 1980, p. 131). This audience research was convincing in its argument that there is “more to watching TV than what’s on the screen” (Morley, 1986, p. 47). The (then) new audience research offered a radical reconceptualization of the audience. The work done by Hobson (1980, 1982), Brunsdon (1981) and Morley (1986) revealed how the social conditions of television viewing affect how and what television means. From the work of Katz and Liebes (1985), Ang (1985), and Hodge and Tripp (1986) we gained new insights into the polysemy and ambiguity of media texts. . . . The new audience research shared a view of the audience member as a socially constructed subject. In this understanding the social subject has a history, lives in a particular social formation (a mix of class, gender, age, religion, language, etc.), and is constituted by a complex cultural history that is both social and textual. Briefly, the research found that audiences exerted substantial control of the mass communication process. (pp. 89–90)

With this general background, we turn to research on the audiences for soap operas published in the last 15 years. This section will look at audience characteristics, including a special section on children and teens as soap opera audiences; audience engagement or involvement with soap operas; how audiences make meaning; type of viewing; and fans.

A. Characteristics

Researchers since Herzog have shown an interest in the characteristics of the audiences for soap operas. Clearly, sponsors seek demographic data to better place advertising; program producers seek similar data to better create plot lines that will engage their viewers and listeners. Scholars look at audience characteristics to better understand viewer motivations.

Several studies have described the soap opera audience in Portugal. Cunha (2010) draws on data from MediaMonitor Marktest to understand a decline in viewing of the (Brazilian) Globo network prime time soap operas in Portugal. She also ties these figures to reception studies “to understand the behaviors and preferences of the Portuguese against the Brazilian

soap operas” (p 92). Carriço Ferreira (2014) also uses Marktest data to analyze Portuguese audience share of the Brazilian versus Portuguese soap operas, but places her study in the larger context of station competition in the Portuguese television system, scheduling, soap opera plots, and local production.

Because marketers and scholars have long regarded soap operas as a “women’s medium,” a number of audience studies consider gender. Hobson (2006) offers a self-reflective review of her work on soap operas from 1982 through to 2003. The article includes “various audience studies: women, young unemployed men, young male offenders, black youths, and young schoolgirls” and then connects this research to her theorization of “individual readings of televisual forms” (p. 121). As part of a larger study of the audiences for British television, Redfern (2015) draws on data collected in 2011 for a British Film Institute study on program preference by age and gender. Not surprisingly, the data show that “male audiences prefer sports, factual entertainment, and culture programs and female audiences reality TV/talent shows, game/quiz/panel shows, chat shows and soap operas” (p. 57). However, a look at the audiences in the U.S. by Berman (2006) reveals “the changing attitude of male viewers towards soap operas in the U.S.” Men who would not watch traditional soap opera, even those shown in prime time, have embraced soap-opera like shows, such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *Desperate Housewives*. Berman attributes some of the male viewership to production strategies including a change of venue and “tougher” plot lines (p. 38).

Paul and Shim (2006) attempted to expand the study of audience characteristics beyond age and gender to personality types. In their review of scholarly work on personality types and viewing of soap operas, they summarized the past work in this way:

First, viewers obtain a sense of reality by tracking and sharing every mood or thoughts of soap opera characters. In addition, viewers can escape from boredom and tensions (avoidance) and get entertainment (diversion) from soap opera viewing. Finally, viewers seek a vicarious opportunity to interact with others (social utilities). Other researchers suggest soap opera viewing also provides something to do in order to pass idle time, as a voyeuristic outlet, and as a source from which to gather social information The tendency among those high in traits associated with greater levels of neuroticism to try to escape from negative moods has also been considered in relation to a preference for soap operas. . . .

[T]hose who reported experiencing chronic loneliness were more likely to use soap operas to pass idle time. Thus it seems that individuals who express higher levels of neuroticism will prefer soap opera viewing, relative to those lower neuroticism. (p. 9)

Predicting then that a person's stable personality type would predict preference for a variety of programming types, including soap operas, they found a significant but weak effect of neuroticism on soap opera preference (pp. 17–18). The two reported the results more formally the next year (Shim & Paul, 2007), noting stronger effects for viewers of reality television than for those of soap operas when considering the the personality characteristics of psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism. In a more diagnostically oriented study, Fogel and Carlson (2006) surveyed older women about their viewing habits and compared that with the results of standard cognitive tests. Their results showed that “talk shows ($P < 0.05$) or soap operas ($P < 0.05$) as a favorite television category were consistently associated with poorer scores on all cognitive outcomes in both unadjusted and adjusted analyses. Clinically significant cognitive impairment across domains were associated with watching talk shows ($OR = 7.3$; 95% CI = 1.9, 28.4) and soap operas ($OR = 13.5$; 95% CI = 3.7, 49.5)” (p. 226). They recommend that clinicians include questions about viewing habits to help identify candidates for further screening on cognitive impairment.

B. Children and young people

The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth, and Media, part of the NORDICOM institute of communication ressearch for the Nordic countries has long studied children and young people's media habits. Having received questions from members of their network about children's viewing of more extreme or adult fare (von Felitzen, 2004a, pp. 7–8), they solicited essays from their larger network around the world on young people, soap operas, and reality television. Von Felitzen explains the concerns in this way:

What motivated this Yearbook is the fact that the transformation of the traditional soap opera into certain more extreme soaps, and the emergence of the recent “global” reality TV formats have whipped up storms of controversy in a great number of countries, and generated worries about how such programs are received by, and may influence, young viewers—because children from all over the world watch adult programming from an early age. The same is true of

radio listening in areas where television is less common. Both soap operas and reality TV have, for example, been accused of striving for sensation by seasoning the contents with sex, nudity, promiscuity (especially in an age when HIV/AIDS is a great concern), bad language, and racism; they have been accused of promoting voyeurism and exhibitionism, and of contributing to new lifestyle standards that prioritize publicity, glamour, competition, heightened self-centeredness, individualism, and oppressing other people—yes, contributing to mental violence. (von Felitzen, 2004b, p. 12)

The members of the research network provide information on children's viewing of and learning from soap opera and reality television. About half of the essays that von Felitzen (2004a) has collected present data from around the world on children, teens, and soap operas. Von Felitzen provides a very useful summary of that work in her introduction (2004b), providing answers to questions such as “How much do children and young people watch soap operas and reality TV?” (pp. 14–17); “The meanings of soap operas, telenovelas, and drama serials for young people” (pp. 17–25); and entertainment-education (pp. 39–41).

Individual contributors offer more detail. Pérez Ornia (2004) gives statistics from Spain for viewing among 4- to 12-year olds. Given the television schedules and the low demand for children's programming, this group tends to watch programming aimed to the general audience. Drawing on data from an audience research firm, he estimates that “‘Telenovelas and soap operas’ constitute 3% of the time that children 4 to 12 years dedicate to television. Almost all of these programs are Latin American and are found in TVE1’s schedule” (p. 52). As a context for this figure, Pérez Ornia notes that the four highest categories for Spanish children are cartoons (17.7%), advertising (15%), feature films (12.4%), and news (11.9%). In addition to the soap operas, children also watch soap-opera like reality television.

Recognizing high viewership rates for soap operas among German children, Götz (2004) summarizes work addressing a key question: “the study examined why 6- to 19-year-olds are fascinated by the genre of daily soap operas and the *Big Brother* format” (pp. 66–67). As a background statistic, she offers this example: “*Good Times, Bad Times* (*Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten*) has a marketing share of over 50% for 10- to 15-year-old girls. This means that every second young female adolescent viewing television at this time is

watching *Good Times, Bad Times*, often five times a week for many years" (p. 65). The study found three functional reasons to explain soap opera viewing: "the situational function: soaps structure everyday life and create a specific situation" (p. 67); "the interactive function: a new subject of conversation every day" (p. 68); and "the subjective-thematic function: everyone makes something different out of the soap opera" (p. 69). In this last category, Götz notes that soap operas serve as entertainment, information providers, counselors, thought-provokers, and need satisfyers for the young viewers. Quin (2004) provides a similar overview of young people's soap opera viewing in Australia. Using an ethnographic study of 10 groups of girls from 12 to 14 years old, she found that the shows provided pleasure, a chance to show knowledge and predict characters' future behaviors, and an opportunity to project themselves into the situations. Simonnes and Gjelsten (2004) report on a wider Norwegian study of television viewing in the 11–12 and 15–16 year old groups, comparing the values the children learn in school and the "parallel school" of the media. Hobson (2004) updates her ongoing research on British soap opera viewers for the Yearbook, interviewing a group of 13–14 year olds. All were avid soap opera viewers. Asked why they watched, "the words which they used most to describe what was the appeal of the genre were: 'interesting,' 'funny,' 'good,' 'exciting,' 'good acting,' 'good storylines.' The most used adjective was 'funny' and this was the highest praise in contrast with the harshest criticism, which was for a program to be 'boring'" (p. 135). Not surprisingly, her interview with an older teen group (17–18) revealed a more sophisticated and critical understanding of the shows. Hobson offers this general conclusion, based on her interviews:

Far from being badly affected by the storylines, these young people revealed that they questioned the representations and were aware that these were media productions which also had a function as entertainment for the broadcasters. Their sophistication as viewers was evident. Their viewing patterns showed that they chose programs which were related to their youth, their favorite characters were either young, or ordinary, and programs had primarily to be funny. (p. 144)

In a similar ethnographic study that included younger viewers in Brazil, Machado-Borges (2004) "argues that viewers' engagement with telenovelas should be seen as part of the practices of coping and hoping that make up their lives. Their dialoguing with

telenovelas is neither duped nor completely subversive, and it does not preclude laughter or pleasure—it is a way for viewers to imbue their lives with fiction, images and fantasy, not only to momentarily escape from reality, but also as a way to hope and act in order to be embedded as a subject, as 'someone who counts,' in a society where 'counting' is anything but self-evident for the majority of the population" (p. 154).

Gultig (2004) reports on young viewers reactions to *Yizo Yizo 2* (This Is It 2), a South African soap-opera like educational drama geared to addressing sensitive topics (rape, drug use, gangs, etc.). He notes, "Our study suggests that young people aged 13 to 20 read the series in a far more nuanced way and are more discerning than their parents or the media think they are. They are also better readers of television than their parents" (p. 228). More information and a critical analysis of the program appears in Smith (2004).

De Melo Rocha (2009) offers a different perspective on youth and soap operas. Examining the Mexican telenovela *Rebelda*, she analyzes how the producers employ a strategy of using images of youth to engage their imaginations and build audience loyalty among them.

C. Audience engagement

Audience members engage with soap operas in many ways, ranging from structuring their days around a viewing schedule to learning new behaviors from them to using them as tools for shaping or understanding identity. The engagement can also explain audience loyalty to particular shows.

To account for ongoing and intense viewer loyalty to American soap operas, Beck (2012) argues "that soap operas matter to viewers because the multi-generational nature of audiences and mediated texts foster interconnections between viewer and textual narratives" and that "increasingly blurred boundaries between ever-emergent personal, public, and mediated narratives" engages viewers through complicity in the narratives themselves (p. 152). Ribeiro Ferin Cunha and Tranquillín Silva (2014) employ theories of memory and collective memory to explain why women in Portugal and Brazil constitute long-term audiences. Their interviews note "the ways these women remember and have experienced the viewing with the family, and how they discuss, using memories and comparisons, gender, female identity, patriarchal power, sexuality and sensuality" (p. 22).

Interviewing audience members who followed the British soap opera, *EastEnders*, Madill and

Goldmeier (2003) found that the viewers identified seven categories of thematic material that created a sense of community for them: “reduced troubles, gender, relaxation, social activity, community, realism, and Britishness” (p. 471). The authors suggest that these result in a kind a therapeutic viewing experience.

Criticizing “orthodox theories” of the soap opera audience as assuming greater similarity than exists, Wilde (2009) “investigates how viewers discuss and interpret representations of impairment and disability, focusing in particular on prime-time soap operas” (p. 4). She continues, “Within this project, engagements and identifications, along with interpretations and performances of self, are evaluated against the model reader(s) of soap opera narratives, highlighting significant dimensions of identification and subjectivity, exploring a transactionally constituted sense of self” (p. 5).

Engagement can also predict learning outcomes from entertainment-education. Conceptualizing audience engagement as involving affective-referential and cognitive-critical involvement, Sood (2002) analyzes “data from a popular 104-episode entertainment-education radio soap opera from India, *Tinka Tinka Sukh*” and “argues that the concept of audience involvement is multidimensional, and serves as a mediator for promoting behavior change” (p. 153). The audience engagement forms a first step towards both self- and collective efficacy in acting on the program content.

Indirect learning also results from following soap operas, what Simonnes and Gjelsten (2004) called the “parallel school.” Based on interviews with regular viewers of the New Zealand soap opera *Shortland Street*, de Bruin (2010, 2011b) concludes that audience members evaluated the life skills of the characters and indirectly judged their own life skills. Other interviews (de Bruin, 2011a) indicate indirect learning of “cultural citizenship” through viewing the program. Using social cognitive theory, Tamborini, Weber, Eden, Bowman, and Grizzard (2010) measured the impact of repeated exposure to soap operas on moral judgment. They report, “Results demonstrated the effect of prolonged exposure on both the polarization of dispositions toward characters and a trend in moral judgments toward social convention” (p. 621). Regular program viewing, even over a seven-week period, does lead to indirect learning about things as significant as moral judgment.

Advertisers and sponsors also show interest in indirect learning, both of positive attitudes to products and to things that can hinder a marketing message. Stern, Russell, and Russell (2007) look specifically at

negative influences of soap opera engagement. Both the literature and their own study indicates unhealthy engagement; they worry that this phenomenon can adversely affect product placement, for example. A more positive engagement with a Korean soap opera emerged among Japanese fans of *Winter Sonata*. Among other things, viewers of the drama showed more positive attitudes towards Korea and a greater desire to visit Korea (and show sites) as tourists (Kim, Agrusa, Lee, & Chon, 2007).

People’s engagement with soap operas can also affect their sense of identity. While some governments fear the influence of outside cultures through soap operas (Syed & Runnel, 2014), research offers a more nuanced view of soap opera audiences more consciously negotiating issues of identity. In a study of Malaysian women, Syed and Runnel found “that Malay women are neither passive, vulnerable consumers of foreign soap, nor easily manipulated by those who claim authority; rather, they confidently assert their autonomy as consumer-citizens of a modern Islamic state” (p. 304). U.S. Hispanic viewers of Mexican telenovelas also more consciously used the programs to make sense of their situations. “From the data, the researcher concluded that the telenovela, within certain limits, reflected some of the national, ethnic, gender, and class tensions that defined the viewers’ identities as working-class, Mexican American girls” (Mayer, 2003, p. 479). Similarly, Uribe Alvarado (2007) found that immigrants from Mexico living in Los Angeles used the telenovelas to manage the change in their lives. In a Brazilian ethnographic study, Sifuentes and Ronsini (2011) explored how soap operas helped to shape the identity of young working class women. In comparison with other sources of information, they conclude, “The soap opera is also essential, because if, on the one hand, [it] (re) produces a traditional female model—in which motherhood and marriage are female priorities—the other, gives evidences of gender equality representations, which they don’t experience in their daily lives” (p. 131).

D. Audiences and meaning

Drawing on established theory, a number of researchers attempt to describe in more detail how specific audiences interpret or negotiate the meaning of soap operas. Several point out that the contexts of that interpretive work has expanded beyond the soap opera itself. Milton (2015) looks at how South African viewers use Twitter to “negotiate and reflect upon issues of rep-

resentation on SABC2's [South African Broadcast Company, channel 2] flagship soap opera *7de Laan*, which professes to be a multicultural soap opera, paying reverence to the diverse cultural, ethnic and linguistic make-up of South Africa" (p. 245). She notes that the viewers use the social network to frame the discourse first proposed in the program. Malian viewers also have more media options as they make sense of U.S. and Brazilian soap operas. Schulz (2007) looks at "public subjectivity" as viewers rearrange images of consumerism and daily experience to fit their local situation.

In a contribution to Pacific Islander studies, Uppal (2009) investigated how audiences in Fiji made sense of New Zealand's *Shortland Street*. Focus group discussions showed that "the audiences, now exposed to much of global television are aware of their negotiations with the media texts, thus defying the one directional view of cultural imperialism" (abstract).

Studying soap operas and young people in Holland, de Bruin presents three studies on how different groups make sense of their viewing. An early study (de Bruin, 2001) offers data on how teenage girls from different ethnic backgrounds interpreted the Dutch version of *Good Times, Bad Times*. After reviewing the literature on how ethnicity affects interpretation by positioning the audience, de Bruin (2003) summarizes the results of a study of how a multicultural audience responds to soap operas and police-themed serials. "Preliminary results show that while young people from diverse ethnicities talk a lot about soaps in their daily lives, they only seldomly discuss police series" (p. 8), something de Bruin attributes to the story-telling and generic features of the programs. Finally, a more complex study (2006) presents

three "active" ways in which teenage girls and boys from diverse ethnic backgrounds interpret this soap, using the concept of "performative style" to analyze the results of 20 focus group interviews. One performative style revolves around questions of morality and sex, one focuses on specific characters, and one looks at the soap as a whole. By employing these performative styles in talking about the soap, young people construct a particular set of performances of the self. Rather than being influenced by the characters, storylines and representations of the soap, they use them for their own purposes. (p. 1)

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the publication of *¡Cuéntame en qué se quedó...! La telenovela como fenómeno social* (Covarrubias, Bautista, &

Uribe, 1994), a book dealing with the reception and interpretations of soap operas among families from Colima, Castro (2007) summarizes current work in reception studies.

E. Types of viewing

Many studies of soap opera audiences study individual viewers, although a great deal of evidence exists for communal viewing: Ly (2006) and Schultz (2007) both describe such viewing in Mali. Tager (2004) specifically describes communal viewing by Zulu-speaking students in university residence halls in South Africa, offering an ethnographic study of the viewing process itself as well as of student motivations for watching the soap opera.

Other studies examine international or transnational viewing. Barrera and Bielby (2001) focus on Spanish-speaking immigrants in the United States, who watch Mexican telenovelas. The viewers indicated a number of reasons for watching. "For the women we interviewed, watching telenovelas provided a way for them to remember Latin America, often in great detail" (p. 8). Others, even primary English speakers, wanted to hear the language to maintain their fluency in Spanish. They also showed a clear preference for characters: "They identified more with the women characters who challenge the traditional female roles of dependency, long suffering, and submission" (p. 12), but they also valued the depiction of the family on the shows. Watching soap operas across borders in effect allowed the viewers to maintain cultural bonds. Other international viewers see in the soap operas a window into a wider world, particularly when their own sense of identity is weak. Jirattikom's (2008) study of the Shan community, living on the border of Myanmar and Thailand, indicates this need for identity but also explains how the shows indirectly encourage migration by preparing viewers for a different culture, despite the viewers' "ambivalent sense of interaction with mediated modernity" (p. 30).

A new category of soap opera audience has emerged with the growth of digital culture. In addition to terrestrial and satellite transmission, broadcasters now make soap operas available online. Jiang and Leung (2012) applied a uses and gratifications model to Chinese Internet audiences of American and Korean soap operas. "The results show that narrative appeal, viewing habits, and gender were predictors of viewing preference. Lifestyles were significantly linked to gratifications sought. Frequent American TV drama view-

ers tended to be motivated by learning about American language, culture, and fashion; attracted by the complicated plot; and preferred online viewing” (p. 159).

F. Fans

Fans constitute a particularly powerful and vocal subset of the audiences of soap operas, so much so that they have attracted their own set of studies. Fans not only watch the programs, but discuss the programs (as seen in some of the ethnographic studies reported above), create their own content, write story lines, create videos (Ng, 2008), maintain far-flung and wide ranging online networks (Baym, 2000), and so on. In fact, fan studies has become a recognizable “discipline” within popular culture studies. Though soap opera fan studies appears only incidentally, Ford’s (2014) overview of fan studies provides a valuable introduction to the area. He describes 20 years of development, from the landmark books, *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins, 1992) and *Enterprising Women* (Bacon-Smith, 1992), to more recent conferences. The history also shows a gendered split in approaches: “a more explicit ‘fanboy’ focus—looking at ‘affirmational fandom’ practices . . . in which fans operate to varying degrees within the prevailing logics of the content producer” and “a more explicit ‘fangirl’ focus—focused on ‘transformational fandom’ practices . . . aimed at reconstituting media texts outside their original context for the fan community’s own needs and desires” (p. 56). The digital world has increased the scope of activities for fans, from simply discussion groups to showcases for elaborately produced video material. Ford goes on to describe the great variety of fans (every kind of media production seems to have its own dedicated viewers) and how these fans have in some ways redefined the notion of audience. He notes, “many modes of engagement and action once primarily considered ‘fan activities’ are now how people engage with, around, and about political news, hot-button cultural issues, civic media, goods and services, and even their professional life. In short, some active audience activities once labeled ‘fannish’ and considered marginal are now accepted and readily used forms of daily engagement” (p. 66). Fans have not only redefined engagement but have also created a valued marketing segment.

Baym (2000) sets out to describe and conceptualize online soap opera fan groups. In one of the earliest studies of these groups—the ones she describes interact on a Usenet newsgroup—Baym offers a way to study online communities and the topics and practices that define online communities. As background for that

study, she draws on years of online postings to provide a detailed description of this soap opera audience and gives an ethnography of its interpretive practices, which she describes as “personalization,” “character interpretation,” and “speculation” (pp. 71–82). Another feature of the community arises from its informative practices: “updates” on shows, “spoilers” that tell what will occur in upcoming episodes, “trivia,” and “sightings,” which describe seeing a soap opera star in another role (pp. 83–90). Each of these practices has a social function within the larger community of fans. The fan communities also criticize the shows, perhaps in more detail than established television critics, and assess them in ways that the show producers track. In some ways the online fan groups continue the fan clubs of the past, but add a much greater interactive quality, not only writing letters to the producers or actors, but creating a kind of pressure group. Baym notes, too, how the online interaction led to a certain kind of interpersonal relation, one that foreshadowed today’s social media world.

Three studies examine specific soap operas in the online world. One demonstrates another kind of fan activity, one with a more pragmatic bent. With rumors that the U.S. soap opera, *Another World* faced cancellation, fans banded together in a campaign to keep the show on the air. Interviews with campaign participants showed that “their perceptions of success were closely correlated to how connected they became to the soap community” (Scardaville, 2005, p. 881).

“*The Archers*, first broadcast on BBC radio in 1951, is the oldest radio soap opera in the world still running, and the daily broadcasts (Sunday–Friday) and weekly ‘Omnibus’ on Sunday morning attract a large audience of around 4.5 million listeners” (Thomas, 2009, p. 49). The BBC producers have encouraged fans with an online web presence, which includes message boards, program information, and online streaming of the programs. Thomas (2009) finds that fan groups of different ages interact with the site. Much like Baym, Thomas attempts two things in her study: to analyze “online fans’ own descriptions of their fandom and [to provide] the observation of the practice of that fandom online” (p. 51). Among other things, Thomas notes that online listening has removed the daily structure of tuning in at a given time, but that it has added a different kind of community dimension.

Williams (2010) focuses on the Australian soap opera, *Good Neighbours*, describes the relationship between online fans and the program producers, and

explains how a fan relationship can both help and hurt a program.. She describes three purposes to the study:

Firstly, it seeks to expand upon the prior work conducted on soap opera audiences and to update research on *Neighbours*, a long-running and enduring text. Secondly, the paper contributes to work on the relationships between fans and those responsible for creating their objects of fandom . . . Whilst these interactions are often affable, fan/producer interactions may become antagonistic and lead to points of fissure or dispute. . . . When fans critique *Neighbours* and its creators they engage in . . . “anti-fandom,” maintaining ties to fan objects and other fans through mutual dislike and dismissal. . . . [T]his study considers what happens when invitations to audience tele-participation backfire and when fan expectations of producers/writers cease to be met. Thirdly, the paper explores such fan/producer relationships through sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s work on “cultural fields,” considering fans and producers as agents who occu-

py positions within the “broadcasting field” . . . and who engage in often fierce clashes over these positions and the expected behaviors associated with them. (p. 280)

This and other studies on online fan groups provide a deeply detailed look at how fan groups act, react, organize, and participate in their programs.

Turning from the online world, Wottrich (2012) offers an ethnographic study of older Brazilian soap opera viewers in their homes, watching along side them and observing their interactions. The study “demonstrated the importance of the soap opera in the construction of the women’s old age, marked through social class and gender relations” (p. 74). These older women, Wottrich notes, modeled growing old on soap opera characters.

Another kind of fan focuses on a particular character or even actor. Salvato (2007) focuses on the fans of the American actress Joan Van Ark and their ambivalent attitudes towards her career choices.

4. Studying Soap Operas

The academic study of soap operas mixes a number of stances, methodologies, and historically important topics. This section will present a brief summary of overviews of the recent work on soap operas, and then review studies that address the topics and methodologies of soap opera research. After the overview, we will consider studies defining or expanding the genre; feminist approaches and methodologies; and studies of the pleasures of viewing soap operas, of representation, of identity, of LGBT themes and concerns in soap operas, of sexuality in soap operas, of politics in soap operas, of the production of soap operas, of the aesthetics of soap operas, and of individual programs.

A. Overview

Ien Ang’s 1985 study of how viewers received the exported prime-time U.S. soap opera *Dallas* around the world forms a milestone in soap opera studies. A number of other scholars had begun to call attention to the soap opera, but this study positioned the soap opera not as a specialized area or as a kind of programming that catered to a minority audience, but as a genre that would redefine mass media audience studies. Ang (2007) recaps 25 years of new directions in

studying soap operas, paying attention to methodological questions. She also presents some information on the global soap opera business and the culture it has created. Ang (2010) furthers these reflections, adding notes on the more sophisticated viewing strategies of today’s international audiences.

In introducing a special issue of *Television & New Media* on telenovelas, Slade and Beckenham (2005) briefly describe the characteristics of the genre, some terminological issues, and the research tradition. In a similar vein, Bergamo (2006) traces the research on the Brazilian telenovela from the 1970s to the present, noting the shifting focus in research topics. Both Alvarado (2007) and Covarubias Cuéllar (2007) offer reflections on 20 years of Spanish-language soap opera research in a special edition of *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas*.

B. Genre

The soap opera forms one of the enduring and most widespread genres arising out of the U.S. broadcasting industry. Brown (1987) and others have identified its key features, which the introduction to this essay summarized. Over the last decade and a half, a

number of researchers have both developed and critiqued the body of work on soap opera genre. Silverblatt's (2007) handbook on genre provides theoretical background on the chief television genres, identifying key issues and points of discussion. In the chapter on soap operas, he identifies key formulaic structures—opening scene, narrator voice-over summary of previous episode, two segments of plot action, narrator voice-over suggesting problems ahead for the next episode (p. 37).

González (2003) also provides an introduction to and overview of the work on genre, but with a focus on the Spanish-language work, drawing a distinction between telenovela and soap opera in generic terms. Encouraging more comparative work across borders, he offers a general framework for investigation of the form. Pearson (2005) calls attention the generic qualities of the telenovela, focusing on the Mexican product. She argues that the Mexican telenovela mixes fact and fiction and “that the new tendency to feature a narrative style incorporating a more socially realistic treatment takes us closer to reality while keeping us firmly in the world of fantasy and illusion” (p. 400). Drawing on Bakhtin's work on speech genre, From (2006) “examines the relationship between one of the general characteristics of the genre, the fact that there is far more talk than action, and the ways people actually talk in the soap” (p. 229)

Literat (2011) illustrates how the soap opera genre has spread through adaptation to other forms, analyzing the “hip-hopera” *Trapped in the Closet*, which she argues borrows from soap opera and music video in a generic convergence that mimics the convergence of distribution channels. U.S. soap operas have also attempted to update genre conventions in the search for wider audience. Levine (2014) examines the new convention of “supercouples” that offered traditional romance while defying traditional expectation. “They also helped to address viewers' uncertainties about a world changed by the women's liberation movement, embracing the 'liberation' of young women free to embark on romantic adventures with the men they loved, but removing any sense of patriarchal injustice, offering instead a fantasy space apart from ongoing social problems of gender inequality” (p. 20).

Geraghty, a long-time and well-respected scholar of soap opera, comments on current developments in British television studies. She argues that a “critical orthodoxy” about soap opera genre has prevented original analysis and proposes a fresh look at the generic

developments in the British soap opera. “Opening up soap opera study to different methods and conceptual understandings is a key to further work” (2010, p. 93), which should include cultural operation, textual features, industrial or production techniques, and audience influences.

C. Feminism

Feminist scholars have done more than any other group to advance soap opera studies, with contributions ranging over the last 40 years. Pietilä (2005) offers a helpful introduction to this tradition and to the wider scope of “Feminist views of language and mass communication.” Her chapter on feminist approaches to mass media studies introduces different forms of feminism: “liberal, Marxist, radical, and poststructuralist feminism” (p. 273), “essentialism and anti-essentialism” (p. 275), and those investigating the “technologies of gender” (p. 278). In this context, she introduces feminist studies of soap opera. She writes, “A view that genres like romances and television soap operas, favored by women, are not trash manipulating them to keep to their subordination came up during the 1980s in many studies that bestowed upon such genres appreciation as text types specifically fit to address women's psyche and their cultural abilities of interpretation” (p. 278). After reviewing representative work, Pietilä concludes, “It is largely thanks to the feminists' interest in romances and television soaps that popular texts have been accepted as legitimate objects of study. Feminism has also promoted the view that such texts, being more complex than earlier believed, offer women ‘an opportunity for symbolic resistance to dominant meanings’ (Ang & Hermes, 1991, p. 311)” (p. 282). She also reports that others, specifically van Zoonen (1991) criticize this view, arguing that a focus on soap operas limits the ability of feminist criticism to offer a comprehensive critique; the celebration of an “open text” also limits the ability to engage in any kind of political argument, since no interpretation appears better than another (p. 283).

Brunsdon (2000) provides a book-length discussion of feminist approaches to soap opera: “This book traces the historical engagement between feminism and soap opera in the 1970s and 1980s, suggesting that this engagement can be read as representative or typical of the Western second-wave feminist engagement with the media and popular culture generally” (p. 19). However, to get there, she provides a background to soap opera study, with the context provided in the 1940s studies of

Herzog and of Helen Kaufman. Kaufman used the data from Herzog's surveys but took it further: "Kaufman is investigating the extent to which 'the specific content of a serial' accounts for its appeal to specific groups of listeners. These groups she initially designates as young and old, rich and poor, but in the surveys attention is paid to educational level and rural/urban habitation as well as age and income" (p. 45). In addition to a concern for the feminist engagement with a women's genre, Brunsdon also considers female agency and the female viewer. Here she introduces the reader to the work of Carol Lopate, Michèle Mattelart, and Tania Modleski. The larger part of the book features extended interviews with key figures in the feminist study of soap operas: Christine Geraghty, Dorothy Hobson, Terry Lovell, Ien Ang, and Ellen Seiter.

McCabe and Akass (2006) also offer historical perspective. They address work on female agency and female viewers, beginning "with discussions of representational politics before detailing the debate on female viewers and viewing pleasures relating in particular to soap operas and comedy." They also fill in the more recent history of the post-feminist debates, dealing with topics like "gendered subjectivity" and sexual politics (p. 117). Geraghty (2006), summarizing much of what had gone before adds a perspective on feminist soap opera research: "The body of work, which associated women and soap opera, has to be read in the context of feminist politics in which notions of, for instance, 'women's space' and 'women's fiction' had particular strategic connotations" (p. 133). In this context she provides a look at more recent and more international work.

Brown (2009) presents an investigation of women's interpretations of telenovelas, limiting her treatment to the Latin American form, particularly at it appears in Brazil. She notes how women employ soap operas for social purposes but also to challenge cultural notions about female sexuality and the female body. Rios (2008) presents a research study of largely Hispanic and mostly female soap opera viewers in the U.S. and identifies themes focused on gender, ethnicity, and life cycle. She notes that "women exercise critical skills by rejecting, talking back, and contradicting characters as part of their popular culture entertainment" (p. 1); they also use the soap operas to learn about the dominant culture in which they live. Ahmed and Khalid (2012) find in soap operas a means of women's empowerment in India, particularly in issues of development and development education.

Spigel (2013) contrasts the post-feminist view of women presented in shows set in a pre-feminist era, like the cable offering *Mad Men*. While the show does not address feminism, it does have a loosely focused sense of social justice, which could include women's issues.

D. Pleasure of viewing

People watch soap operas because the programs and the viewing give them pleasure. Spence (2005) offers a book-length analysis of viewing pleasure, summarizing much of the research of the previous decades. The early research into soap operas offered a number of sources of pleasure. Citing Herzog's work in the 1940s, Spence notes that Herzog found some viewers enjoyed soap operas for the vicarious contact they brought with the wider world. Herzog also suggested that the soap opera provided for a kind of wishful thinking and compensation for a lack in the lives of the listeners. Later scholars, including Annette Kuhn, note that some soap opera viewing provides the pleasure of simply counting oneself as part of a larger audience, a "community" of viewers (p. 11). Soap operas become a place of "creative play," as viewers ponder what might happen (p. 17); they offer a chance for a kind of protected self-disclosure in the discussion of relationships (p. 19). Following Modeleski's work in the 1970s, Spence points out that the soap opera has deep cultural connections and that these afford opportunities to the viewer to critique the culture and to experiment with it (pp. 38–39).

Spence's book provides both a very helpful review and, with its interview data, more insight into the pleasure of viewing. Her fourth chapter specifically addresses "The Power of Pleasure; or How to Enjoy Soaps" (p. 140). Here she describes the "psychic and cultural pleasures and displeasures," the deep desires (p. 141) that viewing brings. Some examples:

- "Some of the women I spoke with describe watching soap operas as almost therapeutic, a source of comfort as well as a distraction, both calming and exciting" (p. 141).
- Even the advertising helps: "Other ads provoke an experience of community as they proffer good advice from 'one of our own'" (p. 144).
- "Dorothy Hobson reports that many of the British working-class women whom she interviewed perceived television and radio as their only connection with the 'outside world' (not that it necessarily was their only connection but that it was seen as such)" (p. 145).

- The “anticipation and the ability to run ahead of time, to see into the future, to play with the predictable, are forms of mastery, transforming the uncertainty of history into readable spaces. Both a stage for memory and a stimulus for making connections, the new meanings we invent make older ones visible and, likewise, the story forms we uncover elsewhere help us to sharpen our inventive tools. Such pleasures can be both a response and a threat to the alienation that is a part of everyday life” (p. 158).

The soap opera offers a wide range of sheer pleasure in viewing, as Spence demonstrates in various ways.

Harrington and Bielby (2005) add some other aspects to the sense of pleasure in viewing, including “the concepts of flow, home, and media pleasures” (p. 834). The first takes up the idea of a sense of absorption into something that lulls us into a state of relaxation; the second describes our entry into the familiar, into a setting we know well; and the third, a move into the cultural sphere of entertainment. They apply their model to cross-cultural television, though it could well apply locally.

E. Representation

Because of their popularity and closeness to cultural issues and because of the high level of influence they can have on their viewers, soap operas form an important source for the study of how cultures understand themselves. Many soap opera scholars examine the characters and plots of soap opera to provide some sense of how the shows represent various groups.

A good number of recent studies look at the representation of ethnic groups on soap operas: black characters on Dutch soap operas (Meijer & de Bruin, 2003); how program producers deal with ethnic difference on Dutch soap operas (Meijer, 2001); guest workers and immigrants on a German soap opera (Nijhawan, 2008); black characters and race on Brazilian telenovelas (Dos Santos & Kotowski, 2008); hegemonic presentations of national identity in Brazil (Porto, 2011); Asian women in the context of hybridity on Australian soap operas (Winarnita, 2011); indigenous people and sexuality on Australian soap operas (King, 2009); and Irish characters on British programming (Free, 2001);

Feminist scholars and others have paid particular attention to the representation of gender and gender roles on soap operas. Recent work includes a content analysis of the portrayal of women on Indian soap operas (Somani & Doshi, 2016); descriptions of gender

and generic conventions on the U.S. *Desperate Housewives* (Hill, 2010); a review of gender roles in the setting of 1950s-era programming in the U.S. (Watson, 2006); an analysis of stereotypes of women and the female audiences for soap operas (Englund, 2003); a textual analysis of portrayals of vulnerable and damaged women on soap operas and their impact on viewers (Stern, Russell, & Russell, 2006); and a study of the representation of both sexes offered to children through their viewing of soap operas (Bautista Romero & Dolores Degrado, 2008).

Other studies of representation touch on a variety of groups. Allahverdi and Farajiha (2014) consider the ways in which television programming (soap operas, documentaries, and news) represents criminality and those accused of criminal behavior, particularly youth. Perales and Pérez Chica (2008) investigate the stereotypes applied to children by soap operas, comedies, and advertising, considering both the “good” youngster and the punishments for breaking rules. Acosta-Alzuru (2013) offers a multi-method study of the representation of a character with Asperger’s Syndrome on a telenovela. She points out the difficulties in balancing the requirements of the genre and a message of inclusion; and in balancing the commercial focus of television with a sense of social responsibility. Two studies of Brazilian soap opera call attention to the representation of poverty and life in the favelas (Jaguaribe, 2004; Drumond, 2014).

F. Identity

Many researchers associate the concept of identity with representation, arguing that the images people see, the actions or roles that characters enact, and the level of identification with characters shapes personal identity. Given the strong parasocial relationships with soap opera characters, soap opera researchers have explored how fictional portrayals affect issues of identity.

Working in the Mexican context, de la Luz Casas Pérez (2005) builds a model of narrative structures, viewing habits, and role modeling to investigate the formation of cultural identity. In Brazil, dos Santos Neves and de Nazareth Santos Carvalho (2014) focus their model on language and the varieties of spoken Portuguese as shaping the identification with indigenous characters. Marx’s (2008) interest lies “in the construction (or deconstruction) of identities within the South African context,” notably gender identities (p. 80). Drawing on a theoretical model influenced by Edward Said, Simone de Beauvoir, and Luce Irigaray, she examines the formation of gender identity across

four South African soap operas. Tager (2010) also examines South African soap opera, specifically *Generations*, arguing that it forms “a ‘commercial’ technology through which a diversity of viewers are able to constitute a sense of themselves as sharing a wide range of discursive patterns, images, beliefs, and lifestyle practices, even as it also motivates them towards social mobility, social action, and social change” (p. 99). Giomi (2005) explores the identification of an Italian audience with the locally produced *Vivere* (Living). Using textual analysis and reception studies, he hypothesizes “that its popularity, which is comparable to no other Italian soap, comes from its ability to allow viewers to identify with its characters without forsaking the typical ingredients of a Hollywood series, central to the TV habits of the Italian audience” (p. 465).

Education entertainment advocates build on the potential of soap operas to shape identity. Sherring and Brown (2011) seek to find “the links, if any, between social and personal identity of Indian women and the effects of Indian prosocial soap operas in forming mindsets affecting attitudes and actions relating to the two major social problems—female feticide and child marriage” (p. 1).

Identity formation via soap opera may also extend to one’s sexuality. Aubrey (2007) reports a two-year panel study of U.S. college women, watching soap operas and prime-time comedy, prime-time drama, and music videos. Following a cognitive processing model, Aubrey notes that “Time-1 exposure to soap operas predicted a decrease in sexual self-concept at Time 2, suggesting that soap opera viewing exposure may be damaging to women’s sexual self-concept” (p. 167). The overall research does suggest an impact of viewing on this aspect of identity.

G. LGBT concerns

Soap opera writers quickly react to social change, particularly in the domestic sphere where they set many of their ongoing stories. British television’s 1999 program, *Queer as Folk*, used the soap opera formula to feature the lives of gay men and its American version presented a somewhat sanitized version of the program. Johnson (2004) reports that in the UK “audiences and the media were taken by surprise at the graphic sexual scenes and the impressive presentation of a range of experiences and relationships in gay life” (p. 293) and that the original British series received multiple complaints. However, after several years on the air or on

cable television, both the British and American versions are generally accepted, though Johnson asks whether they have changed public perceptions. In the wider soap opera world, gay characters appear regularly and without any public complaint. About a year after the debut of *Queer as Folk* in Britain, the U.S. soap opera *All My Children* featured a long-term gay character (Morrison, 2007, p. 3). Though some questioned the viability of the character in the soap opera world (Harrington, 2003), the strategy worked for the show. In an interesting essay, Owens (2016) argues that the 1960s occult soap opera *Dark Shadows* acted to introduce supernatural otherness. “By fashioning what Scott Bravmann has called such ‘queer fictions of the past,’ meditations on the non-normative politics and pleasures of historical discourses, *Dark Shadows* introduced, and even made palatable, queer occultism to mainstream broadcast audiences” (p. 350).

The incorporation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender characters has occurred outside the English-speaking world as well. Salgueiro Marques (2010) analyzes how Brazilian soap operas represent LGBT characters, noting “points of intersection between fiction and citizens’ concrete experience, investigating the narrative structure that articulates them” (p. 40). By studying program dialogue, she aims to critically examine the “symbolic oppression” of the group. De Oliveira (2015) similarly examines the portrayal of gay and bisexual characters, this time in the Brazilian soap opera *Amor à Vida*, which ran from 2013–2014 on Rede Globo. Using speech analysis, he notes “a change in the pattern of representation” of gay characters and “the participation of television fiction and its appropriation of the spaces that share the fight of the movement” for wider acceptance of the LGBT community (p. 41). Cesar Henn and Viero Machado (2015) provide additional information on audience reactions to scenes of gay and lesbian characters kissing by examining fan responses on social media, looking particularly at the construction and deconstruction of meaning. In a study of another Rede Globo soap opera, *Queridos Amigos*, Colling and Pirajá (2011) apply post-structuralist and queer theory to “problematic the representation of two transvestite characters,” questioning whether there is “an advance” in the “representations of dissident sexualities” (p. 507). In explicating the Mexican world of telenovelas, Lewis (2008) questions the “impact of symbolic presentation” of the gay community, at least in terms of the program, *La madrastra* (p. 1). Joyce (2013) also raises critical questions about the Brazilian soap opera presentation of gay

characters, noting some inherent bias built into the genre and medium. However, she concludes, “the sheer number of gays and lesbian characters in recent TV Globo telenovelas indicates that the audience has come at least to expect, if not accept, their presence. To what is this change owed? Possible answers may range from optimistic—producers, writers, and audiences are becoming more open-minded—to more cynical ones: All is fair in the ratings war, and writers, especially those at TV Globo, are in competition for the title of ‘most audacious’” (p. 61).

Morrison has studied audience responses to transgender characters in an ongoing study of reactions to a storyline on *All My Children*. In a survey of over 900 viewers in the week following the character’s appearance, she found that “willingness to consider a transgender storyline contrasted with a dislike of the specific character. Concerns over character believability, writer motivations, writer skill, and veteran actor exclusion appeared to contribute to the dislike. Responses further indicated higher levels of stigma toward transgender persons than lesbian persons, and a conflation of the notions of sexuality and gender identity” (2007, p. 2). In a second study, she explored how the LGBT community reacted to the transgender character. Situating the study in the context of reported tension about the transgender population within the LGBT community (2010, p. 651), Morrison reports that while the LGBT group disliked the character more than non-LGBT viewers, the “negative response . . . was tied not to the transgender status of the character but specifically to unhappiness with a plot development seen to threaten the identity of the lesbian character, Bianca” (p. 650).

Another way to explore viewer responses to LGBT characters appears in fan narratives. Ng (2007, 2008) examines fan music videos. While much of the scholarly writing about fan narratives focuses on written texts, Ng urges an examination of video, which provides a more limited medium in some ways for fans. “A fan fiction author can have characters engage in actions that have never been portrayed or described in the canonical television show, movie, or book, as well as create new characters, settings, and situations” (2007, p. 1) while a fan editing a video can only use what appeared on the original show, but create a new sound track by choice of music. Many fans, dissatisfied with the show’s portrayal of the relationship between two female characters, created a new narrative, although within narrow parameters: the “video makers draw on dominant cultural discourses even as they

offer certain sorts of reworkings of canonical narratives” (p. 21). Ng (2008) returns to this analysis but placing it in the wider critical and academic discussion of LGBT representation and the soap opera writers’ desire to portray conventional ideas about romance, even romance between same-sex couples. The fan videos pick up on this and tend to stay within the bounds of soap opera conventions. However, Ng concludes, “that viewers are motivated by the desire for more satisfying depictions of romantic love to produce fan texts like the Lianca videos speaks to the continuing inadequacies of such representations in televisual media” (2008, p. 118).

Dhaenens (2012) also examines fan videos, but sees them as a way to challenge the dominant discourse. He writes, “Despite the increasing efforts of representing gay main characters, popular soap operas still hinge on the discourse of heteronormativity.” His analysis of fan material based on the German soap opera *Verbotene Liebe* (Forbidden Love), raises the question of “how subversive practices of rearticulating narrative conventions of soap operas may function as strategies of resistance” (p. 442). Barnhurst (2012) offers a narrative of the development of gay storylines on soap operas and their reworking in fan videos, calling attention to both the limits of the fan videos (as did Ng) and the opportunities in LGBT soap opera stories from around the world.

H. Sexuality

By its very nature, the soap opera deals with issues of romantic relationships and sexuality. Greenberg and Hofschie (2000) offer a detailed report on sexuality on U.S. television during the 1990s, reviewing content analyses of shows (including soap operas) and cultivation studies to estimate any effects of the programming. Specifically in soap operas they noted, “Two substantial differences in sexual content emerged between 1985 and 1994 among the three soaps analyzed in both studies. Intercourse between unmarried partners increased from 1.56 to 1.83 instances per hour, or one more act every four episodes. Rape increased from one rape reference per 10 episodes to more than one per episode” (p. 95). They also noted a dramatic increase in talk about sex. In a similar review of British soap operas, Al-Sayed and Gunter (2012) find broadly similar results: a dramatic increase in talk about sex and an increase in sexual depictions, though passionate kissing constituted much of the sexual activity on the programs.

In a research study involving more than 2,000 first-year U.S. university students, Lei, Hust, Ran, Ren, and Marett (2013) report that “watching soap operas is associated with lower intentions to refuse unwanted sexual activity and lower intentions to adhere to decisions about sexual consent” (p. 11). They theorize that the “sexual scripts” or individualized attitudes and semi-automatic actions modeled on the soap operas influences these behaviors among the students (p. 12).

I. Politics

Soap operas both directly and indirectly touch on the political realm. Jones (2001) argues that the satire of politics in the U.S. treats political news as soap opera, borrowing generic conventions and applying them to a very different realm. Montuori Fernandes (2014) takes the discussion in a different direction, analyzing Brazilian remake of the telenovela *Saramandaia*, whose “main plot aimed at government corruption and inefficiency” (p. 101). This fictional narrative set out to directly address key Brazilian political issues. British soap operas touch the political in yet another way, featuring politicians and political themes. Coleman (2008) developed a three-dimensional definition of “the political” and then explored “the distinction between the personalized communities depicted in soaps and the impersonal world of politics” (p. 197). Barnard (2006) “examines selected episodes from recent South African television sitcoms and soap operas in order to show how current popular culture in South Africa is working alongside political and social institutions to both chronicle the transformation of the country into a multicultural democracy and imaginatively/materially create a New South Africa” (p. 39).

J. The production of soap operas

The success of soap operas depends on a combination of narrative, character, writing, cultural factors, actors, producers, distribution, financing, and so on. While theoretically understood, few producers or networks can predict which shows will succeed—much as with any television production. In the period under review, a number of scholars have explored aspects of this area of soap opera production.

Examining a radio soap opera in Afghanistan, Skuse (2002) reviews “some of the semantic linkages that exist between the producers and consumers” (p. 409) as a way to understand the production techniques. Pait (2005) describes the work of writers attempting to create the public spaces that result from a Brazilian soap opera and their negotiation of the various misun-

derstandings that arise between the various stakeholders in the production and the audience. Brennan (2004) focuses on the changing organization of the production of Irish soap operas, noting the declining power of the writer and the increasing power of broadcaster’s production office.

Rodríguez Cadena (2004) examines source material for historically based Mexican telenovelas. Here the writers must balance an historical character or event with the non-historical demands of the genre: “interconnected subplots of passion, love, jealousy, betrayal, and intrigue” (p. 49). The link to Mexican history also demonstrates a general audience preference (in whatever country) to cultural proximity. Castelló (2010) “argues that the discourses on society and culture proposed at production level are received as being ‘proximate,’ but that this perception is not just national, cultural, or linguistic. Cultural proximity also incorporates educative, cognitive and emotional elements and aspects related to the audience’s immediate surroundings” (p. 207). Üçer (2013) shows how a Turkish soap opera, *The Valley of the Wolves*, managed to balance the soap opera created myth with culturally meaningful “reality” or ideology.

K. Aesthetics

In addition to the conventions of the genre, soap operas often develop their own aesthetics, as Munshi (2010) describes for the soap operas in India, which often borrow from Bollywood conventions. Pucci Junior (2014) and Bona (2014) both examine the aesthetics of the Brazilian *Avenida Brasil*. Following schemata analysis, Pucci Junior holds that the telenovela reconfigures aesthetic designs found successful in films. Bona, basing his work on that of Pucci Junior, looks at the design of communication interfaces.

L. Studying specific programs

Soap operas provide texts for study, offering researchers insight into cultures, programming design, strategies of viewer interpretation, methods of encoding and decoding, and fan culture. During the period under review a number of people evaluated specific soap operas. The South African soap opera, *7de laan*, has the largest audience of Afrikaans-language soap operas; using reception analysis, van der Merwe (2012) explored the appeal of the program, since its audience cuts across all income groups going far beyond the producers’ target audience. Motsaathebe (2009) turns to another immensely popular South African soap opera, *Generations*, the highest rated program on South

African television, asking about gender stereotyping. Using material from a sample drawn from nine years of program data, Motsaathebe saw some changes over the years:

Although the number of females in positions that were traditionally regarded as male-only has increased over the years, mainly due to government legislation on gender and other developments such as symposia and debates surrounding the issue, stereotyped gender images in *Generations* still linger in muted values manifested in gender roles. The research results showed that *Generations*, for its part, has attempted to portray women in more responsible roles, although it failed to improve the status of these female characters in terms of the behavior patterns they are made to display. As a result the soap opera paints women as weak despite all the glamour we see around them. (p. 445)

The research also showed that female characters did appear in roles formerly designated for men, a development that viewers noted, according to an accompanying survey. Bradfield (2008) presents a similar gender analysis (though focused on masculinity) of *Home Affairs*, another production of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Bradfield notes that *Home Affairs* represents a hybrid, combining aspects of the soap opera genre with other programming characteristics. Using a close reading methodology, Bradfield concludes, “From this analysis it has become clear that multiple masculinities are available to South African men within a gender-sensitive context. However, it is also clear that the representations included in *Home Affairs* do not encompass the entire potential for alternative and more progressive masculinities in this context but hark back to the apartheid legacy of constructions of masculinity” (p. 97).

In Spain Merayo and Laffond (2008) studied a soap opera of the Spanish Civil War, *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, looking at its representation of a difficult topic and “the originality of such kind of subject, placed, in this case, in soap opera genre” (p. 1).

British soap operas have received a good deal of scholarly attention with, as Brunsdon (2000) explains, soap operas central to the insights of the British cultural studies movement. Thomas (2009) explores the digital transformation of *The Archers*, the world’s oldest continuously running radio soap opera, created by the BBC in 1951. With the program now available online, Thomas notes several changes:

The Archers, as one of the most popular programs on contemporary British radio, benefits from these developments [Internet access, mobile phone play, podcasts, etc.] that committed listeners now have many ways of following the program and greater flexibility regarding when they listen. Flexibility can, however, be two-edged, and some listeners (albeit a minority) miss the structuring of everyday experience provided by radio. Others, despite being fully aware of and able to access the programme online, stick to the broadcast times, precisely because they value the call to (and permission for) a moment of leisure that the broadcast represents. The thriving online fan culture on the BBC Archers website and elsewhere also means that the broadcast (or post broadcast) moment acts as a meet-up time for online fans—with a flurry of activity occurring at 7:15 p.m., particularly when the narrative has hit a high point. *The Archers* retains its connections with domesticity and security; even though the radio in the kitchen may no longer be the real material context of listening, the image of it is retained. In this sense, and in this instance, the experiential and psychic qualities of radio become portable across media. (p. 64).

However, she also concludes that fans remain fans, even with new media.

Lamuedra and O’Donnell (2013) interviewed viewers of the British *EastEnders* about their perceptions of the show’s dealing with social issues. They find a kind of “nostalgic sense of community” among the viewers that reflects a “social-democratic worldview” (p. 58). Holmes (2006) uses the soap opera *The Grove Family*, another BBC production from the 1950s, “to explore a relationship between critical and methodological approaches to television genre, and the construction of television history” (p. 287). Holmes notes a difference between the BBC’s sense that the show represented the lives of real people and the actual generic discourses of the show. Malik (2009) uses a London-set soap opera, *King of the Ghetto*, as a case study of “a nexus of issues in relation to ethnic minority representation, institutional frameworks, and social change” (p. 246).

Sanderson (2002) and Ford (2002) both study the U.S. soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful*, with Sanderson focusing on a character, examining how the show portrays older women, and Ford concentrating on how women incorporate the show in their own lives. Middleton (2001) turns to the MTV soap opera

Undressed in a larger study of that former music only network's programming trends. He sets out to explore three things: "the appropriation of network program formats without the satirical politics of MTV shows from the 1980s" (p. 59)—that is, with a loss of the sense of cultural critique; the "increase in programming that deploys therapeutic and confessional discourses" (p. 59), arguing that MTV uses the programming without any ideological purpose; and "the emphasis on sexual content and a voyeuristic quality in the program" (p. 60), through which he explores theories of the gaze in cinema versus the "glance" on television. As noted, the ABC network experimented with a vampire-based soap opera, *Dark Shadows*, from 1966–1971. Worland (2012) explores the attempt to attract two audiences (the traditional soap opera viewer and a youth segment interested in the horror genre) through various innovations in style and narrative.

Ward (2000) recounts how the German ARD channel experimented with the soap opera format in *CityExpress*, a program set on an intercity train. In the account Ward argues that the show worked "to reinforce a particular conception of nation to mark out the borders of that nation through the rail network and to unfold the gaps between mainstream and minority cultures within Germany" (p. 232).

Some authors use their analysis of a given show to illustrate larger themes in the increasingly globalized world of television production. Mikos and Perrotta (2012) use the example of the Colombian soap opera *Yo soy Betty, la fea* as an example of the export of a successful plot idea. The producers exported the program for local adaptation to the United States, Germany, Russia, and Spain. Mikos and Perrotta call attention to the similarities in narrative and the differences necessitated by adaptation. Donoghue (2011) also examines the show, but only the U.S. version, as

part of a discussion of the role of the telenovela, of the business strategies in the international television market, and of how the "discursive emphasis by producers, critics, and audiences on telenovela authenticity and geo-cultural origin complements issues of Latinidad, inclusion/exclusion, and inmigration within *Ugly Betty*'s narrative" (p. 258).

At other times, cultural import requires other changes. The American docu-soap about the Osbourne family, *The Osbournes*, became *The Pfaffs* in its Flemish setting (Dhoest, 2005). Not only did the producers change the family, the family name, but also the cultural and national contexts, retaining only the broad concept of the program.

Castelló, Dobson, and O'Donnell (2009) offer another cultural comparison, of soap opera in the minority language regions of Scotland and Catalonia. They examined production procedures through an ethnography, program texts through discourse analysis, and audience reactions through reception analysis of Scotland's *River City* and *High Road* and Catalonia's *El cor de la ciutat* (The Heart of the City) and *Ventdelplà*. The first of each pair has an urban setting and the second a rural one. The shows wrestled with issues of identity and language, of who speaks for the respective countries, and of urban and country reality. Viewers indicated that "they engaged with them as sites of discursive struggle over the definition of reality, sometimes using the same discourses as the producers, sometimes challenging them, occasionally even mocking them. This would appear to be the sense in which they are most fundamentally 'Catalan' or 'Scottish,' in that they constitute sites for a national debate, carried out in the national prestige language, or at the very least with the national accent" (p. 481). This analysis, like the others listed here, gives a sense of the scope of what a soap opera reveals about producer, viewer, and context.

5. Teaching with Soap Operas

A. The education-entertainment model

In most human experiences, people learn both directly and indirectly; so it should surprise no one that people learn from soap operas. U.S. radio soap operas during World War II supported the war effort and educated audiences about government policy, teaching

about and encouraging things ranging from dietary items to women's factory work. Horten (2002) quotes a government report that concluded "that a number of soap operas furthered their listeners' understanding of the nature of the enemy and the Allies' fighting objectives by dealing with such issues as the Nazi invasion

of Denmark, the forced deportation of French labor to the Reich, and life in a Nazi concentration camp. The daytime serials also provided an invaluable contribution to the war effort through their portrayal of home-front issues such as rationing, conservation, and salvage” (p. 152).

The BBC also took advantage of the ability to teach by soap opera in 1951 in their popular radio soap opera *The Archers*, including intentionally educational messages about agricultural development (Singhal & Rogers, 2003, p. 290). Scholars noticed the soap opera’s ability to foster indirect learning from a televised Peruvian soap opera *Simplemente María* in 1969. María, the main character, purchased a Singer sewing machine and enrolled in adult literacy classes to improve her livelihood; soon large numbers of the program’s viewers did the same (p. 291). Singhal and Rogers explain what happened next:

Inspired by the audience success and the unintended educational effects of *Simplemente María*, Miguel Sabido, a television writer-producer-director in Mexico, developed a methodology for creating entertainment-education soap operas. Between 1975 and 1982, Sabido produced seven entertainment-education television soap operas (one each year), which helped motivate enrollment in adult literacy classes, encouraged the adoption of family planning methods, promoted gender equality, and so forth Sabido’s entertainment-education soap operas were also commercial hits for Televisa, the Mexican television network, demonstrating that educational messages do not limit the popularity (and profitability) of entertainment programs. (p. 291)

Gokulsing (2004) lists a number of characteristics of the Sabido method: intentionally educational messages, planned “to promote and reinforce particular pro-social beliefs and values,” designed to increase viewers’ knowledge, matched to the reality of the viewers’ conditions, and reinforced through an epilogue summarizing the learning goals (pp. 4–5). He also indicates that many of the educational soap operas use both formative and summative research in their program planning and have a generally robust theoretical basis, including (in addition to Sabido’s work) Bandura’s social learning theory, Bentley’s dramatic theory, Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, and MacLean’s theory of the brain (p. 5). The realistic portrayal of daily life matters (de la Barrera, 2009) as well as the ability of viewers to identify themselves in the program world. Chicharro (2011) “concludes that the

majority of female viewers use fiction in an explanatory sense, and that the telenovela is a genre in which women identify themselves individually and as a group” (p. 181).

Singhal and Rogers (2003) note that the entertainment-education works for social change in two ways: first, “It can influence audience awareness, attitudes, and behaviors toward a socially desirable end. Here, the anticipated effects are located in the individual audience members” (p. 289) and second, “It can influence the audiences’ external environment to help create the necessary conditions for social change at the group or system level. Here, the major effects are located in the interpersonal and social-political spheres of the audience members’ environment” (p. 290).

Vaughan and Rogers (2000) present the details of their “staged model” of the learning effects from entertainment-education. They “draw on (1) the hierarchy-of-effects (HOE) model, (2) the stages-of-change (SOC) model, (3) social learning theory (SLT), and (4) the diffusion of innovations (DOI) to synthesize a staged model through which communication messages have effects on individual behavior change by stimulating (1) involvement with media characters and role modeling of their actions, and (2) interpersonal communication” (p. 203).

In addition to understanding processes of learning from soap operas, researchers have also examined the characteristics of viewers to gauge their competency to learn from the soap opera. Dutta-Bergman (2006) “seeks to (a) construct a descriptive profile of the soap opera user based on selective processing theory from the media effects literature and (b) sketch a narrative of the soap opera user that recalls, processes, and uses health information from soap operas” (p. 11).

As the use of soap opera for education has increased, so has the need to assess such programs. Following the theories of Martín-Barbero, Tufte (2007) proposes an assessment approach based on measuring the relation between the soap opera and its audience. Key variables include the context, emotional impact, and level of participation. Arroyave (2008) tested another method which involved post-viewing discussion of the program. In an experiment with 400 undergraduates from Colombia and the U.S., he found that “soap opera plus post-discussion [was] more effective with regard to knowledge, positive attitude, and intended behavior about sexual responsibility than exposure to E-E [entertainment-education] soap opera alone” (p. 16). Other hypotheses about the length of the soap opera program

and various kinds of learning (knowledge, attitude, behavior) received mixed support. Based on a study of the Indian radio opera *Tinka Tinka Sukh*, Sood (2002) suggests a more complex model of audience involvement, one with two dimensions: “(a) affective-referential involvement, and (b) cognitive-critical involvement. Involvement,” he concludes, “appears to be a precursor for increasing self-efficacy and collective efficacy, and in promoting interpersonal communication among individuals in the audience” (p. 153). Papa, Singhal, Law, Pant, Sood, Rogers, and Shefner-Rogers (2000) also look at measuring effectiveness based on parasocial interaction and collective impact.

B. Health campaigns

Health intervention has received the most research attention in the last 15 years, with soap operas around the world providing both general and specific health information. Bouman and Brown (2011), noting the increase of health education by way of entertainment and the growing collaboration between health communication professionals and media practitioners, propose a model for such work, drawing on projects in Europe, East Africa, and Asia. Lee and Taylor (2010) approach the research from the other direction: examining viewers, using a uses-and-gratifications approach to understand why people watched medical dramas or medical soap operas. They report, “Consistent with the previous uses and gratification studies, the results showed that the audience activity plays a role as a partial mediator in the influence of health-information motives on consequent behaviors. In addition, as a psychological factor, health-information orientation was a significant predictor for health-information motives for medical drama viewing” (p. 1). Koordeman, Anschutz, and Engels (2012) look not to producers or to audience, but to the programs themselves. They focus on alcohol portrayals in soap operas and other entertainment television, reviewing 27 studies (13 longitudinal, eight cross-sectional, and six experimental) for approaches to health education, noting that on-screen alcohol use does not affect all viewers in the same way.

Researchers in the UK have explored health information in soap operas. Verma, Adams, and White (2007) present a content analysis of health-related behaviors on the most popular British soap operas. They found positive portrayals of seven of 11 key behaviors occurring 959 times over four weeks and conclude that showing healthy behaviors as normal

may influence behavioral norms among viewers. Harper (2010) reports similar findings with regards to mental health issues. Coombes (2003) disappointingly cites evidence that some UK television broadcasters refused to air a soap opera dealing with multicultural health issues.

Women's health issues appear in studies of soap operas in India (Duff, Singhal, & Witte 2005), the Sudan (Greiner, Singhal, & Hurlburt 2007), and China (Wang, Liang, & Schwartz, 2008). The first two test the efficacy of radio soap operas while the third uses video. The studies include different methods and helpful reviews of the literature.

By far the greatest number of studies published in the last 15 years address issues of health education and HIV/AIDS. Singhal, Rogers, and their colleagues have published extensively on the issue, as well as on the model of entertainment education and health communication in general. Singhal and Rogers (2003) explain how education-entertainment method works in some detail as they describe its use to combat AIDS. They relate case studies of programming in South Africa (*Soul City*), Tanzania (*Twende na Wakati*), Brazil (*Malhacão*), and Kenya (*Ushikwapo Shikamana*) (pp. 298–333). Vaughan, Rogers, Singhal, and Swalehe (2000) describe a field experiment in Tanzania, using the program *Twende na Wakati* (Let's Go with the Times). The effects of program listening included “(1) a reduction in the number of sexual partners by both men and women, and (2) increased condom adoption. The radio soap opera influenced these behavioral variables through certain intervening variables, including (1) self-perception of risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, (2) self-efficacy with respect to preventing HIV/AIDS, (3) interpersonal communication about HIV/AIDS, and (4) identification with, and role modeling of, the primary characters in the radio soap opera” (p. 81). The team also reports a study in India. Rogers, Singhal, and Thombre (2004) found that viewers of an American soap opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, that features an HIV-positive character judged the self-disclosure of the disease good, but unrealistic in India.

Other studies of HIV prevention strategies through soap operas took place in South Africa (Cassidy, 2008; Ridgard & Struthers, 2010), Tanzania (Mohammed, 2001), Ethiopia (Cho & Witte, 2005), Cambodia (Hocking, 2005), Colombia (Obregón, 2005), and the United States (Kennedy, O'Leary, Beck, Pollard, & Simpson, 2004). The U.S. study included

tracking calls to a national AIDS hotline during the soap opera time slots.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention project, the Modeling and Reinforcement to Combat HIV/AIDS, “has developed a set of tools through which creative writers can exercise greater control over the behavioral content of their stories. The Pathways to Change tools both guide scriptwriters as they write BCC/EE [behavior change communication/entertainment-education] storylines and help project managers monitor BCC/EE products for theoretical fidelity and sensitivity to research” (Petraglia, Galavotti, & Harford, 2007, p. 384).

C. Other education topics

Soap opera writers and producers have included other topics in attempt to support development around the world. Ebert (2005) describes a Vietnamese radio soap opera, which won a World Bank contest for new ideas. The winning program—like *The Archers* in 1951—promotes farming and has had a positive response among listeners.

Several other programs promote good government, ways in which citizens can resist or criticize corrupt practices, or work to promote better lives. Mandel (2002) describe *Crossroads*, a Kazakhstani soap opera, teaching post-Soviet citizenship. Ly (2006) offers a brief recap of *Wahala* in Mali, the first locally produced soap opera, and one that dared to criticize the government. Sucido (2012) recounts how the telenovela *Montecristo* promoted human rights in Argentina. Van der Merwe (2005) reviews the ways that the South African soap opera, *Isidingo*, promotes social change, social responsibility, and nation building. Schlotte (2007) reports a qualitative study on a German soap opera targeting immigrants and helping them to understand the varied motives of different immigrant groups. Koldzic and O’Brien (2015) turn to refugees, describing using a radio soap opera in Jordan “as a tool for residents in telling their own stories” through the program *We Are All Refugees*. They also mention “Dadaab Stories” in Kenya (p. 16).

Looking at larger pro-social aims, Sherring and Brown (2011) suggest some effects upon female viewers in India, noting changing attitudes to child marriage and female feticide, though they also note a dearth of scholarly studies to generalize the findings.

In a change from the typical education-entertainment model, Slade (2000) describes a project to support the “development of moral reasoning skills in children” through soap operas (p. 419)

At least one study offer some caution. Khattri (2011) reports a study of women viewers in India, attempting to track the levels of influence. The conclusion is surprising:

Soap operas are becoming the mentor of metro women. Their hypnotism is converting their world. The imaginary world of soap operas is changing them into introverted personalities. The research reflects the fact that the characters of soap operas are taking the place of members of their family. They know the social problems of neighboring state, which is a healthy sign about their awareness. But the sad part is that they are now more unaware about the needs of their own society. (p. 247).

Rakhmani’s (2014) study of the Indonesian Islamic soap opera (*sinetron*), while noting the contrasting motivations, points out that “all narratives use Islamic teachings to address societal issues experienced by middle-class Indonesian Muslims” (p. 340) and work to proselytize Islam.

D. New directions in educational soap operas

The research community continues to explore ways to increase the effectiveness of learning through entertainment. Several medical researchers, Jibaja-Weiss and Volk (2007) present a method to combine computer-assisted decision aids with soap opera content in interactive learning modules to help low-literate patients to understand and engage in health treatment.

EDAM [edutainment decision aid model] provides such a framework for decision aid developers to link learning theory and entertainment education to decision-aid design for lower literate and naïve computer users. The EDAM uses two integrated components to promote user engagement—soap opera scenes and ILMs [interactive learning modules]—integrated elements that engage the user in an interesting story while providing essential information about the choices and tools for clarifying values in making a decision. This approach holds great promise as a strategy for aiding patients with low health literacy and limited computer skills in making informed decisions about their health care. (p. 693).

This method reflects some current thinking about extending the Sabido model to new technologies. Knowing the power of soap opera elements to promote learning, researchers continue to test and refine the model itself.

6. Research Utilizing Soap Operas

Soap operas appear in research that does not immediately focus on them; that is, information about or drawn from soap operas provides data to larger studies, which merely employ them as one media form among others. A brief look at this research gives some sense of the ways in which communication scholars see soap opera as defining parts of the popular culture.

Because of the long association of soap operas with advertising, many marketing researchers will include soap opera viewers in their studies. Durkin and Wakefield (2008) included soap opera viewers in a study to determine whether the narrative of a story affected resistance to persuasive appeals in the ads. Programs whose audiences participated included drama, comedy, soap opera, light entertainment, sports, documentaries, and news. The stronger narrative forms did interfere with persuasive messages. Similarly, Noguti and Russell (2015) found a moderating relationship between attitudes to brands advertised through product placement and a purchase intention among Brazilian telenovela viewers.

Studies of children and younger students often use soap opera viewing as a measure of, or contributor to, television hours. Sormunen, Turunen, and Tossavainen (2016) studied student bedtimes and found a relationship between parental approval of television viewing, bedtimes, and the students' preferences for cartoons and soap operas. Pool, Koolstra, and van der Voort (2003) measured school achievement and background media; soap opera viewing formed one of the experimental conditions (versus music videos, music, and quiet). Soap opera viewing proved the most disruptive to learning. Another group of school children participated in a Swiss study that examined how they used television programs as part of their social selection. "Students with similar media use tend to become friends while students with different media use tend to have less contact"; social networks also influenced program choices, which included soap opera, music television, news, and police procedurals (Friemel, 2008, p. 2). Soap operas also played a role in a media education project in New Zealand, where 11–13 year olds made their own film clips, incorporating material drawn from soap operas (Finch & Jackson, 2002).

Many of the classic theories developed by communication researchers developed without much input from soap opera studies. More recently, researchers have included soap opera viewers as they test and develop their theories. Some work in the last decade includes cultivation theory, including genre cultivation effects (Bilandzic, & Rössler, 2004), and cultivation of intercultural attitudes (Vu & Lee, 2013); cultural imperialism, its reverse flow, and its nuances (Moran 2000); parasocial interaction (Sood, & Rogers, 2000); resistance to cultural imperialism (Halstead, 2012; Chivandikwa, 2010); disposition theory (Weber, Tamborini, Lee, & Stipp, 2008); uses and gratifications and the active audience (Lee & Taylor, 2010); reality judgments and the ability to trust broadcast information—here soap operas formed one experimental condition in each study (Shapiro & Chock, 2003; Busselle, 2003). In the first, the generic conventions explained about half the variance; in the second, global audiences interpreted generic guidelines differently. Creeber (2009) includes televised soap operas in his re-thinking of British social realism and how it portrays the working class.

As Friemel (2008) reported about school children, a person's program or genre preference provides social cues. Hall (2007) surveyed young adults to learn how they draw conclusions about others, based on the others' perceived preference of a variety of entertainment forms. "Genres that tended to have a positive effect included jazz music, comedy films, and comedy TV programs, whereas genres that tended to have a negative effect included heavy metal music, anime films, and soap operas" (pp. 267–268).

Key soap opera studies in the 1980s and 1990s addressed how viewers interpreted the programs, often through cultural and personal lenses. Matheus (2014) offers a review of the larger field of hermeneutics, and drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, shows how it can apply to Brazilian programming, including news, politics, and soap opera. Abrudan (2011) also uses hermeneutics as a means to understanding visual culture. She demonstrates a possible analytic technique through case studies of Romanian film and soap opera. Förster's (2007) analysis of interpreting visual media in the Côte d'Ivoire builds on a tradition of the prac-

tices of seeing / looking in the culture, a tradition that includes soap operas. Merayo (2009) proposes an interpretive process for the “texts” of Spanish soap operas, urging a recognition of the reading strategies included in the programs themselves. Combining a hermeneutical phenomenological approach with a psychological process model, de Kock and Wagner (2012) apply it to a South African soap opera as an illustration of its interpretive power.

Other commentators apply the criticism of literature, film, and television to soap opera. Silva and De Lima Soares (2013) review theories of media criticism in Brazil to show how it applies to both fictional and non-fiction productions. Duarte Guimarães (2011) proposes an intersemiotic approach to the criticism and “reading” of Brazilian soap opera. Dillman (2005) draws on generic practices in the soap opera to offer a critic’s reading of the film, *Magnolia*, focusing on the practices of “gender address and enunciation” (p. 143). In a criticism of television criticism, Jacobs (2001) argues that television functions as an artistic medium with multiple formats (including soap opera) that demand different critical approaches. Lee Harrington, Scardaville, Lippmann, and Bielby (2015) analyze how newspaper critics viewed the soap opera in the U.S. during its development years, its heyday and its decline, that is from 1930 to 2010. In this instance the soap opera itself gave rise to a new form of criticism.

Salt (2001) offers a sweeping reappraisal of film criticism, proposing a new theoretical approach, which he has tested over several years. He “applies these ideas to the stylistic analysis of 20 recent television drama series (including soap operas) from Britain, Australia, the U.S. and Finland, and a consideration of how true it is that TV style is uniform” (p. 98). Allen (2004) situates soap opera criticism within the larger context of television criticism and offers ways to help viewers and students “make sense” of soap operas. In his brief introduction, he provides something of the history of soap opera, the generic conventions, and the cultural differences around the world.

Other studies connect not so much to criticism, but to literature itself and to different media forms. Puhl and Lopes (2011) explore how Brazilian soap opera make use of literary sources. Their analysis looks to the adaptation of the genres, how television writers adapt material from a written form. Describing a move in the opposite direction, Ariza (2007) argues that Spanish popular journalism (the “gossip press”) has

borrowed from the discourse of the soap opera to create a kind of fictional meta-story.

Soap operas and their audiences also supply data for more sociological studies. Salo (2003) examines racial and gender identities in Cape Town, South Africa, linking them to local histories, local cultures, and global culture factors like soap operas. In a study of the growth of an American public, Loviglio (2005) tracks the factors that created this “imagined community,” reviewing politics and radio in the 1930s. Radio and the radio soap opera served to bridge the traditional private and public realms. Stevens Aubrey, Rhea, Olson, Fine, Hauser, Kaylor, and Yang (2007) examine a different crossing of private and public in their study of how television viewing (including of soap operas) affects relational management.

Soap opera content also reflects awareness of research issues as van Vuuren, Ward, and Coyle (2013) show in their replication of a 1990 study on the depiction of environmental concerns in Australian soap operas. Using content analysis they noted an increase in environmental consciousness. “*Neighbours* also demonstrates how much climate change discourse has entered the conversational lexicon, whereas *Home and Away* still maintains its traditional stance towards the environment. What is interesting to see, however, is how some ‘green’ issues (such as recycling and green consumerism) have become normalized and uncontested in both programs” (p. 46).

A number of scholars report on the use of soap opera to support language study. Grant and Starks (2001) compare natural language conversational closings from soap operas with textbook examples, pointing out the greater realism in the former. Al-Surmi (2012) asks whether the language heard on scripted television programming reflects natural language characteristics. He reports a study in which he “adopts a corpus-based register analysis tool to investigate the extent to which soap opera, compared to sitcom, reflects the linguistic representation of natural conversation. . . . Findings indicate that sitcom captures the linguistic features of natural conversation more than soap opera does” (p. 671). Camargo (2010) used Spanish-language soap operas as part of a language-teaching course and provide evaluative research of comparative strategies. Goebel (2011) employed soap operas indirectly in his study of language, observing the talk of the audience of an Indonesian soap opera among themselves in reacting to the program. This natural language example of meaning and structure

flowed from attempts to understand the language as spoken by the actors. Shiau (2015) studied how Taiwanese gay men draw on soap opera language as one linguistic style to serve as an identity marker.

Soap operas also figure into moral discussions. Krijnen and Meijer (2005) studied television narratives and “argue that prime time television (news, soap operas, sitcoms, and so on) is not only rife with reflections on what counts as a moral issue, who we are, who the ‘other’ is, and various ways of deliberating moral issues but also that the content of prime time programming contradicts the arguments used in the moral panic surrounding prime time television” (p. 353). In a follow-up, Meijer proposes a deconstructive approach (Meijer & van Vossen, 2005). Tamborini and his team report an experiment to gauge moral judgments about behaviors observed on television, leading to a more generalized model (Tamborini, Eden, Weber, Bowman, & Grizzard, 2008). Following up, Eden, Tamborini, Grizzard, Lewis, Weber, and Prabhu (2014) experimentally tested their model of the influence of media exposure on morality. They report “the findings indicate that repeated exposure to domain-specific media content embedded within entertainment programming can influence the salience of moral domains” (p. 511) and thus influence moral judgments. Kennan (2009) applies the moral theories of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan to the prime time soap opera *Army Wives* to examine specific moral dilemmas that appear both in the show and in military life.

As seen in other parts of this review essay, people do learn from soap operas: morality, identity, behav-

iors, interpersonal and language skills and so on. Ward (2003) reviews the situation of sexual socialization of young people in the U.S. Weighing the impact of a range of media products (print media, music, television, soap operas, film), she attempts to develop a model of influence of the media as a socialization agent. Eggermont (2005) examines a similar issue, asking how much television viewing (including soap operas) influences “young adolescents’ beliefs and assumptions about sexual relationships.” In other words, what sources do young adolescents drawn upon as they establish attitudes about sexuality? Considering a very different topic, Quintero Johnson and Miller (2016) include soap operas as a source of knowledge about and attitudes towards mental illness.

The analysis of political influence usually includes various kinds of power: military, economic, hegeconomic, hard, and soft. Yörük and Vatikiotis (2013) consider Turkey’s role in the Eastern Europe and the Middle East and include a discussion of the export of Turkish soap operas. Tourism forms yet another way that nations influence one another. While scholars have included television as an avenue to promote tourism (with fans wanting to see places that appear on the screen, for example), Kim and Long (2012) argue that genre mediates the effect. They argue “that viewing soap operas may promote identification, empathy, emotional connection and parasocial interactions, and that these may motivate some audience members to visit soap opera locations, and also contextualize their anticipation concerning what they might expect to experience” (p. 173).

7. Soap Operas around the World

Though many trace the origins of soap operas to United States radio and television programming, the U.S. holds no monopoly on soap operas, as countries around the world employ the soap opera format. Its domestic settings, its interpersonal and usually problem-based interactions, its strong audience engagement, and its relatively low production costs make it attractive to both radio and television broadcasters. Both the United States and Britain have had long-running (over 50 years!) programs. This marks one difference in soap opera: in the U.S. and the UK, soap operas feature open-ended stories that continue from year to year; in the Latin American telenovela format, each

soap opera comes to an end after a set number of episodes and the resolution of the central plot.

At least 40 countries, reflected in the research gathered here—and probably more—produce local soap operas. Many others (as well as the local producers) import soap operas from other countries, a phenomenon also reflected in the research here. Some, like Italy for example, began by importing soap operas in an attempt to win audience share from established networks and then began to produce locally (Cardini, 2011). Others took existing soap opera programs and “translated” them into their own cultural contexts, as happened with the Colombian program *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, which

moved into Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Greece, India, Israel, Mexico, Russia, Spain, and the United States (Mikos & Perrotta, 2009; Donoghue, 2011).

As appears elsewhere in more detail in this review, individual countries produce soap operas for both entertainment and educational purposes. Researchers have studied soap opera plots, investigated their audiences and audience motivation, looked at production techniques, and explored soap operas' roles in local cultures. This country-by-country recap of the research will briefly present what people have published in the last 15 years; it does not pretend to cover all soap opera production everywhere.

Afghanistan. Radio soap-opera in Afghanistan feature issues of poverty and social reality. Skuse (2002) notes that the program he has studied uses television-style production techniques; further, he "explores some of the semantic linkages that exist between the producers and consumers" (p. 409). As with most soap operas this one promotes audience engagement through familiarity with characters but with enough openness in the text to let people identify with the story.

Argentina. Two studies examine an Argentinian soap opera adaptation of Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Musante (2009) recounts how the production of "*Montecristo: Un amor, una venganza . . .*" presents[s] a socially and historically credible depiction of the period of military dictatorship in Argentina from 1976 to 1983 . . . and portrays the abduction and appropriation of babies by the Argentine military dictatorship" (p. 69). Sucido (2012) focuses on the human rights aspect of the program. He notes how the producers worked with the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo group to put pressure on the Argentinian government; they aired the program both in Argentina (the 2006 season) and in the United States (two years later). He notes that the "process displays topics such as memory, justice, and power in current Argentine society" and he "analyzes the genre telenovela as a cultural production with specific features in a growing transnational cultural market and its position inside the Latin American cultural industry" (p. 180).

Asia. Dissanayake (2012) offers a brief review article on "the evolution of television dramas in the Asian countries" (p. 191), examining books on Japanese productions, Hindu nationalism in India soap opera, and the more general world of the soap opera in India.

In a regional study, Fung (2007) argues for a more complex theory to account for the intercultural flow of programming, in this case between Japan and Hong

Kong. While technology plays a role ("the video disc culture" that supports exchange of programs, p. 267), export strategies, historical relationships, and cultural homologies also matter (pp. 265, 268–269). Based on survey and interview data, Fung argues that "the regional values from Japan have gradually displaced the global culture to become Hong Kong's emancipatory power to resist the control of the state" (p. 265).

Australia. Australia has a long-established tradition of soap opera production with *Neighbours* running for over 25 years; with exports, the show has become globally well known. Ward, O'Regan, and Goldsmith (2010) compare it to a newer show, *Packed to the Rafters*, which they describe as "a contemporary version of familiar Aussie themes related to everyday middle-class suburbia, populated with blue skies and feel-good characters expressing wholesome family values, but with a stylistic innovation defined here as domestic realism." In their discussion, they argue that "As part of the production ecology of the late 2000s, *Packed to the Rafters* demonstrates the considerable role for local drama productions as loss leaders and flagship programming for commercial free-to-air networks up against an increasingly difficult domestic market" (p. 162). In a similar vein, Cenere (2006) offers a retrospective on *Blue Heelers*, a soap opera that ran for 12 years, analyzing its successful formula.

Stepping back from specific shows, Davies (2000) situates Australian soap operas in the context of television drama in that country, noting themes of action, obsession with human life, and an opposition to dysfunctional lifestyles. In a similar big picture approach, Turner (2005) examines the link between the shows and the local culture, noting "that narratives produced for local audiences are always going to operate in some relation to established discourses of local or national cultural identities." He extends his analysis to the "processes of appropriation and adaptation" in reality television programming that in one way or another "draw on the soap opera format for their narrative and formal structures" and, as in the soap operas, recreate the local (p. 415).

In addition to the examinations of specific programs, scholars turn to soap operas as a way to examine representation of various groups. King (2009) studies "the representation of indigenous sexuality on Australian television drama since the 1970s," tracing changes over 40 years. He concludes "that in representations of intimate and loving relationships on screen it has only recently become possible to see hopeful mod-

els for interaction between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians” (p. 37). Following hybridity theory, Winarnita (2011) uses representations of Asian women as a starting point to delve into the idea of identity in an increasingly multicultural society. Her analysis of the characters on two soap opera highlights the paths of representation, particularly when constrained by the opposing program forces of melodrama and realism.

Bangladesh. Though not focusing on soap operas produced in Bangladesh, Al Helal (2013) provides a key look at Bangladeshi society as it interacts with Indian soap operas. Concerned with the negative effects of such viewing, he reports a study based on interviews with a snowball sample of viewers in Dhaka. Among other things, he reports that his informants identify a number of negative effects: watching the shows distracts people from other pursuits and the shows themselves “provoke sexual behavior, instigate pre- and extra-marital affair, educate criminal activity, originate eve teasing, and nurture conflict between family members” (p. 37). Others fear that the shows promote a Hindu culture. Al Helal also includes a helpful literature review on pages 39–40.

Belgium. In Belgium, as in Italy, the national public service broadcaster used soap operas to build audience ratings in the face of satellite or cable television competition and to foster a greater sense of national identity. Franco (2001) presents the results of a comparative study of the Belgium *Thuis* (At Home) and the British *EastEnders*. “Through an examination of the construction of the community, social class, and gender as well as thematic preoccupations and a narrative/ideological analysis of representative story lines, [Franco] attempts to distill the unarticulated givens of *Thuis*’s social structure as indicative of the agenda of the society that watches the soap. . . . Cultural tropes and, most important, an informal standardized language that has become the point of resistance against Dutch and French linguistic and cultural hegemony unify the heterogeneous Flemish community on and off the screen” (p. 449).

Brazil. Serialized novels began on radio in Brazil and then moved to television at the very beginning of that medium in the country. Like the transition to television in many countries, the Brazilian telenovela simply recreated its radio predecessor and experimented with the form until it found a successful formula (Rêgo, 2011, p. 75). In her history of the form, Rêgo writes that the radionovela “arrived in Brazil in 1941 in the form of an Argentine production sponsored by the

Colgate-Palmolive company of the U.S.” (p. 78). Soon, however, an indigenous telenovela began and grew to the point that it almost defines some networks.

The Brazilian version of the soap opera or telenovela ranks among the most widely watched shows, dominating parts of the viewing day. Researchers have approached its study from a number of angles, looking at production, style, values, audiences, and interpretation. Like many producers and media companies, Brazil’s Rede Globo seeks to maximize the audience for its telenovelas. Da Silva Castro (2012) looks at its marketing of one program, *Cheias de Charme* [Full of Charm] and the incorporation of digital media for a kind of hybrid storytelling. Oikawa, John, and Avancini (2012) conduct a similar study of two Globo telenovelas, *Passione* and *Avenida Brasil*, examining the network’s digital strategies for distribution and for involving the shows’ fans in a kind of co-production. Finally, in another study of *Avenida Brasil*, Pucci Junior (2014) uses schemata theory to analyze stylistic innovations, concluding that “some Brazilian telenovelas, of which *Avenida Brasil* is probably the best example, absorb audiovisual schemata tested in cinema and other media, reconfiguring them according to their own narrative and communicational needs” (p. 675). Following the work of Pucci Junior and several others, Bona (2014) develops the idea of the cinema as a source of influence on *Avenida Brasil*, seeing in it a growing media convergence.

Television programs, including soap operas and mini-series, provide researchers with “texts” to provide insight into Brazilian society. Brennan (2015) argues that the mini-series format builds on the soap opera; in his analysis, he “concludes by arguing that discourses surrounding production and critique of the television mini-series provide an understanding of the roles of authority and resistance in Brazil’s continuing negotiations of its national values” (p. 686). Brown (2009) uses the telenovelas as a means of insight into the lives and values of poor women in Brazil. In a feminist analysis, she notes that the programs form not only “a central form of sociability for many women living in conditions of poverty; but also that women employ them as a means of challenging negative valuations around their bodies” (p. 6). Guided by reception studies, Wottrich (2012) “investigates how women of advanced age in popular classes, who have watched Brazilian soap operas since their initial appearance, establish their identities from this television genre.” Through an ethnographic study she also notes the oppressive gender experience of the women,

but that in the soap operas “the women find models of female old age with which they can identify, in accordance with the more positive meanings of old age that they construct for themselves” (p. 74).

Some have used soap operas to study other minorities in Brazil. Indigenous people, marked by poor Portuguese language use, gets the attention of dos Santos Neves and de Nazareth Santos Carvalho (2014), who study four telenovelas broadcast between 1978 and 2005 to track how the culture “constructs” minorities. Joyce (2013) uses the telenovelas’ presentation of homosexuality in three storylines on TV Globo soap operas to examine “a struggle for a monopoly of knowledge over discourses that deem homosexuality as acceptable, and one that views it as unacceptable and strange” (p. 48). Finally, Drumond (2014) studies the representation of minorities on *Avenida Brasil*, noting the possibilities of upward mobility in the spaces of the fictional suburb in which the producers set the show.

Britain. The BBC and other channels in Britain have produced both long-running and medium-term soap operas; the genre has directly and indirectly influenced other programming on British television. These include *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, *The Grove Family*, *Brookside*, *Crossroads*, and *King of the Ghetto*. In fact, Brunsdon (2000) maintains, “the British broadcast schedules have been dominated by serial drama . . . By 1994, all three major British soaps, *Coronation Street*, *Brookside*, and *EastEnders*, had moved to three evenings a week” (p. 3). The dominant position of these programs has, in turn, led to a great deal of scholarly attention. Brunsdon herself engages in a project of “a history of the encounter of soap opera and feminism” (p. 4). Lamuedra and O’Donnell (2013) explore, through interviews, how *EastEnders* serves “as a site of cultural citizenship and, via the concept of public service, of resistance to the current neoliberal hegemony” (p. 58). Holmes (2006) focuses on *The Grove Family* “to explore a relationship between critical and methodological approaches to television genre, and the construction of television history,” arguing that the idea of genre includes greater latitude and a number of discourses—from drama to comedy to documentary (p. 287). Malik (2009) also focuses on just one program, *King of the Ghetto* and notes that its portrayal of London highlights the multiracial tensions of the city “through its representation of the politics of diaspora space that prevailed in the city’s East End” (p. 232).

British soap operas touch on most aspects of life in the UK. Coleman (2007) examines ways in which

political themes appear in soap opera, making “the distinction between the personalized communities depicted in soaps and the impersonal world of politics” (p. 1). In addition to surveys and focus groups of fans, he also interviewed writers and producers. Granville (2009) returns to the theme, but focuses on the satires of *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*, which take the soap opera viewer into contemporary politics.

Like soap operas in many countries, those in the UK address health behaviors from time to time. Verma, Adams, and White (2007) set out to test how much British soap operas actually addressed positive portrayals. A content analysis showed that seven of 11 selected behaviors (many dealing with alcohol or smoking) did indeed appear, suggesting that government or health agencies might work with program producers to promote healthy living. A few years earlier, however, Coombes (2003), writing in the *British Medical Journal*, reported that British television refused to air *Kismet Road*, a low-budget Asian soap opera dealing with public health issues.

Burma (Myanmar). While no studies in this review examine soap operas produced in Myanmar, Jirattikom (2008) studies the ways that the Shan communities in Burma view Thai programming. He notes “how the Shan appropriation of transnational television creates a new site of identity transcending national boundaries and expressing an ambivalent sense of interaction with mediated modernity” and how it encourages migration (p. 30).

Cambodia. Cambodia uses the soap opera format as part of public health campaigns. Hocking (2005) tells the story of the production of *Taste of Life*, a show dealing with AIDS in Cambodia. Despite a lack of an established media industry to produce the program, it became a success among the target population.

Catalonia (Spain). In two articles, Castelló notes the soap-opera style used in Catalan language television production (2011) and applies the cultural proximity model to show “that the discourses on society and culture proposed at production level are received as being ‘proximate,’ but that this perception is not just national, cultural, or linguistic. Cultural proximity also incorporates educative, cognitive, and emotional elements and aspects related to the audience’s immediate surroundings” (2010, p. 207). Based on this, Castelló offers an extended version of the cultural proximity thesis.

China. Lu (2000) presents a study of Chinese soap operas “involving transnational romances between Chinese men and Russian and American women” (p.

25) within a larger context of the development of Chinese television broadcasting since 1958. Interestingly, he notes that the first soap-opera television drama, broadcast in 1990, found sponsorship by commercials for detergents (p. 26). In his reading of the transnational romances, he concludes that “the construction of Chinese masculinity through the foreign woman has become a new way of imagining national identity in the age of globalization” (p. 25).

Colombia. While the United States, the Netherlands, Mexico, and Great Britain dominated the market for exporting television programs, the Columbian telenovela, *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, became a top export for the Colombia industry. Mikos and Perrotta (2009) compare the various adaptations of the production, noting both textual and cultural requirements for a successful export.

Czech Republic. As in a number of other countries, the Czech public television service has to compete with private broadcasters for audience share; it has chosen to enter into co-production agreements with private companies. Pjajčíková and Szczepanik (2014) offer an ethnographic study of one such co-production, tracing how *The First Republic* shifted away from the Czech tradition of complex drama to the soap opera format. They regard the program as an example of “a shift away from the longstanding Czech tradition of having one or two writers pen either six- or 13-part screenplays as one whole in favor of having a writing team collaborate on dozens of screenplays” and a move to following trends in American-style production (p. 55).

Ecuador. Ayala Marín (2012) provides a brief report on the situation in Ecuador, which remains an importer of telenovelas but a producer of local comedy shows, popular with the Ecuadorean audience.

Egypt. With the greater availability of satellite television distribution, the Egyptian soap opera productions, initially focused on a local audience, have aimed for a pan-Arab audience, particularly producing programs for viewing during Ramadan. Rooted in the “musalsal” or “series,” the Arab-language soap opera has anchored the industry. Since the mid-1960s an “Egyptian and smaller Syrian television drama industry developed, with a distinct set of conventions and a range of sub-genres, including historical, contemporary social, comedy, folkloric, and the science fiction-like ‘fantasy’” (Salamandra, 2011, p. 276). Abu-Lughod (2006) examines the reception of such programming in the villages of Egypt.

Finland. A study of children’s bedtime habits indicated that television viewing (and more lax parental permissions for later viewing hours) led to later bedtimes. *Salatut elämät*, a Finnish soap opera claimed high viewership among the pre-teen group (Sormunen, Turunen, & Tossavainen, 2016).

Germany. Several studies published in this period examine the content of German soap operas. In an examination of innovation in the genre, Ward (2000) recaps *CityExpress*, a soap opera set on a train; he argues that in an attempt to increase audience share, broadcasters more freely combine generic elements in a search for a successful formula. Nijhawan (2008) examines the expansion of audience appeal in a different way—through the constructions of multiculturalism and ethicity in the soap opera *Lindenstrasse*. Accepting that the show’s producers regard it as a kind of “cultural mirror,” Nijhawan writes, “*Lindenstrasse*, while presuming a white majority audience, has attracted attention by virtue of a non-stylish, average German middle class approach that speaks through its numerous intertextual references to class, gender, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation as well as to socio-political and multicultural issues that go well beyond the regular broadcast agenda of prime-time television entertainment” (p. 162). However, she concludes that the show reproduces clichés, especially about guest workers and reduces the multicultural to the realm of the other (p. 161).

Moran (2000) offers a different perspective on the cultural imperialism hypothesis through a study of the adaptation of the Australian soap opera, *The Restless Years*, for German television. He notes that the first episodes stayed close to the original but that the later ones became more national in scope, character, and focus.

India. With its huge population and growing middle class, India provides a fertile ground for the growth of soap opera. With a booming television industry, “Indians prefer a television set than a good water system in their homes” (MacPherson, 2007, p. 76); by 2007, 112 million Indian homes had television (p. 76). And with increasing audiences, more scholars have paid attention to programming, of which soap operas play a leading role. Both Gokulsing (2004) and Munshi (2010) offer book-length studies of the Indian soap opera. The initial soap operas in India, *Hum Log* (We People, 1984) and *Buniyaad* (Foundation, 1986) appeared on Doordarshan, the state television network and both fit generally into the education / development

paradigm of soap opera (Gokulsing, 2004, p. 2; Munshi, 2010, p. 1).

The biggest change in soap opera content occurred with a dramatic increase in the television audience in India. Munshi (2010) reports a rise from 116 channels available in India in the year 2000 to 427 channels eight years later (p. 34). With the growing competition from satellite television channels, more purely entertainment soap operas appeared. “These soaps raised the bar for production values; introduced catchy title songs and the opening montage; brought in aspirational lifestyles, but one that espoused *parivaar aur parampara* (family and tradition); expensive and stylized sets; and an upmarket look, reminiscent of popular Hollywood films of the 1990s” (p. 1). Audience demographics also played a role. Chakrabarti (2014) argues that the year 2000 marked an important shift in soap opera content, with a greater emphasis on upper-class families and with a focus on the importance of the Hindu religion. The shift occurs, he holds, because “the very structure of the audience marketplace, especially the Indian television audience measurement system and shifts in marketing practices, abets the naturalization of particular political discourses within popular cultural forms, in this case Hindu nationalist discourse within television soap opera” (p. 473). The shift also reflects the desire of the various channels to increase audience share among middle- and upper-class viewers, a conclusion also supported by Munshi (2010, p. 5).

The soap opera form did not move into India as a purely Western import. The initial government-sponsored soap operas appeared irregularly and those produced by commercial companies for the satellite channels have adjusted to their local audiences. Munshi offers the distinction between soap opera, serials, and series but admits to some flexibility in this distinction. She writes:

a serial is spread over many episodes but tells a complete story. It may use the device of the hook, sometimes also called a cliffhanger, to lure audiences back to the next episode. . . . They differ from soaps in that there is a closure to their narratives.

The series format resembles a soap in offering a set of characters and often, a specific place with which audiences become familiar. Generally one hour long, the narrative structure, however, is such that the main story is resolved in a single episode.

In soaps, as Christine Geraghty observes, “stories are never finally resolved and even soaps which ceased to be made project themselves into a nonexistent future.” (pp. 2–3)

The Indian soap opera generally adopts most of the typical soap opera format but within this genre tends to the serial format and features the following characteristics:

- (1) Open-ended narratives told in serial/episodic form which resists narrative closure
- (2) Multiple characters, plots, and sub-plots
- (3) Use of time at a dual level—one, which parallels actual time and implies that soap characters’ lives go on whether we watch or not; and two, when the narrative takes a generational leap to introduce new characters and new story lines
- (4) Emphasis on dialog and attempt at resolution
- (5) Mixing of genres of melodrama, myth, realism and entertainment
- (6) Hook, Recap and Precap
- (7) Male characters whose actions move the narrative forward
- (8) Women as the central protagonists
- (9) The family home as the main setting for the show. (Munshi, 2010, p. 20)

Other differences between Indian soap operas and those in the West arise from tradition in India: in drama, in Bollywood film, and in the willingness to draw on religious epics.

Within this overall format, the Indian soap opera remains a feminine discourse, aimed at a women’s audience. With his interest in educational soap operas, Gokulsing (2004) includes a chapter on “women-oriented soap operas” and notes the following common themes: family relationships, health education, birth control, fitness programs, immunization programs, and applied nutrition (pp. 85–87). In addition to these “social” programs, he also reports religious and political soap operas on the state broadcaster, Doordarshan (p. 27). The satellite channels feature more serials and fewer educational or social themes (p. 59). Munshi (2010) adds that satellite channel soap operas will more likely address consumerism, lifestyle choices, and issues of “Indian-ness” (p. 176).

Munshi (2010) offers a look at the key players in the Indian soap opera—many of whom could find a place in the production of any country: the producer, the writers, actors and actresses, costume designers, set and location designers (pp. 82–96). Some distinctive features also appear in the design of opening credits and the use of music, drawing freely from the

Bollywood film style (pp. 96–98). One particular difference comes with the “swish-pan shot”:

This is a feature perhaps unique to Indian soaps. It is when, at a critical point, the camera and sound track go somewhat wild and a couple of things happen. For example if someone has been slapped, the same action is shown three times, with the camera panning, or swishing in and out rapidly. . . . The shot is accompanied by loud music, signaling that something critical has occurred. That action is also shown in different colors—either the faces of the characters in the scene turn red and yellow; the villain’s face almost always turns green; and the faces of the characters witnessing the event are shown consecutively, frozen in black and white, as if to register shock and horror. (p. 98)

In addition, the Indian soap opera places the mother-in-law daughter-in-law relationship in a central place in the unfolding drama, reflecting cultural realism (p. 101). Finally, the Indian soap opera features “the male voice” as a way to move the narrative, even though the programs focus on women. The male and female characters “function differently in soap narratives,” often with the men as catalysts for plot developments (p. 161).

Like any television program, the soap opera must maintain its audience. Following the theory first proposed by Herzog in 1944, Gokulsing (2004) identifies three key factors for the audience members: “the emotional release they receive through the storylines and characters . . . an opportunity for fantasy fulfillment (wishful thinking) . . . information and advice from their favorite characters” (p. 3). Sood and Rogers (2000) apply the well-known theory of parasocial interaction to explore the kinds of interaction viewers of *Hum Log* manifested in letters to the program producers, the things that built viewer loyalty. Following the literature, they identified five dimensions of interaction: affective interaction, cognitive interaction, behavioral interaction, referential involvement, and critical involvement (pp. 390–391). Examining the ways in which these factors appeared in the letters, they propose an audience theory to aid designers of educational kinds of soap operas. In a later audience study, Sood (2002) uses “data from a popular 104-episode entertainment-education radio soap opera from India, *Tinka Tinka Sukh*,” to confirm the multidimensional model for audience involvement, seeing the same dimensions identified in the earlier study. He also notes that “involvement appears to be a precursor for increasing self-efficacy and collective efficacy, and in promoting

interpersonal communication among individuals in the audience” (p. 153).

Theorizing audience involvement a bit differently, Sherring and Brown (2001) examined the effects of educational soap operas on female viewers. Postulating a link between “social and personal identity” and “the effects of Indian prosocial soap operas in forming mindsets affecting attitudes and actions relating to the two major social problems—female feticide and child marriage” (p. 1), they found mixed results with the audiences for some soap operas showing a link but the audiences for other programs not (p. 27). Their paper includes a helpful review of Indian soap operas and their context.

In a different kind of audience study, one based on cultural proximity theory, Soman and Doshi (2016) asked expatriate Indian viewers of Indian soap operas about their reactions to various themes in the programs: “portrayal of women, heterosexual romance and intimacy, and joint family.” Many respondents told them that “the role of Indian women being created in Indian serials did not reflect the image of Indian women the participants remembered when they migrated to the United States in the 1960s” and that “these portrayals reminded these participants that they were cultural outsiders in modern India” (p. 203). This latter study also indicates how satellite television has expanded the audience for soap operas well beyond the intended target audience on the subcontinent.

Jaggi (2011) combines a brief history of the soap opera in India and their usual themes with a content analysis to measure the development of the genre, as least in terms of key themes or cultural expression as the form becomes more indigenous. Noting that the study continues, Jaggi sketches five key questions:

- “Does the ‘feminine-oriented’ narrative in Indian soaps propagate or challenge gender stereotypes?
- “Do notions of family, traditions, rituals, patriarchy and similar codes reinforce stereotypes?
- ‘Does the new crop of soaps, which is based on social problems, address the issues substantially? Does the issue stand out or get lost in the drama and narrative?’
- “Does the new category of soaps trivialize what the earlier versions were offering? What is the interpretation in the audience’s mind?”
- “Does the line and treatment create a cultural connect or cultural divide for the audience?” (p. 141)

Jaggi points out that since the opening of Indian broadcasting to new entrants, soap opera themes do indicate

a different treatment of women, with strong female characters, the glorification of the joint family, and some increase of social issues (pp. 144–145). At the same time, the quest for ratings leads to “bizarre turns”: “It was the time when the soap should have introduced a social progression, but after a multitude of twists in terms of domestic politics instead of dealing with the social evil, this could well be an expected line of action. Instead of challenging the social ill, women are being depicted as docile and towing the line” (p. 145).

Like a number of other countries, India exports its soap operas beyond its own expatriate citizens. Osman (2011) explores just one aspect of this, examining the “culture wars” occasioned by the export of Indian soap operas to Afghanistan. Despite a long cultural connection with India, Afghan governments, particularly under the Taliban, attempted to ban Indian soap operas on religious grounds:

One of the main grievances of the religious groups against the Indian soap operas is that they are “Hinduizing” Afghan culture and therefore tainting what is imagined as a pure Islamic Afghan culture. Since the Indian dramatic serials address issues such as adultery, divorce, and other domestic issues, the faith-based groups have also charged the programs with “immorality.” They have voiced fears that Afghan women and youth are particularly susceptible to emulating the “improper” lifestyles and customs of South Asians. (p. 244)

Within this framework, Osman revisits the cultural imperialism and cultural vulnerability theories, basing his analysis on an ethnographic study of audiences.

Indonesia. Indonesian soap operas (*sinetron*) have provided researchers with both content and tools for study. Rakhmani (2014) examines Islamic themed soap operas and finds “that contrasting ideological motivations among producers have resulted in particular narratives within their content. Despite these peculiarities, all narratives use Islamic teachings to address societal issues experienced by middle-class Indonesian Muslims. This, in turn, projects an image of Indonesian Islam that blurs existing political divisions in Indonesian society” (p. 340). Gobel (2011) does not so much study soap opera themselves but soap opera viewers and how they determine the meanings of unfamiliar words, offering a tool to understand how people decode signs.

Ireland. Brennan (2004) uses a description of the production of *Fair City*, the most popular Irish soap opera

to argue for a change in cultural production. Unlike other kinds of creative work, the show’s economic success depends on the “rationalization” of the production process, from the collaborative work of teams of writers to a quick production process (leading to four shows a week). In addition the predictable genre both lessens risk and allows different voices to emerge in the dominant culture, a phenomenon Brennan terms the “‘proletarianization’ of formerly autonomous and prestigious cultural work” (p. 66).

Israel. The adoption of soap operas in Israel began with the import of Latin American telenovelas. Ginossar (2011) traces that history, using it to argue for a change in the cultural imperialism thesis, seeing in it a different flow of influence, one that eventually leads to a “secondary flow.” She describes the work in this way:

I analyze the structural and cultural aspects of this flow. I propose that this flow led to processes of cultural learning, in which audiences adopted elements of Latino culture, most notably expressed by Israeli fans learning to speak Spanish, and of cultural resistance, manifested in a public debate over the impact of Argentinean telenovelas aimed at children and adolescents. Structurally, I depict how this flow began with importing telenovelas and proceeded to production of local Israeli telenovelas, as well as to the founding of an internationally-traded company owned by Israelis that co-produces and distributes Latin American telenovelas to more than 50 countries. (p. 57)

Italy. Italy also witnessed a kind of delayed production of soap operas, with Italian broadcasters, locked in a ratings war, producing local soap operas only after seeing the success of American imports. By the late 1990s, Italian production became well established. Cardini (2011) notes that the competition led to two different styles:

On the one hand, there was the American style represented by *The Bold and the Beautiful* aired by Canale 5. Luxury locations, fashionable and glossy characters, complicated and unrealistic love stories developed on the screen at a very slow rhythm. Long and slow conversations between two characters at a time took place in interiors—mainly the characters’ rich houses located in a most elegant neighborhood in Los Angeles. On the other hand, RAI was airing the first Italian soap opera by adapting a completely different style taken from the British soap opera. . . . The action takes place in real locations such as pubs, shops, squares and streets, classrooms,

and workplaces; characters are real-looking people, far from the glamour of the American soap opera. The narrative focus is on social and cultural themes such as alcoholism, abortion, divorce, and drugs, rather than on love affairs, marriages, and adultery. (p. 118)

Using case studies of different productions, Cardini traces the development of the soap opera “industry” in Italy. Lombardi (2009) also sketches the history of the Italian soap opera, placing it within the development of the genre around the world. Commenting on specific programs, he notes that *Incantesimo* suffered “death by format” (p. 233) with RAI changing its design several times to adjust to audience needs, leaving viewers somewhat baffled. Others shows like *Un posto al sole* (A Place in the Sun) and *Agrodolce*, illustrate other aspects of the national production, including the policy desideratum of reviving film and television production centers.

As with scholars in other countries, Italians also look to audience study and reception analysis to understand the success of programs. Giomi (2005) argues that *Vivere* (Living) succeeded for both anthropological and cultural reasons. The program grew out of Italian society and carried cultural meaning as it allowed Italians to see themselves in new ways.

Like other public broadcasters, RAI has experimented with new delivery platforms. Zanatta and Zoppeddu (2015) offer an overview of such efforts, reporting case studies of a political talk show and of the soap opera, *Un posto al sole*. RAI collaborates with its subsidiary, Rainet, to create a multiplatform delivery of the programs. In the case of the soap opera, the program producers work with the broadcaster to offer a richer experience, even though they came later to the online world than some other programs. Rather than simply uploading program content to the website, “The extra-television offer of the soap opera consists of teletext, the Internet, mobile phone and tablet, and other ‘parallel’ distribution channels from books to guided tours of the filming location” (p. 146). The group also has expanded to social media. Zanatta and Zoppeddu describe the roles of the various actors here: the production company, the multiplatform producers, the broadcaster, so on, noting an “anomalous” process since it did not begin as a top-down management strategy.

Jordan. In her general overview of soap operas in the Arabic speaking world, Salamandra (2011) notes that even these seemingly entertainment programs cannot avoid politics. She describes the fate of *The Road to Kabul*, a Jordanian-Syrian co-production that raised

concerns with the U.S. government. “The Americans feared the series’ sympathetic depiction of mujahidin fighting the Soviets would attract new recruits to the Iraqi insurgency. Ironically, promotional clips of the series portraying a fanatical Taliban angered some Islamic groups, who issued their own complaints against the show’s producers and cast” (p. 277).

Kazakhstan. As with many countries in the global south, soap operas in Kazakhstan serve development goals set by governments and by aid agencies. Mandel (2002) offers a case study of what she terms, “a Marshall Plan of the mind,” a soap opera intended to create a new post-Soviet identity. Funding by a British agency, the program *Crossroads* began as an attempt to import the kind of realism known to British soap opera fans. Initially the local writers resisted because they felt that the style and the language were “too common” (p. 216); the British trainers could not understand the pull of Soviet socialist realism. Quoting Boym, Mandel explains, “socialist realism has virtually nothing to do with the everyday existence of Soviet citizens; it does not even attempt to mime or imitate it. The point is to visualize the mythical and utopian world and thus bring it into existence” (p. 217). In effect the British unwittingly aimed to combine three genres: soap opera, British realism, and Soviet socialist realism. Mandel’s conclusion highlights the dilemma:

An irony of *Crossroads*, then, is the tale of how a Thatcherite propaganda tool for the teaching of privatization, market reform, and democracy to ex-Soviet citizens was repeatedly hijacked and transformed—even derailed until ultimately it became, at least in part, the voice of a nationalized highly censored state-controlled media empire, not dissimilar from its Soviet predecessor. . . .

Returning to the multiple worlds invoked earlier, I argue that this Kazakhstani example offers an intriguing instance in which a Second World society, now realizing itself as a Fourth World nation, is given a First World genred medium that it in turn transforms itself into an indigenized product. (p. 224)

Kenya. In response to a government-mandated increase in local programming on the various broadcast channels, local producers turned to soap operas. Ngugi King’ara (2011) uses case studies of some of these programs to explore the entertainment function of television and “how Kenyan producers conceptualize the

audiences of television entertainment programs” (p. 129). Ngugi King’ara goes on to argue that:

the entertainment function of soap operas is related to roles such as fulfilling audience’s needs in mood repair and imparting socio-cultural education to audiences. Furthermore, soap operas’ socio-cultural relevancy promotes audiences’ social interactivity by locating them within their socio-cultural-political networks. In this respect, soap operas facilitate the audiences’ self-reflexivity by enabling viewers to negotiate socially ascribed subjectivities hence allowing them to view their world from more personalized perspectives. (p. 130)

In addition to entertainment-oriented soap operas, Ngugi King’ara also looks to the audience responses to educational soap operas, a subgenre popular with governments, NGOs, health organizations, and even with audiences. However, in recounting a failed Kenyan production, he comments, “Unlike conventional soap operas, entertainment-education soap operas have to be culturally coherent, and must project clear moral distinctions between the good and bad behavior” (p. 139). What audience will overlook in an entertainment venue, they will not where they perceive an informative benefit.

Korea. Exports of soap operas serve both economic and ideological goals. Fuyuno (2004) examines the popularity of *Winter Sonata* in Japan, noting how Japanese women, particularly the wartime generation react. Kim, Agrusa, Lee, and Chon (2007) also use the reception of *Winter Sonata* to study different audience effects. “In Japan, a fever was created by a 26-part Korean TV drama series titled *Winter Sonata* which led to a variety of economic and socio-cultural impacts. The induced flow of Japanese tourists has been rapidly increasing, indicating the number of visitors to Korea in 2005 compared to those of 2003 and 2004 reported a raise of 35.5% and 35.4%, respectively” (p 1341). To better understand this phenomenon, the group used various secondary sources (magazines, newspaper articles, etc.) to estimate and to explain audience engagement. In a more detailed study Lin and Tong (2007) examine gender identity and the exploration of gender boundaries by heterosexual Hong Kong men watching Korean soap operas. Using in-depth interviews they found that male viewers watching the soap operas gained a better understanding of women’s concerns, the social pressures forcing men to control emotional expression, ideas of romance, and gender roles.

Malaysia. The Malaysian government has taken particular interest in soap operas, encouraging local production to promote “the state’s vision of alternative Asian-style modernities” (Syed & Runnel, 2014, p. 304). But even these seem to feature transnational images of modernity too much. Syed and Runnel empirically examined Malay Muslim women’s understanding of non-Western soap operas. They asked about “the significance of non-Western soaps to an understanding of gendered expectations and the progressive re-territorialization of the socio-political order in the context of an ethos of mediatized cultural globalization” and argue that “Malay women act as strategic audiences who mobilize sophisticated viewing tactics that we call ‘watching competencies’ to negotiate the pleasures and potential conflicts of their access to non-Western soaps. This research indicates that Malay women are neither passive, vulnerable consumers of foreign soap, nor easily manipulated by those who claim authority” (p. 304).

Mali. Television service in Mali began in the 1980s and did not much develop until the mid-1990s. Ly (2006) recounts the history of early television in the country and indicates that the first Malian soap opera, *Wahala*, appeared in 1999 (pp. 96–97). Produced by the national network with funding from the government and from private sponsors, the show attracted a large following. Ly offers this explanation:

Valuing indirectness over directness, TV allows Malians to express themselves and their views on social issues obliquely. Rather than use themselves as examples, Malians can refer unashamedly to the characters in *Wahala*, who live and encounter the very issues they endure in their own lives. They relate easily to these characters because the problems that their fictitious counterparts experience are often their very own. The show’s ability to speak for and of the people gave it a certain freedom to address social issues without harshly criticizing the very system that perpetuated these societal problems. Indeed, *Wahala* was set apart from the people and the government at the same time that it presented them. (p. 97)

While remaining popular, this and other soap operas that criticize government corruption have failed to raise enough funding to stay on the air—as the producers fears being accused of the corruption they decry as they accept donor money for program costs.

Schultz (2007) examines the reception of U.S. and Brazilian soap operas and telenovelas in Mali as

part of a study of media practices in that country. Describing a pattern of communal viewing of, and commenting on television, Schultz notes that viewer assessment of soap operas varies with age, sex, social position, and education (p. 25). She expands on this:

To my hosts' wives and their adult friends, too, the entertaining character of soaps and telenovelas extended beyond the serials' story lines. They eagerly assessed dresses and tokens of a fashionable and "civilized" feminine lifestyle, a style they variously associated with the capital Bamako, more "advanced" neighboring countries, or with France. . . . The *filimu* world serves to situate them in a local context of difference among women, a difference that is couched in terms of moral distinction and of sophistication.

Men's (surprisingly unanimous) reactions revealed a similar tendency of treating the *filimu* as a diagnostic spotlight elucidating one's own daily experiences. Rather than emphasizing the different, exotic nature of the world depicted on TV, men, many of them intellectuals, stressed the "sameness" of the telenovela world. (p. 26).

Placing her observations in the context of audience studies, Schultz shows how the Malian viewers construct both preferred and oppositional readings of the foreign soap operas.

Mexico. With its tradition of telenovelas, Mexico has long produced soap operas, exporting them first to other Spanish-speaking countries and then to countries around the world. Finally, with the rise of satellite and cable television in the U.S., the telenovelas began to reach the Spanish-speaking market in that country. Abad-Izquierdo (2011) sketches the history of the Mexican telenovela from the 1950s to the 1970s from the perspective of political economy. The early development, made possible through station licences obtained through connections with ruling party, demanded a careful maneuvering: "The television producers creating telenovelas had to strike a complex balance between the demands of their patron, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), and the demands of urban, middle class viewers that were their growing and vital consumers" (p. 93). Further, she attributes the rise of the telenovela to a greater sense of culture and nationalism in the period. Wary of foreign broadcasting imports, the government also wanted to maintain the legacy of the revolution and to cultivate a sense of Mexico as "modern, middle class, and urban" (p. 95). Looking for cheaper alternatives to the *teleteatro* (lavish, televised theatrical productions), the newly licensed

stations turned to telenovelas, which featured cheaper productions of serialized, almost addictive stories.

A number of scholars study Mexican telenovelas. Rodríguez Cadena (2004) examines how the historical soap opera "constitutes a discursive form, an arbitrary interpretation mainly from documental sources, and exemplifies a process that embraces the craft of fiction, language, education, politics, imagination, and representation." The historical soap opera combines "the representation of a specific period of collective history and its main heroes in plots that depict wars, conspiracy, heroic feats, the public deeds of the heroes and national unification. As a complement to that essential historical component, non-historical characters enact interconnected subplots of passion, love, jealousy, betrayal, and intrigue" (p. 49). Such telenovelas connect in one way or another with cultural identity, though any telenovela will express the Mexican identity. De la Luz Casas Pórez (2005) explains that the telenovelas shape cultural identity through "patterns of viewing, role modeling, narrative, and other characteristics" (p. 407). Uribe Alvarado (2007) sees the cultural and social influence of the telenovelas even among Mexicans in the U.S. Studying Hispanic immigrants in Los Angeles, she notes how the telenovelas on the Univisión channel has affected various daily rituals. De Melo Rocha (2009) explores how the aesthetics of one program, *Rebelde*, both highlight youth and attract of youth audience.

Two studies turn to the narratives of different soap operas. De Jesús Corral Corral (2007) analyzes *Amor en custodia* to show how the writers use action rather than speech to create a link between the show's actors and the audience, bridging two very different worlds. Lewis (2008) looks at *La Madrastra* and the way in which it incorporated current events—in this case the police mishandling of the case of a serial killer. Lewis asks about the role of symbolic presentations like this on different audience segments.

Nepal. As noted above, Indian soap operas gather viewers among the expatriate Hindu population. Burch (2002) asks why they also succeed in Nepal, noting the program aesthetics and the cultural proximity to India.

The Netherlands. In the general area of reception studies, de Bruin (2001, 2003) focuses on audience reaction to the soap opera, *Goede Tijden Slechte Tijden* (Good Times, Bad Times). The first study reports initial interviews with young female viewers who, when they discuss soap opera, discuss characters. The second study sets out a wider study; its literature review situ-

ates the viewing of soap operas in Netherlands among ethnic groups (pp. 3–5).

New Zealand. Dunleavy (2003) introduces *Shortland Street*, the first soap opera or daily drama produced in New Zealand and among the first programs produced after the country's television deregulation. The soap opera combines commercial and public service objectives and often deals with important issues such as HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, indigenous culture, and so on. Dunleavy discusses aspects such as “its creation as a co-production between public and private broadcasting institutions; its domestic role in a small television market; its relationships with New Zealand ‘identity and culture’; its application of genre conventions and foreign influences; and its progress . . . in a range of export markets” (p. 18). De Bruin (2011a) also examines *Shortland Street* but from the perspectives of its viewers. Interviews over several years explored how people talked about the issues raised by the program, particularly in terms of the “practices of cultural citizenship” (p. 85).

Pakistan. Ali (2010) offers a textual analysis of *Baitiyaan* (Daughters), a soap opera produced in Pakistan by Hum TV. Focusing on the image of women, the author argues that the Pakistani representations resemble those of the telenovela “*Simplemente María* and the East Asian drama *Oshin*, with women as passive figures whose virtue needs to be protected” (p. 1)

Scotland. While Scotland receives broadcasts of British soap operas, it also produces its own. Hibberd (2010) analyzes *River City*, which she writes “was conceived to more adequately address Scotland’s position as a semi-autonomous nation as well as the needs of a post-devolutionary audience” (p. 46). She notes that its broadcast occurred only in Scotland, thus limiting knowledge about it among scholars. Castelló, Dobson, and O’Donnell (2009) also examine soap operas produced in Scotland (as well as those produced in Catalonia), with interviews with writers and producers and focus groups in each region. They studied “their historically different narratives of the Self, . . . representations of town and country, the handling of social issues, and in particular the role played by language choices in societies where more than one language is available for the purposes of everyday communication. The analysis demonstrates how, rather than being in any simple way a ‘reflection of real life’ (a claim often made by producers), these soaps use well-established discourses circulating in their respective societies to offer a forum for the negotiation of social values, and that the reaction of the audience can vary from support

for the discourses mobilized by the producers, through scepticism to open mockery” (p. 467).

South Africa. South Africa produces a number of soap operas that compete for audience share on the various networks. Van der Merwe (2012) seeks to explain popularity of *7de Laan* across audiences through interviews with its producer and a sample of viewers as well as through reception analysis. A different research group sought to understand the appeal of *Isidingo*, another popular soap opera. Using a secondary analysis of a market study by the broadcasting authority, the authors offer a “model for the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty.” In addition to the mental processes, they note the importance of realism, social influences, and time slot in viewer interest (de Kock, & Wagner, 2012, p. 293).

Other studies of South African soap operas examine indirect learning. Van der Merwe (2005) recounts how the producers of *Isidingo* (The Need) include pro-social content; she reports “the perceptions of female viewers in respect of self-reported knowledge acquisition, attitudes, and behavioral changes due to watching this program” (p. 47). As part of a larger study on identity and young people, Salo (2003) compares how the impact of global culture (as found in soap operas) affects a local community; she reports that local factors mediate the impact of the programs. Also considering the question of identity, Marx (2008) looks at the narratives of four soap operas—*Egoli* (Place of gold), *Isidingo*, *Generations*, and *7de Laan*. Applying the theories of Said, de Beauvoir, and Irigaray, she analyzes the construction and deconstruction of gender.

Sudan. Greiner, Singhal, and Hurlburt (2007) report an interesting research method as they measured how well listeners to a Sudanese entertainment-educational radio soap opera understood its content. They asked participants to sketch or take photographs to illustrate plot-lines and educational content in the show *Ashreat Al Amal* (Sails of Hope); participants also shared reactions to the programs on women’s health.

Syria. Before its civil war, Syria produced a good number of Arab-language soap operas. Building on a cultural respect for the written word and a tradition of story and drama, Syrian producers took advantage of a common regional language and a new satellite distribution system for television to expand their market, even in the face of different kinds of opposition. In the 1990s, about 35 Syrian soap operas aired during Ramadan. Salamandra (2011) writes, “Syrian dramas

are taken seriously enough to spark protests and diplomatic tensions. Ethnic groups in Syria habitually complain when series depict them in ways they deem negative” (p. 277). Sometimes the programs have unintended effects, as Salamandra explains: “My own work on the series *Damascene Days* demonstrated how state-produced dramas, seemingly designed to engender nationhood, may instead enhance sectarian, regional, and class divisions” (p. 276).

Tanzania. Two studies examine entertainment-education soap operas in Tanzania. Vaughan and Rogers (2000) develop a model of effects based on such standard communication theories as social learning theory, diffusion of innovations, stages of change, and hierarchy of effects to look for message effects on behavior change “by stimulating (1) involvement with media characters and role modeling of their actions, and (2) interpersonal communication.” Examining the radio soap opera, *Twende na Wakati* (Let’s Go With the Times), and its family planning message they found “that (1) the model provides a useful framework for understanding the effects of an entertainment-education program, and (2) the radio soap opera promoted progress through the stages for family planning adoption in the treatment area in three of the four years of broadcast” (p. 203). In the second study Mohammed (2001) found that interpersonal discussions of health themes incorporated in soap operas occurred among groups with “high degrees of homophily with their network partners and [people] are more likely to discuss matters arising from the radio program with their network partners who are of similar tribal membership, religious affiliation, and gender, and those who are equally or more highly educated than themselves” (p. 137).

Turkey. The increasing export of Turkish soap operas has both direct and indirect effects. Yörük and Vatikiotis (2013) argue that the soap operas provide an example of soft power exercised by Turkey in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe; they base their findings on an analysis of the programs’ audience and the context of other influences (economic, cultural, political) on those audiences. Karlidağ and Bulut (2014) look at some of the factors for the expansion of the exports into, by their count, 50 countries from Eastern Europe to China. These include program production values, costs, non-Western perspectives, historical links between the export markets and Turkey, and political economy.

An analysis of the Turkish soap opera *The Valley of the Wolves* and its creation of a virtual world through

coverage in Turkish newspapers shows how audiences react to the characters. “This paper argues that within the series, viewers lose track of the reality: they face confusion between what is real and what is fiction and consequently their perception of reality is altered deeply. This creation of the virtual world can be understood and interpreted as an ideological production of the reality in an effort to legitimize and clear state actions in the name of patriotism” (Üçer, 2013, p. 213). A content analysis of several other Turkish soap operas, *Gümüş*, *Aşk-i Memnu*, *Hanimin Çifliği*, and *Öyle Bir Geçer Zaman ki*, focuses on their portrayal of women who had abortions, noting a “decidedly negative” view. “The women who have abortions are seen as defying cultural expectations to place motherhood before all else. They are portrayed as cheating on their husbands, having sex outside of marriage, and prioritizing career over marriage and family” (O’Neil, 2013, p. 810). O’Neil argues that such a view regards these women as subverting the ideal of motherhood endorsed by the government.

Uruguay. In a report on media history in Uruguay, Maronna and Sánchez Viela (2001) include serialized fiction in newspapers, magazines, radio, and soap opera, tracing the continuities of the form across different media. “This continuity is thematic in characters and in fictional approaches, but also in the configuration in reading schemes and consumption practices” (p. 90). The authors note that the form draws on both oral tradition and the use of memory in reception.

Vietnam. Ebert (2005) describes a Vietnamese radio soap opera, which promotes sustainable rice farming. The program, developed as a proposal for a World Bank grant program, aims to teach farmers about pest management.

8. Conclusion

This long review of the last 15 years of research on soap operas indicates that the area continues to thrive. However, it also shows few breakthroughs such as occurred in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, with cultural studies, feminism, and education-entertainment guiding researchers to understand soap operas as a key part of popular and mass culture; as providing an insight into how audiences decode, negotiate, and understand texts; and as a means to teach. While the research has deepened in these areas, its global reach and global concern forms its one new aspect.

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