

## Telenovelas in crisis? US streamers' troubled attempts to reshape Brazilian television

*¿Telenovelas en crisis? Los intentos fallidos de los streamers estadounidenses por redefinir la televisión brasileña*

*Telenovelas em crise? As tentativas frustradas dos streamers estadunidenses de redefinir a televisão brasileira*  
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MAYKA CASTELLANO

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4401-5979>

MELINA MEIMARIDIS<sup>1</sup>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3481-817X>

This study explores the entry of US subscription video-on-demand services into Brazilian telenovela production. Through an examination of production strategies, we reveal how these services position themselves as “saviors” of the format. Their attempts to “reinvent” telenovelas fuel debates on their supposed decline but often mask shortcomings in replicating the format. Despite investments, these services remain unable to grasp the storytelling, scale, and cultural nuances that define Brazilian telenovelas, revealing the limits of their global influence.

**KEYWORDS:** Television, SVODs, telenovelas, Brazil, US series.

*Este estudio analiza la incursión de los servicios estadounidenses de video bajo demanda por suscripción en la producción de telenovelas brasileñas. A través del análisis de estrategias de producción, revelamos cómo estas plataformas se posicionan como los “salvadores” del formato. Sus intentos de “reinventar” la telenovela alimentan debates sobre su supuesto declive, pero a menudo ocultan sus limitaciones para replicarlo. A pesar de inversiones, estas empresas siguen sin comprender la narrativa, escala y matices culturales que definen a las telenovelas brasileñas, lo que evidencia los límites de su influencia global.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Televisión, SVOD, telenovelas, Brasil, series estadounidenses.

*Este estudo explora a entrada de serviços de vídeo por assinatura sob demanda estadunidenses na produção de telenovelas brasileiras. Por meio de uma análise das estratégias de produção, revelamos como esses serviços se posicionam como “salvadores” do formato. Suas tentativas de “reinventar” as telenovelas alimentam debates sobre seu suposto declínio, mas frequentemente mascaram as deficiências na replicação do formato. Apesar dos investimentos, esses serviços permanecem incapazes de captar a narrativa, a escala e as nuances culturais que definem as telenovelas brasileiras, revelando os limites de sua influência global.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Televisão, SVOD, telenovelas, Brasil, séries estadunidenses.

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author.  
[melmaridis@hotmail.com](mailto:melmaridis@hotmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

The sharp decline in Brazilian telenovela viewership has intensified the debate over the format's future. Recent offerings such as *Terra e Paixão* (TV Globo, 2023-2024) and *Mania de Você* (TV Globo, 2024-2025), both with modest ratings, reveal the format's growing fragility in today's media landscape. Central to this shift is the rise of subscription video-on-demand services (SVODs, hereafter), the reshaping of audience expectations, expanded access to global narratives, and diversified viewing experiences. Grupo Globo's long-established quasi-monopoly in telenovela production faces formidable obstacles, suggesting a structural rather than cyclical transformation (Meimaridis & Castellano, 2026).

Telenovelas, long the cornerstone of Latin American scripted television storytelling with distinct national variations, faces pressure to adapt to evolving viewer expectations and consumption patterns (Piñón, 2019). In an increasingly competitive environment, a significant shift is emerging: foreign SVODs are investing in Brazilian telenovelas, challenging the longstanding dominance of free-to-air television (Hamburger, 2005; Lopes, 2011). However, these companies face notable challenges, primarily due to their lack of specialized infrastructure and technical expertise required for long-form serialized content production.

This study seeks to explore the entry of foreign SVODs into the Brazilian telenovela production market over the past decade. Rather than focusing on an in-depth analysis of individual productions, we adopt a panoramic approach grounded in a focused examination of foreign SVODs' strategic attempts to produce original telenovelas for the Brazilian market, including production investments, creative partnerships, and distribution strategies.

Our findings reveal how foreign streaming services, in collaboration with local media and critics, have constructed a narrative that questions the legitimacy of Brazilian telenovelas, positioning themselves as the potential *saviors* of a format they claim is obsolete. This study adds nuance to narratives of decline, exposing their corporate market foundations. A critical analysis of telenovelas in Latin America needs to recognize the format's cultural specificity and contextual development

(Lopez, 2002). The assertion by US companies that the established model requires modernization reflects a hegemonic perspective that fails to acknowledge local cultural dynamics. Documenting what is happening in the Brazilian industry may help illuminate similar processes in other telenovela industries.

We contend that, the “rebranding of telenovelas” by foreign streaming giants –through calculated terminology like “telesséries” (teleseries) (Carlos, 2022), “série com DNA de novela” (series with telenovela DNA) (Pereira, 2024), and the curious “novela com botox” (novela with botox) (Wasko & Pazin, 2025)– reveals not innovation but appropriation masquerading as progress. This linguistic sleight-of-hand exposes their fundamental misunderstanding: different narrative traditions are not hierarchical steppingstones but distinct cultural expressions.

#### THE END OF AN ERA?

Brazilian telenovelas have captivated national audiences for decades, establishing themselves as a cultural phenomenon of extraordinary significance (Hamburger, 2005; Lopes, 2011). Despite the introduction of foreign programming and the rise of subscription television services in the 1990s, the telenovela maintained its powerful hold on Brazilian viewers (Néia, 2024; Svartman, 2023). Yet, beneath the dominance of telenovelas, Brazilian viewers grew increasingly frustrated with the creative and ideological constraints of these productions. During an era of limited content options, these restrictions adequately satisfied audience needs and strengthened preferences for domestic programming (Meimaridis, 2024). However, the media ecosystem transformed dramatically with technological advancements –particularly the Internet and subsequent rise of SVODs– ending this period of scarcity. This new landscape has begun to undermine the long-standing dominance of Brazilian broadcast television, with telenovelas facing challenges to their once-secure position.

During the 2000s, telenovelas like *O Clone* (TV Globo, 2001-2002) and *Páginas da Vida* (TV Globo, 2006-2007) maintained their commanding position with Brazilian viewers. The 2010s, however, witnessed a steady erosion of TV Globo’s telenovela ratings, despite

occasional hits such as *Avenida Brasil* (TV Globo, 2012). This shifting landscape prompted the network to acknowledge the necessity for strategic adjustments while proceeding cautiously to avoid alienating its dedicated viewership. During this period, media commentators revived discussions about the potential demise of telenovelas, intensifying perceptions of an industry in crisis (Svartman, 2023). The primary challenge now came not from technological innovation but from an alternative narrative structure: US television series, which were captivating Brazilian audiences.

Although US television series had been available in Brazil since the 1960s, they posed no serious threat to telenovelas for decades, typically appearing sporadically in off-peak timeslots and often serving merely as schedule fillers. However, the landscape began shifting with breakthrough hits like *Lost* (ABC, 2005-2010), which gained significant followings on both broadcast and pay TV. Digital piracy and fan-made subtitles accelerated Brazilian access to these productions (Mendes Moreira De Sá, 2011), making them viable alternatives to the traditional telenovela.

Within the context of Brazil's increasingly fragmented viewership landscape, TV Globo deployed what we term a "rhetoric of experimentation" –a calculated discourse creating an impression of bold reinvention while carefully preserving traditional formulas and market dominance. This institutional approach represents an exercise in conservatism disguised as innovation, where the network signals responsiveness to audience transformation while safeguarding core elements of Brazilian television tradition. The concept of "supersérie" (superseries) exemplifies this strategy. Introduced with *Os Dias Eram Assim* (TV Globo, 2017), these hybrid productions occupied an intermediate position between traditional telenovelas and conventional series, featuring condensed narratives of approximately 60 episodes broadcast in the 11:00 PM timeslot.

Lima and Néia (2018) argue that this terminology shift reflected primarily a marketing strategy rather than genuine structural transformation, designed to appeal to younger male demographics. Despite their "innovative" marketing borrowed from contemporary television, these productions retained the traditional *feuilleton* roots of the telenovela

format, leading to their classification as “telenovelas” on Grupo Globo’s streaming service, Globoplay.

This strategy of rebranding telenovela traditions is not unique to Brazil but reflects a broader trend as broadcasters navigate digital convergence. Piñón (2019) observes a similar dynamic of disruption and continuity in the US context, where media conglomerates also adopted the term “super series”. At Telemundo, this label described higher-value, faster-paced narratives with shorter runs of 10-12 episodes, designed for cross-platform circulation. The key similarity lies in a hybrid rhetoric: despite claims of departing from tradition, Telemundo’s series still “share key elements of the telenovela genre” (Piñón, 2019, p. 205), just as Globo’s *superséries*. This parallel illustrates a push-and-pull, where incumbent broadcasters modernize their discourse while preserving their foundational formulas.

Piñón (2019) provides a crucial contrast for understanding the Brazilian case. While Telemundo’s *superséries* successfully launched a new wave of “premium” content, Globo’s project was abandoned by 2019, facing resistance in international markets confused by a product that was neither telenovela nor a series (Padiglione, 2019). This contrast highlights Globo’s specific “rhetoric of experimentation”: unlike Telemundo, which created a genuinely new genre, Globo pursued a conservative and ultimately superficial recalibration, reflecting a stronger institutional resistance to fundamentally transforming a proven, yet diminishing, industrial model.

Beyond format classification, narrative experimentation manifested in certain telenovela writers’ attempts to revitalize conventional norms by incorporating elements characteristic of US scripted dramas (Lopes & Lemos, 202). These modifications included decreased episode counts, smaller cast and reduced subplot complexity, yielding more condensed storytelling. Xavier (2017) attributes *Avenida Brasil*’s success to its fusion of “serialized melodrama tropes presented in fresh packaging, conveying an aura of innovation, disguised through cinematic visual style and series like pacing” (par. 8). Concurrently with these narrative adjustments, TV Globo introduced greater racial and socioeconomic representation across its programming slate (Néia, 2024; Porto, 2023).

Though Globo abandoned the *supersérie* model, format hybridization continues, now driven by foreign SVODs promoting this blending as essential for telenovela “modernization”. As serialized format boundaries blur, the key question is whether foreign SVODs can produce telenovelas while preserving the format’s fundamental characteristics.

#### THE ATTEMPTS AT “REINVENTING” THE TELENOVELA BY FOREIGN SVODS

While Brazilian free-to-air networks leverage their longstanding expertise and infrastructure in telenovela production, foreign SVODs face significant hurdles. They lack specialized infrastructure and technical expertise for crafting long-form serialized narratives, which has stymied even ambitious projects. These productions, despite high expectations, encounter unexpected challenges during development and production. Setbacks include: abandoned projects, drastically reduced episode counts, hasty format conversions, compromised production values, and lost cultural nuances when attempting to internationalize this traditionally local format. Each concession weakens the distinctive qualities that define telenovelas as a unique narrative tradition. Nevertheless, foreign SVODs persist in producing original telenovelas. The following analysis explores three main approaches these services use to establish a foothold in Brazil’s telenovela production landscape.

##### *Series with a telenovela “flavor”*

Netflix’s entry into Brazilian telenovela production exposes the fundamental clash when a global streaming giant attempts to adapt a distinctly local format. Since its 2016 debut of the original series *3%* (Netflix, 2016-2019), the streamer has sustained a consistent output of Brazilian productions, releasing new series annually (Rios, 2024). Despite its ongoing investment in original productions, the company remained detached from the most traditional and culturally significant format of Brazilian television: the telenovela.

Their first venture, *Coisa Mais Linda* (Netflix, 2019-2020), began with an executive’s premature claim of creating the “best telenovela of the year” (Guaraldo, 2019, par. 8). However, the production was ul-

timately structured as a series, comprising two short seasons of seven and six episodes, respectively. The final product, when compared to the executive's bold declaration, exposes the gap between Netflix's surface-level approach to the format and the conventions at the heart of Brazilian telenovela creation. Although such statements were not officially employed by the company –which merely described it as a series “with a *novela* flavor”– they reveal the ambitions of agents directly involved in the project and, in this sense, we consider them relevant to our analysis. This is particularly significant because Netflix's definition of *novela* was limited to the narrative dimension of an intense use of melodrama, overlooking the highly complex technical elements involved in producing a telenovela.

After years of unfulfilled commitments regarding telenovela production, Netflix replaced Maria Ângela de Jesus with Elisabetta Zenatti as the head of scripted content in Brazil (César, 2021a). The newly appointed executive was entrusted with the challenge of securing the company's foothold in this highly competitive market, a goal that materialized in 2023 with the announcement of *Pedaço de Mim* (Netflix, 2024-), the SVOD's first Brazilian telenovela. Targeting 50 episodes (Camiotto, 2023), the production aimed for a careful balance, bridging the concise storytelling of SVODs with the expansive narrative tradition of Brazilian telenovelas, which typically span over 150 chapters. The melodramatic plot centered on a woman pregnant with twins, each with a different father.

Yet, establishing a production framework dedicated to telenovelas proved to be a formidable challenge, primarily due to the distinct characteristics of the Brazilian audiovisual market. A key obstacle was the historical concentration of expertise and production infrastructure within free-to-air television networks, particularly TV Globo, which has long dominated the format. To mitigate this challenge, Netflix strategically recruited seasoned professionals from TV Globo.

Netflix's marketing campaign for *Pedaço de Mim* showed a certain lack of coherence in its overall message. Initially announced as the company's first original telenovela, the promotional strategy eventually shifted, alternating between describing it at times as a “Brazilian melodrama” and at others simply as a “series”. In a post on Netflix

Brazil's Instagram account, the platform described *Pedaço de Mim* as “a new series with a telenovela flavor” (Netflix Brasil, 2024). This ambiguity stemmed from dramatic production changes, including reducing the episode count from the originally planned 50 to just 17. The show's structure further blurred format lines. By releasing all episodes simultaneously and focusing tightly on the main storyline—eschewing the rich subplots characteristic of telenovelas—*Pedaço de Mim* defied traditional format expectations. Frequent time jumps and fast-paced twists pushed it even further from conventional Brazilian telenovelas. Yet this hybrid approach fulfilled Zenatti's vision, which aimed for a so-called “blend” (as cited in Marthe, 2024, par. 4) merging the addictive pacing of Netflix series with telenovelas' emotional resonance.

The format-blending rhetoric surrounding *Pedaço de Mim* reignited the ongoing debate about “superseries” and telenovelas with a “series pace”. Although the screenwriter herself acknowledged that *Pedaço de Mim* is, in essence, a series, she nonetheless underscored that the production retains a “telenovela DNA” (Chaves, as cited in Pazin, 2024, par. 9). Brazilian critics promptly identified this format ambiguity and exploited it as an opportunity to delegitimize the telenovela format. Their enthusiasm for the production's condensed structure—marked by a reduced episode count and accelerated narrative development—served as a convenient justification to revive perennial criticisms regarding the alleged tedious pacing and bloated length of Brazilian telenovelas. This response perpetuated a crisis narrative that serves global market agendas while stifling substantive discourse about Brazil's rich storytelling tradition. The discourse reached a revealing turn when some critics suggested that Globo should take lessons from Netflix in crafting the very format it had mastered (Miyashiro, 2024).

It is noteworthy, however, that while Netflix marketed the production as a “series” in the local Brazilian market, it adopted a different approach for the international audience, presenting it as a “Brazilian telenovela” (Guaraldo, 2024), exploiting and exoticizing global perceptions of Brazil's telenovela tradition (Meimaridis et al., 2024). Although the formal categorization of *Pedaço de Mim* within the telenovela canon is not the primary focus of this discussion, its significance

lies in how Netflix strategically employs this classification to engage a global audience.

We argue, therefore, that Netflix's superficial engagement with telenovelas exposes the contradictions that emerge when transnational streaming services try to commodify storytelling forms deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts. Currently, Netflix produces series with "hollow echoes" of telenovelas –more of a rhetorical exercise than a substantive one. Yet, this is not an isolated case. Many Netflix originals reflect the US industry's appropriation of local formats. Under the neo-liberal discourse of diversity, what we see is a homogenization of narratives. For Mazur (2023), this creates a "format limbo", where Netflix "adapts local formulas to align with Hollywood and US standards", but in doing so, it "distorts the functional models of the global periphery in favor of what they call 'modernity', stripping these products of their distinct national characteristics" (p. 228). Ultimately, Netflix's global dominance allows it to produce content in multiple markets while controlling the narrative about them; even without producing telenovelas, its influence convinces the world otherwise.

### *Structural challenges in the production of Brazilian telenovelas*

Telenovelas harbor hidden complexities beneath their seeming simplicity, especially for those seeking to preserve the format's defining traits rather than simply labeling a series as a telenovela. WarnerMedia emerged as a key contender in the Brazilian market, building on HBO Latin America's regional experience (Ikeda, 2022). In 2021, it launched HBO Max in Brazil, nearly a decade after Netflix, using the delay strategically to refine its approach and capture the Latin American telenovela market. Initially it focused on licensing content, particularly from Grupo Globo's iconic productions like *Avenida Brasil* –largely due to Globoplay's limited regional expansion capability (Meimaridis, 2024). This strategy expanded through agreements with Colombia's RCN and Mexico's Televisa (Vaquer, 2022). These licenses, however, were only a preview of WarnerMedia's broader ambitions. Vertical integration in production gave rise to a "corporate telenovela", marked by unexpected twists and behind-the-scenes turbulence that reshaped the industry.

Taking cues from Netflix, WarnerMedia recruited former TV Globo veterans to shape its telenovela strategy. In 2021, it created a Latin American drama division, led by ex-Globo executive Mônica Albuquerque. Max further solidified its ambitions by securing Silvio de Abreu, a renowned author with four decades at Globo, to lead Max's telenovela initiative. This choice was not just about his writing prowess; Abreu had pioneered Globo's superseries strategy and was entrusted with leading a comparable project at HBO Max: the development of so-called *telesséries*. This new term, another diluted label, merges "telenovela" and "series", promising shows with "series-like pacing" in roughly 50 episodes (Tréz, 2021). This term reflects a belief that telenovelas must transform to compete with series. However, such calls for "modernization" miss the point: different narrative forms can co-exist and complement each other, catering to audiences seeking diverse viewing experiences.

HBO Max announced its first original telenovela project in early 2022: *Segundas Intenções*, a 50-episode production. Penned by Raphael Montes, recognized for his work on the Netflix series *Bom Dia, Verônica* (2020-2024), under the supervision of Abreu and directed by Joana Jabace, another seasoned professional from TV Globo. The production company *Coração da Selva* was chosen to execute the project. Set against the glamorous and cutthroat beauty industry, this tale of vengeance and justice marked HBO Max's inaugural telenovela, featuring some of Brazil's most celebrated TV Globo actors.

Inspired by the success of *Pantanal* (TV Globo, 2022) –both in audience engagement and revenue generation– Max devised an innovative distribution strategy for its original telenovela: incorporating commercial breaks and adopting a daily release schedule to emulate the experience of live broadcast (César, 2022). This approach represented a significant turning point for SVODs in Brazil, as advertising revenue was expected not only to ensure the project's financial sustainability but also to signal the emergence of a new phase in the production of Brazilian telenovelas by international players. Yet the ambitious venture hit an unexpected roadblock when the 2022 WarnerMedia-Discovery merger cast a shadow over ongoing productions, leaving their fate in limbo.

The consolidation of the newly formed Warner Bros. Discovery conglomerate triggered a significant financial restructuring that affected both the US market and its global operations, including in Brazil. The production of *Segundas Intenções* came to an abrupt halt in September 2022, while still in the preparation phase, leading to the dissolution of the original cast. The success of the telenovela *Todas as Flores* (Globoplay, 2022-2023) on Globoplay, however, caught Max executives' attention, prompting them to revive the project alongside *Dona Beija* (HBO Max, 2026) as cornerstones of their Brazilian strategy (Vianna, 2023). The latter project is a remake of the period telenovela *Dona Beija* (Rede Manchete, 1986).

After a period of uncertainty, the *Segundas Intenções* project was resumed and rebranded as *Beleza Fatal (Scars of Beauty)* (HBO Max, 2025), undergoing substantial revisions. One of the most notable changes was the reshaping of the cast, with Camila Queiroz assuming the lead role. The revamped cast also featured other prominent talents from TV Globo. Additionally, the narrative was condensed from 50 to 40 episodes—while this number is considerably shorter than the typical length of traditional free-to-air telenovelas, it still surpasses the standard episode count for most original streaming series.

In 2023, production began on *Dona Beija* and *Beleza Fatal*, revealing Max's struggles in telenovela production. The significant challenges during production and post-production highlighted deeper issues: a lack of specialized expertise in the telenovela format and insufficient infrastructure among Brazilian independent production companies. This challenge became even more pronounced when considering the format's inherent demands: producing dozens of hour-long episodes requiring sustained production capacity. To put this in perspective, a US network series like *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC, 1999-) takes about two full seasons to reach the content volume of a single Max telenovela—approximately 40 hours.

Operational realities forced Max to mature quickly, undermining its ambitious goal to “be the new Globo” (César, 2021b, par. 1) in Brazilian telenovela production. Media reports revealed serious production issues, particularly around scheduling and working conditions (Santiago, 2023). Actors accustomed with Globo's organized production

structure found themselves in a chaotic environment, often receiving scripts just hours before filming. Both cast and crew faced intense pressure to maintain a rapid filming pace, a consequence of cost-cutting measures that ultimately compromised the production process.

Lead actress Camila Queiroz diplomatically framed the situation by calling it both “a great learning experience” and “a great challenge”, noting that “the recording pace has been very different from what we are used to in Globo’s telenovelas” (as cited in Andrade, 2024, par. 3). These issues transcended mere technical concerns: rest periods between filming were not adhered to, and essential production support was insufficient. The constant comparison to Globo’s standards highlights how decades of technical and organizational excellence at the network shaped the expectations of Brazilian telenovela professionals, setting a benchmark for quality.

Beyond mere planning deficiencies, Max’s adoption of an “agile” production approach revealed a fundamental shift in priorities: maximizing output and minimizing costs took precedence over artistic merit and worker welfare, cornerstones that had long defined Brazilian telenovela production, championed by SATED (*Sindicato dos Artistas e Técnicos em Espetáculos de Diversões* [Union of Artists and Technicians in Performances]). The challenges faced on set underscore a critical issue in contemporary audiovisual production: the tension between different production models and the complexities of adapting telenovelas for streaming. This experience illustrates that the mere transposition of the format, without appropriately adapting production processes, results in significant artistic and labor challenges (Rios, 2024).

On January 27, 2025, *Beleza Fatal* premiered on HBO Max, both reimagining and preserving classic Brazilian telenovela tropes. Unlike Netflix, HBO Max explicitly marketed it as a telenovela on their official social media accounts. Although they considered “live” episodes with commercial breaks, the streamer ultimately adopted the *Todas as Flores* release model, dropping five commercial-free episodes every Monday. The show built a dedicated following, particularly on social media, where fans campaigned for the finale to be released separately on Friday instead of Monday with the weekly batch. HBO Max changed its distribution strategy to accommodate fans who organized viewing

parties in major cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The finale aired on Friday, March 21, at 8:00 PM, enabling nationwide simultaneous viewing and creating an event-like atmosphere.

To broaden its viewership and recoup investment, HBO Max licensed *Beleza Fatal* to the Band network. This sparked discontent among the cast, who considered Band less prestigious than TV Globo and, more importantly, received no compensation for the terrestrial broadcast as their contracts were only for streaming (Rodrigues, 2025). This licensing strategy warrants critical examination when viewed through the lens of *Beleza Fatal's* narrative. In the sixth episode, the antagonist proclaims to her husband: "I'm in the future... I'm streaming and your father is broadcasting TV. Broadcast TV is dying! I'm here, alive and kicking!" This reveals a fundamental contradiction between the rhetoric of technological revolution and SVODs continued reliance on traditional television frameworks (Meimaridis & Campanella, 2025). Despite their claims as pioneers of audiovisual innovation, SVODs still rely on Brazilian free-to-air television's professional expertise, established cultural legitimacy, and massive audience penetration to validate their own presence in the market. This dependency reveals a crucial paradox: while broadcast television faces challenges in some markets globally, the Brazilian context demonstrates its continued dominance as the primary mass medium, contradicting narratives of its inevitable decline.

### *Strategic partnerships*

In recent years, speculation has circulated regarding potential alliances between foreign SVODs and Brazilian broadcasters, particularly involving TV Globo, yet meaningful collaborations remained elusive until 2022, when Prime Video joined forces with SBT for telenovela production and licensing. This partnership was strategically sound: SBT had already demonstrated its strength in the streaming market through the success of its youth-oriented telenovelas across various SVODs (Nantes, 2023). The alliance offered Prime Video a calculated entrance into telenovela production, minimizing risks by tapping into SBT's proven expertise and infrastructure. Meanwhile, SBT gained both a vital injection of production funding and an enhanced digital footprint.

The first project selected for production was *A Infância de Romeu e Julieta* (*The Childhood of Romeo and Juliet*, 2023-2024), written by Íris Abravanel. The telenovela reimagines the classic tale weaving everyday elements into the familiar story while deliberately steering clear of violence, sexual themes, or overt romance—a creative choice aligned with SBT’s more conservative viewership. The production’s distribution strategy sought to balance the traditional television broadcast model with the affordances of on-demand consumption. Its May 8, 2023 debut ushered in a unique experiment: SBT continued its daily broadcast schedule, while Prime Video opted for a weekly cadence, dropping five episodes initially and new batches each Friday. However, it also introduced a challenge when the telenovela’s finale was released on Prime on August 8, 2024, 11 days before its broadcast on SBT. As plot revelations spilled across social media, the incident exposed a fundamental tension in coproductions between free-to-air broadcasters and SVODs: maintaining narrative control when content flows across linear and non-linear models. In today’s digital age, where information spreads instantly and release windows grow increasingly fluid, preserving the traditional telenovela viewing experience becomes increasingly complex.

The telenovela initially captivated audiences across both linear television and Prime Video, soaring to the SVODs top rankings in week two. However, sustaining audience engagement throughout its full run—totaling 335 episodes—proved to be a significant challenge. Television ratings plummeted to historic lows for an original SBT telenovela, while its streaming popularity steadily waned. Though streaming viewership data remains opaque (Rios, 2024), the termination of the Prime Video-SBT partnership in 2024 speaks volumes about the venture’s ultimate disappointment (Silvano, 2024).

The end of this partnership did not necessarily represent a setback for collaborations between free-to-air television and SVODs; rather, it encouraged new forms of cooperation. Prime Video broadened its scope by incorporating Grupo Globo’s channels in its service, while SBT established a partnership with Disney+ for the distribution of its telenovelas, beginning with *A Caverna Encantada* (2024-). The distribution strategy remains distinct, however: episodes reach Disney+ only after airing on broadcast television.

The coproduction of telenovelas has become a key strategy for foreign streaming services to reduce investment risks in the Brazilian market, leveraging existing infrastructure and the expertise of free-to-air TV professionals. Yet, this approach has also exposed challenges in reconciling the demands of linear and non-linear distribution models. The format's extended narrative, daily scheduling, and audience-driven development make it less adaptable to hybrid distribution strategies, ultimately complicating expectations for successful partnerships between Brazilian broadcasters and US SVODs in the production of original telenovelas.

## CONCLUSION

“If they want to declare the end of the telenovela,  
I’ve been waiting since 1972”  
(Tony Ramos, as cited in Reis, 2018, par. 14).

“Is this the end of the Brazilian telenovela?” Actor Tony Ramos, a veteran known for his decades-long career in major Brazilian telenovelas, wryly notes how this question has lingered in discussions about Brazilian TV. The media discourse surrounding this format reveals a drive toward modernization that treats telenovelas' traditional elements as outdated, favoring a shift toward US series' conventions. This perspective betrays an internalized cultural hierarchy that elevates “imported” formats as inherently more sophisticated. Ironically, in the global market, Brazilian telenovelas attract interest precisely for their unique storytelling, narrative structures, and blend of melodrama with social commentary. Therefore, the cultural authenticity that is often diluted domestically is, paradoxically, the very attribute that makes the format appealing globally.

The commercial logic behind this homogenization is exemplified by *Beleza Fatal*. While specific viewership data is unavailable, HBO Max's renewal for a second season (Miyashiro, 2025) signals its success. This renewal, however, transformed the show from a single-season telenovela into the multi-season structure of US series. Like *Pedaço de Mim*, it illustrates the challenges foreign SVODs face, often subordin-

ating local storytelling traditions that define the telenovela to a hegemonic industrial logic, highlighting the tension between global streaming models and culturally specific formats.

Regarding foreign SVODs' troubled attempts to "reinvent" Brazilian telenovelas, we expose the significant hurdles these newcomers face in this culturally nuanced and fiercely competitive landscape. Their struggles reveal that telenovela success demands more than capital, it requires format knowledge, cultural fluency, and production expertise that broadcast networks have honed over generations. These endeavors highlight the challenges of transplanting a linear television format into streaming environments, with inadequate production infrastructure limiting large-scale development. Behind their rebranding of telenovelas with new terminology lies a stark reality: the persistent imbalance of power that shapes how global SVODs distribute and transform local content. Streaming's emergence, rather than ending the format as initially predicted, enabled its growth across new distribution platforms.

While foreign SVODs have struggled to produce telenovelas, Brazilian companies have likewise grappled with the challenges of a rapidly shifting audiovisual market. The gradual decline in audience ratings, driven by fragmented viewership, heightens the challenges of an increasingly plural media ecosystem. Changing consumption habits, especially among younger generations, further complicate the scenario. How can the long-term viability of a format spanning over 150 hour-long episodes be sustained when younger audiences favor short-form content? How can viewer loyalty endure over months of daily broadcasts amid on-demand catalogs that promote rapid consumption and swift migration to the next trending series? These questions remain crucial, demanding further research to advance the debate and the field.

Despite the uncertainties surrounding its future, the Brazilian telenovela emerges as an example of how local narrative traditions from the Majority World can not only survive the disruption brought by streaming, but also reinvent themselves by exploring the affordances of the on-demand model, establishing new paradigms of consumption and preserving the national video culture.

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## PROFILES

*Mayka Castellano*

Federal Fluminense University, Brazil

[maykacastellano@gmail.com](mailto:maykacastellano@gmail.com)

Assistant professor in the Department of Cultural and Media Studies and a permanent member of the Postgraduate Program in Communication at Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF). She is a CNPq Research fellow (process no. 312340/2022-2) and the coordinator of the NEPSEM research group Center for Studies on Power, Subjectivity, and Media. She has several publications on topics such as video streaming services, cultural consumption, gender studies, and self-help literature. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Feminist Media Studies*, *Critical Studies in Television*, *International Journal of Communication*, and *MATRIZES*, among others.

*Melina Meimaridis*

Federal Fluminense University, Brazil

[melmaridis@hotmail.com](mailto:melmaridis@hotmail.com)

Postdoctoral researcher at the National Institute of Science and Technology in Information Disputes and Sovereignty (INCT-DSI, Brazil) (project no. 406504/2022-9). Her research examines transformations in television and audiovisual cultures, with a focus on TV series, video streaming, and fan communities. She is a member of the Global Internet TV Consortium and studies the transnational expansion of video streaming platforms and services into Majority World markets. Her work has appeared in journals such as the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, *Feminist Media Studies* and *Cuadernos.info*, among others.