

Introduction

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One of the main findings of the studies published in Volume 19, Issue 5 of *Visual Anthropology* on visual media and women in Nigeria and Senegal was that the development of domestic consumption of television and video programs has relegated older visual media like photography and cinema to a position of secondary importance in the local “mediascapes.” This finding is also shared by the three authors whose articles are published in the present issue, who have conducted fieldwork studies in Mauritania, Mali, and Côte d’Ivoire. These West African countries, which belong at least partially to the francophone cultural area and once were French colonies, have in common their experience of an increasing consumption of television programs, the distribution of which remains largely in the hands of state-managed national networks.

In the first article, entitled “Women of Mauritania: Cathodic Images and Presentation of the Self,” Aline Tauzin takes a step aside from our initial working hypothesis to approach the role of visual media in feminine identity dynamics through a two-sided research methodology. On the one hand, by means of a synchronic study, Tauzin examines the possible effects of visual media consumption on women’s body transformations. On the other hand, using a diachronic analysis, she questions this issue in light of the recent history of Mauritanian society. Such an approach, which takes into account both the societal context and its transformation through time, is possible only if one knows this society perfectly. That is the case with this anthropologist, who has been working for long years in Mauritania, always with a focus on the question of women’s identity in this Muslim society [Tauzin 2001].

The centrality of television, as opposed to the decentralized character of media like video or radio, has been clearly underlined by the ethnographic study carried out in Mali by Dorothea E. Schulz, and entitled “Drama, Desire, and Debate: Mass-Mediated Subjectivities in Urban Mali.” Working from a long-term perspective, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, this specialist in Malian society has chosen a transverse method to approach the multifaceted object resulting from the encounter between media and their publics. Her hypothesis is that spectators draw their knowledge from the combined consumption of different media in what she calls an “intermedial space.” Thus the reception of visual products as different as *soap operas* made in the United States, *telenovelas* made in Latin America, and locally made musical video clips [Schulz 2001] is analyzed from a comparative point of view that also includes an analysis of how local radio programs are listened to and consumed.

In the third and last article on this theme, Khadidia Touré has chosen to work on the same topic, but using a comparative perspective. Her article, entitled

“*Telenovelas* Reception by Women in Bouaké (Côte d’Ivoire) and Bamako (Mali),” concerns two cities, Bouaké and Bamako, which represent two different societal and social contexts, in which women, mostly Muslims, are consuming the same kind of program. Both were former French colonies, but Mali is a predominantly Muslim society with large, collective family households, whereas Côte d’Ivoire is a multidenominational country with predominantly small, nuclear family households. Through a comparative analysis, this author shows that the interactions between these various contexts of reception, and individual differences (of class, age, educational level, and religious belief), are functioning as filters that influence the reception of *telenovelas*.

REFERENCES

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