A GENTE SE FALA DEPOIS DA NOVELA:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF TELEVISION VIEWING
IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

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ABSTRACT – *This research employed ethnographic methodologies to examine how the residents of São João de Pirabas, a small fishing community in the Brazilian Amazon, deal with television on a daily basis. In the fall of 1996, the researcher spent three months doing fieldwork in that community. This article relates the results of that ethnographic study and tries to answer the questions: what has been the role of television in the way rural Brazilian communities construct their own interpretation of reality?; and what kinds of cultural changes (if any) can be attributed to systematic and pervasive television viewing? The results of this research indicate that systematic television viewing has indeed played a role in the way Pirabas residents construct their own interpretation of the world and of themselves; there is very little "cultural dialogue" between that rural community and the dominant Brazilian urban elites; and several cultural changes are indeed taking place in the community, possibly as a result of the systematic and pervasive presence of television programming. Those changes are mainly reflected in new conceptualizations of space and time; in the modification of work patterns; in a new wave of consumerism; in a general shift in expectations towards life and towards the community; and in the displacement of private and public activities.*

KEY WORDS: Ethnography, Amazon, Brazil, Television, Mass media.

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RESUMO – A pesquisa relatada nesta monografia utilizou metodologias etnográficas para analisar como os moradores de São João de Pirabas, uma comunidade pesqueira da Amazônia Brasileira, usam a televisão na sua vida diária. O pesquisador viveu e conduziu trabalho de campo nesta comunidade durante três meses em 1996. Este artigo relata os resultados do estudo etnográfico e tenta responder as seguintes perguntas: qual tem sido o papel da televisão na forma em que comunidades rurais brasileiras contróem sua interpretação da realidade?; e que tipos de mudanças culturais podem ser atribuídas ao consumo sistemático de televisão? Os resultados desta pesquisa indicam que a televisão tem desempenhado um papel de destaque na maneira como os moradores de Pirabas constroem sua interpretação do mundo e de si mesmos; há muito pouco "diálogo cultural" entre aquela comunidade e as elites urbanas; e algumas mudanças culturais têm ocorrido na comunidade, possivelmente em conseqüência da presença sistemática e ampla da televisão. Estas mudanças refletem-se em novos conceitos de espaço e tempo; na mudança dos padrões de trabalho; numa nova onda de consumismo; numa mudança geral de expectativas com relação à vida e à comunidade; e no deslocamento de atividades públicas e privadas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Etnografia, Amazônia, Brasil, Televisão, Comunicação de massa.

INTRODUCTION

It is two o'clock in the afternoon. The scorching tropical sun hits the earth with the fury of an unsatisfied god. The ocean breeze sways the coconut trees and produces the soothing but eerie sound of rustling palm leaves. The eerie feeling is enhanced by the fact that, at *sesta* time, São João de Pirabas resembles a ghost town. The streets – usually occupied by a horde of playful children – are empty – and silent. The butcher shop and the bakery are closed; and so is the drugstore and every other store in town. Even the dogs seem to be sedated by the dry, overwhelming heat. As I walk down the streets, they barely

acknowledge my presence. Moving out of their comfortable shades would mean giving up the pleasure of a replenishing *sesta*. That just seems to be an altogether unbearable task. Instead, they only raise their heads and watch me go by.

It hasn't rained for more than a month. The breeze raises some light red dust from the unpaved streets. In the distance, I hear a lone voice. "The butler will show you to the swimming pool," a woman says. There are no swimming pools in Pirabas; nor butlers, for that matter. I finally think the heat has got to me, and I'm having some kind of hallucination. As I keep walking, the sounds get clearer. Now I hear some music, and a group of young people talking about São Paulo's nightlife. The mystery is over. In the dead calm of Pirabas' *sesta*, what I hear is somebody's television set.

In Pirabas, the houses are always open. The separation between *a casa e a rua* ("the house and the street") is as thin as the actual wooden partitions. Doors and windows open towards the street; and they stay invitingly open for most of the day. Private life seems to be a public matter. Mothers delouse their kids under unfenced backyard mango trees; men and women tie up their hammocks in their front porch and sleep away the afternoon. If you have a television set, you are expected to leave it in a place where your neighbors and friends can watch it; most often on a book shelf that faces the street. The same rule applies to music stereos; if you want to hear some music, you might as well crank up the volume and let everybody else hear it too.

But how did butlers, swimming pools, and São Paulo's nightlife get mixed up with this small Amazon coastal city, where most men fish in the open sea for a living, while the women tend the garden, take care of the house and raise the children? The simple, technical answer is that they arrived through the modern works of broadcast signals, either beamed down from a geo-stationary communications satellite or relayed from a communal antenna. The social, cultural answer is much

more complex: In the past four or five years, television has become an important source of entertainment and information for this Brazilian town of 6,000 people.

In Brazil, past, present and future combine to provide an interesting sample of diversity, regarding media audiences and communication technologies and uses. Much like three or four countries within the same geographic boundaries, those communities have as many characteristics in common (shared language, nationality, some cultural and social values), as they have others setting them apart.

I explore in this paper, the relationship between the sudden explosion of mass media consumption and the alteration of traditional ways of living. Since I was born and raised in the Brazilian Amazon, it seemed perfectly natural for me to explore how that relationship played itself out in that region of Brazil. The way I figured it, the study would allow me to go back to my "Brazilian roots," and it would also allow me to try to reconnect the ties between two separate professional "lives": A past career as a Brazilian media professional, and a current one, as a communication researcher.

For reasons that will be better explored in the following chapters, I chose to employ ethnographic methods, such as direct observation, participant observation, and in-depth interviewing, to conduct a study of television audiences in that rural area of Brazil. For three months in the fall of 1996, I lived and did field work in São João de Pirabas, a small community which I had visited a couple of times when I was younger, in my home state of Pará.

During those three months, I interviewed local residents, watched television with three different families, and made general observations about life and television viewing that provided the basis for the ethnographic account that follows.

The central question to be addressed by this research study is: In the context of modern Brazil, what is the relationship between television viewing and culture building? I will try to answer that major question by exploring some "minor" ones, such as: Does Brazil have a "dominant" national culture, or "dominant" national identity?; how are mass media in general, and television in particular, incorporated into the daily lives of Brazilians?; on an everyday basis, how do people relate to/consume mass media?; are there are noticeable changes in community life that might be attributed to television's pervasiveness?

This research study will try to answer those questions by:

1. Providing a theoretical foundation on how those questions can be (and have been) framed; how similar questions have been answered in the past. Those chapters will include:

a. A discussion of the concept of culture, universal cultural values, cultural crisis, postmodern perspectives, and contested representations;

b. A discussion of mass communication's perspective, and of concepts such as acculturation, virtual tribes, cultural hegemony, and enculturation.

2. Providing an overview of the study of mass media audiences; "reception" research; some of the techniques that have been used and the theoretical models that have been developed to study the impact of mass communication socially and culturally. This part will include:

a. A historical overview of the field, with a discussion of research models such as the 'cultivation' hypothesis; the fields of critical studies and qualitative communication research, with special attention to concepts such as audience's interpretation of messages, 'reception' analysis, and the overall importance of social context in the study of mass media phenomena;

b. An overview and historical analysis of ethnography as a mass communication research technique.

3. Providing information about the Brazilian society, culture and cultural traits; the search for a Brazilian national identity; and the Brazilian television system. This part will include:

a. General characteristics of the country;

b. A discussion about the existence of a Brazilian cultural identity;

c. The Brazilian television system: its history and an overview of the current situation;

d. A cultural interpretation of the *Caboclo* culture that characterizes the Amazon region;

e. A historical account of the city of São João de Pirabas and the *Salgado* zone.

4. Elaborating research questions that will clarify and narrow the focus of the research study conducted.

5. Explaining what was the methodology used to answer those questions. This part will include:

a. A justification of the site chosen;

b. A description of how the work was done.

6. Describing the findings. This part will include:

a. A contextual and historical section about the particular Brazilian region and city where the study was conducted;

b. A narrative account of the process of living and watching television in São João de Pirabas;

c. Television as a culture-building medium: an analytical section that will try to explain what are some of the cultural and social changes that might be attributed to television's pervasiveness.

The study of mass media audiences has become an essential part of the field of mass communication research. Along the past few decades – in a historical and cultural process that will be better explored in the upcoming chapter – both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been used to examine how audiences react to the media messages they consume.

The research study described here belongs in a more recent tradition – that of ethnographic studies of the mass media audiences in developing countries. The significance of this study lies not only in the further development of ethnography as a methodological tool, but also in the exploration of the cultural and social phenomenon of television viewing in rural Brazil.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

In order to address some of the questions posed by this study, in particular the relationship between mass media consumption and culture-building, it is necessary to examine in more detail concepts such as culture and cultural identity. In this chapter, I will discuss not only those very controversial concepts, but also the different theories and analytical models that have been used to interpret cultural phenomena.

Universal Cultural Values

Is there such a thing as universal cultural values unifying a nation or an ethnic group? In their book about a possible theory of cultural variation, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961: 2) assume that "there is a philosophy behind the way of life of each individual and of every relatively homogeneous group at any given point in their histories." That "philosophy," which they identify as "a central core of meanings – basic values," is what gives "some sense of coherence or unity" to

the group. In the past decades, there has been much discussion among philosophers, social psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and, more recently, communication scholars, about the existence of what Edward Sapir characterized as "unconscious systems of meaning" (Sapir 1924: 421).

Although academic circles are far from reaching a consensus on the subject, there is a widespread belief that every regional or ethnic group has, indeed, a central core of basic values – shared language, beliefs, world-system, religion – that unifies and characterizes that particular group in time, setting it apart from other groups. In the following sections, I will examine the various definitions of culture, and the postmodern dilemma of finding (or defining) universal cultural values from the perspective of cultural anthropology and mass communication studies. Hopefully, that discussion will enable us to incorporate the more recent approaches to analyzing culture-building phenomena.

Cultural Anthropology's Contribution

Cultural Crisis

David Bidney (1996) broadly defined cultural crisis as "the suspension of normal, or previously prevailing, technological, social, or ideological conditions" (Bidney 1996: 349).[2] For him, every authentic cultural crisis marks "a state of transition" (ibid.) from an old to a new way of living. When talking about the cultural crisis of the modern world, Sapir (1924) stressed the fact that, at the heart of this crisis, laid the fabricated contradiction between the concepts of

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[2] David Bidney's classic *Theoretical Anthropology* was originally published in 1953. Citations here refer to the 1996 second edition.

"genuine" and "spurious" culture: In its frenzy to satisfy immediate needs, humankind has lost sight of its remote needs.

Sapir argued that in genuine ("harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory") cultures there is a profound relationship between the metaphysical and physical worlds – religion, mythology, cosmology and the arts are essential molders of both interior and exterior life. In our modern 'spurious' cultures, on the other hand, there would be a large gap separating the "elevated" life of the soul (ballet dancers performing a *pas-de-deux*, for example), from the 'mundane' world of everyday life (the mechanical work of Sapir's "telephone girl," whose isolation in a booth, repeating the same rationalized, mechanical gestures was the epitome of the "spurious" culture)[3].

In many ways, our contemporary world seems to be living within what Bidney characterized as "perpetual crises" (p. 362-365). The growth of information and technology has given us the means to replace "old" ways of knowing with "new" ways of knowing. In a few decades, contemporary societies have sprung from "local contexts" to a "global context." Transportation and communication innovations have taken us to the outskirts of the global village predicted by McLuhan (1968). The postmodern "time-space compression," conceptualized by Harvey (1990), tries to represent a "shrinking" world: The world of late capitalism, in which life's pace is accelerated and spatial barriers are crumbling.

The Cultural Anthropology Dilemma

For post-structuralist philosophers, the "cultural crisis" proposed by Sapir has become, in essence, an epistemological crisis, or a "crisis

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[3] Harvey (1990) noted that AT&T operators are still expected to deal with one call every 28 seconds.

of understanding." Inspired by Habermas, Jameson (1979) characterized that postmodern malaise as a crisis of legitimation. Early in his much lauded essay on postmodern knowledge, Lyotard (1984) sets the book's tone by defining postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives". He believes both the scientific discourse and the "narratives" are confronting a major crisis of legitimation.

In this section, I will examine not only what exactly is meant by "legitimation crisis," but also some of the routes that have been taken by contemporary thinkers to overcome such malaise. Philosophers Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, for example, have revolutionized psychoanalysis, linguistics, and philosophy by concentrating their attention on the diverse dimensions of interiority. Some of them, namely Foucault and Derrida, have expanded the concept of "modes of being," and given new meaning to terms such as deviance, now interpreted more as *différance* than as distance from the norm. For the purpose of clarity in the definition of terms, it would be appropriate to discuss in more detail what is meant by *différance* and why language has become such a powerful tool to explain cultural phenomena.

Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure adopted a relational approach to explain the linguistic value of signs. As argued by Culler (1982: 27-45), Saussure emphasized the fact that signs are primarily defined by their relationship to other signs. To explain to somebody what the color *brown* means, for example, you have to show them what is *not brown*. It is the distinctions that establish the signs' relational identity.

Allen (1993: 9-27), on the other hand, wrote that, for Plato, differences were secondary and they derived from the primary ontological signification of a word. Saussure reverted the equation by explaining difference as original, and identity as derivative. To understand a language system, he wrote, you have to understand the

differential relationship between signs, and then infer their identity from that relation.

Both Allen and Culler stressed the fact that, for Saussure, there are only differences in language. Normally, we define difference as a characteristic that sets two things apart. In language, wrote Saussure, every single unit is different, in the way it stands apart from other units, and in the way it differentiates itself even from the nonsign its meaning is attached to. Difference, again, would be the primary characteristic of language.

Allen argued that, for Saussure, this difference is a limited difference. He would have limited the difference to the sphere of the semiological, to the sign itself (originating his "langue," his system of language). Saussure seemed to be saying: somewhere, there is an absolute nonsign that gives meaning to a particular sign, and precludes it from mutating too much and distancing itself too much from its original meaning. Likewise, Heidegger would also have limited the difference to the ontological, to the self-identity of the sign.

Drawing from both Saussure and Heidegger, but at the same time going beyond them, Jacques Derrida abolished the limits of difference: The difference of signs is not limited to self-identity, nor to the linguistic system they belong to.

In his much quoted essay "Différance," Derrida (1972: 129) explained that his desire to create this new word came from the realization that the verb "to differ" has two separate meanings: "On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible". [Derrida is also playing with the French verb "différer," which means both "to differ" and "to defer"].

Derrida used the word *différance* to name this *sameness* that is *not identical*. *Différance*, he wrote, indicates a middle voice: "it precedes and sets up the opposition between passivity and activity" (Derrida 1972: 130).

Derrida's concept of *différance*, the second meaning of the verb "to differ" he alludes to, has its origin in Husserl's idea of internal time consciousness.

For Derrida, there are three main consequences from expanding the borders of difference:

1. When he divided up language systems into "langue" and "parole," Saussure implicitly established a hierarchical relationship between them. Speech, or "parole," seemed to override "langue," in the sense that oral discourse would be closer to originality, to a "genuine" use of the language. Derrida, on the other hand, explains that differences give a sign its value as signifier or as signification. In that sense, every sign, and not only the written sign, is a sign of a sign, is a secondary entity. By abolishing the limitations of difference, there is no prescribed difference between written (the traditional secondary signs), and spoken signs;

2. By abolishing the limitations of difference, signs become open to time and historical conditions. Signs are not indifferent to changes in time and context. This is important because it implies that, as an interpretation of reality, language is as alive and open for change as reality itself;

3. If there is no absolute nonsign whose self-identity limits the reference from sign to sign, there is no clear distinction between thing and sign, between idea and representation. As a result, Derrida unleashes the signs from their Saussurean condition of secondary entities.

When Lyotard (1984: 9-10) analyzed the postmodern crisis of knowledge, it is precisely in Derrida's concept of *différance* that he went looking for answers. Lyotard strived for the rehabilitation of the *agonistic* character of language games. Genius comes from dissension, he said; it comes from the struggle between creativity and the established language. Difference, again, is singled out as the primary characteristic of language. As much as Derrida, Lyotard is drinking at the source: Just like the late eighteenth – and early nineteenth-century German philosophers before him, particularly Nietzsche, he was also awed by (and fighting to preserve) the diversity of the *Weltanschauungen.*

In opposition to Edward Sapir, Lyotard (1984) is not worried with the dissolution of the "organic" or "genuine" cultures. "[The] breaking up of the grand Narratives," he wrote,

> leads to what some authors analyze in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion. Nothing of the kind is happening: this point of view, it seems to me, is haunted by the paradisiac representation of a lost 'organic' society (Lyotard 1984: 15).

In reference to our study of television viewing in the village of São João de Pirabas, I will adopt a view that is closer to Lyotard than Sapir, in the way cultural changes are perceived more as a narrative shift than a traumatic break with traditional ("authentic") ways of living.

That view, which will be explored in more detail in an upcoming section on the recent changes in cultural anthropology, has the concept of "perspective thinking" as one of its main sources. The multiplicity of cultures and the infinite possibilities of language that awed German philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries culminated with Nietzsche's introduction of "perspective thinking." For

Nietzsche, as important as identifying (and moving away from) absolute morals is recognizing that truth is also relative.

In anticipation to postmodernism's "polysemic" interpretation of texts, the Nietzsche of *On the Genealogy of Morals* denounces the Judeo-Christian tradition of "identity thinking." For him, the negation of the other, the negation of *différance* canonized by the Western tradition is all but a disguise (one of the "conjuring tricks" described by Derrida): What it conceals is that tradition's insecurity about its own paradigms. Born out of resentment, those paradigms have nowhere to go: To affirm themselves, to establish the "new truth," they need to deny everything that is outside them, including the past.

Drawing primarily from Nietzsche, postmodern thinkers such as Derrida, Deleuze and Lyotard, among others, want to rescue "perspective thinking." In their attempt to preserve diversity in thinking, and in opposition to what nineteenth century philosophers did, those writers do not turn to science (or to philosophy, in the traditional sense of philosophy as metadiscourse): They turn to language. They turn to language, as Lyotard puts it, because it is language that has the epistemological key to explain reality as discourse. In this context, science (and philosophy itself) is nothing but a stylistic variation in human discourse.

In his rebuttal of scientific legitimacy as a given, Lyotard explained that knowledge and power are two sides of the same question: "[W]ho decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?" (Lyotard 1984: 9). As noted earlier, for him, the current postmodern crisis of understanding is also a crisis of legitimation, sprung from intellectuals' reluctance to acknowledge who is served by the knowledge they produce.

Recognizing the economic factors at play, Lyotard observes that in the information age, postmodern science would be marked by the

predominance of the *performativity* criterion. Crystallized by capitalism, performativity, the search for ideal, effective production conditions, found a perfect match in technology. For Lyotard, the reciprocal legitimizing characteristic of power and science is not only at work here: It is magnified by technology and the information explosion.

Human sciences have tried to overcome their crisis of legitimation by mimicking natural sciences. But whereas in recent years physical and biological sciences have thrived by incorporating old, traditional, and frequently non-orthodox, concepts and theories to explain complex natural phenomena, human sciences are still caught between the heavy emphasis on finding universal laws (the explain, predict, control model) on one side, and the incompleteness of heuristics derived from cultural relativism, on the other.

What Lyotard prescribed for this essentially postmodern crisis is more than the recognition of science as discourse; the answer, for him, lies in the recognition of the power of the "little narratives" (*petit récit*): Overlapping, multiple ways of retelling and interpreting the world.

Lyotard's idea of the *petit récit* is mirrored and expanded by intellectuals like Michel Foucault and Felix Guattari, and their concept of multiple, "atomized," micro centers of power;[4] and by Derrida's defense of *différance*. In my view, those concepts tie in perfectly with the idea of science as a multi-layered language, where simultaneous, concurrent, non-excludent interpretations might co-exist. In that sense, physicists, in my opinion, are leading our way out of the postmodern "crisis of understanding."

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[4] De Certeau (1984) used the term "microphysics of power" to characterize Foucault's idea (particularly in *Discipline and Punish*) of miniscule technical procedures that act on and with details to redistribute "a discursive space in order to make it the means of a generalized 'discipline'" (xiv).

When Austrian physicist Fritjof Capra (1984) published his work *The Tao of Physics*, not by accident he dedicated his book, among other people, to mystical thinkers Carlos Castañeda and Krishnamurti. Trying to explore the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism, Capra was extremely successful at incorporating some of the ancients concepts of Taoism, particularly the idea of complementarity of opposites, into modern physical constructs. In a foreword that is reminiscent of Castañeda's *Don Juan*, Capra recalls how, in what the Buddhists would call a moment of "illumination," he saw the cosmic dance of the atoms around him and understood that it was the Dance of Shiva, the dancer god adored by the Hindu.

Poetic license aside, Capra makes a very valid point, albeit not a new one. In the beginning of this century, Niels Bohr, another distinguished physicist, was already acknowledging that the teachings of Taoism were a primordial source of inspiration in his theorizing of the Quantic nature of energy and matter. Both Capra and Bohr, or, for that matter, Albert Einstein, were attuned with Thomas Kuhn's (1962) statement that genius comes from the "displacement" of traditional concepts.

In his analysis of scientific creativity, what Kuhn forgot to examine, according to Hanson (1969), was the multi-faceted character of the scientific language. For people like anthropologist Richard Chaney (1991), and, one could make the case, for Derrida and Lyotard, "multi-layeredness" is precisely the single characteristic of the scientific discourse that will save us all.

Contested Representations

That more recent concept of cultural critique as a "multi-layered" discourse echoes James Clifford's assertion that culture is formed by "seriously contested codes and representations" (Clifford 1986: 2). For him, cultures, and not only particular texts, have to be interpreted

as *polysemic* constructions, where many different voices and interpretations might simultaneously reside.

For Clifford (1988: 8,16), in our postcolonial world, to define terms like culture, cultural identity, tribe, or ethnicity one has first to answer questions such as "who has the authority to speak for a group's identity or authenticity? What are the essential elements and boundaries of a culture?". For him, indigenous populations have had to reckon both with the destructive and the inventive sides of the forces of "progress" and "national unification." "Traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered," wrote Clifford; "but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex, oppositional contexts".

Under the influence of expanded communication and intercultural contact, the world has grown to be "ambiguous and multivocal," he wrote (Clifford 1988: 22-23). In a global condition that Ukranian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin called "heteroglossia," we have got to a point where it is "hard to conceive of human diversity as inscribed in bounded, independent cultures".

Analyzing the implications of a 1976 trial in which the Mashpee Indians tried to regain possession of 16,000 acres of land in Massachusetts, Clifford (1986: 338) asserted that groups negotiating their identity in contexts of domination and uneven exchange have to learn how to "patch themselves together" in ways that differ from a living organism. Unlike a body, he wrote, communities can lose a central organ and still survive: "All the critical elements of identity are in specific conditions replaceable: language, land, blood, leadership, religions".

Cultures, as well as tribes, are perceived by Clifford as "historical inventions, tendentious and changing". In the domination and uneven exchange context created after the arrival of European settlers, Native

American cultures have been caught in a "long, relational struggle to maintain and recreate [their] identities" (Clifford 1986: 339).

Clifford's idea that cultures are "historical inventions" echoes Benedict Anderson's assertion that concepts such as nationalism and national identity are also creations, or "cultural artifacts" (Clifford 1983: 13). In B. Anderson's view, a nation is "an imagined political community" (Clifford 1983: 15) whose creation dates back to the end of the eighteenth century, but whose conceptual origins can be traced to the religious (or sacred) characteristic of language. Not unlike Clifford, B. Anderson situated culture as a product of historical conditions.

Into this context of culture as the product of "contested meanings" and of "negotiated processes,"[5] comes anthropologists Marcus and Fisher's (1986) idea that cultural anthropology is caught between an ethnographic past that strived for "salvaging" unique cultural forms, and a future of self-reflection and self-criticism. This moment, for them, is one of opportunity; a moment which cultural anthropologists have to seize and transform into a possible way of answering the puzzles put forth by the current "crisis of understanding" (a riddle that, as I noted before, dominant human sciences paradigms have been unable to answer).

For Marcus and Fisher, the task for anthropology is "to produce accounts of cultures which reveal their distinctive structures of meaning" (Fisher 1986: 142-143). Two possible ways of doing that would be through "epistemological critique," where meeting the 'other' changes the way in which we think and perceive the world; or through "cross-cultural juxtaposition," where ethnographic details from diverse cultures are juxtaposed to make a critical point.

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5   Both terms will be better explored later in the text.

Victor Turner (1986) in many ways anticipated the debate stirred by Clifford, Marcus, Fisher and others. He observed that a then recent turn in anthropology had shifted the theoretical emphasis from structure to process; from competence to performance; from the logics of cultural and social systems to the dialectics of socio-cultural processes. For him, that shift is of utmost importance because it signals a change in the very essence of cultural anthropology as a discipline.

Instead of merely looking at symbols, rituals and myths as "abstract sets of interdependent binary oppositions," cultural anthropologists are trying to look at cultural manifestations as ongoing, complex, contradictory processes. If anthropologists such as Marcus, Fisher and Clifford are interested in different ways of presenting (and representing) cultural texts, V. Turner is focused on the "modes of symbolic action" that are peculiar to each culture and its "mundane, everyday sociocultural processes" (1986: 21).

In one of his studies, Turner (1986: 33-71) looked at the "dialectics of meaning" of the Brazilian religion Umbanda. In it, he defined the religion as a "social drama," pregnant with conflictive, competitive and agonistic layers. Umbanda, for him, became a "drama," in which the different psychological, political, sociocultural and theological perspectives of the "main characters" provided simultaneous (and many times conflicting) narratives.

Other examples of the "multi-layered" or "multi-vocal" approach to studying cultural phenomena as social processes are Richard Parker's (1991) *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions*, an analysis of sexual culture in contemporary Brazil; and Roberto da Matta's (1983) *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis* ("Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes"), an analysis of the Brazilian cultural "identity".

Instead of presenting a traditional view of Brazilian sexuality, with stereotypical characters such as the "macho," the effeminate

homosexual, and the subjugated woman, Parker (1991: 1) tried to use the voices of his human "subjects" to paint a more vivid and complex picture of equally vivid and complex sociocultural processes. His book, Parker explained, emerged from a cultural anthropology tradition that "focuses on the symbolic dimensions of human experience".

Likewise, Da Matta (1983) insisted in preserving in his work the ambiguities and "opaqueness" of the "Brazilian character," analyzing, for example, the religious (or pagan) side of the well-known Brazilian Carnival. Da Matta's interest, he wrote, was to provide a more complex view of the so-called "Brazilian dilemma;" a view that reflected the dialectics of the paradoxes and indecision involved in the process of defining a Brazilian "identity."

Cultural anthropology is not the only academic field that has explored the dynamics of social representations in the context of particular cultures. The field of intercultural (or cross-cultural) communication has also produced a wealth of conceptual and theoretical models designed to analyze the interaction between cultures and its consequences. Some of those concepts will be explored in the following section.

Mass Communication Studies – The Intercultural Perspective

Porter & Samovar (1994: 11) have observed that culture is a "complex, abstract, and pervasive matrix of social elements" that orients us and enables us to make sense of our surroundings. Along with other cultural anthropologists, they list artifacts, concepts, and behaviors as the three basic "ingredients" of culture. Those authors think there are six main characteristics of culture: Culture is learned; transmissible; dynamic; selective; the facets of culture are interrelated; and culture is ethnocentric (1994: 12).

Theorists such as Prosser (1978), and Collier & Thomas (1988) have stressed the historical aspect of culture. According to them, culture is the set of shared beliefs and values that are handed down or transmitted from generation to generation.

Within the intercultural communication tradition, authors such as Jandt (1995) have observed that modern definitions of culture have come a long way from traditional views, which placed different ethnic groups in a cultural development "continuum" that went from savagery to barbarism to civilization. Anthropology has come to appreciate and concentrate most of its efforts in analyzing what makes cultures unique, valuable and different. "Only recently," wrote Jandt, "has recognition been given to the study of multiple cultures without imposing the belief that Western culture was the ultimate goal" (Jandt 1995: 7).

That author stressed that complex cultures, like the United States, are made up of a large number of groups with which people identify, and from which they are able to extract various values, norms, and rules for behavior. He calls those groups "subcultures" (Jandt 1995: 9-10).

Recent popular culture and mass media studies have used the term "virtual tribes" to define groups in which participants do not come together through culture, language or shared history and beliefs. Rather, these groups would be united by no more than one or two common interests. Critics such as Schrøder (1994) have warned that labels like "virtual tribes" and "communities of meaning" might set artificial boundaries around imaginary groups, where shared meanings and rituals are hardly frequent, if not completely absent.

According to her interpretation, an example of an artificial "interpretive community" (or "virtual tribe") would be one that grouped teen-age fans of pop star Madonna. It could be plausibly argued that a 14-year-old Madonna fan in Indonesia does not decodify the singer's latest video clip the same way that a Swiss girl the same

age does. It would not make sense to speak of "interpretive communities" in this case, since meanings are hardly shared by the group's supposed participants.

In the case of media reception studies, Schrøder argues that emphasis on how those "artificial communities" receive cultural messages often takes for granted the fact that individuals (or subjects) precede the media products they consume. As a lesson to my own research, I might conclude that lumping different local interpretations into one large umbrella or category; and disregarding the subjectivity of individual interpretations are mistakes to be avoided.

Negotiation of Meanings

As I examined earlier, the negotiation of meanings and values between dominant/marginal cultures or subcultures is not always peaceful and balanced. Cross-cultural and intercultural communication scholars have tried to outline different theories and models to explain how those processes occur.

It has been argued that when cultures and subcultures interact, there are several degrees in which that interaction might take place. Those degrees go from the simple diffusion of innovations (a single artifact or cultural practice is copied by the "receiving" culture) to cultural domination (a whole set of beliefs, norms and artifacts is imposed by the "dominant" to the "marginal" culture). In between, one might encounter cultural processes occurring in intermediary stages, such as acculturation, assimilation, integration, separation, marginalization and cultural hegemony.

Acculturation

Acculturation, for one, is an umbrella term that encompasses the different processes (and stages) resulting from the contact between two

different cultural groups. As defined by Berry and colleagues (Berry 1989: 186), acculturation happens "when two independent groups come into continuous first-hand contact over an extended period of time, resulting in changes in either or both cultural groups". In the case of São João de Pirabas, it is my intent to look at cultural changes as a two-way road (the concept of cultural dialogue will be better explored later in the text).

Most studies examining acculturation processes (Y. Kim 1977; J. Kim 1980; Berry et al. 1988, 1989; Choi & Tamborini 1988) either assume or conclude that minority groups tend to be more affected than the dominant culture. Berry et al. (1989) state that there are two main issues which groups and individuals have to face in the acculturation process: Desirability of contact with the other group; and desirability of maintenance of the group's own cultural heritage. In each case, they would have to answer the questions: "Is it considered to be of value to maintain contact with other groups?," and "is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?" By answering yes or no to those issues, the acculturation process could take four different routes: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization.

Assimilation happens when the group (or individual) does not value retention of its own identity, but instead values assimilation of the other group's perspectives. Integration happens when the group considers both identities important. Separation means considering important one's own culture, but avoiding contact with other groups. And marginalization refers to saying no to your own culture, and also to other cultures.

Immigrant groups have provided researchers with a myriad of patterns and cultural characteristics that exemplify all of those acculturation routes outlined here. The difference in acculturation patterns has been related to education, socioeconomic status, mastery

of the "host" language, and consumption of both ethnic and "host" mass media.

Young Yun Kim (1977), for example, surveyed Korean immigrants in the Chicago area, and found that language competence, acculturation motivation, and channel accessibility (both interpersonal interaction potential and mass media availability) are mediated and influenced by mass communication experiences. Berry et al. (1988, 1989) reached similar conclusions when analyzing the acculturation of immigrants in Canada and Australia. It is arguable that issues such as access to television, degree of social interaction, and literacy will be important determinants in the levels of integration or acculturation or isolation observed in the community of São João de Pirabas.

Cultural Hegemony

Cultural hegemony might be interpreted as one stage before cultural domination. The term is defined by Jandt (1995) as the predominance of cultural constructs from one group over another. As opposed to cultural domination, where political power plays a predominant role in assuring that one culture or subculture will be subjugated by the other, cultural hegemony has been defined as heavily influenced by economic relations. Economic factors, such as an uneven trade of consumer goods between two cultures, would be very relevant in determining the set of beliefs, values and behaviors that will become hegemonic in a particular culture at a particular time.

For communication theorist Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993), any discussion of the role of the mass media in the construction of ideological and cultural hegemony has to start by reviewing the importance of Antonio Gramsci's concepts. According to Martín-Barbero, Gramsci's concept of hegemony made it possible to move beyond "the conception of social domination as simply an outside

imposition without subjects of cultural action" (Martín-Barbero 1993: 74). Gramsci's idea is that the dominant class (or culture) wants the subaltern classes (or cultures) to not only accept the hegemonic views as "natural," but recognize that ideology as being also in their (the subaltern classes') best interest.

Martín-Barbero (1988: 457) believes that the strict hegemonic model adopted by many Marxist analysts limited the role of the "masses" to passive receivers of pre-constructed messages. In his opinion, rather than acting as mere transmitters of ideologically loaded messages, the mass media have to be seen as mediators between the state and the masses, between the rural and the urban, between tradition and modernity.

For Martín-Barbero (1993), no *place* presents a better opportunity to analyze that mediation characteristic than in the realm of the "popular culture." Popular culture, for him, is the locus where the conflicts that culture articulates come to the surface. However, the rediscovery of the "popular culture" by Latin American media analysts divided those researchers into two extreme positions: One side sponsors a fatalistic approach, which sees those cultural manifestations as unable to compete with the "dominant" culture; the other side has an over-optimistic one, in which popular culture would be seen as an almost magic resource for resistance and defiance. In that context, the importance of studying the "popular" culture would not reside on its authenticity or beauty, but rather "on its capacity to make material and to express the ways of living and thinking of the underclasses" (Martín-Barbero 1993: 74).

By exploring the relationships between traditional ways of living and the cultural changes brought about by media consumption, my research will help to shed some light on the controversy outlined by Martín-Barbero.

Mass Media as an Enculturation Tool

Some studies have focused specifically on the relationship between enculturation (the process of "learning" a culture), and the mass media. Saenz (1992: 43), for example, suggested that television viewing stimulates a sense of "involvement with a more generalized experience: The feeling of being present at a busy, 'live' cultural site".

Foucault's concept of 'generalization' could be translated as the process of expanding specific meanings and particular codes of behavior (e.g. codes of discipline and punishment) into concepts, rules and social constructs which are completely incorporated to the total body politic.[6] Drawing from Foucault, Saenz further argued that television promotes a "generalized culture," which introduces signs supposedly "capable of coding all behavior, hence the medium's apparent scope and inclusiveness" (1993: 43). One could also detect echoes of Foucault, particularly his interpretation of Victorian sexuality as a somewhat cultural productive force, in Martín-Barbero's assertion that "the process of enculturation was never one of pure repression" (1993: 99).

As I am going to discuss further in the upcoming sections, the unique television broadcasting system developed in Brazil, and the political and economic issues associated with it, have prompted some authors to argue that, in that country, the mass media have been very successful at making the views, style, and political ideology of a small elite completely acceptable in the eyes of a large majority of the country's population.

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6 That concept is explored by Foucault in, among other works, "Disciline and Punish" (originally published in 1975), and the three volumes of his "History of Sexuality" (1976, 1984, 1984).

In his study of television and political transition in Brazil, Joseph D. Straubhaar (1989) argued that Rede Globo, Brazil's largest network, is not only the audience leader, but also the creator of a universe of cultural meanings that gained hegemony in the popular taste. One of the best examples of that is the way in which soap operas have become not only the favored genre in Brazilian television, but also a very important and easily recognizable narrative style for most Brazilians.

Based on the studies done by authors such Mattos (1982), Necchi (1989), Straubhaar (1989), Kottak (1991), and Oliveira (1991), among others, it would be reasonable to infer that, in the case of Brazil, television viewing plays an immense role in the definition of those unifying cultural patterns. It is possible to deduce that, what Straubhaar has characterized as the "padrão global de qualidade" (Rede Globo's "pattern of quality") has, indeed, been at the core of the "meaning-making" process developed on a daily basis by Brazilian audiences.

Albeit recognizing the importance of television viewing in the definition of a Brazilian "national character," it is not my intent to isolate that medium's consumption as the sole (or even major) defining factor. In the following sections, I will outline some of the possible ways of operationalizing the study of the television viewing phenomenon in Brazil.

Before I launch into a full-fledged discussion of the specific medium of television and its cultural and social impact, it is imperative to provide a historical account of the study of mass media audiences, and a discussion of some of the theoretical models and concepts that have been used to describe and interpret the relationship between mass media consumption and culture-building.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE
STUDY OF MASS MEDIA AUDIENCES

Hypodermic Needle vs. Limited Effects

Early attempts to characterize media audiences were heavily influenced by the definition of mass society, where most of the blame for perceived problems, such as individualism, isolation and even a rise in criminality was put on modernization, industrialization, and the growth of cities. In 1948, Lazarsfeld & Merton observed how those factors were believed to have provoked an increasing "atomization" of the modern man, with the rise of a faceless and anonymous crowd, particularly in urban areas. This nameless mass audience – for whom media consumption was now available thanks to literacy and education – was perceived to be highly impressionable and ready to be used by manipulators of all sorts.

Likewise, media power was seen as endless and greatly effective. A "shot" of information was the only thing required to affect audience's behavior. That particular model came to be known as the "hypodermic needle" or the "silver bullet" model.

The myth of a faceless crowd crumbled after World War II, together with the "hypodermic needle" hypothesis. The new model – proposed in that same 1948 study by Lazarsfeld and Merton – assigned limited effects to media messages, by saying that those messages would affect the public only indirectly. To be truly effective, those messages had to be mediated by opinion leaders.

The new paradigm affected not only researchers' understanding of the character of audiences, but it also helped them to define new methodologies to empirically measure the public's reaction. Social effects were measured and quantified over and over, in a frenzy to provide raw data which could be used to shape more effective ways of reaching the public (Curran, Gurevitch, & Woollacott, 1982). By

that same time (late 1940s, early 1950s), audiences were turned into commodities that could be bought and sold by media vehicles to advertisers.

Cultivation Hypothesis

In the field of mass communication research, perhaps the best-known model making the linkage between enculturation and acculturation and media processes is the "cultivation hypothesis." I will talk about the cultivation model keeping in mind that the hypothesis is not the only way to operationalize the analysis of media consumption and its relationship to culture building: It is only one possible way of doing that.

As proposed by George Gerbner et al. (1969, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1986), the cultivation hypothesis states that mass media (particularly television) have a preponderant role at the definition of people's cultural and social values. According to the hypothesis, the mass media "cultivate" those values, opinions, and concepts over an extended period of time. Following that rationale, proponents argue that the effects of exposure to television should not be analyzed in terms of immediate response, but always over the long-term.

The models' proponents argue that television's main function is enculturation: The stabilization of social patterns that "cultivate not change, but resistance to change" (Gerbner & Gross 1976). Based on the assumption that cultivation occurs over time, the researchers created the "Violence Profile": A set of indicators that relates images constructed by the television world, and the cultural interpretations of reality they would cultivate in the viewers.

The results obtained by the researchers led them to the conclusion that "ritualized displays of any violence may cultivate exaggerated

assumptions about the extent of threat and danger in the world and lead to demands for protection."

The core of the research conducted by Gerbner and colleagues tends to focus on the effects of exposure to violent television programming. In most of their subsequent studies, they tried to demonstrate that heavy television viewing might distort people's perception of the 'real world' (Gerbner et al. 1977, 1979, 1980).

Using quantitative analytical models, Gerbner and colleagues try to find relationships between the cultural indicators created by the "television world" and the response of the audiences supposedly affected by those images.

Some analysts have criticized what they perceive as theoretical and methodological flaws in the cultivation hypothesis. James Potter (1993), for example, has said that some of the conceptual problems which need to be addressed by the hypothesis' users are: The justification of the television world message; more precise exposure measures; and confrontation of the nonlinear nature of the relationship between exposure and worldview (Potter 1993: 588).

Potter wants the hypothesis' proponents to better define and justify the "cultivation indicators" used in their studies (violent acts, for example, should not only be counted, but also put into context). Moreover, he believes they should assume that the relationship between exposure and behavior is not as neatly linear (causal) as it has been stated. "This realization does not destroy cultivation theory but merely shifts the perspective into discovering the shape of the relationship," Potter argues (Potter 1993: 590).

In a subsequent article, Potter (1994) focused specifically on methodological questions. He was troubled, for example, with the way exposure to television has been measured by most cultivation studies: Instead of using Likert scales that ask the subjects to rank their

television exposure from "never" to "always," he thinks researchers should simply ask them the sheer amount of hours they spend in front of the TV (Potter 1994: 4). The methodological problems, Potter argues, also relate to the ways in which cultivation indicators are measured (participants are usually asked to choose between two answers, one of them representing the "real world," and the other the "television world").

One of the major problems posed by the cultivation model is the lack of emphasis on the importance of the "bigger picture." By omitting the social, cultural, political and economic factors involved in the processes of media production and consumption, the model is risking to throw away the complexity and uniqueness of each group or subculture analyzed. Moreover, when the model tries to isolate and measure the variables deemed significant to the research goals, it creates artificial parameters that, not only take the studied phenomena out of their context, but also do not necessarily cover the spectrum of issues and problems involved.

The cultivation hypothesis, as I mentioned earlier, is not the only way (or the right way) of operationalizing the study of mass media consumption (particularly television viewing) and its relationship to culture building and transmission: It is, instead, one possible way of doing that. For reasons that will be explored in later sections, my research project, albeit recognizing the importance of theoretical concepts put forth by the cultivation theory, opted for employing a more cultural and qualitative approach to the study of similar phenomena.

Critical Studies, Uses & Gratifications

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a new approach to communication processes (and audiences) emerged with the so-called critical studies (Bennett 1982). New methods of decoding and

interpreting media messages, such as semiology and deconstruction, redefined the character of the text itself (McQuail 1994). Researchers and analysts believed messages were read differently by different groups. The text was open-ended, in the sense that it encapsulated endless meanings, whose interpretation would vary according to the audiences (Barthes 1975; Eco 1976).

On the other side, from within the effects theoretical framework, emerged a new conceptualization of audiences: The public assumed a more active role in the decodification process. Audience members were viewed as selecting what (and how) they wanted to read in order to fulfill a basic need for pleasure. The "uses and gratifications" framework explains the audience's selection and interpretation of media messages by basing it on satisfaction (Blumler, Brown, & McQuail 1970; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch 1974).

Uses and gratifications researchers tried to establish their model as a dramatic break from the effects tradition. Authors such as Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, as quoted by Elliott (1974), claim that theirs are "more sophisticated and complex attempts to capture the communicator-audience relationship and to set this within a wider social context" (Elliott 1974: 249). In an empirical study on the reception of the TV show Dallas by different ethnic groups in Israel and the United States, Katz & Liebes (1984) concluded that decodification differed greatly among the groups. Their critical distance to the program varied; they were very articulate in their discussion of the show; discussion and interpretation were selective; dramatic content was related to real life experiences. They basically concluded that viewing was highly active and social, what was understood by the authors to reinforce the uses and gratifications hypothesis.

Critics, such as Elliott himself, and Bybee (1987), have contradicted this notion by pointing out that an "implicit conservative

bias" (Bybee 1987: 195) has prevented the uses and gratifications paradigm from differentiating itself from its ultimate originator, the effects theory.

Bybee argued that functionalism should not be considered the source of the uses and gratifications paradigm's conservative bias. Instead, its roots are grounded on the fact that the concept is an operationalization of the media effects' idea of liberal democracy (Bybee 1987: 200-201).

Elliott, on the other hand, suggested that uses and gratifications proponents should incorporate a sociological framework to their hypothesis. Uses and gratifications' main assumption, he wrote, is ambiguous in dealing with power relationships, in society as well as within media organizations. His alternative approach placed media and audiences within the social structures (Elliott 1974: 261).

Audiences' Interpretation

By the time the uses and gratifications model was so influential in America, a more "sociological" or "socio-cultural" approach was being employed in Great Britain to study the same phenomena. In 1980, David Morley wrote a book called *The Nationwide Audience*, which is considered by many (Turner 1990) to be one of the most influential works in media audience research. In his book, Morley tracked down the variations in audiences' decodings of a British TV program called "Nationwide." He looked, especially, at the relationship between the audience members' interpretation of the program and those people's socio-economic positions. He tried to strike a balance between the audience's autonomy in interpretation and some predisposition, determined by social variables.

For G. Turner (1990), Morley's work was so influential because it explained the decoding process as a process that is constructed according to the discourses (knowledge, prejudices) sponsored by the

viewers. Critics have attacked Morley's studies on the basis that he minimized variations within the groups studied, and tried to generalize the responses obtained.

Reception Analysis

More recently, reception analysis has come to represent a methodological and theoretical counterpoint to traditional uses and gratifications research: "Emphasis is shifted from an analysis of the meanings 'in' the text, central to the text-based approaches to television programmes, to an analysis of the process of reading a text" (Livingstone 1991: 287). The criticism that an avoidance of power relationships and social context has relegated uses and gratification analyses into the administrative research realm (Elliott 1974; Bybee 1987), prompted critical studies to incorporate qualitative research techniques that try not to take for granted status quo and political-economic constraints.

A recent ethnographic tradition of research has been built on the premises that audiences are different, active, and selective, but they also respond to social and economic pressures within their own environments, and according to their cultural backgrounds (Ang & Hermes 1991, referring to the work of Radway, 1984, among others). These and other authors have noted that methodology is the ultimate issue to set apart reception analysis and uses and gratifications research traditions. While the former builds upon qualitative tools (such as ethnographic accounts and environmental immersion), the latter prioritizes quantitative empirical ways of collecting data.

Analysts have also observed that ethnographic techniques are not exempted of taking for granted social context. Critics have noticed that a potential weakness of reception analysis is its failure to extend results, inserting them in a context that explains why messages are read the way they are – better defined relationships of causality.

For example, Livingstone (1991: 299) criticizes reception studies which neglect issues of power and social structure, but she forgets that in her own research, where she used the process of retelling a soap opera to assess viewers' interpretation of messages, much of the blame for different readings (a "cynical" versus a "romantic" view) was put on different levels of involvement with the genre, instead of on the readers' sociological backgrounds.

Some of the questions that have been asked in the analyses of mass media audiences are:

1. How important are external factors (namely, political, social and cultural background) in defining the way audiences receive and process media messages;

2. How do we measure the way those factors affect people's understanding of the messages;

3. How much of what people perceive from messages can be attributed to "media" factors (content, organization, genre), how much to societal factors (power structures, political systems, economic strata), and how much should be attributed to personal factors (taste, involvement with particular genres/issues, psychological, individual background);

4. Is it possible to separate and measure those three levels of influence? If it is possible, what would be the best way to accomplish it;

5. Is there any internal logic in the process of consuming media messages?

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Summary of Literature Review

The literature reviewed up to this point poses some interesting theoretical questions and diverse approaches to the study of the

relationship between mass media and culture-building processes. Some of the threads which permeate that discussion are:

1. There are many conflicting definitions of culture. A possible one is that culture is "a philosophy behind the way of life of each individual and of every relatively homogeneous group at any given point in their histories" (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck 1961: 2).

2. Both cultural anthropologists and mass communication researchers have tried to analyze what are some of the external and internal factors that influence a particular group's cultural manifestations. That discussion is relevant for the research summarized here because the gist of my work is trying to identify what are the changes brought about by pervasive television viewing to the traditional ways of living of a community in the Brazilian Amazon.

3. Particularly important for recent cultural anthropologists is the notion that the multiplicity of "cultures" (as concurrent "ways of living") and the infinite possibilities of language (demonstrated with particular success by post-structuralist philosophers) has opened up the field of anthropology to the complex, contradictory and ever-changing character of cultural manifestations.

Instead of looking at anthropology as the description and analysis of traditional ways of living as the constant struggle between binary oppositions, cultural anthropologists such as James Clifford and Victor Turner have defined culture as the terrain of "seriously contested codes and representations" (Clifford 1986: 2); and cultural anthropology as the analysis of "ongoing, complex, contradictory social processes" (V. Turner 1986).

4. This shift in the epistemology of cultural analysis is relevant for my work because when looking at the cultural changes brought about by television in the community of São João de Pirabas, I want to steer away from simplistic and reductionistic views of cultural production as

the result of technological (and cultural) conflict: Past vs. present, old vs. new, antiquated vs. modern. Instead, I want to incorporate in my analysis an approach that is open to the multi-layered (multiple, complex interpretations that are concurrent and non-exclusive) and multi-vocal (multiple voices from the field should be heard) character of cultural manifestations.

5. Some of the lessons we have learned from the field of mass communication studies (and more specifically from intercultural communication analysis) include the belief that different meanings and values are negotiated whenever inter-group and intra-group interactions take place.

6. Enculturation has been defined as the process of "learning" a culture. It has been suggested that television is a powerful enculturation tool, in the way that it stimulates a sense of "involvement with a more generalized experience" (Saenz 1992: 43) – involvement in societal life (including politics) and cultural production; and also in the way television programming resonates a dominant (or hegemonic) view of society, and its ideological and organizational constructs (Barbero 1988, 1993).

Research Questions

Analyzing television's overall influence as a mass medium, Snow (1983:166) wrote that it was "not a matter of television causing specific cultural change in a deterministic manner". What he concluded to be the case was that audiences were rather using TV to "create culture":

> [P]eople are adopting features of television format and content to interpret and establish meaning in their own lives. The audience is an active, although unaware, participant or accomplice, to *a process in which culture is being created through television.* (Snow 1983: 166, emphasis added)

In his ethnographic study of television audiences in Central Mexico, Murphy (1996) similarly concluded that:

[T]elevision watching as a cultural practice informs family relations, punctuates time, provides common themes for interpersonal interactions, structures the use of masculine and feminine domains and/or viewing times, and even influences other daily patterns of social interaction such as work and meal times. (Murphy 1996: 154-155).

Considering the theories and concepts relating mass media and the construction of cultural identity discussed here; the wealth of literature indicating a relationship between mass media and the cultivation of certain modes of being; the pervasiveness of television as a mass medium in Brazil (which will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming chapter); as well as the uniqueness of that country's television system, my first research question examines television as a culture-building medium.

In general terms, the first research question asked by this study can be translated as:

1. Has television played a role in the way rural Brazilian communities construct their own interpretation of the world and of themselves?

De Certeau (1984) noted that by adding their own "superstitions" to the everyday practices of an established major religion (Catholicism), Brazilian "believers" re-employed an essentially oppressive system, which had been imposed on them by outsiders, to modify (and subvert) "the fatality of the established order" (De Certeau 1984: 17). Likewise, he wrote, particular ways of speaking a received language "transform it into a song of resistance". More generally, de Certeau observed, "*a way of using* imposed systems constitutes the resistance to the historical law of a state of affairs and its dogmatic

legitimations," creating "a space for maneuvers of unequal forces and for utopian points of reference" (De Certeau 1984: 18).

In *Television Culture*, Fiske (1987) proposed that "[r]eading television texts is a process of negotiation between [the] existing subject position and the one proposed by the text itself, and in this negotiation the balance of power lies with the reader" (Fiske 1987: 66-67). The immediate result of this *dialogue*, Fiske concluded, is meaning production that derives "from the intersection of [the viewer's] social history with the social forces structured into the text" (Fiske 1987: 82).

The concepts and theoretical models discussed in the previous sections indicate that, in a way predicted by De Certeau, Fiske, and other scholars, television might be used by minority groups as a way of gathering information about the views, ideas and cultural constructs that are "dominant" in a particular society, in a given period of time. Television, then, would be used as a vehicle for stimulating dialogue and change (including cultural resistance) between and within different ethnic and cultural sub-groups in a particular society.

Thus, a second question asked by this research study is:

2. Has television played a role as an *acculturation* vehicle in rural Brazil? In other words, has television been used to establish a dialogue between rural groups from the poor Brazilian countryside, and the dominant urban, "cultured" elites?

A third important research question, deriving from the two previous ones, deals with the general impact of the "television world" into a relatively isolated rural community. In general terms, a third research question can be translated as:

3. What kinds of cultural changes (if any) have been produced by systematic and pervasive television viewing in an until recently isolated rural community?

In the next sections, I will discuss the adequacy of qualitative methodologies for the study of culture-building processes mediated by television viewing. I will be playing particular attention to ethnography, since that was the primary methodology employed in this research study in order to answer the three major research questions posed here.

Qualitative Communication Research

Lull (1983: 21-22) has outlined some basic advantages of doing qualitative research of communication phenomena:

1. "Emergent data" can become known: Quantitative, statistical analyses usually superimpose on the data a scheme developed by the researcher before the study was even conducted; when he or she started the study, the researcher had already defined the important variables and relationships that should be sought. A whole array of unexpected variables, properties, behaviors and relationships are left out or deemed unimportant. Qualitative research tends to incorporate those "emergent data" into the analysis and interpretation of the phenomena studied;

2. "The detail and complexity of human communication behavior become known in a richer way." The "thick," detailed description of micro-social units is better accomplished (and much more telling) if qualitative methods (direct observation, in-depth interviewing) are used;

3. Observations made *in situ* tend to incorporate "real world" behaviors and relationships;

4. Qualitative studies are often more appealing to the lay public.

When explaining the basic normative characteristics of qualitative research (and opposing them to their quantitative counterparts), J. Anderson (1987) presented nine main ones: Inductive, eidetic, subjective, contextual, mundane, textual, preservationistic, interactive,

and interpretive. I won't analyze here each one of those characteristics, but three of them (inductive, contextual, interpretive) deserve a better look, since they help to explain why a qualitative ethnographic method would be more adequate to study the phenomena associated with television viewing.

Qualitative research focuses on inductive, and not deductive, methods because it is assumed that each social system is uniquely constructed. Qualitative methodologies want to preserve those unique qualities found by the researcher, and not to erase them, as if they were anomalies obstructing the discovery of a bigger truth.

Qualitative research is contextual, and not generalizable, because it is assumed that the "meaning structures that integrate into social realities are formed within the holistic envelopment of a [particular] context." There are multiples realities to every phenomenon, and those are set by the context, understood here not merely as the setting, but also as the interpretations offered by its actors.

Qualitative research is interpretive, and not material, because it is assumed that the analysis comes as a result of the interaction between the analyst and the observational text (fieldnotes, interview notes, etc). Meaning, writes J. Anderson, is "promiscuous and prolific; it is the product of human consciousness and is not contained in objects."

The Importance of Social Context

Now that I have provided an overview of how the study of audiences and some of the different models and methodologies fit into the bigger picture of "communication studies," let us take a more detailed look at the use of ethnographic methodologies in media research.

Anthropologist Edmund Carpenter, as quoted by James Lull (1983) in one of his ethnographic accounts of mass media and family communication, warned that:

> [W]hen social science extracts the individual from his social context it renders him unrecognizable and risks the possibility of converting the color and detail of his being into 'unreadable jargon and statistics, almost none of it translatable back into life energy.' (Lull 1983: 2-3)

In the past two decades, a very strong point has been made for recognizing the importance of social context in the study of mass communication processes. A whole school of media analysis has been built upon the premises of epistemological and methodological tools which distance themselves from the traditional empirico-quantitative ways of approaching communication issues. In the same study mentioned above, Lull echoed sociologist Herbert Blumer's call for "methodologies which reveal the intertwined, interacting, and transforming makeup of the communicative process" (Lull 1983: 8).

Ethnography

Ethnography has been particularly successful at addressing some of the fundamental issues underlying that process. Ethnography might be defined as a set of techniques that facilitate the study of a "different" culture (from the researcher's perspective) by making it less traumatic for the him or her to "enter" that extraneous culture. It has been around for more than a hundred years, and has been particularly successful in anthropological and sociological studies. Ethnography relies heavily on participant observation, interviewing, and the "lived through" experience of the researcher.

Hammersley (1990: 1-2) defined ethnography as a method of social research that presents five main features:

1. People's behavior is studied in everyday contexts;

2. Data are gathered from a range of sources, but observation and informal conversation are the most important ones;

3. Data collection is "unstructured," in the sense that it does not follow a detailed a priori plan;

4. The focus is usually a single group or setting (or even a single individual);

5. The analysis of the data involves interpretation of meanings and functions of human actions, taking usually the form of verbal/ written descriptions.

Ethnography, he says, had its origins in the writings of travelers and explorers, and started to be used more systematically by cultural anthropology and sociology in the later part of last century.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many ethnographies of urban subcultures were produced, and those had an influence on audience studies, especially from the late 1970s on. In 1985, Müller & Meyer compiled 454 studies dealing with television viewing by children and families. All of those studies could be labeled as reception research, a type of research which is "primarily recipient-oriented ... and emphasizes the predominantly active role the recipient plays in whatever form of interaction with the media" (Müller & Meyer 1985: 6). Most of the studies listed by the authors used methodological techniques usually associated with ethnographic analyses, such as direct observation and in-depth interviews.

Livingstone (1991: 286) provided further support for the linkage between recent reception research and ethnographic methodologies: "Empirical reception research regards viewers' interpretations as primary, seeking to relate these to ethnographic and to effects-related concerns at a later stage". Citing a reason that has been at the core of the option for ethnographic studies, the author argued that this more

recent turn to ethnographic media research is one that "focuses on the viewers' active interpretation – or meaning negotiation – of television programmes" (Livingstone 1991: 286).

James Lull (1983) justified his choice of ethnography as a methodology by pointing out the uniqueness of the "family setting," as a mode of television viewing. When families get together to watch TV, he wrote, the resulting patterns of interaction transcend the individual personalities of each family member. Therefore, "the family must be studied as a holistic unit-in-interaction, not as simply the sum of independent parts" (Lull 1983: 16). Lull quoted earlier communication researchers, such as Bechtel, Achelpohl and Akers, as having concluded that media habits might be better understood if the consumers are studied *in situ*. Ethnography, he concluded, is the methodology best capable of providing a non-obtrusive way of looking at the process of media consumption *in situ*, as it occurs.

Historic View

The use of ethnographic methodologies for the analysis of the television viewing process is not a new phenomenon. In 1964, anthropologist Dell Hymes published an article in the *American Anthropologist*, called "Toward Ethnographies of Communication," in which he already proposed the incorporation of linguistic and communicative aspects by anthropologists and ethnographers interested in conveying the multifaceted complexity of a particular culture. Hymes emphasized the importance of social context to ethnographic communication studies:

> For anthropologists and anthropologically-minded investigators from other disciplines, ethnography of communication seems best to indicate the necessary scope, and to convey and encourage the fundamental contribution they best can make: studies

ethnographic in basis, and of communication in the scope and kind of patterned complexity with which they deal.

In short, 'ethnography of communication' implies two characteristics that an adequate approach to the problems of language which engage anthropologists must have. First, such an approach cannot simply take separate results from linguistics, psychology, sociology, ethnology, as given, and seek to correlate them, however partially useful such work is. It must call attention to the need for fresh kinds of data, to the need to investigate directly the use of language in contexts of situation so as to discern patterns proper to speech activities ... Secondly, such an approach cannot take linguistic form, a given code, or speech itself, as a frame of reference. *It must take as context a community, investigating its communicative habits as a whole, so that any given use of channel and code takes its place as but part of the resources upon which the members of the community draw.* (Hymes 1964: 2-3, emphasis added).

Ethnographic accounts of media consumption became more popular in the 1970s and 1980s, with the appearance of ground breaking studies such as James Lull's doctoral dissertation *Mass Media and Family Communication: An Ethnography of Audience Behavior* (completed in 1976 but published only in 1983); and other studies by Noble (1975); Fowles (1977); Anderson, Alwitt, Lorch, & Levin (1979); Reid (1979); and Brody and Stoneman (1983), among others.

In 1985, Müller and Meyer described 55 studies, some of them characterized as "observational" or "contextualized," in which emphasis was given to family interaction during the television viewing process.

When analyzing the use of ethnography by British communication and cultural studies, G. Turner (1990) mentions Hoggart's 1958 *The Uses of Literacy* as a seminal, influential analysis of "everyday lives." Quoting Batsleer, Davies, O'Rourke, & Weedon (1985), G. Turner (1990) wrote that ethnography usually "starts not with a text or a theory

but with a social group, and observes their use of commodities and messages to produce culture, meanings and interpretations" (G. Turner 1990: 170).

From the late 1970s on, that approach has produced an array of communication or media-oriented studies that try to make sense of the "consumption/meaning production" process as experienced by different social groups.

Besides the already mentioned studies, other similar works worth referring to are Janice Radway's analysis of female readers of romantic novels (1984); Dorothy Hobson's study of soap opera audiences (1982); Ien Ang's 1985 study of the show *Dallas*; Sonia Livingstone's analysis of British soap operas (1991); and Purnima Mankekar's (1993) examination of gender issues in the decodification of media messages in India.

Problematic areas

Ethnography's growth as methodology of choice for qualitative analyses of the mass media – and particularly for audience reception studies – – has prompted some "friendly fire" from critics such as Radway (1988), Ang (1990), and Kim Schrøder (1994), who argue that emphasis on audience reception of media messages often takes for granted the fact that "individuals/subjects precede the media products they consume" (Schrøder 1994: 338).

In that same study, Schrøder calls attention to the fact that the concept of "interpretive communities," first introduced by Radway in 1984, has been stretched to accommodate definitions that hardly resemble the original meaning. As defined by Radway (1984), Schrøder argues, interpretive communities group people who share a uniform way of reading a particular text or genre.

One way of avoiding the danger of over-simplification and generalization is by disregarding any a priori conception about the analyzed community. Rather than searching for uniformity and "virtual tribes" united through one-dimensional constructs, my study of television viewing in São João de Pirabas should pay special attention to diversity and multiplicity in the interpretation of messages.

Social Context, Power Relationships

Other common recent criticism was well summarized by Ien Ang (1990), when that researcher warned against the fact that the intense proliferation of ethnographic studies of media audiences carried the danger of producing an alternative formal "truth": The accumulation of ethnographic analyses would take "social realities" out of their context, and generate overgeneralized accounts of media reception.

The researcher's answer to that is an approach that would go beyond the mere description of the "media/audience encounter," and focus on the social, economic and power relationships inherent to those processes. Ethnography, argues Ang, has to be "placed in a broader theoretical framework, so that it ceases to be just a sophisticated form of empirical audience research, but becomes part of a more encompassing understanding, both structural and historical, of our contemporary cultural condition" (Ang 1990: 244).

A good example of this more recent, self-critical way of doing communication ethnography is Purnima Mankekar's (1993) analysis of how gender roles are relevant to the decodification of media messages in Northern India. In that study, the author examined how men and women interpret entertainment serials shown on Indian television. Instead of falling for an outsider's description of "exotic local communities," the researcher opted for including a "broader political-economic conjuncture," and also for looking at audiences as active participants in the decodifying process (Mankekar's 1993: 544).

Mankekar's and Ang's attention to the holistic aspect of the analyzed culture is attuned with Janice Radway's resistance to classify her own studies as ethnographies. Her point is that traditional ethnographies study cultures as a whole, while media studies, although borrowing some ethnographic techniques, usually tend to concentrate on cultural fragments, and particular aspects of a culture.

The Noble Savage

The danger of "exoticizing" the community studied is related to a romanticized, idealized view of its human components and cultural manifestations. Rousseau's myth of the noble savage is very much alive, both in popular culture and in academic circles. By bringing former "outsiders" and "outlaws" to the spotlight, the myth only apparently reverted the tables of colonialist thinking. Commoditized for immediate consumption, the noble savages' values and way of life are, once again, stripped from all meaningfulness and "processed" for easier assimilation.

One could try to escape that fate by making sure that the multiple voices and narratives involved in the story can be heard. My kind of ethnography is very much attuned with the suggestions made by Clifford (1986), when he identifies dialogism and polyphony as the two strongest characteristics to be incorporated by any current ethnographic study. Dialogism is here understood as the dialectic interaction between each one of the parts involved in the study (and not only between researcher and "objects"). Polyphony might be defined as the ability to echo the diverse voices involved in the process.

Research Methodology

Research methods used in this study included participant observation, informal in-depth interviewing, and formal interviewing (questionnaires).

An Ethnography of Television Audiences in Rural Brazil

Ethnography was the major methodology employed in this study in order to answer the three central research questions posed in the previous chapter. The ethnographic techniques most often used were direct observation, participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and informal conversations. Besides those techniques, a simple questionnaire was also used by the researcher.

The site of this study, the town of São João de Pirabas, a community of 6,000 people located on the northern Brazilian coast, was chosen because it presented some unique characteristics relevant to this research. Pirabas, as the locals call it, is sufficiently isolated from any major urban centers – Belém, the state capital is a four-hour drive away; there were no domestic private phone lines in town when the study was conducted; there were no other mass media besides television – to guarantee its character of a relatively "traditional" rural area. Moreover, the town is located in the remote and sparsely populated Amazon region; it has a strong sense of community; and it has done a good job of preserving some of the local "authentic" cultural traditions.

Besides those characteristics, the area in which Pirabas is located, the *Salgado* region of Pará state, has been the focus of a wide array of sociological and anthropological research work, done by both Brazilian and foreign researchers in the past 20 years. Albeit the bad roads, lack of direct communication, and uncomfortable bus ride, Pirabas is also relatively close to Belém, the site of a major research institution, Museu

Emílio Goeldi, which opened its library and offices to my study, and offered me a place to set up a much needed "home base."

My study was conducted in Pirabas between mid-August and late November, 1996. During that period of time, I rented a very simple house in town, and spent most of my time observing and taking part in Pirabas' daily life. I had five major local informants: A grocer, his wife, a bar owner, a fisherman, and a fish vendor. I also interviewed, or simply talked to, a great number of local residents, from all age groups and different occupations.

The questionnaire was designed as an auxiliary tool: A way of "getting a foot in the door." It was mainly used as a way of "breaking the ice" and getting to know some of the locals a little better. The questions (translated from Portuguese) included:

1. Name and age of each family member

2. Profession

3. How long have you been living in Pirabas?

4. Place of birth

5. Do you know many people in town?

6. Do you have a large family living in Pirabas?

7. Do you usually visit your friends or other family members?

8. What is the frequency of your travels to Belém, Salinas or Capanema?

9. If a fisherman, do you belong to the local union chapter?

10. What is your approximate monthly income?

11. How do you spend your leisure time? Trips? Parties? Visiting friends?

12. Do you like to live in Pirabas?

13. What do you like the most and the least about Pirabas?

14. Would you like to live somewhere else? Why? If yes, where?

15. Do you own a TV set?

If yes:

16. Do you have a satellite dish?

17. Do you watch TV on a daily basis? How many hours a day?

18. Which channels do you normally watch?

19. What kind of shows do you like the most? Novelas? Newscast? Sports? Variety shows?

20. Who in the house decides which shows to watch?

21. What time of the day is the TV on? And off?

22. When you are watching TV, do you talk about the shows you are watching?

23. How many TV sets at home?

24. What did you use to do at night when you didn't have TV?

25. Do you like to watch TV? Why?

26. Is it important to have TV at home? Why?

27. Do you feel more informed about what goes on in the world now, as compared with before you had TV?

28. Do you feel well-informed on politics, the economy? What are your views on those subjects?

29. Do you read the newspaper? Do you listen to the radio?

If you don't have TV:

16. Do you watch TV at your neighbors' or friends' houses? If yes, how often? If no, why not?

17. Would you like to have a TV set at home?

18. What shows do you like the most?

19. Do you go to your neighbors' or friends' houses to watch only special events?

20. Do you talk to other family members or friends about the shows you (or they) watch?

21. What do you do at night, when you don't watch TV?

22. Is it important to watch TV? Why?

23. Is it important to have TV? Why?

24. Do you feel more informed about what goes on in the world now, as compared with before you watched TV?

25. Do you feel well-informed on politics, the economy? What are your views on those subjects?

26. Do you read the newspaper? Do you listen to the radio?

As noted earlier, the questionnaire presented here was used more as an "ice breaker" than as a formal research tool. The questions served more as a reminder of interesting topics to mention than as a rigid script that had to be closely followed. In many cases, questions were skipped or added, depending on the subjects' responses. On other occasions, the "script" was abandoned altogether, in favor of a more personal approach.

To most people I talked with, I explained my research as "university work" on Pirabas and its people. To my closer informants, I explained it was a research work, focused on families and communication. At the end of my stay, I explained my research in more detail to all my closer informants, including the two families who opened their homes to me, and let me watch TV with them almost every night.

One of the families, the Pereiras, invited me to come to their house after our first conversation, when they noticed my interest in

television and realized I did not have a set. The Pereiras[7] treated me at first as a guest, and later as a "visiting friend." They made me feel comfortable and seemed to be also comfortable with my presence. The other family, the Queluzes, kept a TV set in their establishment, the only hotel/restaurant in Pirabas. Their set attracted the attention of the hotel guests, as well as of the restaurant/bar's patrons. In that case, I just had to "mingle" to become a well-positioned observer.

In the next chapter, I will shift the focus from the theoretical and methodological aspects of mass communication research to a historical, social and cultural analysis of the Brazilian society.

BRAZIL

Before I can describe in more detail the characteristics of the particular Brazilian region in which this study was conducted, it is necessary to provide an overview of some historical, cultural, economic and social aspects of the Brazilian society. In the next sections, I will provide not only those general historical and social aspects, but also an introduction to the discussion of the Brazilian cultural identity, and an analysis of some of the cultural characteristics of the *Caboclo* culture prevalent in the Amazon region.

General Characteristics

In the Western hemisphere, Brazil's population – over 157 million people in 1997[8] – is second only to the United States'. In terms of geographic area, Brazil is the fifth largest nation in the world: With 3.285 million square miles, the country is larger than the 48 contiguous

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[7] Some of the names were changed to preserve the co-participants' anonimity.

[8] Based on the official census data, IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), 1997.

American states.[9] In the 1990s, the biggest and, by all accounts, wealthiest Latin American country has experienced an economic boom that, combined with low inflation rates and a stable economy, has given a boost to its socioeconomic indicators (Azevedo 1996). In sheer numbers, Brazil is the Americas' second largest democracy and third largest economy.

A continent-sized country united by a language and a common heritage, Brazil is the proverbial "melting pot" of races and cultures. The country's history as a nation goes back to the year 1500, when Portuguese *navegadores* set foot on what is now the state of Bahia. Before the Portuguese, pre-colonial Brazil was occupied by several different native populations. Just how densely occupied is anyone's guess. Despite wildly divergent estimates, most historians believe the country was heavily populated along its lush 4,600 mile-long shoreline, and less occupied inland.

Numbering close to one million people (Ribeiro 1995: 31), the most prominent native Brazilian group was the Tupi nation. Spread throughout the Atlantic coast, the Tupis were subdivided in several different tribal groups, each one with its own language, deriving from a common Tupi linguistic matrix. Other important Indian nations were the Tupinambá (inhabiting what is now Rio de Janeiro), the Carijó (in the São Paulo plateau), the Goitacá and the Aimoré (in the Coastal mountain range), the Bororo, the Xavante, the Kayapó and the Guaikuru (spread throughout the inland area from the central plains to as far west as the Paraguay river, and as far North as the Amazon river).

Years before they had even "discovered" Brazil, the Portuguese had already claimed the eastern half of South America, when they signed with Spain the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 (the western half

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9   Crystal (1993).

was assigned to the Spaniards). The colonization of Brazil, which started 30 years after discovery, was justified by economic, political and religious reasons. Portugal needed not only the abundant raw materials (wood, sugar cane, spices) free for the taking in the new colony, but it also took upon itself the duty of converting to Christianity the pagan souls it encountered in the new land.

Portugal's fierce colonization plan, which involved enslaving and converting docile Indians while slaughtering "rebel" ones, translated itself into a genocide comparable to the massacre implemented by fellow Europeans in the rest of the Americas. Ribeiro (1995: 105) estimated that more than one million Indians were killed by the Portuguese in the first decades of the Brazilian colonization.

Authors such as Freyre (1954), Ribeiro (1968, 1970, 1995), and Da Matta (1983, 1991a, 1991b) have noted that the degree of racial integration that characterized the first centuries of Brazilian history, has set the country's settlement apart from similar colonization processes that took place in the rest of the Americas. From the very beginning, the three main cultural and racial matrices that converged to form the Brazilian people – Africans, Europeans and native populations – have mixed in a way that was unprecedented in the Western hemisphere. Coming together to form *um povo novo* ("a new people"), those different ethnic groups produced what is now referred to as *uma etnia nacional* ("a national ethnicity"), a Brazilian ethnicity.[10]

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[10] In the book *O Povo Brasileiro* (1995), a *tour de force* in which the author tried to synthesize more than 50 years of personal anthropological research, Darcy Ribeiro explored the historical factors that led to the uniqueness of the Brazilian "civilizatory" process. Besides "etnia nacional" and "um povo novo," he also used the expression *povo-nação* ("a people-nation") to describe the result of five centuries of inter-ethnic and interracial melding that led to the current Brazilian situation.

However, both Ribeiro and Da Matta, among others, have observed that the so-called "Brazilian racial democracy" has been used to mask the deep-seated social, economic and cultural inequalities that characterize the modern, class-divided Brazilian nation.[11]

In one of the most comprehensive recent analyses of the Brazilian society, Schneider (1996) aptly entitled his first chapter "The Several Brazils." The author's idea, shared by a large number of Brazilianists, is that it is impossible to talk about Brazil as one single entity: The range of regional, social, cultural and economic disparities is so broad, that any serious analyst is tempted to present the country as a collage of diverging experiences.

The 26 Brazilian states, some of which are larger and more populous than several Latin American countries, are commonly grouped in five different regions: North, northeast, center-west, southeast and south. In terms of population and socioeconomic indicators, the north and northeast are usually regarded as poorer and less populated than the other three regions. The southeast alone, with only 11 percent of the country's area, had 42 percent of the Brazilian population, 62 percent of the GDP and over 70 percent of the country's industry in 1996 (Schneider 1996: 4). The three largest Brazilian cities, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte, are located in this region.

Although it displays less impressive numbers, in terms of quality of life, socioeconomic indicators, and distribution of wealth, the south might be considered the most prosperous Brazilian region. With a

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[11] In the book *Modern Brazil: Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective* (1989), Conniff, McCann and several other authors explored the political, economic, regional and racial overtones of Brazilian class division. Both their analyses and Da Matta's exploration of the "Brazilian way" and the Brazilian national identity, will deserve a closer look later in this chapter.

heavily mechanized agriculture and concentrating most of the country's cattle, the center-west, which has recently achieved economic importance, occupies one-fourth of the country's area, but has only less than one-twelfth of its population (Schneider 1996: 19).

Brazil is today an essentially urban country. According to the official census data, the percentage of the population living in urban areas sprung from 36 percent in 1940 to 76 in 1991 (Schneider 1996: 2). Those same data indicated that more than 85 million Brazilians lived in cities of 100,000 or more in the early 1990s.

In terms of ethnic and cultural characteristics, the north region is mostly populated by the descendants of native Indian groups. Known as *caboclos*, men and women of this sparsely populated Brazilian region (where most of the Amazon forest is located) live along the banks of the many rivers and creeks that constitute the Amazon river basin. Most of those *caboclos* rely on subsistence crops, fishing, and hunting as their main economic activity. Many of them still preserve much of the physical and cultural traits that characterized their native Brazilian ancestors. In the northern region, the influence of Portuguese and other European immigrant groups can best be felt in larger cities, such as Belém and Manaus.

In the northeast, the *sertanejo* is the equivalent of the northern *caboclo*. *Sertanejo* is the term usually employed to describe peasants and small farmers that populate the arid and poor inland areas of that region. The northeastern coast received the largest numbers of African slaves brought from across the Atlantic. Today's *sertanejos* are the result of centuries of racial integration between African and local native groups. The African influence is still heavily felt in the region's largest cities, especially Salvador and Recife.

In terms of ethnic diversity, the southeast and center-west regions are the best examples of the "melting pot" of cultures and traditions

described in earlier paragraphs. Albeit local differences, there are no dominant ethnic groups in those regions of the country, where the African, European and native Brazilian presences can be equally measured.

However, heavy European and Asian immigrations have radically altered the ethnic make-up of the five Brazilian regions in the past century. The most important "recent" ethnic groups are Germans, Japanese, and Italians. Their immigration to Brazil started in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and continued throughout the first half of the century. The Japanese population, concentrated in the states of São Paulo (southeast), Paraná (south), and Pará (north), has grown to 1.2 million over the decades (Schneider 1996: 186). German immigrants concentrated in the three southern states, where many rural areas are still referred to as "little Germany," while a very large number of Italian immigrants concentrated in São Paulo and also in the south.

In terms of physical and environmental characteristics, the five regions are set apart by climatic and geographic differences that go from the heavily wooded and equatorial Amazon region, in the north; to the semi-arid scrubland of the northeast; from the milder tropical and subtropical savannas of the center-west; to the temperate mountains and coastal forests of the southeast and south.

The Existence of a Brazilian Cultural Identity

Darcy Ribeiro, the *éminence gris* of Brazilian anthropology and perhaps the greatest contemporary Brazilian intellectual, dedicated most of his life to analyzing the various facets of Brazilian society. Much like Roberto Da Matta and Paulo Freire, other Brazilian intellectual giants, Ribeiro has tried to show how historical, cultural, economic and political factors have converged to make Brazil such a diverse and unique country.

"What makes brazil, Brazil?," asked Da Matta (1991b) in the title of one of his books (*O Que Faz o brasil, Brasil?*). Ribeiro would answer: The existence of *um povo novo* ("a new people"), emerged from the conjunction of Portuguese invaders, native Indian populations and African slaves (Ribeiro 1995: 19). Bringing together three very distinctive cultural traditions, that convergence gave birth to a new model of societal structure: A national ethnicity strongly *mestiçada* ("mixed") and revitalized by a syncretic culture.

Ribeiro explained that, as opposed to what happened in other nations, where the confrontation between different ethnicities created an oppositional, violent, multi-ethnic society (Guatemala and South Africa are examples that come to mind), Brazil developed a basic ethnic unity, forged by unique (and sometimes adverse) environmental and economic conditions (Ribeiro 1995: 20-21).

For Ribeiro, acknowledging the existence of a cohesive Brazilian national unity and cultural identity does not mean overlooking a pervasive and deep "social distance": An oppressive class structure that threatens the fairly stable Brazilian status quo (Ribeiro 1995: 23). The current social system, he wrote, is a direct consequence of centuries of political and economic injustice. Starting with the genocide against native populations, and then with the establishment of black slavery as the main pillar of the colonial era's economy, Brazilian elites have been very successful at devising mechanisms of control and repression which allowed them to perpetuate their grip on Brazilian society (Ribeiro 1995: 23-26).

McCann and Conniff (1989) quoted Faoro's (1958) influential *Os Donos do Poder* ("The Owners of Power") as placing the origins of Brazil's political leadership in medieval Portugal (McCann & Conniff, 1989: xiii). The legacy Faoro found in history "was a bureaucratic establishment, secure and self-contained, which preserved the status quo and served as an instrument of authority". The elitist character of

Brazil's political and socio-economic structure has been noted by a myriad of analysts and scholars. In their book about elites and masses in Brazil, McCann and Conniff (1989) mentioned Brazilian authors such as Euclides da Cunha, Pedro Calmon, Gilberto Freyre, Honório Rodrigues, Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, among others, as the constructors of a Brazilian sociological tradition deeply influenced by the notion that the prevailing sharp socio-economic inequalities have created a nation of alienated "masses."

More than a simple political fact, the alienation of the underprivileged masses can be felt throughout every sector of the Brazilian society. The major systemic opposition in Brazil is not between urban and rural, black and white, educated and non-educated, male and female. Those contrasts can indeed be observed as different threads running through the fabric of everyday life, but the tacit confrontation that permeates every aspect of the Brazilian society is, in the broadest sense of the terms, between "haves" and "have-nots."

The easiest way to show the gap between those two opposing sides is by displaying some conjunctural indicators. Discussing the trend towards concentration of wealth, Schneider (1996) observed that in 1960,

> the top 10 percent of earners received 39.6 percent of total income, and the bottom decile got 1.9 percent. This gap grew to 48.7 and 0.8 percent at the trough of recession in 1991 as the richest 1 percent of Brazilians received 14 percent of income compared to 12 percent for the poorest half. (Schneider 1996: 172).

Those economic disparities are reflected by and perpetuated in an unjust system in which basic services such as education and health care, and the possibility of social mobility are inaccessible to the majority of the population.

Da Matta (1991b) has observed that the search for a definition of the Brazilian social and cultural identity should go beyond the examination of environmental and historical conditions in which the country was "built." According to him, it sure helps to know that:

Brazil was discovered by the Portuguese and not the Chinese, that Brazilian geography has some particular characteristics such as the Center-South coastal mountain range, ... that we speak Portuguese and not French, that the Portuguese Royal Family transferred itself to Brazil in the beginning of the 19th century etc. (Da Matta 1991b: 16, my translation).[12]

But a better definition of the country's social *psyche* will come from the "qualitative" sociological and anthropological examination of values, such as the ambiguity towards religious expression, and the social characteristics, such as the fluid separation between public and private spaces, that are prevalent throughout the Brazilian body social.

In that respect, Da Matta (1991a, 1991b, 1983), himself has constructed a rich anthropological tradition that has helped to shed some light on the central aspects of the contemporary Brazilian identity. In his already mentioned *O Que Faz o brasil, Brasil?*, as well as in the earlier *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis* ("Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes", and *A Casa e a Rua* ("The House and the Street"), Da Matta proposed that one of the central characteristics of the Brazilian "spirit" is the middle ground, the Brazilian *jeitinho* ("way out"), sought as a solution to the conflict between a modern society based on strict, universal rules, codes and laws, and a cultural tradition built on interpersonal relationships:

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[12] "O Brasil foi descoberto por portugueses e não por chineses, a geografia do Brasil tem certas características como as montanhas na costa do Centro-Sul, ... falamos português e não francês, a família real transferiu-se para o Brasil no início do século XIX etc."

Brazil is not a dual country where one operates only with an 'out *or* in;' 'right *or* wrong;' 'man *or* woman;' 'married *or* separated;' 'God *or* Devil;' 'black *or* white' logic ... [B]etween the black and the white (which in the Anglo-Saxon and South African systems are mutually exclusive terms), we have an infinite and diversified set of intermediary categories in which the *mulato* represents the perfect characterization. (Da Matta 1991b: 40-41, my translation).[13]

Da Matta (1991a, 1991b) used the terms *sistemas relacionais* ("relational systems") and *sociedade relacional* ("relational society") to explain Brazilian society's tendency to place interpersonal relationships (kinship, friendships, and even acquaintanceships) above the impersonal character of the rules that dictate any modern society's functioning. While in countries such as the United States, England and France, for example, there would be an "enormous coherence between the judicial rules and the practices of everyday life" (Da Matta 1991b: 97, my translation), in Brazil personal relations give universal laws a specific *malleability* that allows them to "bend" depending on the context in which they are applied (Da Matta 1991b: 98).[14]

That particular ambiguity in dealing with bureaucratic, judicial and other "formal" contexts, the already mentioned *jeitinho brasileiro* ("the Brazilian way") has spilled over to virtually every level of interpersonal interaction. In Brazil, wrote Da Matta (1991a), the "sacred" separation between public – *a rua* ("the street") – and private spaces – *a casa* ("the house") – is still very much prevalent.

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[13] "[O] Brasil não é um país dual onde se opera somente com uma lógica do dentro *ou* fora; do certo *ou* errado; do homem *ou* mulher; do casado *ou* separado; de Deus *ou* Diabo; do preto *ou* branco ... [E]ntre o preto e o branco (que nos sistemas anglo-saxão e sul-africano são termos exclusivos), nós temos um conjunto infinito e variado de categorias intermediárias em que o *mulato* representa uma cristalização perfeita."

[14] "Nos Estados Unidos, na França e na Inglaterra... [há uma] enorme coerência entre a regra jurídica e as práticas da vida diária... [No Brasil] a possibilidade de gradação permite a interferência das relações pessoais com a lei universal."

A casa – a highly personal, well-protected, singular and well-defined space – would protect its members, *a familia*, from the impersonality and roughness of the street. Meanwhile, *a rua* – this cruel, often dangerous, impersonal space – would constitute a public arena for earning a living, making friends and providing a perspective through which we interpret the world. More than physical spaces, wrote Da Matta, *a casa* and *a rua* are Brazilian sociological categories and moral entities, "capable of awakening emotions, reactions, laws, prayers, songs and images aesthetically framed and inspired" (Da Matta 1991a: 17, my translation).[15]

For Da Matta, there is, however, a "shaded" space where those two separate worlds overlap. The resulting connection between private and public – the myriad of "grays" in-between definite "blacks" and "whites" – is what best characterizes the Brazilian identity, the "relational society" in which the impersonality of formal *loci* is touched and warmed up by the humanity of personal relations:

[I]n Brazil, more important than the opposition between different elements is the connection that brings them closer, the links that unite them... I refer to Brazil as a *relational society*,... a system where conjunctions have reasons which the terms related by them might perfectly ignore... [T]he secret for a correct interpretation of Brazil lies on the possibility of studying which that is "in-between" things. (Da Matta 991a: 27-28, my translation).[16]

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[15] "... capazes de despertar emoções, reações, leis, orações, músicas e imagens esteticamente emolduradas e inspiradas."

[16] "[N]o Brasil, mais importante do que os elementos em oposição é a sua conexão, a sua relação, os elos que conjugam os seus elementos... Daí eu estar me referindo ao Brasil como uma *sociedade relacional*... um sistema onde a conjunção tem razões que os termos que ela relaciona poder perfeitamente ignorar... [O] segredo de uma interpretação correta do Brasil jaz na possibilidade de estudar aquilo que está 'entre' as coisas."

The *Caboclo* Culture

Ribeiro (1995: 42-63) wrote about the conflict between Portuguese settlers and native groups as a face off (*enfrentamento*) between two opposing worlds: While the Indians saw the Europeans' arrival as an event of mythical proportions, the Portuguese saw the "discovery" of Brazil as a God-given opportunity for both economic exploitation and religious expansion. While in North America Indians were considered a nuisance, almost like a geographic accident obstructing the path of "conquest," in Brazil they were considered by the Portuguese an integral part of the colonization plan: The settlers claimed to the Crown not only the newfound territory, but also the "pagan souls" that came with the land.

Ribeiro (1995) used these eloquent words to explain the contrasting worldviews espoused by Indians and white settlers:

For the Indians, life was the quiet fruition of existence, in a generous world and a harmonious society....For the newcomers, on the other hand, life was a task, a painful obligation that condemned everyone to work and subordinated everything to economic gain.... Civilization [was] first imposed through an epidemic of mortal plagues. Later, through the genocide of extermination wars and slavery. (Ribeiro 1995: 47, my translation).[17]

Today's *caboclos* and *caboclas*, the native Brazilians that comprise most of the local population in the Amazon, are direct descendants of the Tupinambás and other Indian groups that once flourished in that region. They still maintain the physical

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[17] "Para os índios, a vida era uma tranqüila fruição da existência, num mundo dadivoso e numa sociedade solidária.... Para os recém-chegados, muito ao contrário, a vida era uma tarefa, uma sofrida obrigação, que a todos condenava ao trabalho e tudo subordinava ao lucro.... Assim é que a civilização se impõe, primeiro, como uma epidemia de pestes mortais. Depois, pela dizimação através de guerras de extermínio e da escravização."

characteristics – dark skin; straight, black hair; high cheekbones; almond-shaped, dark eyes; strong, fit bodies – that so impressed the first Europeans. However, some darker complexions and curly heads here and there (as well as lighter complexions and blond heads here and there), denote the centuries of African and Portuguese miscegenation that took place in the region.

As much as society itself, the "authentic" *caboclo* culture is also the product of the clash between opposing Portuguese, African and native cultures. Furtado (1978) defined the word *caboclo* not only as an ethnic expression, but also as a fundamentally *cultural* one:

[As defined here], the term *caboclo* does not have only an ethnic connotation, but, above all else, a cultural sense. In the Amazon, caboclo is not only the mixed-race type, resulting from the miscegenation between whites and Indians, with a *moreno* (dark) complexion, straight hair, almond-shaped eyes, the men almost hairless. The definition goes beyond the ethnic stereotype, assuming a cultural connotation made palpable by a life style. (Furtado 1978: 67, my translation).[18]

The "life style" Furtado mentioned – hunting, fishing, planting subsistence crops, taking care of the house and the kids, following nature's laws and rhythms – was deemed by the Portuguese invaders as a "lazy" one:

At the eyes of the newcomers, the Indians. . . had a capital bad habit: they were lazy, living a worthless, useless life. What did they produce? Nothing. What did they amass? Nothing. They lived their

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[18] "O termo **caboclo**, não tem aqui apenas a sua conotação **étnica**, mas sobretudo, um sentido cultural. Na Amazônia, **caboclo** não constitui apenas o tipo mestiço, resultante do cruzamento entre brancos e índios, com tez amorenada, cabelos lisos, olhos amendoados, os homens quase imberbes. Porém extrapola o estereótipo étnico, assumindo uma conotção cultural manifestada pelo seu estilo de vida."

futile and abundant lives as if in this world life itself was the only thing worth living for. (Ribeiro 1995: 45, my translation).[19]

Based on Sahlins' (1966) definition of culture as a *reciprocal* relationship between men and their environment, Furtado (1978: 2-3) proposed that in the Amazon, besides historical and social factors, communities are heavily influenced by the specific ecological conditions of their environment and basic economy. Thus, she concluded, *caboclo* fishermen of a particular area might have more in common with fellow fishermen further down the coast, than with peasants living in the same town (Furtado 1978: 2-3).

Similarly, Penner (1984: 67) observed that some of the basic socio-economic characteristics of the Amazon *caboclos*, such as their reliance on fishing and the widespread use of boats as a form of transportation, might be credited to the *caboclos'* "dependency on the *Amazonic* physical environment". Moreover, she wrote, in the Amazon, the environment influences men to the point that, in many areas of the forest, "the river dominates human life;" the river becomes the *caboclo*'s "horizon: his universe" (Penner 1984: 68, my translation).[20]

Submissive Awe

The overwhelming character of the *Amazonic* environment – the vastness, warmth and humidity of the "Green Inferno" described by Alexander von Humboldt – has indeed produced a unique life style that

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[19] "Aos olhos dos recém-chegados, aquela indiada louçã... tinha um defeito capital: eram vadios, vivendo uma vida inútil e sem prestança. Que é que produziam? Nada. Que é que amealhavam? Nada. Viviam suas fúteis vidas fartas, como se neste mundo só lhes coubesse viver."

[20] "O homem é um dependente do meio físico.... Em muitas localidades, o rio domina a vida do homem amazônico.... O rio é o seu horizonte, o seu universo."

is best translated as a permanent state of awe and respect towards nature. Distances seem insurmountable (a "neighboring" village might be hours away by boat); resources seem inexhaustible; wilderness seems untamable. In this world populated by myths such as the *Curupira* – the forest creature who erases animals' footprints to confound hunters – nature always has a way of winning every battle.

In that context, human activity takes place in a respectful submission to nature's rhythms and caprices: There is no point in catching more fish than one can eat or sell, since unsold seafood goes bad, while fresh fish will always be abundant in the river for the taking; there is no point in clearing the forest around the village, since woods have a way of regenerating themselves, and nature will get back at us by sending all the suddenly homeless mosquitoes into our town; and so on.

The respectful wonderment towards nature, as well as the consequent submission to its laws and rhythms, is one of the major identity traits of the "authentic" *caboclo* culture. The immediate result of that general attitude is indeed what can be best described as an "ease" towards life: The Amazon *caboclo* seems very comfortable with the idea of living life leisurely.

In Pirabas, whole afternoons might be spent in a hammock under the trees. An otherwise "back-breaking" activity, such as washing the entire family's laundry in the river, becomes a playful, enjoyable domestic task for middle aged housewives, who work, sing, and chat while their kids swim and frolic down the creek. Business dealings might be put aside by Dona Maraci, the hotel owner, so they won't interrupt a friendly chat with her *comadre* (an old family friend). The fisherman knows there is no point in trying to "beat" the not always predictable ocean tides: He adapts himself and his work routine to their rhythms instead.

Conformity and Hopelessness

The other consequence of that awe/submission towards nature is the *caboclo*'s prevalent sense of conformity and hopelessness. Overwhelming vastness and apparently immutable surroundings give *caboclos* and *caboclas* the idea that nothing can be changed. That fatalism towards life is best exemplified by the traditional notion that poor socio-economic conditions were determined by God and cannot be changed – a very frequently heard phrase is *"Foi Deus quem quis assim"* ("It was God who wanted this way").

The *caboclo*'s fatalistic religious conformity spills over to every single aspect of daily life. A 20-mile bus ride from Pirabas to Salinas becomes an endurance test that lasts two-and-a-half hours: The dusty road is so covered with potholes, that there is no telling if it is paved or not; the bus is literally falling apart (many of the seats are gone, the remaining ones have no cushions, there are large holes on the bus' wooden floors, the windows are permanently open); the heat is almost unbearable, etc. Yet, during my frequent trips to and from Salinas, I never saw any passengers (mostly local residents) complain about the conditions in which they had to travel.

Work as Penance

A third important identity trait of the *caboclo* culture is their perception of hardship and suffering. For the *caboclos*, life is enjoyable, but it also involves a considerable amount of pain and suffering. For them, life is hard; life is a constant struggle; and comfort does not come easy. Seu Orlando, one of my main informants, punctuated his life story with *"Não é fácil"* ("It's not easy") and *"Eu sofri muito"* ("I suffered a lot").

As opposed to other Western cultures, where comfort is a totally acceptable 'consequence' of hard work, the heavy Catholic influence

on Brazilian culture makes it so that physical comfort carries a great amount of guilt. For a middle class man like Seu Orlando, only the pain and suffering of a life full of hardship might justify a present comfortable social status. The *caboclo*, who feels blessed by God for living in an abundant and generous environment, welcomes penance and hardship: They relieve his guilt and turn acceptable the little daily miracles that make life easier.

Da Matta (1991b) observed that the "street," the public arena for daily life, becomes for Brazilians a place where the "struggle," the "hard reality of life" takes place: "Hard work in Brazil is seen as something biblical.... Among us [Brazilians], remains the Roman Catholic tradition of work as punishment, and not the Calivinistic notion of work as action that brings salvation" (Da Matta 1991b: 31, my translation).[21]

Religiosity

October is a month of intense religious activity in the whole state of Pará. On the second Sunday of the month, *peregrinos* ("pilgrims") from all over the state flock to Belém, the capital, to participate in the *Círio de Nazaré*, an extraordinary religious procession famed around the world. Close to one million people take part in the procession, either by watching it or following the "sea of people" down the mango tree-lined streets of Belém.

The excitement in Belém is palpable during the weeks that precede the procession. The *Círio* is not only a religious activity: It is also a very festive one. It provides an opportunity for socializing with

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[21] "[O] trabalho duro é visto no Brasil como algo bíblico.... Entre nós, perdura a tradição católica romana e não a tradição reformadora de Calvino, que transformou o trabalho como castigo numa ação destinada à salvação."

family and friends. The festive mood, comparable to the atmosphere brought by the Christmas season in America, is best translated in the grandiose *Círio* supper, a staple of every household in Belém.

Rich and poor families alike put a lot of money and work into the *Círio* supper: They cook *pato no tucupi* ("duck on manioc sauce"), *maniçoba* (a stew made with pork and manioc leaves),*vatapá* (shrimp in coconut milk and palm oil), and other typical dishes that are accompanied by rice, manioc flour, and Amazon fruits ice cream. Some of the most complicated dishes, such as *maniçoba*, might take a whole week to prepare. The effort, however, is considered worth while: The typical *Círio* supper lasts for several hours and usually brings together large extended families.

In preparation for the procession and the other *Círio* activities, small boats full of *peregrinos* keep arriving at the city's docks throughout the week. Whole families come to visit their relatives, bringing gifts such as live ducks (raised just for that special occasion) that will be prepared for the *Círio* supper.

On Sunday, the warm and breezy streets of Belém are completely taken by an incredible crowd. Everybody puts on his or her best clothes to either watch or follow the *Círio*. The procession starts very early in the morning, with a mass said by Belém's archbishop at the downtown Cathedral. The little icon of *Nossa Senhora de Nazaré* ("Our Lady of Nazareth"), which opens the procession, is then carried in a large float that is pushed all the way to the Basilica, in the other side of town.

Estimates vary wildly, but somewhere between 500,000 and one million people are believed to follow the *Círio* procession. The religious parade is punctuated by many large floats, called "promise carts," where the faithful deposit their offerings to the *Santa*, the way they refer to their patron saint. At least as many people as the crowd following the procession line up the streets to watch the *mar de gente*

("sea of people") go by. Every house, building and window down the procession's path is specially decorated for the occasion: Large white linen sheets hang down from the windows as a sign of respect. As the procession goes by, on-lookers wave at the crowd and throw flowers and confetti on them.

In Pará, people's religiosity is translated into a respectful attitude and feverish adoration towards their *Santa*. They refer to her as their mother and protector. They sincerely and completely believe in her power to cure diseases, restore family peace, and bring them a better life. They ask her all kinds of favors, from a new house to the curing of a child's ailment. In return, they promise her to pray the rosary, go to church regularly, and deposit a *promessa* ("promise") at her feet in the Basilica, normally after having carried the offer with them all the way through the *Círio* procession.

During the procession, it is very common to see people carrying plaster casts of different parts of the body – a leg, a head, a heart – that represent *uma graça alcançada* ("an achieved blessing"): The curing of an illness or of a broken limb. Others "pay their promises" by carrying small boats or houses, which represent material goods they feel they finally could afford because the *Santa* helped them. It is also very common to see kids dressed up like angels following the procession: Often, their parents had promised to do that if the kid survived a life-threatening condition.

The *caboclos'* relationship with the *Santa* mirrors their attitude towards work and life in general: Nothing comes without sacrifice and pain. Penance and hardship are the "natural" way towards salvation, as well as the price to be paid for the achievement of a blessing, be it a new house or a healthy child. For the *caboclo*, if nature always carries a price tag, so does divine intervention. As Da Matta (1991b) put it:

We, Brazilians, are intimate with certain saints who are our protectors, our patrons... the relationship that exists is personal, that is, founded on sympathy and loyalty towards the agents of this world and the other world. We are faithfully devoted to saints and *orixás* [Umbanda saints], and with each one of them we have a relationship based on the direct language of patronage or mystical 'patronship' – through the work of prayers, promises, offerings, heart-felt requests and obligations. (Da Matta 1991b: 114-115, my translation).[22]

Following the example of the state capital, virtually every city and town in Pará has its own *Círio* procession. In Pirabas, the religious festivity, also called *Círio de Nazaré*, takes place on the last Sunday in October. Last fall, the whole weekend was filled with religious activities, such as masses and rosary praying circles, and also "profane" ones, such as a street carnival, that enlivened the otherwise quiet Pirabas nights.

Pirabas has two Catholic churches, one close to the seashore (the *igreja-matriz*, "mother-church"), and the other one (*igreja de São Pedro*, "St. Peter's church") down the road, almost on the outskirts of town. Early Sunday morning, approximately 1,000 people followed the procession that carried an icon of *Nossa Senhora de Nazaré* from the *igreja de São Pedro* to the *igreja-matriz*. Along the way, local residents prayed, chanted and asked for the *Santa*'s protection.

Not surprisingly, Pirabas' *Círio* is much less "impersonal" and formal than Belém's procession. During the parade, the crowd stopped

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[22] "Nós, brasileiros, temos intimidade com certos santos que são nossos protetores e padroeiros, nossos santos patrões... a relação que existe é pessoal, isto é, fundamentada na simpatia e na lealdade dos representantes deste mundo e do outro. Somos fiéis devotos de santos e também cavalos de santo de orixás, e com cada um deles nos entendemos muito bem pela linguagem direta da patronagem ou do patrocínio místico – por meio de preces, promessas, oferendas, despachos, súplicas e obrigações."

in front of local businesses and homes, so that residents and owners could pay their public respects to the saint. On top of a *carro-som* (a truck filled with loud-speakers), a church deacon led chants and prayers for the well-being of Pirabas and its residents. He would ask the crowd to say a prayer for a particular older resident battling a life-threatening illness, or acknowledge people's participation in the procession by calling out their names.

On the seashore, all the boats were specially decorated for the occasion, with white and yellow little paper stripes tied to their masts. The procession stopped in front of the pier, so that the fishermen could pay their respects by sounding horns and setting off hundreds of firecrackers.

Just like in Belém, Pirabas' *Círio* attracts people from all over the county and surrounding communities. They come to the county seat by boat or by bus, bringing the whole family and gifts for their hosts. *Círio* supper consists of *pato no tucupi*, *maniçoba* and fish stew, accompanied by rice, manioc flour and *açaí*, a dark, thick beverage made out of berries from the *açaí* palm tree.

The "profane" side of Pirabas' *Círio* is marked by the street carnival – rides and food tents set up in front of the *igreja-matriz* – and by *festas* at the seashore *barraquinhas*. Those parties last throughout the night, blasting loud dance music into the air until early in the morning.

In a blatant confrontational attitude, Pirabas' Evangelicals, locally referred to as *Crentes* ("Faithful"), moved up their Sunday service from late afternoon to early morning. As the *Círio* procession went by the front of their church, they positioned their own loud speakers towards the street, and blasted their own hymns and prayers into the Catholic crowd. The provocation did not go unnoticed by some

of Pirabas' residents, such as Seu Orlando, who later complained to me about the *Crentes*' "disrespectful attitude."

Evangelicals are the second largest religious group in Pirabas. Two of my main informants, José, a fisherman, and Seu Raimundo, a fish vendor, were *Crentes*. (The Evangelicals' religiosity and point-of-view will be better explored later in this chapter).

Solidarity, Community

Pirabas (and I suspect the same to be true for most small towns in the Amazon region) still has a strong sense of community. Instead of a vague moral notion, that "sense" is best translated as a palpable sentiment of solidarity, comradeship and belonging that permeates every level of social and familial relationships.

Grade school teachers demonstrate a caring and protective attitude towards their students. Far from being a stranger's kids, students are their neighbors' and cousins' children. Most likely, the teachers and the kids' parents grew up, went to school, and played in the street together. They know each other on a first-name basis: They are *comadres* and *compadres*, as close as people get in Brazil, when they are not related by blood.

A teacher will pay a personal visit to her *comadre* to talk about social gatherings and religious activities. In the process, she will talk about her friend's child's progress in school, the classes she is better at, and the ones she should spend more time practicing at home. One afternoon, I witnessed one of those informal visits, paid by Dona Maraci's *comadre* and teacher of one of her daughters. In the middle of a conversation about the community center, the teacher let it out that Regina, Dona Maraci's teen-age daughter, had skipped class twice already that week. Dona Maraci said she would talk to Regina about it.

Dona Maraci, who could almost be considered an affluent person by Pirabas' standards, feels responsible towards her less fortunate neighbors. Poor street kids come to her door asking for food, clothes, and water. They never leave empty-handed. She gives them 50 cents, or a small bag of beans or manioc flour. She talks to them about their families, asks if their mother is still sick, or if their father is still gone.

Both in town and at the smaller hamlets and localities, mothers will ask neighbors to look after their kids, if they need to go shopping or pick up their new voting documents. Baby-sitting, in those cases, is not very different from what goes on regularly: Children play together in the backyards or in the streets all the time. They form large and small playing groups everywhere, and, most of the time, there is no telling which kids belong to which household, anyway.

During the day, in most public places, such as the streets around the seashore and the public market, children and adults mingle together. While their parents work, de-gutting and salting fish, or mending their fishnets and boats, kids play around and freely participate in the grown-ups' world. They ask questions, make comments, and are motivated to learn a new task or a language expression they didn't know.

In this free environment, in which work routines and lives are public and open, children move around at ease. They are the repository of centuries of collective knowledge about fishing techniques and gardening secrets. In this context, even the traditional separation between the male and female worlds – otherwise prevalent in the *caboclos'* culture – becomes almost indistinguishable.

In small Amazon coastal towns, fishing is the traditionally "male" activity, as much as homemaking and gardening are the traditionally "female" jobs. Boys tend to hang around the pier, helping or just observing the fishermen, including their fathers and uncles; girls, on

the other hand, tend to walk around town with their busy mothers and aunts. However, taking care of a stall at the market, or salting and drying fish for wholesale, are jobs done by *Pirabenses* of either gender. Consequently, in most public, "communal" settings, such as the marketplace and the seashore downtown area, boys and girls mingle together with grown-ups of both genders.

Equality

Kottak (1983) described the Brazilian fishing community of Arembepe, in the northeastern state of Bahia, as an open and essentially egalitarian society. In the mid-sixties, Kottak wrote, Arembepe had an undeveloped political structure and an almost undifferentiated social structure: There were few local political figures, as well as few "middle class" families. Most local residents were either fishermen or store keepers (Kottak 1983: 56-61).

That also seemed to be the case in Pirabas, where poor living conditions were a characteristic "shared" by most families in town. This "equality in poverty" was explained by Seu Raimundo, a fish vendor, in very simple terms: "*Não tem muito dinheiro circulando em Pirabas; aqui não tem muita riqueza para dividir*" ("There is not much money circulating in Pirabas; there is not much wealth to be divided here").

In Pirabas, a more comfortable economic status does not necessarily translate into political power. Seu Orlando and Dona Maraci, a store owner and a hotel owner, respectively, have attained some economic affluence that makes them "notable" figures in town. None of them, however, holds a public office or exerts a position of authority and power in town. (Although Dona Maraci has held a city council seat, her political career is, in her own words, pretty much over).

Since most small Amazon communities are economically stagnant and relatively isolated from the social dynamics of larger centers, in the *caboclo* culture, social mobility is determined by a fundamental break with the community ties: To ascend socially and economically, the *caboclo* has to leave his small town and search for fame and fortune elsewhere. Many of the current middle class Pirabas families either inherited their land and/or businesses (Dona Maraci, for example), or left town at some point to try to amass a *pé-de-meia* ("a nest's egg") elsewhere (that was the case with Seu Orlando). For the new generation, social mobility might also come as a consequence of a better education, and that can only be attained by moving to a larger community.

Daniel, a *caboclo* in his early thirties who takes care of one of the storage areas where merchants keep their salted, dry fish, expressed to me his hopelessness of ascending socially in these terms:

> *Daniel*: If fishing made you rich, there would be a lot of rich people here. Whoever has a little house to live in is very lucky. Fishing one day is great, the next is a disaster. When you catch the fish, it's only enough to pay the bills. I haven't left this place because it is too hard to find a buyer for my house. If I could sell it, I'd leave. I'd go to Abade (another coastal, fishing village not too far from Pirabas). It's better there than here. It's not easy. In my house, there are seven mouths to feed everyday.

In order to provide a context in which the process of television viewing in Pirabas be better understood, it is necessary to provide in the following sections an overview of the Brazilian television system, including a historical account of its development, an overview of its content, and a discussion of the role of television in Brazilian society.

An Overview of the Brazilian Television System

The growth of television viewership in Brazil is a unique and impressive phenomenon yet to be completely explored. TV sets numbered only 200 in the entire country on September 18, 1950, when commercial broadcasting started in São Paulo. By the end of 1980, only 30 years later, there were estimated 20 million TV sets in the country (Mattos 1982; Queiroz 1992). By that time, Brazil alone had more TV sets than the rest of Latin America combined (Miranda & Pereira 1983). "Brazilian households with TV increased from 7 percent in 1964 to 51 percent in 1979, and the figure exceeded 75 percent in 1990" (Kottak 1991: 71). More recent data estimated a total of 40 million TV sets in Brazil in 1993 (Schneider 1996: 194). According to another source, 30 million Brazilian households had at least one television set in that same year (Hoineff 1996: 125-126).

The growth of viewership in Brazil both was stimulated and reflected the huge industrialization process that took place in the country from the 1940s on. In 1954, the development of an autonomous national industry was made possible by the creation of Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional (National Steel Company) and its peripheral heavy equipment manufacturers.

Brazil is today the world's eighth largest economy. Although strangled by the largest foreign debt in the world, the country's economy presents signs of vitality, with a strong currency, inflation under control, and a record trade surplus (Brooke 1994; Schneider, 1996: 140-141). The middle class represents one third of the country's 160 million population – some 50 to 60 million people, "a tantalizing market, the second largest in the Western hemisphere for television and consumerism" (Kottak 1991: 71).

Brazilian media organizations were clearly aware of the country's economic potential. They took full advantage of the

"expansion and integration" process that led the military dictatorship to create the Empresa Brasileira de Telecomunicações (Brazilian Telecommunications Enterprise, or Embratel), in 1967, and to launch a development plan that, by 1986, had virtually every Brazilian covered under a satellite blanket (R. Turner 1988).

From the top of fancy skyscrapers on Paulista Avenue, in São Paulo, to the outskirts of the Amazon jungle, to the Northeastern coast, to the most remote central inlands, 100 percent of the country's population can now be reached by television signals (Oliveira 1991: 201). In 1988, there were 140 TV stations in Brazil, most of them commercial. In 1985, there were only nine government-owned stations (Amorim 1985). By 1996, the total number of TV stations had jumped to 315 (Schneider 1996: 194).

The Pioneers

The first Brazilian network, called TV Tupi, was established in São Paulo in 1950 by Diários e Emissoras Associados, a media conglomerate headed by journalist Assis Chateaubriand. A second TV Tupi station was launched in Rio de Janeiro on January 20, 1951 (Federico 1982). Diários e Emissoras Associados owned more than 30 daily newspapers, 18 TV stations and 30 radio stations. The conglomerate also had its own news agency, advertising agency, and some public relations firms. It published several magazines, including the influential *O Cruzeiro*, which was until 1967 the largest selling magazine in Latin America (Tunstall 1977).

Television in Brazil was established following a 'trial and error' pattern similar to the one experienced by American networks. "Programming was determined through mimesis and adaptation from other vehicles or through trial and error, repeating the same process that had taken place with 1920s and 1930s radio" (Federico 1982: 83,

my translation).[23] According to the same author, during the first years of Brazilian TV, there was little to no experimenting: Television was a "second-hand vehicle," absorbing formats which had their origins in radio, newsprint media, and theater. TV Tupi's broadcast included news, comedy and "filmed theater," or "teleplays" (Federico 1982: 84).

Throughout the first half of the 1950s, television was a very elitist medium. Only a small percentage of the population (namely, wealthy families in Rio and São Paulo) had television sets. Consequently, programming was directed to that segment of the population. The situation changed in 1955, when television lost its "novelty for the wealthy" appeal and became a household item. Around that time, it became common, for example, to present newlyweds with TV sets. Aware of the new trend, TV Tupi "dumbed down" its broadcast, "which leaned towards sensationalism and provincial entertainment" (Thomas 1979: 43).

During most of the 1950s, TV Tupi's leadership remained unchallenged. That situation changed in the 1960s, when three competing networks – TV Excelsior, TV Record, and TV Globo – were launched: "TV Record went in for both well-structured journalism and musical productions that had a striking impact on the country" (Thomas 1979: 43). TV Excelsior was born in 1964, already in the age of soap operas, and excelled in this genre and in musicals (Federico 1982: 86). TV Globo came to challenge the leader, also aiming its programming at the lower economic strata (Mattos 1982).

Competition among four different TV networks, combined with economic expansion, stimulated television's growth. In 1950,

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[23] "A programação foi sendo preenchida por mimese e adaptação de outros veículos ou por tentativa e erro, repetindo os passos dos anos 20/30 do rádio".

viewership was limited to large cities, such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, due mostly to the cost of TV sets (Mattos 1982). But if sets were only 200 in 1950, in 1965 they were already 3 million, spread throughout the country (Sodré 1977).

Unlike other Latin American and European countries, where either monopolistic and/or government-owned broadcasting traditions were established, Brazil consolidated in the 1960s a major trend towards commercial television and multiple, privately-owned national networks, a format that had the American TV system as its model and inspiration.

It was also in the 1960s that Brazilian television created its own specific style, best translated in the *telenovela* or simply *novela* (soap opera) genre. Interestingly enough, Colgate-Palmolive's line of cosmetics had indeed been one of the major advertisers in 1940s Brazilian radio, when soap operas first became popular in the country (Federico 1982: 74).

According to Federico, one of the reasons why Brazilian *telenovelas* were created by the networks was to provide a long enough product in which advertisements could be placed (Federico 1982: 85). For ten years, Brazilian TV had struggled to find the right format for its potential advertisers. Most shows were short in duration (15 minutes, on average), because of the conditions in which they were produced and broadcast – virtually every program aired was a live presentation. Even the early soap operas followed that format. Advertisers were reluctant to invest in a medium that failed to grip the audience's attention in a habit-forming fashion.

Throughout the 1960s, however, networks decided to "resuscitate" some of radio's most popular soap operas. Although soap operas were a common staple of Brazilian broadcasting since the early 1950s, the Cuban drama *Direito de Nascer* ("A Right to be Born"), a

radio favorite of the 1940s, is believed to have originated the *telenovela* audience phenomenon in Brazilian television (Fernandes 1987: 50). First aired on December 7, 1964, the soap opera experienced an overwhelming success which continued to its final daily installment, broadcast live from an over-crowded sports arena in Rio, in August of the following year.

Rede Globo comes into the picture

"If the 1950s and 1960s were dominated by TV Tupi/Diários Associados, the 1970s and 1980s were hegemonically dominated by Rede Globo de Televisão" (Queiroz 1992: 17, my translation).[24] Rede Globo (Globo Network) is "the world's most regularly watched commercial network" (Kottak 1991). Brazil's giant media organization is also "the fourth largest commercial television network in the world" (Necchi 1989), commanding an estimated daily viewership of 100 million people, or 70 percent of the country's population.

How did Rede Globo come to amass such power in just 30 years? The network thrived during the military regime (1964-1985), when it received special treatment and financial incentives from successive governments. The conglomerate both reflected and legitimated the authoritarian regime's ideology of "development and national security" (Mattos 1982; Straubhaar 1989; Queiroz 1992).

Rede Globo initially aimed its programming at the lower economic strata of the population, competing directly with then leader TV Tupi. "By the end of the sixties, Globo... had gained a large audience" (Mattos 1982: 15). The rise of Globo in the popular

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[24] "Se os anos 50/60 foram resultado da hegemonia da TV Tupi/Diários Associados,... os anos 70/80 foram hegemônicos da Rede Globo de Televisão".

preference coincided with the death of media mogul Assis Chateaubriand, which detonated a process of internal disputes and bad management that ended up by destroying TV Tupi, which went bankrupt in the 1970s.

In his study of television and political transition in Brazil, Joseph D. Straubhaar (1989) described the consolidation of Rede Globo not only as an audience leader, but also as the creator of a universe of cultural meanings that gained hegemony in the "popular taste":

> By 1971 TV Globo had achieved network status and consolidated production of both its news programs and its telenovelas (evening serials or 'soap operas') into the most popular programming in Brazil. One of TV Globo's achievements has been to gradually develop the ability to produce ten to twelve hours of programming per day. In doing so, TV Globo has managed to push out most imported American programs (at least out of prime time) and create a pattern of taste among the audiences for its particular style, referred to as the padrão global de qualidade (the Globo standard of quality). (Straubhaar 1989: 141).

According to Schneider (1996: 194-195), some \$3.35 billion are spent annually on television advertising, with nearly half of that amount going to the dominant Rede Globo.

Mattos (1982) and Straubhaar (1989) characterized Rede Globo's role at gaining public support for the military regimes as subtler – but not less effective – than mere propaganda. Straubhaar noticed that the first military governments (1964 to 1974) pursued exclusionary policies that led them to rely on continued repression to maintain hegemony. The following period (1975 to 1985) marked a so-called transition from military to civilian rule. Legitimacy, then, had to be obtained more through the construction of cultural and ideological hegemony than through overt repression (Straubhaar 1989: 144).

Straubhaar pointed out the fact that Globo played a key role in both periods. In the first one, widely watched *telenovelas* worked to create a positive, happy and optimistic image of the country and its people, when the so-called "economic miracle" was emphasized to support the idea that *Esse é um país que vai pra frente* ("This is a country that moves forward," a popular government slogan of the time).

In the second period, when loss of legitimacy due to economic recession led the military regime to propose the alternative of "transition" to civilian rule, Rede Globo threw all the heavy weight of its news coverage to support "indirect" transition (a civilian president indirectly elected by an electoral college), as opposed to a president chosen by the popular vote. The main consequence of the tactic was a complete ignorance of the unprecedented popular demonstrations demanding *diretas já* ("direct elections now").

Brazilian media critic Gabriel Prioli explicitly attributes Globo's success story to the military regime's favors: "[Rede Globo] amassed this power because the Brazilian state wanted it to. [The military] created the necessary conditions, for example, for the transfer of North-American investment, know-how and technology, which permitted this network to be established" (Medina 1987: 62).[25] Moreover, he said,

Rede Globo was the vehicle chosen by the state. Among all the networks in the market, it was the company that had the greatest economic, political and ideological identity with the ruling group. Roberto Marinho was one of the main planners of the 1964 military coup. That explains why he had all the advantages that allowed his

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[25] "Ela conseguiu ter este poder porque o Estado brasileiro assim o quis, criando uma série de condições, por exemplo, para a transferência de capital norte-americano, know-how e tecnologia para a implantação desta televisão."

network to be the strongest and the fastest-growing. There was a convergence between his and the state's interests. (Medina 1987: 63, my translation).[26]

The second largest Brazilian network – Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão (SBT) – was launched in August 1981. Owned by game show host Silvio Santos, SBT has nine local stations, including its national broadcasting center in São Paulo, and 76 affiliated stations throughout the country. The network's programming is a mix of game shows, sensational journalism, soap operas (in-house productions and Mexican imports) and popular comedy shows.

SBT prides itself on being Brazil's second-largest network. The network's penetration is strongest in São Paulo. According to the Nielsen data furnished by SBT on its Internet home page (1997), the network had 30 percent of the advertising market share in São Paulo in 1995. Globo had 43 percent; Bandeirantes 11 percent; Manchete 10 percent; Record 2 percent and independent stations 4 percent.

Telecommunications Policies in Brazil

To paraphrase Oliveira (1991), in Brazil, the government rules the airwaves, but the private sector owns them. Mattos (1982) and Queiroz (1992), among others, have noticed that the Ministry of Communications, as well as the already mentioned Embratel, were created by the military government in 1967 to foster both technological development and political control over broadcasting.

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[26] "A Rede Globo foi o aparelho escolhido pelo Estado. De todos os meios televisivos que estavam lançados no mercado, era o grupo que tinha maior identidade econômica, política e ideológica com o grupo que estava no poder. Foi exatamente o Roberto Marinho um dos principais articuladores do golpe de 64. Isto explica por que ele teve todas as facilidades para conseguir que sua rede fosse a mais forte e se expandisse rapidamente. Havia uma conjugação de interesses dele e do Estado."

If in the 1960s and 1970s the process of government supervised licensing was used chiefly as a means of political control and censorship, in the 1980s and 1990s the power to distribute new broadcasting licenses has been used by Brazilian governments as a means of increasing political support. Broadcasting licenses are granted by the federal government and subject to Congressional approval. The exchange of broadcasting licenses for political support was taken to extremes by former President José Sarney, himself a media mogul in his native state of Maranhão: "From 1987 to 1990, the government distributed 850 new radio and television licenses" (Oliveira 1991: 201).

A federal law prior to the military regime established the Brazilian Code of Telecommunications, in 1962. The law created the Conselho Nacional de Telecomunicações (National Council for Telecommunications, Contel), "a regulatory body [which] supervises the activities of government-granted concessions, issues authorizations and permits for the use of telecommunications services, and applies penalties" (Camargo & Pinto 1975: 25).

Analysts have noticed that the military regime had a tremendous impact on broadcasting policies in Brazil (Camargo & Pinto 1975; Mattos 1982; Straubhaar 1989; Queiroz 1992). That influence was translated both into the already mentioned technological changes, and into the establishment of direct censorship. After the coup d'état of 1964, censorship was not only openly exerted, but also officially authorized by the new Constitution, written in 1967.

When the military government stepped down and Brazil went back to civilian rule, in 1985, a democratic process engendered a new Constitution, adopted in 1988. Under the new Magna Carta, censorship of the media is not only condemned but expressly prohibited.

An Overview of Brazilian Broadcast TV's Programming

One of the greatest achievements of Brazilian television is the fact that most of the shows broadcast are nationally made: "In doing so [producing ten to twelve hours of programming per day], TV Globo has managed to push most imported American programs (at least out of prime time)" (Straubhaar 1989: 141). According to Rede Globo's home page in the Internet (1997), "fully 80 percent of the 21 hours of daily broadcast (24 hours on weekends) are produced in Globo's own studios." The network's drama production alone – serials, soap operas, miniseries and specials – would add up to more than 4,400 hours of programming per year, "placing Globo among the leading world class television producers" (1997).

In Brazil, the development of a self-reliant television industry and the national production of television shows are associated with some important historical, technical and cultural issues. In the 1950s, virtually every show had to be produced and aired live, since the technological infrastructure necessary for a taped broadcast was still to be developed. By the early 1960s, competing networks had established a production capability that enabled them to keep on broadcasting their own programming. By then, audiences were already accustomed to tuning in musicals, soap operas, humor, news and variety shows which dealt with national themes.

Those characteristics contributed not only to the development of a self-reliant television industry, but also to the cultivation of a national "taste" for particular kinds of programming. Comparatively speaking, the television production industry in Brazil is similar to the film industry in India, where language, culture, audience demands and economic issues also converged to create a strong cultural industry which relies mostly on its own production. That helps explain, for

example, why American shows were never as popular in Brazil as they became in most of the world.

What Is On?

The analysis of television viewing in São João de Pirabas requires that we take a look at some general characteristics of the programming schedule kept by the main networks. Except for the prime time line-up, Brazilian networks' schedules are very similar to their American counterparts'. On weekdays, there are early local and national newscasts, followed by variety, humor, and children's shows; there is usually another newscast at noon, followed by sports shows, sitcoms, and soap opera reruns; either old movies or talk shows are scheduled in the afternoon, followed by newscasts and early evening soap operas; every network has a major national newscast on prime time, followed by soap operas, movies, and variety and comedy shows; Hollywood movies or foreign-made shows are usually broadcast early in the day or late at night.

On January 15th, 1997, for example, Rede Globo's broadcast started at 6:10 in the morning, with a brief religious message, followed by 45 minutes of distance education programming for adults. There was a 30-minute local newscast at 7, followed by a national newscast at 7:30. The hour-long broadcast was followed by a 3-and-a-half hours children's show; a comedy show rerun; a 20-minute local newscast; a 25-minute sports show (local and national news); and *Jornal Hoje*, a 25-minute national newscast.

The afternoon programming started with *Video Show*, a popular 40-minute long entertainment news show that doubles as an in-house television newsletter, in which most of the celebrities interviewed and the TV productions talked about are somehow associated with Rede Globo. The show was followed by the rerun of *Mulheres de Areia*, a 1993 soap opera.

For that afternoon, Globo had scheduled a U.S.-produced cartoon movie, and a Brazilian daily series called Malhação ("Workout"). At 6:20 PM, Globo showed the soap opera Anjo de Mim ("My Angel"), followed by the local newscast, and the 7:35 PM soap opera, Salsa e Merengue ("Salsa and Merengue"). After that, Globo aired its most-watched programs: Jornal Nacional ("National News," the evening newscast), and its eight-thirty soap opera, O Rei do Gado ("King of the Cattle").

The network had scheduled *A Comédia da Vida Privada* ("The Comedy of Private Life," a monthly comedy show) for the 10:05 PM time slot, followed by a Hollywood movie, a late night newscast, and yet another American movie.

The Novelas

As opposed to long-running American soap operas, Brazilian serials are shorter in duration – they usually last from six to nine months. Each soap opera has one or two main story lines and secondary subplots. The cast is fairly stable throughout the show (although some characters become more popular than expected and have their parts enhanced by the producers), and the dramatic structure of Brazilian soap operas is closer to film than to traditional television styles.

Rede Globo's soap operas are lavishly produced. Much like Hollywood movies, entire location sets are built just to fit a particular story line. Soap operas are as popular in Brazil as the most successful American movies are in the States. The stars are national celebrities, widely recognized by the general public. As opposed to the U.S., where sitcoms and soap operas are shot mainly indoors to avoid the costs of outdoors location shots, Brazilian soap operas and serials have at least as many outdoors scenes as they have indoors ones.

Comparatively, the closest format in American television would be well-produced network dramas, miniseries, or made-for-TV movies.

Soap operas are a staple of prime time Brazilian TV. Rede Globo, for example, always has three different soap operas on prime time – on the 6, 7 and 8:30 evening slots, plus a rerun in the afternoon. All soap operas try to attract female viewers, although the eight o'clock one will shoot for an "across-the-board" audience. Six o'clock soaps (*a novela das seis*) are generally geared towards older viewers. Many times, they are period pieces with romantic overtones. The stories are usually fluff and/or humorous, and the format is never innovative or daring.

Seven o'clock soap operas (*a novela das sete*) try to keep the six o'clock audience and also bring in the younger viewers. They are usually present-day comedies, with "hip" settings, story lines, music, and characters. They are likely to have at least one setting, such as a health club or a dance club, that works as a magnet for the younger characters. In terms of story lines, they favor themes such as inter-generational problems, young people's relationships, and the struggle for fame and fortune.

It is interesting to note that, although they are trying to be modern and "hip" in their format, settings, music and cast, Brazilian soap operas still maintain some of the elements which characterized the 1950s and 1960s serials, namely, arresting drama, and gripping story lines and characters.

The late soap opera (*a novela das oito*), right in the middle of the prime time line-up, is Rede Globo's pride and joy. Globo's ratings are built throughout the evening by the six and seven o'clock soaps, and by the evening newscast. By the time the eight-thirty soap comes on, the show is responsible for keeping, if not increasing, the built-up audience. For that reason, the serial will certainly contain the

network's best cast, directors, producers and writers; and it must have an "across-the-board" appeal for the whole family.

The eight-thirty soap opera usually has more mature and interesting themes. Part of its appeal resides in the fact that the show generally includes social commentary that relates directly to Brazilian society and culture. Many times, the eight-thirty soap will deal with real Brazilian problems, such as homeless children, class structure, political corruption, and economic difficulties. Other times, those issues will be secondary to the more traditional themes of long-lost lovers and family members, corporate power struggles, and so on.

Whichever is the case, that soap will still follow the same dramatic structure of every other serial on television. Keeping up with our previous analogies, the "prime" soap opera could be considered a big budget Hollywood movie. Each daily installment has the same high-quality production "feel" to it. Outdoor locations are preferred; multiple lavish sets are built (in fact, whole scenic "cities" are built); every production item is hand-picked, from the cast members to the costumes to the songs in the soundtrack. These soaps are also likely to include "racier" scenes (at least according to American TV standards), and to use innovative dramatic and visual formats.

If a new soap opera's ratings do not immediately soar, the show will be considered a failure. If, on the other hand, the soap becomes an instant audience phenomenon, its characters, themes and colloquialisms are turned into overnight favorite topics of conversation. Successful soap operas will dictate hair styles, fashion trends, musical hits, and even political phenomena. Soap operas – especially prime time, Globo-produced ones – might bring long-forgotten social issues, such as missing children, back to the spotlight.

Brazilian Television's Pervasiveness

Recent figures still estimated a very limited penetration of 'pay TV' in Brazil – "pay TV," or *TV paga*, is how cable TV and satellite dishes are commonly referred to in the country (Paoletti 1996). In 1993, only 0.8 percent of Brazilian households had it, as compared to 28 percent of homes with it in Argentina (Hoineff 1996: 125-126). Only one year later, however, that number had jumped to 2.3 percent, or 700,000 subscribers; and in early 1996, Brazilian homes with cable TV neared 1.5 million (Hoineff 1996: 125-126).

Yet, 1.5 million subscribers represented less than 5 percent of 31.5 million Brazilian households with television.[27] Comparatively, cable TV's penetration was estimated to have grown to 51 percent of TV households in Argentina in 1995; 13.3 percent of TV households in Mexico; and 6.2 percent in Venezuela in the same year (Arenas 1997). In Brazil, however, for over 95 percent of the population, broadcast TV was still the only option available (Table 1).

Table 1 - Penetration of Cable TV in Latin America (percentage of total households).

Argentina	Mexico	Venezuela	Brazil
51%	13.3%	6.2%	>5%

Source: Arenas 1997.

The preponderance of broadcast TV over any other mass medium in Brazil is even more dramatic when the country's high illiteracy rates

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[27] The estimated number of Brazilian households with television sets varies according to different sources. Whenever possible, we used the numbers provided by the official Brazilian census data from 1995.

are factored in: 17 percent in 1993 (Famighetti 1997). For a population of over 150 million people, Brazil has surprisingly few print media outlets (or surprisingly few overall readers). Nine hundred magazines and 1,650 newspapers (300 dailies) were being regularly published in Brazil in 1996 (Schneider 1996: 194-195). Newspaper daily circulation was estimated in 55 per 1,000 inhabitants (Famighetti 1997). On average, 360 million books were being sold annually. *Veja*, the leading weekly newsmagazine, had a circulation of over 1 million in the same year, twice as much as the competing *IstoÉ*. *Folha de S. Paulo* (circulation: 700,000 daily, 1.7 million on Sundays); *O Globo* (370,000 and 1 million) and *O Estado de S. Paulo* were the leading daily newspapers in the country (Schneider 1996: 194-195).

Hoineff (1996) observed that there are not too many cultural choices outside television in Brazil: "[T]elevision culture in Brazil is closely related to the absence of alternatives in a society with no access to other types of cultural consumption" (Hoineff 1996: 53, my translation).[28] The pervasiveness of the medium has been noted by virtually every researcher (and not only media analysts) doing field work in the country.

In one of his studies of television's influence on Brazilian society, anthropologist Conrad Kottak (1991) observed that "for the overwhelming majority of the Brazilian population, and especially for non-elites, television has become the primary, often exclusive, media conduit to regional, national, and international information – the only gate to the global village" (Kottak 1991: 85).

Straubhaar (1989) noted that the overwhelming power of television in Brazil has led him to propose an alternative "theory of the

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[28] "A cultura televisiva no Brasil está profundamente ligada `a ausência de alternativas de uma sociedade sem acesso a outros tipos de consumo cultural."

press": A variation of the "authoritarian" model which incorporates a degree of popular and democratic participation, dictated by the mass audience in a heterogeneous, class-divided society, such as the Brazilian (Straubhaar 1989: 140). Straubhaar concluded that the political role of television in Brazil is different from that in other Latin American countries, because Brazilian television's structure has evolved to the point of acquiring immense influence on government decision making and the shaping of public opinion (Straubhaar 1989: 141).

Brazilian authors have arrived at similar conclusions. Queiroz (1992), for example, defended a thesis that television's power has influenced even other Brazilian mass media, such as newspapers. For him, Brazilian newspapers have actively worked towards promoting the "legitimation of television's language,"[29] as well as the legitimation of television itself as a power player in Brazilian society (Queiroz 1992: 11, my translation).

Sodré (1977: 128-129) has maintained that Brazilian television established itself as the most powerful creator of hegemonic cultural views by absorbing and manipulating regional and minority cultural traits. In what he calls "the esthetics of the grotesque,"[30] Brazilian TV in the late 1960s and early 1970s tried and succeeded in identifying itself with the excluded, non-elites sectors of Brazilian society by presenting a patronizing and distorted view of popular values which were, supposedly, being corrupted by fast modernization (Sodré 1977: 102).

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[29] "Há uma associação de interesses para a publicação de notícias sobre a televisão no jornal, criando com isso uma relação indissociável capaz de promover a legitimação da linguagem da televisão enquanto instrumento de poder."

[30] "Estética do grotesco."

According to the author, the Brazilian television system has had a predatory influence on the country's authentically popular cultural manifestations (Sodré 1977: 128). Consequently, those "alternative" cultural values can only be perceived by television as "exotic-picturesque clichés."[31] Sodré also complained that television's grip on Brazilian society – what he calls "the monopoly of the speech"[32] – has "neutralized the possibilities of popular expression"[33] (Sodré 1977: 129, my translation).

Rede Globo prides itself on in-house productions that would help to promote Brazilian culture abroad: "The primary goal [of Globo's cultural products] is to reflect and stimulate Brazilian culture in all its facets. Globo productions dubbed into several foreign languages now bring much of Brazil to 130 different nations world-wide" (Rede Globo 1997).

Extremely critical of the still dominant model of broadcast TV in Brazil, Hoineff (1996: 28-29) observed that unique characteristics – concentration of wealth, widespread illiteracy, high quality of national TV production – converged in that country to transform television from a *representation* of reality into an *expression* of reality itself. Moreover, he wrote, the networks abused their power by influencing people, determining behavior and fabricating public opinion (Hoineff 1996: 32).

Hoineff's notion of Brazilian television constructing itself as an *expression* of reality echoes Straubhaar's (1989: 141) assertion that the

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[31] "Clichês exótico-pitorescos."

[32] "O monopólio da fala."

[33] "O monopólio da fala pelo sistema televisivo exerce a função de neutralização das possibilidades de expressão popular."

Brazilian TV system worked hard to create a universe of cultural meanings that has gained hegemony in the "popular taste".

Indeed, my personal experience as a Brazilian television viewer and analyst leads me to believe that, to this day, broadcast TV still has an immense influence on virtually all aspects of Brazilian culture and society. Television programming is often a topic of conversation at school or in the workplace, in the house or among friends. Television is an extremely important source of information for Brazilians of every socio-economic strata. Brazilians "across-the-board" often refer to something they saw on *Jornal Nacional* – Rede Globo's most watched evening newscast, or on one of the soap operas.

Straubhaar (1989) has noted that Rede Globo has attained a remarkable level of horizontal integration that has allowed its expansion to an array of other industries – radio, music recording, newspapers, publishing, cable and satellite TV, and even fashion and real state. That degree of integration has also made it easier for the network to consolidate its political views and establish its cultural products as an important part of the collective public *imaginary*.

In that context, as important as the daily 60 to 80 percent TV ratings assigned to Globo and the "watch the program, buy the soundtrack, wear the T-shirt and read the book" marketing strategy that rivals Disney's and Time-Warner's in the U.S., is the fact that soap operas' and comedy shows' colloquialisms are immediately incorporated into the popular discourse.

The Current Situation: The Broadcasting Model Versus New Technologies

Hoineff (1996: 27) observed that only in very few countries has broadcast TV enmeshed itself so deeply in society's life as in Brazil. He maintains that, unlike many other industry sectors in the country, Brazilian broadcast television perfected itself to the point of being

comparable to the best First World communications systems: "Very few markets experience a situation of permanent profit and stability such as the one experienced by the Brazilian broadcasting industry" (Hoineff 1996: 27, my translation)[34].

However, that author pointed out those same positive characteristics are the reason why new telecommunication technologies – namely, cable and satellite TV – took so long to be introduced in Brazil: At least fifteen years had passed since its development before cable – or, more generically, 'pay TV' – became a viable telecommunications enterprise in the country.

That delay, Hoineff observed, allowed Brazilian cable companies to avoid formats, or to skip stages, that had already failed or proven themselves cost-ineffective internationally (Hoineff 1996; 28-29). Brazilian cable companies, as well as satellite-technology providers, went on in the late 1980s to offer a myriad of enticing services to its potential customers. In roughly half a decade – from 1990 to 1995 – satellite dishes and signal decoders became widespread household items in Brazil. It was not only the urban, media-savvy middle and upper classes that took on the new service. Satellite dishes became a well-accepted novelty for rural lower and middle classes throughout the Brazilian countryside.

In metropolitan areas, new telecommunication technologies are essentially an upper and middle class phenomenon because people have a variety of local broadcast channels to choose from. In a city such as Belém, the state capital of Pará, with 1.2 million people, there are five commercial network-affiliated local stations and one

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34 "Poucos mercados experimentam uma situação tão permanente de lucro e estabilidade quanto o da televião aberta no Brasil."

educational TV station accessible to anybody who has a television set and an aerial antenna.

The two major "pay TV" providers, TVA and GloboSat, offer a wide range of packages that include "nationally-adapted" (edited, dubbed or subtitled) international and also domestic channels, including HBO, CNN, Discovery, Eurochannel, ESPN and MTV. Prices are comparable to U.S. cable, if not a little higher. In October 1996, TVA was charging a R$250 fee to start the cable service (US$245), and R$48 a month (US$47) for the 'complete' package.

Owned by Abril, a powerful Brazilian publishing group, TVA had over 900,000 cable TV subscribers in Brazil in 1996 (Reuters, 09/ 20/96). Besides the aforementioned channels, TVA also offers CNBC, Fox, Deustche Well (from Germany), RAI (from Italy), Warner, and Bravo Brasil, a Brazilian arts channel. The company announced in the September 1996 that it had formed an international partnership to launch pay-television in Portugal (*Reuters* 09/20/96).

GloboSat, on the other hand, benefits from its mother-company production capabilities (the provider is linked to Globo TV Network) to put a "Brazilian spin" in its service: Besides the international channels, it also offers domestic ones, such as GloboNews, a 24-hour news channel launched in 1996. According to its own data, GloboSat had 800,000 subscribers in January 1996; the company's goal was to end the year with over 1 million customers (GloboSat 1997).

New technologies have a different appeal in rural areas of the country. Most Brazilian small cities, towns and villages do not have local TV stations. In many cases, broadcast signal comes from a relay-antenna (locally called *repetidora*, or "repeating station") that captures the signal from the nearest broadcast station and relays it to the city's population. The downside of that system is the poor quality of the reception and the fact that only one TV station can be picked up. Thus,

it is easy to understand why even lower class families are choosing to buy expensive satellite dishes and rely on satellite TV providers. However odd they might look to unaccustomed eyes, huge and small satellite dishes are becoming an increasingly familiar sight in rural Brazil.

In São João de Pirabas, an average of four new satellite dishes are installed each month. According to the TecSat salespeople in nearby Salinas, as of October 1996 they had installed at least 300 of those dishes in Pirabas (the whole county had 3,259 households in 1994, according to that year's census data).[35]

Besides buying the actual dish, which cost R$450 (US$441) in October 1996, Pirabas families had to choose between buying a GloboSat or a TVA signal decoder, spending an extra R$900 (US$882). They would also have to pay a monthly fee of either R$40 (US$39.20) or R$46 (US$45), depending on which service provider they chose.

Direct-to-Home (DTH) Satellite Services and Pay-per-View

Other recent developments in the war for the Brazilian pay-TV market include TVA launching its direct-to-home (DTH) satellite operations; DirecTV's ambitious plan of bringing satellite television to all of Latin America; the similar Mexico-based "Sky" project; and Brazil's NetSat starting its pay-per-view services.

Abril's TVA started its DTH operations in São Paulo in June of 1996. The company invested a reported US$ 150 million in the new service, which uses the KU band to offer 73 video and 30 sound channels (Ejime 1996). Also in June of 1996, it was reported that

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[35] Census data provided by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics-IBGE 1994).

Galaxy Latin America, a subsidiary of the U.S. – based DirecTV, was investing US$ 500 million to bring DTH television to all of Latin America. In the same month, Galaxy inaugurated in Brazil an uplink facility capable of beaming 32 channels of Portuguese programming (Lunan 1996).

In July of 1996, TCI, Televisa, Globo and Fox announced in Mexico City they were together in a DTH satellite operation, the "Sky" project, which is expected to serve 15 Latin American countries in its first stage (Garson 1996). Also in July of 1996, Brazil's NetSat was getting ready to launch its pay-per-view television services nationwide. The company planned to operate 30 pay-per-view and 140 additional DTH satellite channels (O Globo 07/20/96).

Hoineff (1996) envisioned in his book a battle between traditional Brazilian broadcast networks and the new technology-based service providers. He thinks the former resisted changes for too long, and insisted on a format ('generic, open TV') that has its days numbered. He believes the most important current international media trend – demassification, or segmentarization – was completely ignored by most Brazilian networks, which still try to have an "across-the-board" appeal:

Brazilian 'open TV' considers it natural that almost one hundred million people would be authentically wishing to watch the same thing at the same time, never mind if the telespectator is in downtown São Paulo or deep down in the Amazon jungle; never mind if he is a great businessman or a migrant worker, an intellectual or an illiterate person. (Hoineff 1996: 110, my translation).[36]

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[36] "A televisão aberta brasileira considera natural que quase cem milhões de pessoas estejam autenticamente pensando em ver a mesma coisa ao mesmo tempo, não importa se o telespectador esteja no centro de São Paulo ou no interior da floresta amazônica, não importa se ele seja um grande empresário ou um sem-terra, um intelectual ou um analfabeto."

For the author, the new technologies came to shake down the networks' traditional attitudes and beliefs, perhaps bringing to the medium a political, esthetic and economic revolution (Hoineff 1996: 51). He believes that, in the Brazilian case, multiple cable channels will be able to raise the quality of what is produced and aired in the country, also helping to preserve regional and minority cultural manifestations (Hoineff 1996: 94-96).

LIVING AND WATCHING TELEVISION IN SÃO JOÃO DE PIRABAS: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

Mapping Out a Corner of Brazil

The state capital of Pará, Belém is a busy commercial port nestled in the mouth of the Amazon river. International trade companies, food processing industries, manufacturing, tourism and commerce have been the economic backbone of this city of 1.2 million people. The largest city in the Brazilian Amazon region, Belém rivals any other South American metropolis in terms of economic vitality and cultural life. There are federal and state public universities in Belém, as well as private colleges, internationally-renown research institutions, and at least two major public libraries. The city is also an important regional, national and international trade center. Its port is one of the busiest in the country: Timber, industrialized food products and electronics are the main exports.

Belém's history goes back 370 years. Concerned with the danger posed by French explorers, Portuguese *conquistadores* founded the city in 1616 as a fortress and watchtower, designed to protect the main entrance to the Amazon basin. Early on, Belém evolved to be a strategic center of political and economic power, gaining the status of most important Portuguese settlement in the region. Throughout the colonial era, the local economy was based on agriculture (sugar cane

and subsistence crops), cattle raising and commerce. In the 18th century, with the rising international demand for *drogas do sertão* (plants found in the Amazon jungle and used as spices, perfumes and medicine drugs throughout the world), Belém also achieved the status of busy exporting center.

Economic progress brought about architectural and urban development projects, especially forts, hospitals, mansions and sumptuous churches. As a consequence, Belém has today one of the largest and most important colonial-era artistic and architectural collections in Brazil.

In the end of 19th century, Belém would experience yet a second economic boom, detonated by the international demand for rubber latex and its by-products. From the 1890s to the 1920s, the Brazilian Amazon was the most important rubber latex production center in the world. The rubber commerce caused a gigantic internal migration process in Brazil, which populated even the most remote areas of the Amazon region.[37]

Belém, as well as Manaus, up the Amazon river, became the vortices of the rubber latex economic bonanza. In the first twenty years of this century, Belém experienced a period of growth and economic wealth unparalleled in its history. The entire urban structure underwent major changes that altered not only streets and neighborhoods, but also the city's "spirit." Using Paris as their model, local elites widened streets, built beautiful parks and botanical gardens, constructed museums and opera houses, and erected for themselves breath-taking mansions.

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[37] For a detailed historical account of the process of socio-economic development that took place in the Amazon region, see Pinto (1978) "Amazonia: Anteato da Destruição;" and Penner (1984) "A Dialética da Atividade Pesqueira no Nordeste Amazônico."

The decline of the rubber latex economic cycle was followed by a period of stagnation that lasted until the 1970s. In the past 20 years, however, the state of Pará has experienced enormous economic development, due mostly to the discovery of the largest iron-ore, bauxite and gold mines on the planet (Pinto 1978; Penner 1984).

Once again, Belém benefited from the new economic cycle by housing many of the secondary industries and services involved in the mining process. One of those industries, a Japanese-Brazilian aluminum consortium called Albrás-Alunorte, is establishing itself as one of the major aluminum exporters in the world. Located in Barcarena, a small town just across the bay from Belém, Albrás-Alunorte employs thousands of people who live in the greater Belém area. The center of political power in the state of Pará, Belém also works as a reference point and a magnet for the more than 5 million people living in the state.

The socioeconomic and cultural reality of Belém, however, is very different from the situation faced by most people in the rest of the state. A twenty-minute car ride out of downtown Belém will confront any explorer with striking contrasts. Wide, tree-lined boulevards, parks, and nice neighborhoods give way to swampy areas, filled with shanty houses perched on stilts. Barefoot kids play around in the dirt or in the mud, while their parents work hard as construction workers and housemaids.

Zooming In

The socioeconomic situation in a small city like São João de Pirabas can be defined as midway between Belém's middle class's comfort and the misery found in the metropolis' outskirts. By American standards, Pirabas – as most local people call it – would indeed be considered a very poor community. However, a closer look indicates that the abundance provided by the nature of the *Amazonic*

environment has shielded Pirabas from hunger and misery. The fish are abundant, and the soil still extremely fertile.

Although it stands a mere four hour-drive from Belém (140 miles), Pirabas is in many ways light years away from the state capital. The only road that connects the two cities is badly kept. The large majority of the population does not own vehicles, and has to rely on a once-a-day old bus to and from Belém. Any news from the state capital comes to town through word-of-mouth: There is no regular newspaper distribution, nor telephones, nor TV reception of state-wide newscasts. Until very recently, there were no domestic private phone lines in town. In many ways, Pirabas is more isolated from the rest of the country than its physical characteristics would indicate.

The county of São João de Pirabas was created in 1988. The history of the village of Pirabas goes back to the mid-1800s, when three families decided to settle a *povoado* (small settlement) in front of the Pirabas Bay, a saltwater inlet only 30 minutes away from the open sea. The place, a safely retreated and very well-positioned gateway into the Atlantic ocean, soon grew into one of the many relatively prosperous fishing communities along the Pará coast.

Pirabas is located in the *Salgado* ("saltwater") zone, in the northeastern corner of Pará. The area sits in a "transition" region between the lush Amazon forest and the semi-arid Brazilian northeast. Only less than a degree south of the Equator, Pirabas has an equatorial climate, in which the year is divided into two major seasons: Winter, the rainy season that goes from December to May; and summer, the dry season that extends from June to November. There are minor temperature changes throughout the year; the average temperature ranges from 26 to 32 degrees Celsius year-around (between 80 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit, approximately).

According to the official census data, the county of Pirabas had a population of 17,500 in 1994 (Idesp 1996). There were no official estimates of how many of those lived in the *town* of Pirabas, the county seat where our study was conducted. Local authorities estimated that number to be around one-third of the total county population, or 6,000 people. The remaining 11,500 lived in Pirabas' smaller villages, as well as in the county's rural area.

The local economy is almost entirely based on fishing (especially deep-sea fishing) and agriculture (subsistence crops). In the fall of 1996, 1,442 workers were registered in the local chapter of the fishermen's union (*Colônia de Pescadores*). The union admitted, however, that at least the same number of fishermen in Pirabas did not belong to the organization. Most of the fishermen work in their own boats, in a non-industrial scale. They usually spend from four to seven days at sea, coming back to shore whenever their ice boxes are full of sword-fish, *cavala*, *pargo*, *mero*, and *gó*, the most common kinds of fish in the area.

In Pirabas, the three most widespread fishing techniques are *pesca de tarrafa* (trawl net fishing), *pesca de linha* (angling), and *currais* (fish "corrals"). Different fish require different fishing techniques: Trawls, for example, are mostly used to get sword-fish and anchovies; *pescada*, *cavala* and *pargo* are angled; *currais* are used to catch the smaller fish, such as *gó*, *peixe-pedra* and *bandeirada*. Fish corrals are built by tying up wood sticks very close together, and burying the resulting "fence" into the sand banks that are covered by the sea only during high tide. When the tide ebbs, fishermen can collect the fish that are trapped inside the "corrals."

The larger food fish, such as *cavala*, *mero* and sword-fish, are also the most prized ones: The fishermen usually get up to R$ 2.00 for their quilo at the market. They might sell the smaller, less sought-after fish, for half that price. Some of the larger fish, such as the *mero*, might

weigh up to 120 quilos (264 pounds). Vendors at the market told me it is not unusual for them to sell *meros* weighing 70 or 80 quilos (154 to 176 pounds, approximately).

Although fishing takes place year-around, in the northeastern Amazon, the fish "crop" is between January and April. It coincides with the region's rainy season. That is the time of the year when the fish are more abundant. The seashore area in Pirabas, as well as in other fishing villages, becomes very busy then.

Most of the boats used for small-scale fishing are locally made. They measure from 7 to 12 meters, and are made out of wood. They are usually powered by small, noisy, diesel engines, although every boat I saw in Pirabas also had large sails, enabling them to take advantage of the constant breeze. The boats are very well taken care of, and every one of them has a name. When they are back from the sea, the fishermen spend a great deal of time painting or fixing up their boats at the city docks. The small boats are painted with bright colors. I was told by a fisherman that naming a boat is like naming a kid: The name means a lot to the fisherman, and it will probably stay with him even when the original boat is already gone.

Boat names invoke religious, adventurous, or amorous images. Some of the boat names I saw in Pirabas: *Tubarão Branco* (White Shark), *Novo Amor* (New Love), *Deus É Bom Pai* (God is a Good Father), *Almirante* (Admiral), *Lembrança da Heroína* (A Remembrance of the Heroine), *Falcão do Mar* (Sea Hawk), *São Francisco*.

Most boats have a small compartment under the deck, an "ice box", where the fish are stored until they are back at the shore. For most of his life, the boat will be the fisherman's home: That is the place where he sleeps, eats, works, and socializes. When they go to sea, besides their fishing tools, the fishermen take food – manioc flour,

beans, potatoes, salt; fuel for their engines; rough salt for the fish; and kerosene for their oil lamps.

Some of the boats do not have engines: They almost look like canoes with sails. The triangular sails are made out of bright colored canvas – red, yellow, blue. It is not uncommon, however, to see drab-colored ones, or some that look so old you are afraid their canvas patches will not hold for too long.

The fishermen are usually responsible for selling the catch themselves, either at the local market or to fish exporters that come to town with large refrigerated 18-wheelers. Although there is a large local demand for fresh sea food, most of the catch is shipped away to Belém or out-of-state. Prices at the local market vary from one to two dollars for the quilo of fresh fish. Exporters generally buy it 20 to 50 cents cheaper.

Penner (1984), Loureiro (1985), and Mello (1993), among others, have observed that the economic inequalities permeating every level of the Brazilian society have found their way into the fishing industry of the northeastern Amazon. In that region, they wrote, small-scale fishing, practiced almost as a craft by local populations, has to compete with industrial, modern, large-scale fishing, practiced with increasing efficiency by large exporting companies.

In Pirabas, open sea fishing does indeed also occur in an industrial scale. The town houses a large fish packing company called *PrincoMar*. The company employs many of the younger local residents and has its own larger boats. Five-men crews spend from 30 to 45 long, exhausting working days at sea at a time. The fish are frozen in the boats' large ice boxes. Upon return, the catch is processed and canned at *PrincoMar*, and exported out-of-state (mostly to northeastern states, but sometimes even as far south as São Paulo or as far north as North America). Some of the local fishermen resent

PrincoMar's large scale fishing for what they believe to be not only unfair competition, but also a threat to the local natural resources.

Besides fresh sea food, Pirabas' residents also eat local produce – manioc, beans, black pepper, tomatoes, onions and coconuts are the major crops. Everything else – from clothes to house cleaning products, from home appliances and furniture to processed food – is shipped in either from Belém or from Capanema and Salinas, two large cities nearby.

In terms of comfort, education, housing, and health care, quality of life in Pirabas can hardly be considered satisfactory. In the poorest sections of town and in rural areas, houses are made out of adobe and wood, with straw roofs. Those are by far the most common houses in the county. In Pirabas' central areas, most houses are made out of wood or brick, with baked clay roof tiles. According to the official 1994 census data, each house in Pirabas was inhabited by 5.37 people, on average (Idesp 1996).[38] According to the local authorities, only less than half of the houses in the county were connected to the water distribution and sewage systems.

In terms of health care services, the whole county had four small public out-patient and emergency treatment clinics in 1994 (Idesp 1996). There was one full-time doctor, but no hospital beds, nor ambulances or sufficient medical supplies, according to the *Prefeitura* (the county government). Patients in need of serious or special care had to be removed to Salinas or Capanema, 20 and 26 miles away, respectively. Birth and death rates were 1.58 percent and 0.4 percent respectively in 1994 (Idesp 1996). Children's death rate was 2.1 percent in the same year (Idesp 1996).[39]

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[38] Comparatively, Belém's rate was 4.15 people/household in 1994 (Idesp 1996).

[39] Belém's rates were 2.15, 0.54, and 1.8, respectively (ibid).

There were 53 elementary, grade and middle schools, and only one high school in the county of Pirabas in 1994. 4,676 students were matriculated in the former, and 250 in the latter. There were, on average, 28 grade and middle school students and 25 high schools students per teacher in 1994 (Idesp 1996).[40] Parents usually complained, however, that they had to send their children to neighboring counties' high schools, if they wanted them to get a better education.

Life in Pirabas

To a stranger accustomed to a very systematic routine, life in Pirabas seems at first very *disorganized*. In a regular weekday, there is no telling exactly when people's working day starts. There is no rush-hour traffic, or traffic jams, since there are no cars around. Most locals walk and bike around town, and their comings and goings do not seem to be significantly affected by the time of the day. The same applies to the children. They seem to be getting in and out of school throughout the day.

Even the commercial establishments do not follow any particularly strict schedules. Most stores close after lunch, at *sesta* time, for one or two hours. The store owners, however, usually live upstairs or in the back of their shops, so if you have a medical emergency and need to buy pain medicine, for example, you can knock on the drugstore's door and, if you are insistent enough, the sleepy pharmacist will come to your rescue. But even the regular schedule of morning and afternoon shifts with a *sesta* hiatus in between is not written in stone: The bakery could be closed one morning, because the baker needed to go out, and then be open after lunch, at *sesta* time, to make up for the lost hours.

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[40] In Belém, those rates were 27.1 and 24.6, respectively (ibid).

In many ways, the town's rhythms are dictated by nature and necessity, rather than "formal" time and predetermined expectations. The fishermen's decision to go to sea or come back to shore, for example, depends heavily on the tides. Another good example of "following nature's rhythms" is the way people keep track of time. As in most places in America, in most larger Brazilian cities, appointments are set according to schedules based on working and leisure hours. In smaller cities, as I soon found out in Pirabas, time is a tricky concept. If they are scheduled at all, appointments are set based on looser terms, such as "morning," "after lunch," and "evening."

During my three-month stay in Pirabas, I saw the sun being consulted to tell time way more often than regular watches. I hardly saw anybody wearing watches. When I asked José, a fisherman with whom I was getting ready to go to sea, what time we would be back in town, he looked at the sun and said: "Oh, it's about seven o'clock now. With this tide and this wind, we should be getting back around five." Sure enough: Not only it was pretty close to seven, but we did get back when the tide was favorable, around five in the afternoon.

Boats are a very common form of transportation. In many ways, they seem to make up for the non-existence of cars and trucks. Both sailboats and motorboats are not only a necessity for fishermen and other people living from the sea, but they also provide a very reliable way of getting to the many islands and villages spread throughout Pirabas Bay and adjoining waterways.

In most small American towns, it soon becomes clear for the first time visitor that roads play a major role in the way the city is laid out. Many times, it almost looks like the roads came first, and then people moved in. In Pirabas, it is quite the opposite. A maze of interconnected dirt roads, which seem to have been laid out almost at random, reminds you that the houses came first, and then roads were built around them. Except for the main road connecting Pirabas to the outside world, there

is no telling where any street will take you. Perfectly nice roads might end up in uninhabitable swamps. Bumpy, dusty, crooked little lanes might take you right to the seashore, or to the main square.

Not everybody in Pirabas is involved in fishing. Local shops and agriculture are two other important economic activities, which employ a large number of local residents. State authorities estimated the existence of 200 commercial establishments in all of Pirabas county in the early 1990s (Idesp 1990). While most of the men do go out to fish, women stay in town, taking care of the house, tending the backyard plantations, and working as clerks and vendors at the local shops.

On a regular weekday, the bayshore area is always populated by men, either working or just hanging around the pier or the public market. If they are fishermen, they will be downloading the catch, repairing their boats, mending their fishnets, or getting ready to set sail. Otherwise, they will be buying or selling fish, loading the refrigerated trucks, or taking care of their vending stalls at the market.

Women, on the other hand, can be seen all over town, biking to or from work, shopping, taking the kids to school, and working as shopkeepers, school teachers and waitresses. Paradoxically, because life is so much centered on fishing, and because fishing is so much of a male activity in Pirabas, outsiders have the impression that women make up 70 or 80 percent of the city's population. None of the women I talked to in Pirabas was "only" a homemaker. They were always involved in as many activities as they could manage to perform. Taking care of the house was but one of their daily chores.

Life in Pirabas is conducted in a public fashion. Albeit the non-existence of cars, city streets bustle with life. Small and large groups of people gather to talk on every corner, at the *praça* (the main square), in front of the market, or at the pier. For Pirabas' residents, it seems that no matter where you are going or how in a hurry you are, you always

find time to stop and talk to neighbors and friends. Unlike what happens in bigger cities, work does not seem to be separated from someone's other activities. Even while at work, washing down the market floors or packing fish into ice boxes, men and women manage to tease their friends, tell jokes, talk about their kids and spouses, or share information about the upcoming elections.

Even outsiders are invited to join in ongoing conversations, and share a beer or a meal. Questions are always welcome, and never perceived as intrusions upon one's private life. In a week or two of my staying there, the people closest to me when I was in Pirabas – my neighbors, my landlord, the waitresses at the diner, my main informants – seemed to know more about my life and my work than my long-time neighbors in São Paulo.

At night, people gather in groups – especially children and teenagers, but also young adults – at the main *praça*, playing games, dating, listening to music, or just visiting.

Historical Aspects

There are almost no written records of Pirabas' history. In town, the only written information has been compiled by the *Prefeitura* (the local government), in a quasi-anecdotal way. Those records indicate that Pirabas was established as a small settlement (*povoado*), by three Portuguese families in the mid-1800s. I was told that the name São João de Pirabas comes from one the city founders' devotion to Saint John (*São João*), and "piraba" used to be the name of a very abundant fish in the region – the fish's name (or the way it is pronounced) has been changed to "piaba" along the years.

Pirabas sits in the *Salgado* zone of Pará state. Located in the northeastern corner of Pará (the second largest Brazilian state), that geographic coastal area, measuring 105,720 sq. kilometers, got its

name from the salty Atlantic waters that are so important to the region. According to Furtado (1978: 6), the *Salgado* zone is fundamentally a fishing-based area. Subsistence agriculture, however, is also an important economic activity in the region.

In the book *Salinópolis, Praia Balnear Oceânica: Ensaio de Monografia*, Dubois (1949) provided one of the few written accounts of the *Salgado* area's history. According to him, the first Portuguese expedition to the Salinópolis, or Salinas, region (20 miles away from Pirabas) was recorded as having happened in December of 1615. The expedition, commanded by Francisco Caldeira Castelo Branco, was the same that founded the city of Belém, in January of 1616. There were 150 soldiers, plus 50 crew members and passengers on board.

The Salinas/Salgado coast, Dubois wrote, was populated by the Tupinambá Indians. In three different Guarani languages, *tupi* means generator (as in ancestor, father), and *nambá* means descendent. In the first expedition's accounts (as compiled in Dubois' book) the Indians were described as tall as the Europeans, but stronger and fitter, carrying large, heavy, hunting bows. They painted their skin with red and black dyes, making circles and other patterns in their faces and bodies. Their heads were shaven, and they used to pierce the lower lip and introduce a little piece of bone in the hole. They decorated with colorful, feathered headdresses.

The Tupinambás believed in the *Tupã* god, whose voice was the thunder (*Tupãcanunga*); lightning was called *Tupãberaba*; the devil was *Anhanga*; the good spirits, *Apoiaueués*; the bad spirits, *Uiaupias*. The good spirits favored the tribe with good crops, fertility and abundance, while the bad spirits prevented rain and disturbed hunting and fishing.

While in the body, the soul was called *An*; after death, it became *Anguerê*. After dying, the brave ones would go to the fortunate fields; the cowards would fall prey to *Anhanga*.

Like other groups within the Tupi nation, the Tupinambás used to sacrifice and eat their prisoners of war, but only if they were brave enough to die honorably. If the prisoners were considered cowards, they would not be eaten, being turned into slaves instead. The Indians believed that if they ate a cowardly prisoner, they would become cowards themselves (Ribeiro 1995: 34).

The settlement that originated Salinas was called *Virianduba* or *Viriandeua* by its original inhabitants, the Tupinambás. In the 1700s, the area housed three successive Jesuit missions. The Indians were enslaved by the missionaries and settlers. They were made to work six months out of the year for their Portuguese masters, and the other six months for their own support. They received wages of two *tostões* (an old Portuguese coin) a month.

Salinas, as a *povoado*, was founded by the Jesuits in 1645. The village was established for two main reasons: For the extraction of sea salt; and for the tugging of ships at the Atalaia island. A watchtower (and later a lighthouse) was built to warn the ships about their proximity to the shore. Cannon shots were used as a warning signal. In the 1700s, the Indian tribes were extinct as independent entities. As a result, most natives were either "assimilated" or killed. Also in the 18th century, African slave labor was introduced in the region.

Watching Television in Pirabas

Maybe direct-to-home and pay-per-view television are not yet part of Pirabas' reality, but satellite TV certainly is. While kids and young adults gather in the *praça* to socialize, older adults and many of

Pirabas' families gather around TV sets to a nightly routine of watching soap operas.

There are no local traditional mass media in Pirabas. A local public announcement (PA) system plays music and advertisements from 8 to 11 AM. Loud speakers located in front of the market and in the *praça* are the only way to "tune in" to that broadcast. AM radio stations from Belém or neighboring cities can be picked up throughout the day. Newspapers were never published in Pirabas. There is no regular distribution of newspapers from Belém either.

Television broadcast signals can be picked up with aerial antennas, from the repetidora (a relaying station) in Salinas, 20 miles away. The downside of that, as we mentioned in the earlier section, is the poor quality of the reception and the fact that only one TV station can be tuned in.

Although they are indeed expensive, huge and small satellite dishes are becoming very popular in rural Brazil. Apparently, for many families the investment is worth while.

Dona Maraci

Dona Maraci Queluz owns the only hotel/restaurant in Pirabas, the *"Casarão"* ("The Big House"). Her small, fragile *cabocla* frame conceals a strong, powerful matriarch. Besides running a successful business, Dona Maraci is a prominent figure in Pirabas' social life. A well-known character in the city, she was one of the founders of the community center, and despite her ailing health, Dona Maraci still finds time to be an active politician: She was a councilwoman between 1989 and 1992, and was running again for a council seat last fall (although she lost her election bid).

Dona Maraci looks older than her actual 50 years of age. Originally from Pariquis, a small town in Pirabas county, she moved

to the county seat some 30 years ago. She has lived there ever since. Dona Maraci raises her two daughters (a 13 year old and a 22 year old) by herself – her husband left them several years ago. In the house, also live her four year old granddaughter, and four other people that either work or just live with the family. In some ways, hers is a very typical Brazilian household, not only because the sense of family extends beyond the traditional nuclear group, but also because of the way *agregados* ("add ons") have moved into the house and were perfectly integrated to the extended family.[41]

Dona Maraci was the only daughter in a once prosperous family household. She is still very proud of her middle class upbring. She is also proud of her business's success. The hotel is actually constituted by four small rooms built in the backyard of her bricks and wood house. The restaurant is a large room in the front part of the house. The waitresses are her daughters and *agregados*.

Keeping up with the prevailing Pirabas spirit of "private is public," there is almost no separation between Dona Maraci's house and her business. Her public restaurant/bar is a hallway away from her own private living room. The kitchen that prepares the family's meals is the same that cooks for the guests. Her daughters and grandchild come and go all the time, from the house to the restaurant and vice-versa. Dona Maraci's "office" is actually one of the restaurant's tables.

There is a television set behind the restaurant's counter, and that TV is, more often than not, turned on. Dona Maraci has a satellite dish in her establishment, and two other TV sets in the house. Throughout the day, the receiver will be tuned into any of the five channels it can

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[41] Da Matta (1991b) defined *agregados* as "people who live in the household but are not part of the family. A relative who came from the North in search of health or psychological support; a friend going through a financial or marital crisis; an old employee who has no place to go," and so on (Da Matta 1991b: 26, my translation).

pick up. During the evening, however, the sets are always tuned into Rede Globo, Brazil's largest broadcasting network.

From six o'clock in the evening to around ten o'clock at night, Globo airs its most popular programs: Three different soap operas and a national newscast. During that period, it is hard to watch anything else at the restaurant. Dona Maraci's daughters, Cristiane and Regina, and her granddaughter, Mariane, are glued to the tube. Even when setting the tables or waiting on the customers, they find a way of following the televised dramas that unfold before their eyes.

Regina, the teen-age daughter, is very likely to have some of her friends over at night. They will talk passionately about the soap operas' characters and plots. In many occasions, when her friends were not around, she would try to engage me in a soap opera discussion, asking my opinion about a particular character or situation. In at least two occasions, I noticed that Jacqueline, one of the young *agregados* living in Dona Maraci's house, had modeled her hair style after popular *novela* characters. When I asked her about it, she smiled and seemed a little embarrassed.

Dona Maraci, on the other hand, seems to be oblivious to the ever-present TV set. From her "office," she talks to people who come in to ask her different favors – from a bag of manioc flour to a personal note that will help them get the documents they need. It is also at her favorite corner table that she will socialize with the many friends who come in just to say hello. Dona Maraci's intense social life is a remnant of the 17 years she spent as teacher and principal at one of the local public schools. Many of her former students still respectfully call her *professora*.

Although she "blames" it on Pirabas' good weather, I suspect Dona Maraci's large web of social relationships is what has prevented

her from moving out of Pirabas to a larger city, such as Capanema. "I love to live in Pirabas," she told me.

> *Maraci*: Everybody knows me here. Everybody likes me. I've always been a very active and creative person. I like it here because of the weather. I've had many opportunities of moving out but I didn't.

Dona Maraci has owned TV sets since electricity was first available in Pirabas, "some 15 years ago." She told me she likes to watch TV, and soap operas are her favorite shows.

> *M*: The time I watch it the most is after lunch, when I lie down to take a nap. I hardly watch it at night, because I'm always busy.

She told me she follows some of the soaps, but she doesn't like to talk about them.

> *M*: I hate to watch TV when I have company. I hate people talking when I'm trying to watch something.

Dona Maraci thinks it is important to have a television set, not for its entertainment value, but for the news and useful information you can get out of it. "For example, for a person like me, who lives here, it is the only way of knowing what goes on in the world." Although Dona Maraci occasionally buys Belém's newspaper, *O Liberal*, she said she hardly ever has the time to read it. She doesn't listen to the radio, but subscribes to two national magazines, *Veja*, a general interest newsweekly, and *Caras*, a celebrities' life style magazine. "I get most of my information from *Jornal Nacional*," she told me. *Jornal Nacional* is Globo's nightly newscast.

From my observations, television did not seem to be a very important part of Dona Maraci's life. In her busy social schedule, TV was like an afterthought, a background noise: Always there, but somehow lost amid a barrage of real life people, events and situations.

Seu Raimundo

A very friendly man from the poor Brazilian northeast, Seu Raimundo migrated to Pirabas from Ceará state in 1974. Since then, he got married and went on to father 12 children, ages 9 to 29. Seu Raimundo is a fish vendor at the public market. He buys fish directly from the fishermen, when they come back with the catch, and then sells it at his rented stall at the market.

A very religious man, Seu Raimundo belongs to the local chapter of the *Assembléia de Deus* (the "Assembly of God"), an Evangelical church which claims a membership of 600 *Pirabenses*. Known by most Brazilians as *Crentes* ("Faithful"), the Evangelical church's followers are reputed to be extremely strict about their moral and ethical codes. Seu Raimundo told me men and women from his church are expected to dress sternly, avoid habits such as gambling and drinking, and to be very dedicated family people.

Seu Raimundo has never owned a television set. He doesn't want a TV in his house because he believes most of the programming is "pornographic." He told me in the thick northeastern *sertanejo* accent he still keeps:

> *Raimundo*: If I had a television set, I'd watch only the newscast. Today's youth are too much interested in soap operas. All soap operas are about sex. They are very pornographic. They are a bad role model for the kids.

Although he and his wife disapprove of watching TV, Seu Raimundo knows his kids watch it at their neighbors'. The couple has never forbidden them to do so. Seu Raimundo said he doesn't miss watching TV. He regularly listens to *Transpaz* ("Transpeace"), an Evangelical AM radio station from Belém, and even to HCJB, a tropical wave radio station from Ecuador.

Seu Raimundo gets his news from *A Voz do Brasil* ("The Voice of Brazil"), a government nightly broadcast, transmitted by every radio station in the country; from one of Belém's morning radio newscasts; and from a lunch time "real crime" radio broadcast, also out of the capital. He thinks he is a reasonably well-informed man.

> *Raul*: Do you feel left out when your friends or co-workers talk about television shows?
>
> *Raimundo*: Not really. The minister and other church-goers who watch the newscast tell us what is going on in the country.
>
> *Raul*: Do you believe people in general are too much influenced by what they watch on TV?
>
> *Raimundo*: Definitely. Especially young people and others who like to party too much.
>
> *Raul*: What about violence? Does violent programming affect the way people behave? (Surprisingly, Raimundo doesn't think so).
>
> *Raimundo*: Violence has always existed, even before people tuned in to violent shows. What has increased a lot is robberies and burglaries, because television is showing people all the time how to do it without being caught by the police.

Seu Raimundo believes television has an overall negative influence on the population. The only positive shows on television, he told me, are the Evangelical shows, "because anybody who cannot attend the services can be reached by TV;" and the newscasts, "which can be very useful."

Seu Orlando and Dona Ivete

A couple in their late 50s, Seu Orlando and Dona Ivete Pereira own one of Pirabas' small grocery stores. A relatively prosperous couple, they have only one 32 year-old daughter, who still lives with them. Like Seu Raimundo, the couple also migrated to the Pará coast

from the arid Northeast, trying to escape from one of the worst droughts in the century.

Seu Orlando came to Pirabas when he was only 20 years old, some 40 years ago. He remembers the difficulties he had to go through with nostalgia, rather than bitterness. When talking about his life history, he punctuates his conversation with *"Eu sofri muito"* ("I suffered a lot"), as if to remind himself that he deserves all the amenities he can now afford.

Like most people in Pirabas, the Pereiras have indeed had a life of hardship and constant struggle. Since childhood, hard work has been an indelible part of their lives of *sertanejos*. Even nowadays, the two of them are responsible for doing most of the work at the grocery store: The only store clerk they employ is a 12 year-old boy who helps them taking care of the place.

Seu Orlando is a great storyteller. When he realized I was genuinely interested in his stories, he needed very little stimulation to talk endlessly about the most varied topics. He has strong opinions about virtually every subject, and won't mince his words to get his point across. Although Pirabas' official history goes back some 150 years ago, Seu Orlando defines himself as one of the town's founders: "When I got here, there was nobody. This was a jungle; you had to clear up your path with a sickle from the church to the seashore."

Seu Orlando complains about the status quo in Pirabas:

Orlando: The worst problem here is the poor quality of health care. They don't have anything at the public clinic. If you need to take a shot, you have to buy your own hypodermic needle.

He says he knows what is needed to put the town back in the right track, but he won't get involved in local politics because he has to take care of his business.

Raul: Have you ever thought about moving out?

O: Yes, some years ago I bought a plot at the place where I was born. I'd like to live there after I retire. But I haven't left Pirabas because I like it here: I like the weather; and it is a good city, overall.

Not as opinionated and outspoken as her husband, Dona Ivete just nods and smiles while he rants and raves about Pirabas' ills. She talks to me while rearranging the produce or dusting off the shelves at the grocery store. She tells me she likes to watch TV. She usually leaves it on in the evenings, because she likes to watch the six, seven and eight o'clock soap operas.

Although the couple owns a satellite dish, the TV is "left on Rede Globo all the time." Her loyalty to the major network is so great that she doesn't even know exactly how many channels can be picked up – "seven, I think" – or what those channels are. She estimates the couple's daily amount of television viewing as three hours.

Besides the soaps, Dona Ivete only likes to watch the news (*Jornal Nacional*). The movies and other shows, she tells me, come on too late, and being an early riser, she likes to be in bed no later than ten. She doesn't mind talking to me about television:

Raul: For how long have you owned a TV set?

Ivete: Since we got electricity in town, some fifteen years ago.

R: What did you use to do before television was available?

I: I would go to bed earlier. Or I would chat with the neighbors in the sidewalk.

R: Do you still do that?

I: Well, only with one neighbor. I don't have much time for socializing, anymore.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Television as a Culture-Building Medium, or Changes in Perceptions of Self and Society

Illuminated by the theoretical threads pulled together in the previous chapters, the three research questions posed by this study were:

Q1. Has television played a role in the way rural Brazilian communities construct their own interpretation of the world and of themselves?

Q2. Has television played a role as an *acculturation* vehicle in rural Brazil? In other words, has television been used to establish a dialogue between rural groups from the poor Brazilian countryside, and the dominant urban, "cultured" elites?

Q3. What kinds of cultural changes (if any) have been produced by systematic and pervasive television viewing in an until recently isolated rural community?

News and information about the rest of Brazil (and the rest of the world) reach São João de Pirabas through two main channels: Television and the traditional "word-of-mouth." Television has been particularly successful at providing a systematic, reliable and widespread medium through which information, entertainment, and cultural products are brought into that fairly remote fishing community.

The observations and interviews I collected during my ethnographic field work in Pirabas lead me to believe that:

1. Systematic television viewing has indeed played a role in the way Pirabas residents construct their own interpretation of the world and of themselves;

2. There is very little "cultural dialogue" between that rural community and the dominant Brazilian urban elites: Communication between those two groups seems to be a "one-way" road, instead;

3. Several cultural changes are indeed taking place in the community, possibly as a result of the systematic and pervasive presence of television programming.

In the next sections, we will discuss some of the ways in which television viewing has affected Pirabas residents' interpretation of their community and of the world, and also some of the cultural changes that can be perceived as a result of television's pervasiveness. Those changes are reflected in new conceptualizations of space and time; in the modification of work patterns; in a new wave of consumerism; in a general shift in expectations towards life and towards the community; in a distrust towards authority and politics; and in the displacement of private and public activities.

The Concept of Time

Seu Orlando invites me to go over to their house in the evening, to watch the news: "Come at 10 to 8, because *Jornal Nacional* starts at 5 to 8," he says. "That way, we will still have time to talk a little bit before the news." His precision on setting the time for my visit is strikingly different from the vagueness that characterizes the way most people in Pirabas deal with time.

Contrasting with the more "qualitative" sense of time nurtured by most Brazilians, the networks are pretty good at following their programming schedules. The fact that the immensely popular prime time *novela* always starts at 8:30 in the evening, has prompted audiences to accommodate their family and social schedules around it. Thus, if a soap opera "strikes gold," like *Tieta* did in 1989, phrases

such as "I'll meet you after *Tieta*," or "Come to my house before *Tieta*," become part of people's daily talk.

Barrios (1988: 65) observed a similar pattern in Venezuela, where "[t]elevision is embedded in such a way in family life that programming regulates much of the family life organization of time".

When I was explaining to a friend in Belém that, after living for five years in the United States – where schedules are made to be followed and tardiness is regarded as a personal flaw – I too had become much more rigorous about setting and keeping appointments, he pointed out that North Americans and North Europeans deal with time *quantitatively*, while South Americans and Mediterranean cultures in general still have more of a *qualitative* approach.

What he meant to say was that the more "laid back" life style prevalent in Brazil, where people take the concept of "enjoying life" more seriously (so to speak), has made "having fun" a good excuse for missing appointments, for example.

"Time here is measured for its *quality*: For the amount of fun you are having," my friend told me. He went on:

> *Andersen*: For instance, if I tell you I'm going to meet you at 8 o'clock, so we can go to the movies, and I don't show up for our meeting, you know that you shouldn't worry about me, and you should go to the movies by yourself. Most likely, I'd be in a bar, having some beers with other friends, and since I was having fun, that was a pretty good excuse to skip our engagement.

That *qualitative* approach to time is absolutely present in Pirabas. Work breaks are stretched to accommodate a game of dominoes, or even a beer with a couple of friends. That you are in a hurry is no excuse to avoid stopping and talking to your neighbor about her plans for a new spot cleaned up at the backyard. Loosely arranged

appointments are conveniently "forgotten," if they imply giving up a more enjoyable activity.

With its strict schedules, television, on the other hand, tends to set definite boundaries on "fun." Likewise, it also sharpens one's perception of *quantitative* time. Half of my stay in Pirabas took place before the political elections. All parties and candidates have free access to television air time in Brazil. The networks are required by law to broadcast one hour of political advertising per day (30 minutes in the afternoon, 30 minutes on prime time). Those 60 minutes are divided among the parties according to the representation they have in the local, state and federal legislatures.

Rede Globo broadcast its 30 minutes of prime time political advertising between the nightly newscast and the "eight o'clock" soap opera. Since it was a local election, and Pirabas candidates didn't have a local station where to broadcast their TV spots (given that they would have had the means to produce any ads at all), political advertising in Pirabas meant 30 minutes of dead air and blank screens.

Every night, for those exact 30 minutes, Dona Ivete would go to the side walk in front of her house and talk to her neighbor. As soon as the newscast was over and the screen was blank, she would excuse herself from me and her husband and go to the patio, where her neighbor, who had been watching TV herself, would already be waiting for her. For those 30 minutes, the TV would be silent, and the only sounds coming from the living room were my voice and Seu Orlando's, talking about politics, religion, Brazilian society, and life in general.

The strident sounds announcing the end of the political advertising and the beginning of the *novela* would silence both groups: Seu Orlando and I would stop talking, while Done Ivete would say good-night to her friend and come back inside to watch her favorite

show. Barrios (1988: 66) noted that a Venezuelan grandmother "ritualistically went out to visit her friends in the neighborhood at 3:00 p.m., when the daytimes novelas are over".

Similarly, Behl (1988) observed that the introduction of television in an Indian village "rearrange[d] the use of time" and caused an entirely new category to emerge – "time for viewing TV" (p. 155). "Rearrangement of time," she wrote, "now includes an element of leisure, modeled out from the TV for relaxation and joy, thus shifting the orientation of activity from the outside to the inside of the house" (Behl 1988: 155).

"I hardly talk to my neighbor," Dona Ivete told me. "It seems that we just don't have the time for that, anymore."

A couple of days before the elections, when the political advertising was finally off the air, Dona Ivete was grateful for not having that half hour of blank screens anymore. "Thank God it's over" (*"Graças a Deus acabou"*), she told me. She was also grateful for the fact that the soap opera came on 30 minutes earlier, and her evening routine was finally back to normal. She never went to the patio to talk to her friend, after that. She didn't seem to mind it.

Work Patterns and Consumer Culture

"One of the bad influences of television," Seu Raimundo tells me, "is that it is making a lot of young people move away from Pirabas." "How can that be?," I ask him.

> *Raimundo*: Well, you see, young people are very impressed with what they see on TV. They want to dress like the people they see in the *novelas*; they want to drive those cars and live in those beautiful houses. They know that they can't have those things if they stay here, because there are no good jobs here. So they move away to Capanema or Belém, trying to find a good job and a better life there.

Seu Raimundo does not necessarily disapprove young people's moving away from Pirabas in search of a better life. He told me some of his own kids have moved to Belém, because they wanted to attend a better high school and try to pursue a career. He is actually proud of the fact his sons and daughters "have the brains" to succeed in the big city. He just thinks that, in a way, television is "corrupting" young minds, by showing them goods and life styles they will never be able to have.

> *Raimundo*: They cannot be happy here, because of all the things they know they don't have; and they think that somehow moving to Belém will bring them those things. Well, if they don't have the strength of character, they will be tempted to commit crimes to get what they want.

He thinks television shows not only say that it's OK to rely on crimes, but they also teach people how to do it:

> *R: A TV até mostra aos bandidos como roubar* ("Television even shows the criminals how to steal").

Following the caboclo's general pattern of hopelessness, Raimundo explained to me the harsh economic reality of life and work in Pirabas in these terms:

> *R*: Life in Pirabas is hard, because there are no jobs. There is no industry, besides fishing. During the fish crop, everybody is all right, making money and all. When the crop is over, most people are jobless and penniless. The country's economy is bad. It used to be that it was easy to find work in this area, because of the *pimentais* (black pepper plantations). But that is also over. From 72 to 87, 88, the situation was better. From then on, everything became harder. The quilo of the fish has soared to R$ 1.50, when it used to be R$ 0.30 or less. The wages didn't go up that much. If you work 40 hours a week, making minimum wage, you'll make R$ 112 a month. How can you feed your family with that. *É uma miséria* ("It's miserable").

The promise of a better life, brought to Pirabas mostly by television, seems indeed to attract a lot of the local youth to Belém and Capanema. When I was waiting to use the phone at the local *posto telefônico* ("telephone office"), I overheard a girl not older than 18 talking on the phone to a prospective employer: Somebody's aunt, who needed a housemaid in Belém. She set up a job interview for the following Monday, and told her interlocutor she was very excited about moving to the big city.

Adamilson, a 21-year-old *Pirabense* I interviewed, told me there are no other jobs in Pirabas besides fishing. Most of his high school friends have moved away to Capanema, to pursue a career. He was lucky, he said, to get the job he now has, working as a clerk at the fishermen's union. The job enabled him to stay in Pirabas, close to his family.

> *Adamilson*: Moving away to Belém or Capanema is pretty much the normal thing for young people to do here. If you've got an education, you don't really want to work as a fisherman, or just doing odd jobs.

Adamilson has three younger brothers, who now work on their dad's fishing boat, but he does not believe any of them will take up fishing as a profession, later on.

> A: Fishing is very hard, and it doesn't pay well. The truck owners [big refrigerated semis that come to town to buy fish for exporting] set up a low price for the fish among them, and you have no choice but selling the catch before it goes bad.

The down side of living in Pirabas, he told me, is the lack of *coisas pra fazer* ("things to do"). In terms of entertainment, the only options available, according to him, are soccer and weekend *festas* ("parties"). Besides the job and his family, the other reason that has kept Adamilson from moving away is the fact that he doesn't like *a confusão da cidade grande* ("the big city bustle").

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Most young people I interacted with in Pirabas, including Adamilson, dressed in the same "casual sportive" way normally found in any big Brazilian city. Being a par with the fashion and societal trends seemed to be one of the major concerns both young men and women had in Pirabas. Jacqueline, a teen-age girl living and working at Dona Maraci's house, modeled her hair style and clothes after some of the female characters of the seven o'clock soap opera. She told me most of the money she made working as a waitress in her *tia*'s diner went to buying nice clothes and *bijuteria* ("bijouterie"):

> *Jacqueline:Não é porque eu moro aqui que eu tenho que me vestir como um bicho-do-mato* ("The fact that I live here doesn't mean that I have to dress like a hill billy").

After doing field work in a small Indian village, Behl (1988: 143) observed that "with electric light in the rooms and TV presenting a clean and beautiful image of women, [young girls] have become aware of cleanliness and personal appearance."

Adamilson said he goes shopping in Capanema at least once a month, most likely after he gets his paycheck. He also explained why some of the old local customs are changing:

> *Adamilson*: It used to be that people here would get married and have a bunch of kids when they were really young. Guys would just find a local girl and get married [such was the case with his parents]. Now, probably just half of my friends are either married or getting married. The others are busy working or trying to find good work in a bigger place.

Although he does date a local girl, Adamilson is still single, living with his parents. (It is not uncommon to find unmarried young adults living with their parents and siblings in rural Brazil. That was also the case of Adamilson's unmarried siblings).

Being caught between an "old" and a "new" way of life is a predicament of someone who, like Adamilson, is entering full adulthood in a time of changes. The old, "natural" way of doing things – becoming a fisherman, marrying a local girl – is being replaced by a more "nonconformist" way of looking at life and destiny. The demands of a "modern" way of life, brought into Pirabas mainly by television, while making young adults restless, is also making them more confident in their personal qualifications to look for "a better life."

Behl (1988: 143) observed a similar pattern in India: Young mothers, she wrote, "caught between the 'traditional' and the 'modern,'" between "two distinctly separate, old and new, ways of life" were confused as to what their role in society really was.

Television has been a part of Adamilson's and his family's life for a long time. They have two TV sets at home, and a satellite dish that enables them to watch five channels. The hands-down favorite channel is Rede Globo, but they also watch Manchete, Record, Bandeirantes, and SBT, the other national networks.

One of the sets is in the living room, and the other is in his parents' bedroom. The living room set is turned on during most of the day. During the mornings and afternoons, the younger children (18, 17, and 16 years old) watch varied programming. In the evening, everybody in the house gets together to watch TV, most likely Rede Globo's newscast and *novelas*. Adamilson told me he usually watches television from eight to ten o'clock, when he goes to bed. He always watches the newscast (*Jornal Nacional*) at his girlfriend's house. He doesn't like soap operas:

> *Adamilson*: In my house, only my parents watch soap operas. My sisters are both married and don't live with us anymore.

He said he likes to watch movies and soccer games, but acknowledged that in his house, the set is constantly tuned into the *novelas*.

Adamilson remembers not having a TV set in the house, when he was younger. Instead of watching television, he and his brothers would be outside, playing with their neighbors and friends. He said he still likes to talk and socialize with his friends at night – *"a gente gosta de jogar conversa fora"* ("we like to chat away the night") – but he just does that less often now.

> *Raul*: Do you think television is important in people's lives?
>
> *Adamilson*: Yes, it's important to watch TV. I know that when I watch the news, I become more informed, I know what is going on in the world. I understand things better now that I follow the news *(Quando eu assisto o jornal, eu pego muitas notícias, fico mais informado do que está acontecendo. Agora eu entendo melhor as coisas)*.

Behl (1988) also noted a change in the work patterns of men, after the introduction of TV in the Indian village:

> The organization of activities on a day-to-day and seasonal basis – the core of the Indian agricultural economy – is now punctuated by the pressing demands of watching TV and its programs in a seven-day-week routine.... In fact, Sunday has emerged as a kind of agricultural holiday, much like an office holiday. (Behl 1988: 155).

The Displacement of Private and Public Activities

I know from my own experience in Pirabas that what Adamilson told me about young people's social life is true: Although they like to watch the soap operas with the rest of their families at home, young people still have a very active and public social life in the evenings.

At night, Pirabas is not as hot and dusty as it is during most of the day. The ocean breeze cools down the downtown and seashore areas, and the warm temperatures inside the houses invite *Pirabenses* to come out for a pleasant walk. This important nightly promenade (*o movimento*, "the movement"), which anthropologist Richard Pace (1993) also observed in the Pará town of Gurupá, is a ritual that attracts people of all ages.

The areas that concentrate most of the people at night are the central *praça* and the seashore streets. At the *praça*, young couples stroll along with their little children; teen-age boys and girls form separate playing and conversation groups; young men and women go through the all common flirtation and dating rituals. Some people bring their radios and "boom boxes" and crank up the volume, so that everybody else might enjoy the music. Men gather in groups at the several bars around the *praça* to drink beer and talk loudly about politics, work, and amorous adventures.

People also gather at the seashore or *trapiche* area. The *barraquinhas* (straw-roofed huts) serve food, *cachaça* (a strong Brazilian alcoholic beverage made from sugar-cane) and beer to mostly fishermen and truckers. Young people stroll around or ride their bikes up and down the streets. In the weekends, the seashore is where most of the *festas* take place. Loud reggae and *forró* (Brazilian popular dance music) can be heard throughout the night.

In most bars and *barraquinhas*, either a small television set or a music stereo will be on. Usually, the TV will be on earlier at night, when the *novelas* are still playing, and then it will be turned off and replaced by music. Patrons hardly pay any attention to the TV: Most likely, the *novelas* will attract the attention only of the waitresses and the bar owners.

One of the effects of television viewing as a nightly routine in Pirabas is the way it has kept young and older couples, as well as older adults in general, inside the house. Dona Francisca, a 39-year-old homemaker, told me she used to socialize with her friends more frequently when she didn't own a TV set. Now, she says, following the soap operas' nightly "chapters" prevents her from getting out of the house the way she did before:

> *Francisca*: If you miss *um capítulo* ("a chapter"), the plot gets really confusing. I like to watch my *novelas*. I like to follow the stories. Television is the only form of entertainment we still have.

For the reasons explained above, it is not very common to see older couples or older men and women out in the streets at night. If they get out at all, they will stay in front of their houses, sitting down on lawn chairs and talking with their neighbors or with their children.

Referring to the central *praça* in Pirabas, Dona Maraci told me:

> *Maraci*: *Isso aqui era muito animado antigamente. Agora todo mundo só quer ver TV*. ("This place was very busy in the old days. Now everybody just wants to watch TV").

Between 1983 and 1991, Richard Pace and colleagues conducted a study of television-viewing in the Amazon town of Gurupá. Based on the popular custom of watching television at the homes of friends and family members who owned TV sets, Pace (1993: 195) concluded that in that particular community, television viewing would actually have increased "one's social contact with family, neighbors, friends, and even strangers."

What a difference a decade makes! The time I spent in Pirabas leads me to conclude quite the opposite: A virtual saturation in the ownership of TV sets has altered visitation patterns in detriment to what Pace called a more active social life. The few Pirabas families

who do not own a single television set (for religious reasons or otherwise), might still rely on family and friends to keep up with the news and the *novelas*. However, the widespread ownership of TV has produced a wave of inactivity and decreased social interaction in a community that, until very recently, had kept a more socially active routine.

In Pirabas, public television viewing is still taking place, but almost as an unintended activity. At the bus depot or in the many bars around town, men, women and children still pay some attention to the ever-present TV sets. But as noted before, those sets' presence (and the content of the programming they show) is always subdued by the hubbub of loud music, animated conversation and card-playing that is also going on. Never in the foreground, public television sets have come to take the background space reserved to them in similar contexts elsewhere (American sports bars come to mind as a good example of that).

With its invitingly open doors and windows, Dona Maraci's bar and restaurant would constitute a perfect space for public television viewing for "TVless" neighbors and friends. That is not the case, however. Except for a few hotel guests and bar patrons, there are no strangers watching the constantly turned on tube.

A remarkable exception took place on election's day: I went to watch *Jornal Nacional* at a seashore *barraquinha*, and was impressed with the way people were concentrated at watching the news as the elections' results were being announced (bear in mind these were local elections around the country; Pirabas' results were not announced on TV, since the town has no local stations, or even regional political influence).

Similar breaks on group members' apathy to public TV sets happened still a couple of times, when some particularly exciting scenes

took place in the *novelas*. I noticed that one night at Dona Maraci's, when a party brawl erupted in the seven o'clock soap opera and all restaurant patrons (as well as waitresses and even the cook) came in from the kitchen or the outside patio to watch what was going on. Once the scene was over, everybody went back to doing whatever they were doing before the loud music and the fight called their attention.

The increase in visitation patterns notwithstanding, Pace (1993: 196) observed in Gurupá a general "displacement of public activities", brought about by television viewing. The nightly promenade around the riverfront area, he wrote, where young and old local residents would come to escape from the indoors heat and boredom, was "significantly curtailed" by routine TV viewing. That observation still seems to hold true for Pirabas, where, as noted earlier, the older population is replacing their nightly stroll at the *praça* for the comfort of indoors entertainment.

Other activities, such as *festas* and religious or social meetings, are also taking a heavy toll. I was told by a Catholic person in Belém that the Brazilian Catholic Church is "very much worried" about the low attendance of its evening services, such as masses, meetings, and rosary praying circles. "It used to be," this person told me, "that in the weeks before the *Círio de Nazaré* people would organize and attend all kinds of religious activities in their neighborhoods. Now, nobody wants to leave their homes, anymore." The same person told me she believes the Evangelical Church discourages its members from watching TV, so that they will keep attending their church's evening services.

The Concept of Privacy

In Pirabas, long-held notions regarding public and private spaces are also being altered by the replacement of an "old" way of living for a "modern" one. Traditionally, *Pirabenses* have lived their lives in an

open, public, fashion. When I first arrived in town, there were no domestic, private phone lines. Although some people had already purchased their lines from the state phone company for several months, they had not yet been installed. (The lines were finally connected the week before I left, in the end of November).

The whole town was served only by two lines, both connected to the local *posto telefônico* ("telephonic office"). Making a phone call was a complicated procedure that involved going to the *posto telefônico*, asking the operator to make the desired long-distance call, and waiting in line for as long as it took to have it made. After the operator made the call, she would tell you to pick up the receiver in one of the two booths available. The very awkward process culminated with you having to conduct your conversation in a very public way, since the booths had no doors and no privacy whatsoever.

At any given time, there were always several people waiting to be served at the *posto*. On some occasions, I had to wait for as long as 30 minutes before my number was up. Waiting in line soon became a fascinating experience, thanks to the lack of privacy involved in the whole process. Everybody listened to everybody else's conversations, learning all they ever wanted to learn about their neighbors' family problems, illnesses, business deals, etc. At some point, I actually caught myself being interested in the way those problems and deals would resolve themselves.

After seeing a fisherman come back to the shore late one afternoon with 500 quilos of *cavala* in his boat, I met him again at the *posto telefônico* that same evening: He was calling up different dealers, trying to sell his fresh catch. He had assigned his young son to make the transaction, and the boy was negotiating the deal, trying to raise the price of the sale to a desirable level. He was not getting the response he wanted, and finally hung up, promising to call back the

dealer in a few hours. I left the *posto* very curious, and never found out how that story ended.

Talking about personal problems in front of complete strangers, like it happens at the *posto telefônico*, might be dictated by a contingency such as the non-existence of domestic phone lines, but it is not regarded as a problem or an extraordinary event by most local people.

The day I first met José, the fisherman who was one of my informants, he immediately invited me to come to his house and meet his wife. Once we got there, she invited me in and asked me to stay for dinner: "*Entre e não faça cerimônia,*" José told me ("Come in and be very comfortable"). The expression *sem-cerimônia* (literally, "with no ceremonies," or "informally") perfectly defines the relaxed atmosphere that surrounds social relationships in Pirabas. A relationship *sem-cerimônias* is an open, informal, comfortable and trustful relationship.

When I reciprocated the favor, and invited José to my house, he also felt very comfortable: Comfortable enough to share my food and ask me personal, *sem-cerimônia* questions. He asked me about my life in America – where I lived, what I ate, if I liked to live in Oregon, if I had any children.

In the bus between Pirabas and Salinas, total strangers would sit by my side and start talking about their problems. They would talk to me about their sickly kids, or even about marital problems. They also expected me to open up, and tell them exactly who I was and what I was doing there. I had no qualms about giving them a condensed version of my life and research interests. They seemed satisfied enough with what they heard.

In other occasions, I would see people engage in such a lively conversation that I just assumed they knew each other and had boarded

the bus together. Later on, I would realize they didn't even know each other's names, and would see them departing in opposite directions, once the bus got to its final destination.

One afternoon, when I was sitting by the sidewalk writing down some notes, three boys approached me. They asked me who I was and what I was doing. I explained them, and then asked their names. They needed very little stimulation to volunteer a lot of information about their lives, their families, school, and even their television watching habits.

Although the children's spontaneity perfectly fit the prevalent Pirabas notion of life being a public matter, it surprised me, since I had had some indication that younger and middle class local residents alike seemed to be growing more and more concerned with preserving their sense of privacy, and thus changing their way of dealing with acquaintances and outsiders.

Adamilson, the 21-year-old clerk at the fishermen's union, was friendly enough to answer my questions, but he kept a certain "reserved distance" from me, much like people in America (or even in Belém) would do. He did not ask me any questions, or did not feel particularly inclined to volunteer any personal information or opinions that were not asked from him.

Similarly, Seu Orlando and Dona Ivete, a middle class couple, treated me first as a formal guest, and later on as an "out-of-town acquaintance," visiting for a few weeks. They never invited me to share a meal, never asked me personal questions, or my opinion on different subjects. They never offered to give me a tour of the house, or volunteered any information about the adult daughter living with them. They also maintained a "respectful reservation" towards me and towards our acquaintanceship.

In Pirabas, young people, as well as middle class families, seemed to be more attuned to a "new" notion of privacy and respect for individual space, that might be starting to replace a more naive and less self-conscious attitude still prevalent among older and/or underprivileged *caboclos*. When the domestic phone lines were finally connected, the Pereiras, one of the first families to purchase a private line, told me they were very happy to finally be able to talk on the phone with privacy: "I hated having to go to the *posto* to make a call, and having everybody else listening in on my conversation," Dona Ivete told me.

Television as a Status Granting Symbol

Yadava and Reddi (1988: 125) observed that the physical place occupied by television sets in Indian homes "tells a story of its own." Class differences notwithstanding, they wrote, television sets would tend to occupy a special place in the way the household space was organized. That was also the case with Pirabas' households.

In most Pirabas homes with television, the set is strategically placed in the living (or family) room. More often than not, that is the first room in the house: The one that faces the outside world. The set is very frequently placed on one of the highest shelves of a bookcase that faces the "street window." The strategic placement of the set, as I found out, seems to fulfill three functions – a practical one: If the TV is high enough, all family members can see it; a social one: Neighbors and friends who come by to watch TV don't feel obligated to "invade" the set owner's space, since they can see watch it from the street; and a status-granting one: The family's "place" in the community is enhanced by the fact that they own a television set.

Lately, the same seems to be true for satellite dishes. Pirabas' families who owned a satellite dish were considered "a step above" in the community's socio-economic ladder from the ones who didn't.

Pace (1993) noted a similar pattern in the Amazon town of Gurupá:

> Nearly all of the families possessing television sets open their houses for others to view broadcasts. Most of the sets are positioned on tables or wall shelves in the front rooms facing a window opening onto the street. This space is typically reserved for any status item that might be publicly displayed, such as religious icons, porcelain figures, books, or radios. (Pace 1993: 193).

In the previous paragraph, Pace could have almost been describing the Pereiras' and other homes I visited in Pirabas. Television sets not only are a very prominent item in the household: They also become an integral part of the living room's "decor." At the Pereiras,' for example, the TV set was in the living room, adjacent to the entrance patio. Strategically positioned in a corner that faced the front door, the set could be seen both from the patio and from every corner of the living room. If open, the room's windows would also allow the TV set to be seen from the street.

The living room was arranged for the purpose of television watching: The set was placed in a strategic corner, and the furniture – two armchairs, a couch, two chairs, a bookcase, two coffee tables – was arranged so that it would provide comfortable sitting and undisturbed viewing spots for the whole family (and eventual guests). In lieu of books, the bookcase displayed family photographs, porcelain figurines, shells, and flower pots. The Pereiras' living room TV sat on top of its own table, which looked much like an ordinary coffee table. They decorated the set with a large shell, that matched the other ones resting on the bookshelves.

A large television set was also displayed prominently at Dona Maraci's restaurant. The TV sits on its own "niche:" A large shelf built

up high into the wall behind the bar's counter. Sided by liquor bottles and a giant poster of the late Brazilian Formula One car racer Airton Senna, the television set was guaranteed to draw immediate attention from the bar customers and people passing by the restaurant's doors.

Distrust in Politics, Politicians and Authority in General

We discussed earlier in chapter V that conformity, hopelessness, and a submissive attitude towards authority were some of the main traits of the traditional *caboclo* culture. Several scholars have noted that the powerful grip of the Brazilian elites on the underprivileged working classes has been one of the central characteristics of the Brazilian political and social systems: "In all, the tradition of an authoritarian elite in Brazil is powerful and runs counter to the democratizing tendency begun in 1891. Those in office are tempted to invoke it, a ploy known as *continuismo*" (Conniff 1989: 39).

Brazilian political history has been deeply affected by authoritarian and militaristic movements. The Brazilian Republic itself was "promulgated" by a military elite in 1889. During most of the "Old Republic" (1889-1930), Brazil was governed by marshals, generals, and their *protégés*. A "New Republic" was established in 1930 through a popular insurgence led by young Army officers. The promise of a democratic society lasted until 1937, when Congress was shut down, and political power was seized by Getúlio Vargas, one of the 1930 movement leaders.

From 1937 to 1989, political democracy was a reality in Brazil only for brief periods of time, the longest being the one between 1945 and 1964, when public officials were elected by popular vote, and the military stayed out of politics. For most of those 52 years, however, Brazil was ruled by either high-ranking officers themselves – such was the case during the 21-year military dictatorship that followed the 1964

coup d'état – or by whoever they appointed to occupy county, state, and federal public offices.

For most of this century, political power at the local and regional levels has been exercised in Brazil by influential families and/or wealthy public figures. Those local political elites have kept their grip on the underprivileged masses through paternalistic practices known as *clientelismo* and *coronelismo*.

Schneider (1996: 74) has defined *clintelismo* as the age-old practice of exchanging votes for employment and favors. That tradition, he wrote, has kept even the Brazilian middle classes under the spell of corrupt politicians. Prevalent in the Brazilian countryside, as well as in other relatively remote areas of the country, such as small urban centers in the Amazon, *coronelismo* was very well explained by Costa, Kottak & Prado (1997) in these terms:

> [T]he patron-client (*coronelismo*) system dates to colonial times and still pervades the [northeastern] region. These patron-client ties are more than economic relationships.... Traditionally, patrons, including local and regional bosses (*coronéis*, singular *coronel*) have mediated between peasants and regional powers. Those bosses have used the state apparatus to turn their will into law, to offer favors, and to maintain the loyalty of their clients. (Costa, Kottak & Prado 1997: 139).

Nowadays, local political bosses do not necessarily exert and maintain power through intimidation and physical force. Instead, they develop with their subordinates a paternalistic relationship centered on the belief that, in practical terms, the latter will benefit from the election of their benefactor as much as he (or she) will himself (or herself).

Thus, in a small town such as Pirabas, for example, political candidates not only exchange votes for favors, they also "sell" themselves as people's friends and saviors, adopting slogans such as

Pai dos Pobres ("Father of the Poor"), or *Mãe dos Necessitados* ("Mother of the Needy"). In a clear example of Da Matta's "relational systems," Brazilian politicians also try to develop personal, close relationships with their potential electors.

When Dona Maraci was a candidate to a county seat in the Pirabas local elections, her commercial establishment was always teeming with people who came to ask for favors that went from food or money, to a personal note that would help them have a document fee waived at the local notary public. As Dona Maraci handed a bag of beans or manioc flour, or a personal letter to the N.P., she would also give them flyers and other campaign materials, and "remind" them she was a candidate. She would invite her potential voters to sit down and stay for a while, and ask them many personal questions, such as where they came from, how many kids they had, if they had any friends in common, etc. To reinforce the image of a personable and informal political figure, Maraci turned her nickname "Dona Mará" (the way her family and friends referred to her), into her "official" political name.

In small towns, local candidates are still surrounded by an aura of respect and political clout. On elections day, I saw a candidate in Pirabas talking to a group of three men. He was saying: "I need *your* help. With faith in God and your vote, *eu chego lá* ('I'll make it'). *Eu vou lutar por vocês* ('I'll fight for you')." For me, his speech sounded like an empty, fake campaign promise. The men listening to him, however, looked respectful, probably impressed with the fact that a candidate would actually take his time to talk to them.

However, during my visit to Brazil, I noticed that the level of political skepticism and distrust towards authority figures in general was soaring to an all-time high. People I talked to were very cynical about politics, society, and life in general. The 1992 national political scandal, which culminated with the ousting of an elected president

(Fernando Collor) and detonated several other "minor" scandal probes, seemed to have great repercussion in the way the "common" Brazilian citizen relates to politics and public figures.

For most of the Brazilian underclasses, the "Fernando Collor episode," whose television coverage monopolized the news and tantalized audiences for months, was a rude awakening to the reality of political games. Much like the Watergate scandal in America, it also marked the end of an era of credibility and blind trust in political figures.

Although the current president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, is well regarded by most Brazilian people (and seems poised to win his re-election bid), a large majority of the population seems disillusioned with politics in general, and with the idea that public officials have the power (or the will) to change the status quo.

That disillusionment is palpable even in towns such as Pirabas, where *caboclos* would be traditionally inclined to place their fate in the hands of their *coronéis* and *compadres*, and believe that their long-time problems could be solved by incoming public officials. Most people I talked to regarded President Fernando Henrique as a well-intentioned man who is doing whatever he can to improve the country's economic situation. The problem, they would add, is that "he is surrounded by professional politicians and by people who don't let him do anything for the poor."

Television seemed to play an important role in the political "transformation" described here. For Pirabas residents, television news is the main (and many times only) source of information on national and international events. For people such as Seu Orlando, Dona Ivete, Adamilson, and Daniel, it provides the only systematic channel between Pirabas and the outside world.

I was impressed by the level of sophistication those people showed when discussing the political and economic situation in Brazil. Seu Raimundo, for example, knew exactly when each one of the recent "economic plans" had been put into effect to try to save the Brazilian economy. He had strong opinions about those plans, and about the current economic situation. He thought that President Fernando Henrique's "Real" plan gave more purchasing power to the poor, but criticized it for "raising all the prices, all at once."

As we were watching one of the smaller networks broadcast political advertising from São Paulo, Seu Orlando ranted and raved about politics and politicians in general. In his jaded, skeptical opinion, politicians are all the same:

> *Orlando*: They promise too much during the political campaign, and then forget everything they promised. It has been like that for as far back as I can remember.

While watching the political propaganda, he made fun of the obviously tacky, "feel-good" commercials, and seemed to get more interested when candidates started attacking their opponents.

A particular candidate's advertisement blamed the incumbent administration for a bad public health care system. They showed crowded emergency rooms, and interviewed people who had supposedly lost relatives to what they argued to be medical malpractice in public clinics. Seu Orlando sympathized with the victims' families, and said he believed what they were saying, because "it is the same thing here in Pirabas."

When discussing local politics with me, Seu Orlando went on in a long tirade about the outgoing mayor. He blamed him for most of the local problems, and for what he characterized as the state of "complete abandonment" endured by the city. At that point, Dona Ivete joined in the conversation:

> *Ivete*: Everybody wants to get elected. The problem is that the city depends on, and expects too much from, the politicians. How can illiterate people, who haven't even completed grade school, be good council members? They don't know anything.

The distrust towards politics and politicians spills over into other areas of society, including the media. When I was watching the news (*Jornal Nacional*) at Dona Maraci's restaurant, a salesman who was also there told me he didn't believe anything Rede Globo said: "Globo always supports the government," he said. I gave him a knowing smile, and he went on:

> *Wilson*: It's true! In the time of the military, Globo supported them. They didn't want Silvio Santos [a competing media tycoon] to get a network channel, and he couldn't get one for a long time. Then they supported Collor, and now they support Fernando Henrique.
>
> *Raul*: What about the other networks? Do you think they all act the same way?
>
> *W*: They do the same, but they are less open about it, and they don't support the government as strongly as Globo does.

Even during the military regime, Globo's allegiance to the generals was tacitly acknowledged by intellectuals and the middle class. But not until my last visit had I observed that support being scrutinized by a working-class Brazilian. In more general terms, however, class consciousness among the Brazilian underprivileged has been noted by other social scientists. When he analyzed the nonconformist aspect of poor Brazilian northeastern peasants, De Certeau (1984: 16) observed that their socio-economic space was organized around the idea of "an immemorial struggle between 'the powerful' and 'the poor'".

In many ways, that general distrust in politics, authority figures, and now even towards the media, was responsible for the Socialist

Party's candidate winning last year's local elections in Pirabas. There were four candidates running for mayor: One from a conservative, right-wing party; two from center-left, traditional coalitions; and Edivaldo, the victorious candidate, supported by a coalition between the socialist and the labor parties. A young agronomist, Edivaldo presented himself as the "new blood": The successful local boy who had no ties to traditional political groups.

Most people I knew in Pirabas, including Seu Raimundo, Daniel, and Seu Orlando, told me they voted for Edivaldo. Seu Orlando was happy with the elections' results:

> *Orlando*: He had to win. We can only hope that he will change something here. There are just two ways to go: Either the city will get better, or it will get worse. Let's hope it will improve.

Dona Maraci, on the other hand, was hurt by her association to one of the more traditional local political groups: Her party was also the incumbent mayor's party. He failed to make his successor, and she failed to nab one of the council seats. Understandably, she was very disappointed with the elections' results. She had told me before the elections that if she didn't win, she was going to get out of town:

> *Maraci*: If I don't get elected, I'm on the road. I'm leaving Pirabas for good. I've never had a day of leisure in my life. Everybody just wants to ask something from me, but they never give me anything in return.

CONCLUSION

This research work had as its main focus the study of cultural changes that might be attributed to the pervasive presence of television in rural Brazil. My view of cultural production is one that takes into account that the making and consuming of cultural artifacts is deeply affected by political, social and economic inequalities. Moreover,

culture is seen here as a "multi-layered" discourse where multiple, and often conflicting concepts, beliefs, values, and interpretations might reside.

Throughout this manuscript, I have dealt with some theoretical concepts, particularly Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* and Michel Foucault's idea of generalization, that guided my research work in São João de Pirabas. *Différance* in language has come to represent the idea that signifier and signified (the *thing* and its *name*) cannot be separated. I discussed in Chapter II some of the consequences of Derrida's simple but revolutionary concept, especially the opening of language to the influence of social and historical conditions, and the crumbling of barriers separating idea and representation. In this research work, I re-interpreted Derrida's *différance* and expanded the concept into the realm of cultural production. It is my belief that, at any given time and place, the different processes that affect cultural production and interpretation are enormously influenced by the prevailing social and historical conditions.

Moreover, it is also my belief that, at any particular time and place, different, contradictory and, often times conflicting cultural representations co-exist. Derrida's *différance* predicts the end of all hierarchies ranking those diverse and simultaneous interpretations.

Derrida's *différance* was used to guide my interpretation of cultural production and the negotiation of cultural and social meanings in São João de Pirabas. For example, during one of my visits to the Pereiras' residence, we were watching "O Rei do Gado," Rede Globo's prime time soap opera, where one of the sub-plots involved a middle aged married woman, who left her husband and two grown children to live with her (younger) lover.

Seu Orlando's and Dona Ivete's interpretations of the same event could not have been more different. While Seu Orlando assumed a more traditional view of marriage and infidelity, blaming the wife for breaking up the family, Dona Ivete supported the wife's decision, pointing out that maybe the husband was to blame, since before the break up he mostly ignored the wife, and did not appreciate the effort she had put into raising the children and keeping the family together. Before we explain how that example ties into Derrida's *différance*, let us look at three Foucaultian concepts, and try to inform our discussion of them all by re-examining the "divorcée" example.

At least three different concepts extracted from Michel Foucault's *œuvre* have been employed throughout this research. The first is the idea of generalization, the process through which minoritarian views and constructs become widely accepted and incorporated into society's norm. This concept guided my interpretation of the similar process of constructing "general views" about society and culture through television. In the context of São João de Pirabas, that "generalization" process was apparent in the way that the until-recently extraneous concept of individual privacy, for example, has come to be accepted by a whole generation of *caboclos* as a favorable and desirable trait.

The second and third Foucaultian concepts – the idea that power structures are spread throughout the fabric of society, and that traditionally oppressed groups have found ways of resisting oppression through cultural production – are somewhat interconnected.

Since the formation of the modern nation-states, "macro" centers of power have been automatically associated with the political and economic processes that dictate societal life. Foucault's concept of "micro" centers of power brings to light the fact that our daily, mundane relationships are also dictated by power inequalities derived from factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and

educational status (knowledge). Thus, even in a community such as São João de Pirabas, where a widespread lack of resources could potentially "smooth out" social and economic inequities, power and oppression structures might assume the form of gender and/or educational status discrimination. My analysis of cultural production and consumption was informed by those "micro-level" power structures.

Related to that general concept is Foucault's idea that traditionally oppressed or disinfranchised groups have found in cultural production avenues for resisting society's pull for assimilation and "mainstreaming." As I discussed in the previous chapter, in the case of São João de Pirabas, perhaps it is still premature to talk about assimilation and dramatic changes in the patterns of local cultural production due to the relatively recent introduction of television.

Let us now go back to the Pereiras' interpretation of the "divorcée episode." Dona Ivete's position – no doubt a dissenting view in the context of the Brazilian "norm" – might also be seen as representing a break in the traditional interpretation of the housewife role. Arguably, most Brazilians would still condemn a middle aged married woman who eloped with her younger lover; but it was the most popular television show in the country that brought up the controversy, and consequently the spark that lit Dona Ivete's and many others' dissenting view.

Différance in culture allowed me to perceive those "unranked" divergent interpretations; it also allowed me to see them through the lenses of the contemporary, ever-changing Brazilian social mores. Foucault's concepts, on the other hand, illuminated my perception of the "genderized" construction of those interpretations, all the while pointing towards the process through which minoritarian views become apparent, and also towards the use of mainstream media for building cultural resistance and dissent.

From a theoretical standpoint, the use of Foucaultian and Derridean concepts to analyze cultural and social interpretations stemming from television viewing might be considered the most important contribution of this research work. Informed by those theoretical concepts, the research questions asked here revolved around identifying, describing and analyzing what some of the prevalent cultural interpretations might be for the residents of São João de Pirabas.

The changes discussed in the previous chapter included new conceptualizations of space and time; the modification of work patterns; a new wave of consumerism; a general shift in expectations towards life and towards the community; an increased distrust of authority and politics; and the displacement of private and public activities.

It is unclear what kind of impact those perceived changes might have on that and on other traditional Brazilian communities. Communication scholar Martín-Barbero (1988), for one, believes that a process of "cultural homogenization," accelerated by a mass media invasion, is robbing Latin American countries of a cultural pluralism that, until recently, had been an inherent component of those societies.

Brazilian television analysts such as Hoineff (1996), Sodré (1977), and Straubhaar (1989) similarly worry that those hegemonic views might have "straight-jacketed" the Brazilian society and hidden social, political and economic differences.

On the other hand, Hoineff (1996) has opined that the recent diversification of the Brazilian broadcasting and cable systems might have a significant positive impact on the general public, by eroding traditional communication monopolies and exposing a large audience to more diverse and progressive perspectives.

Similarly, Martín-Barbero himself (1988: 453) has observed that a "new appraisal of the cultural is emerging in Latin America". He sees this "radically different" assessment as one that opens *the cultural* to new dimensions of social conflict, as well as new forms of rebellion and resistance based on ethnic, regional, religious, sexual and generational differences.

This more "positive" appraisal of cultural change was also recently reported by Murphy in his study of television and popular culture in Central Mexico (1996). Putting a somewhat paradoxical "twist" in the widespread view of traditional communities as victim and prey to cultural hegemony, Murphy observed in his research that access to television had made "[e]xisting political problems and social inequities... more visible, facilitating a plurality of perspectives, fostering political dissent and opening up channels of cultural improvisation" (Central Mexico 1996: 221).

It is my understanding that a similar situation might be occurring in places such as São João de Pirabas. During my stay in Pirabas, local residents elected a first-ever Socialist mayor. The new mayor – a local man in his late-thirties, who went to Castanhal's vocational high school, 100 miles away – competed against representatives from the regional political oligarchies. Two of my informants told me they voted for the young candidate because he represented "change."

It is hard for me to imagine a similar situation – local political oligarchies being challenged and defeated by leftist newcomers – happening in small Amazon communities ten or fifteen years ago. Television did not do it; but it is arguable that the access to news and information, and the consequent build up of "filtering," critical mechanisms, played a major role in the way that particular political process occurred.

One of the limitations of this research is the fact that there was not a similar study of social and cultural interpretations done before the introduction of television. Growing up in the Amazon region – and being a *caboclo* myself – I had the opportunity of experiencing first hand the caboclos' cultural traditions and way-of-life. I tried to compensate the lack of previous studies by talking to my co-participants about their lives "before TV," and by partly relying on my own memory and interpretation.

However, the fact that I was, for all purposes and considerations, "an outsider looking in" might be considered another limitation of this study. (A limitation inherent to most ethnographic studies).

This research work stopped short of delving into the epistemological considerations which could be associated with social construction of reality – how do São João de Pirabas residents "know what they know" was a question never asked here. Further studies in the same or in similar communities might start out by asking that very question. Arguably, an epistemological interpretation could provide interesting insight into the processes associated with social and cultural construction of reality.

Moreover, additional studies could focus on cultural production itself – oral traditions, religious rituals, music, story-telling – and discuss how those particular cultural manifestations have been affected by the introduction of television. It could also be interesting to analyze how particular genres of narrative (soap operas, e.g.) have impacted traditional story-telling.

Throughout this research project, I have spoken out against bipolar views of cultural production and interpretation which divide the social terrain between heroes and villains. I have consistently opposed simplistic interpretations which present traditional cultures as easy prey to television and its influence.

I want to conclude this manuscript in that same note: While I refuse to assume the developmental view predominant in the 1970s, when mainstream communication researchers believed developing countries would be "saved" by technology infusion, I must recognize that the introduction of television in remote communities such as São João de Pirabas is an irreversible process which might bring advantageous, as well as adverse, consequences. There are no simple, "black-and-white" answers to this complex cultural phenomenon. It demands from us an open mind and analy tical tools which are suited for the equally complex task of examining the problem from different angles and perspectives. I truly hope this research work is one more step in that direction.

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