Creating the Social-Critical Telenovela in Brazil:
How Television Drama by Left-Wing Writers Came to Dominate the National Agenda under Military Dictatorship in Brazil.¹

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Resumo
This paper examines what seems to be a contradiction in an important episode in the history of global television studies. Brazilian television and its primary prime time genre, telenovelas, have been a notable case in global media theorization, since it was pointed out that they were one of the first media or cultural industries in the developing world to extensively replace imported U.S. programs in the 1960s and go on to be a major culture export in the 1970s-80s. As the telenovela took quite different forms across Latin America, starting from their origin point in 1950s Cuba, the Brazilian version took an early turn toward incorporating much more social and political commentary within the family stories and romance of the melodrama. However, much less discussed is the curious fact that they took this politicized direction precisely at the most severe period of political repression and media censorship (1968-75) under the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985).

Palavras-chave: Telenovelas, military government, TV Globo, scriptwriters

Introduction
This paper examines what seems to be a contradiction in an important episode in the history of global television studies. Brazilian television and its primary prime time genre, telenovelas, have been a notable case in global media theorization, since it was pointed out that they were one of the first media or cultural industries in the developing world to extensively replace imported U.S. programs in the 1960s (Straubhaar 1984) and go on to be a major culture export in the 1970s-80s (Marques de Melo 1988, Straubhaar 1991). As the telenovela took quite different forms across Latin America, starting from their origin point in 1950s Cuba (Rivero 2009), the Brazilian version took an early turn toward incorporating much more social and political commentary within the family stories and romance of the melodrama (Hernandez 2001). However, much less discussed is the curious fact that they took this politicized direction precisely at the most severe period of political repression and media censorship (1968-75) under the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985).

This early history of the social-critical telenovelas in Brazil is still very important, for several reasons. First, as noted above, unlike the telenovelas in most countries, the Brazilian telenovelas became very socially engaged, from 1968 on, so it is important to understand how they came to have that form and function. Second, unlike the telenovelas in

¹ Trabalho apresentado no VI Colóquio Brasil-Estados Unidos de Ciências da Comunicação, evento componente do XXXVII Congresso Brasileiro de Ciências da Comunicação.
most countries, the Brazilian telenovelas became a clearly writerly medium, very driven by the major authors. Third, many of those authors came from leftist, even specifically communist backgrounds. For example, Dias Gomes, was the first major writer in this line at TV Globo, starting in 1970 (Gomes 1998). He later became the lead or supervising writer of telenovela production. Fourth, these telenovelas were a key part of the emergence one of the first developing world media powers, TV Globo.

Fifth, these telenovelas had a huge impact on Brazilian national identity (Porto 2011), as well as a notable impact elsewhere. There was a very substantial export of these telenovelas to Latin American regional and Lusophone transnational markets, starting in the mid-1970s, with notable impacts on those cultures, especially the Lusophone ones (Cunha 2011). There was also a very substantial export of these telenovelas to global export markets, especially starting in 1990s.

The early history of these telenovelas reveals a complex interplay of the power of the overall political-economic structures of Brazil, the increasingly powerful structure of TV Globo as a media industry, and the agency of the writers, producers and managers who actually produced them. From several memoirs (OLIVEIRA SOBRINHO 2011, Wallach 2011) and indepth interviews (Wallach 2008) that have emerged over the last few years, it has become increasingly clear that complex negotiations over the political or critical nature of telenovela content took place within the production structure of TV Globo (Wallach 2008). This is an opportune moment to examine what those negotiations tell us about the development of TV Globo’s powerful production structures and what relative agency writers, producers and managers had to pursue their interests and projects within TV Globo.

These same processes reveal an interesting balance of military power, the interests and demands of the emerging commercial economic structure of Brazil, the role of entrepreneurship and management at media industries like TV Globo, and the cultural agency of the producers. Those included telenovela writers, such as Dias Gomes (1998), who began to have something like the power of show-runners in the current U.S. television system. It also included their producers, like José Bonifácio de Oliveira (2011), who had goals of their own in terms of production quality and commercial appeal. Those producers were often the crucial go-betweens between the authors and the managers. The managers, such as Joe Wallach (2011), and the owner of TV Globo, Roberto Marinho, were concerned about political implications since they were usually the go-betweens with outside political and military powers (Wallach 2008). They were also concerned with the productions’ commercial appeal and their success with the audience. In fact, I will argue that the
managers concerns with audiences and commercial success led them to give more power to the writers over time. Finally, the audience for their telenovelas began to exercise a form of collective agency as their positive response to the new style of telenovelas created a powerful argument for them within TV Globo’s power structure.²

There was a subtle relationship between Brazilian artistic circles, particularly in theater, film, radio and television; an increasing economic growth and increase in the size and purchasing power of a rapidly expanding middle class; military and political power; and mass media development, particularly in the commercial television industry.

This development of the social-critical telenovela was an important development in the form and production of global television texts, related to the agency of writers and the production process at TV Globo. This represented a distinct localization, glocalization and hybridization of the telenovela genre, which has turned out to be one of the more significant global genres, particularly among those developed outside the U.S. or Europe. This genre development was related to, but also greatly accelerated the rapidly increasing commercial media power of TV Globo, beginning in 1968 and growing rapidly throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

We will argue that by the 1960s-70s, the need to employ television, particularly the increasingly successful TV Globo, in the process of building up a consumer economy through advertising, product placement, and less tangible promotion of a consumer lifestyle, led the military to make some compromises with TV Globo’s management that ultimately created a space for critical commentary within the telenovela. The overall outcome was complex. We will also argue that the leftist authors who wrote these telenovelas succeeded in creating a space for critical discussion, a cultural forum (Newcomb and Hirsch 1983) that probably helped democratic development in Brazil. In fact, one of Dias Gomes’ telenovelas, Roque Santeiro (1985-86) has been seen as a crucial cultural forum in which the Brazilian transition from military to civilian rule was discussed in through the allegory or dramatic microcosm of a small Brazilian town with an authoritarian political boss crossed by a crusading reformer (Cardoso de Paiva, Johnson 1988, Straubhaar 1988). However, it can also be argued these same writers and their telenovelas also gradually sold the public on the consumer society that the military wanted, helping consolidate consumer capitalism in Brazil (Oliveira 1993). This addresses a key

² Ratings from IBOPE (Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Publica e Estatística), the main television ratings company of Brazil show a rapidly rising popularity of more socially engaged telenovelas, starting with TV Tupi’s Beto Rockefeller (1968) but continuing with the new social style of telenovelas developed by Dias Gomes and others after 1970.
question: How much did 1964-84 military regimes want complete national coverage, promotion of consumer society and nationalized culture via cultural industry? Was that more important than strict ideological control through the censorship mechanisms that they had built up since 1968?

**Brazil as an emergent media power and national policy**

An important element to begin to understand these developments in the social-critical telenovela comes from the history of how Brazilian governments have historically used a variety of media elements strategically to unify the Brazilian nation, create a strongly imagined national community, and by the 1960s, promote a consumer economy (Salles 1975). The Brazilian government had developed a policy of delegating quite a bit of responsibility for both guiding national identity (Anderson 1983) and promoting economic development to private media (Camargo and Pinto 1975). This was a fairly common pattern in Latin America, particularly notable in Brazil and Mexico (Sinclair and Straubhaar 2013).

At first, this follows the theoretical lines laid down by Anderson’s approach to the development of the national imagined community (Anderson 1983). In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Brazilian government stressed language unification, pushing indigenous peoples, African slaves, and European immigrants to use Portuguese, rather than their natives languages, particularly in education. This was reinforced by what Anderson called print capitalism, which began to create local and regional newspapers, a national book industry, and by the mid-1900s, national magazines, such as *O Cruzeiro* (1928-1975). By the 1930s, the populist Vargas government used radio, samba music, and soccer as key national symbols of unification and as propaganda to help mobilize support for his government (McCann 2004). By the 1960s, the government, particularly the post-1964 military governments emphasized TV, telecommunications, and telephone infrastructure as unifying elements, particularly television. Several of those 20th century print capitalists, who created local newspapers and magazines, notably Assis Chateaubriand (Morais and de Almeida 1994) and Roberto Marinho (Hertz 1987, Bial 2005), subsequently became the television capitalists who developed the Brazilian version of the telenovela.

Some of the context of these Brazilian television capitalists comes from Iberian or Mediterranean traditions, some from business developments across Latin America, some from developing Brazilian practices of media industry, and quite a bit from their relationships with government (Sinclair and Straubhaar 2013). Put another way, another crucial part of the context of Brazilian television as a cultural industry is its domestic and
international political-economic history (Brittos and Bolaño 2005). In the southern European practice of corporatism, governments delegate crucial functions related to the state, including news, propaganda, image creation and advertising, to trusted private partners (Malloy 1976, Wiarda 1978). This helps explain the fairly direct partnerships between ruling parties and television networks that developed in Mexico between the PRI and Televisa (Sinclair and Straubhaar 2013), and in Brazil between the military and TV Globo ((Brittos and Bolaño 2005).

Similarly, this tendency for the state to embrace and use powerful media industry partners also has to do with populism, a style of rule related to Southern Europe, but also highly developed across Latin America since the initial media-aided populist regimes of Vargas and Peron in the 1930s (Sinclair and Straubhaar 2013). This form of media use by political power came back powerfully in the 2000s with Chavez and others (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). Another related media-state relationship is clientelism, in which the state gives out crucial favors, like broadcast frequency licenses, state advertising, equipment important licenses, credit for set purchases, access to telecom or other necessary infrastructure, or regulatory favors, as when the Brazilian military ignored the fact that a joint venture by TV Globo with Time-Life, Inc. violated the Brazilian constitution (Straubhaar 1981, Sinclair and Straubhaar 2013). The state can also sanction competitors, as when the Brazilian military government forced the closure of one of TV Globo’s main potential rivals, TV Excelsior, in large part because it considered its owner an enemy to their rule (Costa 1986).

For many scholars, a particularly crucial part of the history of Brazilian television is its relationship to the emerging global political-economy of media (Hertz 1987, Brittos and Bolaño 2005). Brazil, particularly TV Globo, was also a crucial test case of the various possible impacts of outside investors and partners, like Time-Life, Inc. We will examine the role of Time-Life in some detail below, because it had a strong impact in several ways: through foreign finance or investment, in the use of technology, and in the thorough revolution of television network management. Part of that analysis will come from the critical literature of Brazilian political economy and television history, part of it will come of from published memoirs by several TV Globo managers, and some will come from interviews done with former Tupi employees, Time-Life executives, and TV Globo managers by Straubhaar, at several points from 1979 to 2008.
The Context of TV Globo’s Predecessors and Competitors

Television in Brazil was started by TV Tupi (1950-1981). Its flamboyant founder was Assis Chateaubriand. He was the foremost media magnate in Brazil before Roberto Marinho. Chateaubriand was the head of the Diários e Emissoras Associadas radio and newspaper group. He started TV Tupi in 1950, against the advice of advisors who thought it was premature and not yet economically viable (Straubhaar 1981). TV Tupi inherited a number of problems from its parent organization. It had a fatally decentralized organization. It was composed of 22 co-equal regional newspaper, radio and/or television groups, who cooperated sometimes, but not enough to put together a national network with simulcast programming or advertising. From the top, under Chateaubriand, it had an inconsistent focus on whether to make money from advertising or playing politics at both national and regional levels, taking money to publicize one politician and taking money to hide foibles of another (see R. Valentini and other interviews cited in Straubhaar 1981). Joe Wallach, a former Time-Life executive in Brazil, who later joined TV Globo, noted in an interview with Straubhaar in 2008, that he and other early TV Globo managers feared TV Tupi: “they could have eaten us up,” but Tupi was “worst run television in the world.”

While TV Tupi was terribly run in economic terms, its creative staff created quite a bit of good programming, including the first Brazilian telenovelas. It was a particularly important training ground for actors, writers, producers, etc. (Alves 2008). In particular, TV Tupi created the first truly direct predecessor of the more socially observant telenovelas that TV Globo would build on, the then revolutionary Beto Rockefeller (1968-69). It was considered a major breakthrough because it focused in a more realistic way on character types, themes, and social issues visible in Brazilian life, or at least famous from popular culture (Straubhaar 1982, Mattelart and Mattelart 1990, LOPES 2003). So one role of TV Globo’s competitors was as sources of ideas and people, both indirectly by creating visible precedents, like Beto Rockefeller, and directly by feeding people into TV Globo production operation when it began to hire talent away.

Another crucial source of genre development, ideas and people came from TV Excelsior (1959-1970). It had the first modern administration of a television network in Brazil (Costa 1986). It was trying to arrange simulcasting and coordinated advertising sales at least between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Brittos 1999, de Moya 2004). It had instituted the programming practice of predictable daily telenovelas and had contributed various ideas toward innovation in the genre (Simões, da Costa et al. 1986). To the regret of many historians of Brazilian television, who saw it as perhaps the most viable competitor to
TV Globo (Brittos 1999, de Moya 2004), it declined and ultimately went under after 1964 after the military went after the finances of its ownership group, which were said to be corrupt (Interview with de Moya, cited in Straubhaar 1981)

Another interesting competitor was TV Rio (1955-1977). It specialized primarily in comedy, where it produced several standout comedians, like Chico Anisio, who later worked on TV Globo, and in music programming, where it provided a launching pad to a number of musicians and groups, which would become prominent in Brazilian popular music (Bucci 1996). It also developed further the form of the live variety show, which would rival telenovelas for top popularity in prime time for much of the 1960s (Straubhaar 1983).

Another, potentially significant competitor was TV Record (1953-current). “As early as 1954, TV Record was already challenging the then-leader TV Tupi, with emphasis on areas such as journalism, sports and musicals. In a few years, TV Record went from a local, São Paulo-based independent station to a national network, with sister stations in Rio de Janeiro (TV Rio), and affiliates in other major Brazilian cities” (Reis 2006, p. 168). Like other potential networks, TV Record stalled somewhat in the late 1960s, as TV Globo began to pull away some of its ideas and talent, so it went into a long period of decline. In 1990, it underwent a major change of ownership when its stations were purchased by a large Pentecostal denomination (Reis 2006), the Universal Church of the Reign of God (Birman and Lehmann 1999).

So TV Globo built on what was in many ways a quite creative, but not very well organized television scene, particularly in its home base in Rio de Janeiro. It could and did draw managers, writers, producers, advertising representatives, etc. as well as less tangible resources, such as genre development experiences and ideas, from other Brazilian TV network competitors. It also went somewhat further afield from those already working in television per se. TV Globo also built on existing cultural resources from related areas, particularly playwrights, scriptwriters, film producers, and film directors. In a fascinating wrinkle upon the central contradiction we address in this paper, it seemed that while the military governments kept a censorship operation and blacklist that prohibited a number of talented playwrights, scriptwriters, film producers, and film directors from reaching tiny elite audiences through these elite media, the military were willing to let them work in telenovelas that would soon reach millions (Gomes 1998). Maybe they thought TV Globo would keep them under a tight leash, while using their talents to accomplish the military’s goals. As we argue below, they may have been partially right.
Localized or Glocalized? The Time-Life – TV Globo Joint Venture

TV Globo was started in 1964 by Roberto Marinho, the owner of an already significant family-based media holding company. It had the O Globo newspaper, several popular radio stations, and several relatively popular magazines. But neither Marinho nor those who already worked in his media companies had any experience with television, even though he had obtained a Rio de Janeiro TV frequency license in 1957 (Wallach 2011). As recounted by Joe Wallach, Marinho was unconfident of launching a television station with his existing people. He had met with Time-Life executives at international television conferences. Striking up a series of conversations, they discovered their mutual interest (Wallach 2008). Time-Life was looking to invest abroad, since it was limited from entering network level television in the U.S. by the lack of available VHF stations. They were particularly interested in investing in networks in Latin America, as was ABC, at about the same time (Read 1976). For his part, Marinho thought taking on a U.S. partner, especially one that offered seemingly useful resources in finance, technology, programming advice and management, was perhaps a quicker route to success than trying to find all those resources within Brazil. The result was a Time-Life joint-venture, 1964-70.

This offers a promising moment for some theoretical analysis of the structural balance of power between Time-Life and TV Globo. This is critical because most television historians, particularly those from political economy backgrounds, assume that the Time Life deal was fundamental for the success of TV Globo. Theoretically, many see it as a textbook example of cultural imperialism (Oliveira 1991). Interestingly, when Straubhaar interviewed Barry Zorthian, who had been international head of Time-Life at the time of the deal, he felt that they had been exploited by TV Globo, which had been backed up by the Brazilian government in keeping them around as long as their resources were useful, then kicking them out at just the moment when the venture was about to become profitable, leaving them to withdraw with considerable financial losses (Zorthian interview, cited in Straubhaar 1981).

To better theorize this, let us think about where power resides in these kinds of interactions. Here we look at an actor, Time-Life, from what was then thought of as the center of a world system of capitalist power (Wallerstein 1979), such as the U.S.-based Time-Life, Inc., which analyzes, particularly at that time would have been presumed to be commandingly power. TV Globo would then have been considered either an actor from the semi-periphery of the world system (Wallerstein 1979), or a highly dependent media
enterprise, operating from a country usually considered quite dependent on the U.S. in terms of technology and capital (Cardoso 1970), commercial structure (Beltran and Fox de Cardona 1980), and the unbalanced inflow or importation of television programming in specific (Nordenstreng and Varis 1974).

This kind of international media industry interaction was usually thought of in terms of an overarching holistic cultural imperialism, a somewhat similar media system dependency, or a more empirically defined media imperialism. Cultural imperialism theorists saw such interactions as a deliberate effort by the U.S. to draw developing countries more tightly into the international capitalist system, dominated by the U.S., by turning their systems into commercial media systems that would then import or produce programming that was more homogenized with or synchronized with American or European programming (Hamelink 1983), and that would make their audiences ideologically content with a tighter embrace of capitalism (Schiller 1969, Beltran and Fox de Cardona 1980). Media system dependency theorists took a less holistic view, but saw Latin American media systems as fundamentally dependent on the U.S. in their finances, their access to technology, their form of organization, their dependence on advertising, their focus on entertainment, and their cooptation of local media elites into cooperation with U.S. capitalist media (Cardoso 1973, Dagnino 1973, Salinas and Paldan 1979, Sarti 1979, Janus 1986, Oliveira 1989). Another international mode of analysis preferred to focus on more empirical indicators of unbalanced international relationships that its theorists saw as evidence of media imperialism: foreign investment that tended to pull developing country systems into a capitalist mode; an unbalanced flow of news, film and television programs; reliance on advertising, particularly foreign advertising; and an impact of these trends upon culture, making it more homogenized with the industrialized West, or global North (Boyd-Barrett 1977, Lee 1980, Fejes 1981).

Starting with the more empirical flow research and media imperialism paradigms, a number of researchers began to find evidence that flows were changing as some countries began to produce more of their own media contents, particularly in television (Lee 1980, Straubhaar 1984(Straubhaar 1982)). Audience research for several paradigms: reception (Morley 1980, Ang 1985, Liebes 1990), active audience (Liebes 1990), routines of daily life (Jacks, Silva et al. 2009), uses and gratifications (Katz, Blumler et al. 1973) began to question whether either micro level effects or macro level cultural homogenization were as automatic as earlier research focused on either structures (Schiller 1969) or the ideological content of texts (Dorfman and Mattlelart 1975).
We will consider most of these perspectives as we proceed with our analysis, but let us introduce some more recent theoretical perspectives that we particularly wish to apply and use this case study to expand upon. As researchers and theorists (Appadurai 1990, Straubhaar 1991, Tomlinson 1991, Tomlinson 1997) began to look for perspectives that took better account of audience activity, textual complexity, more complex flows, etc., much of the discussion began to center on globalization. Part of that movement saw globalization specifically as a more complex, theoretically subtle formulation to replace cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1991, 1997). A key issue for several was recognizing that different landscapes or levels of global activity had different dynamics, either quite specifically disjunct (Appadurai 1990) or interdependent but asymmetric (Straubhaar 1991); both rejecting the assumed economic basic to ideological or cultural superstructure argument of Marx, still present in most political economy works in the 1970s-80 (Schiller 1969 (Dorfman and Mattelart 1975).

As part of the continuing turn toward globalization as a macro theory, various forms and versions of the concept of hybridity emerged (Bhabha 1994, Canclini 1995, Kraidy 2005). In this paper, we would like to take two of the ideas that emerged within the context of hybridity, redefine and apply them to this case of TV Globo and the infrastructure it created to make telenovelas: localization and glocalization. Both come originally from observation and theorization of industry practice. Both have been used and defined in a variety of ways, but we would like to return to their original industry definitions, then reflect on them as ways of envisioning how the international or global hybridity of media organizations takes place between global or foreign forces, and domestic or national media industries. Both concepts can be extended somewhat further to look at the relative power of the actors in a specific process of hybridization.

**Localization and Time-Life**

Localization represents a longstanding international media industry debate and perspective. The global advertising industry has been discussing for at least 50 years whether globalized campaigns using the same texts, imagery, etc. worldwide are more effective than campaigns which were localized, i.e. adapted to local cultures (Agrawal 1995). Interestingly enough, this debate was roaring in Brazil when Straubhaar was first interviewing advertising agency people, television marketing people, marketing researchers among others as part of his initial, overall television industry research in 1978-79. The advertising firms with the most innovative images were quite convinced that in a large
nationalistic culture (and market) like Brazil, advertising has to be localized, that is to say, adapted carefully to Brazilian culture, to be effective (Roberto Dualibi, DPZ Agency, interview quoted in Straubhaar 1981).

Localization represents the point of view, the position or interests, and, as we will argue, the power of the global, international, or foreign company (or other actor, but here we concern ourselves principally with commercial companies). This global or international actor approaches another market, an essentially domestic one, with the sense that it has something to offer, to sell, to license. If we look at the global television issues of the time, the question was sometimes that of potential foreign investors, like Time-Life thinking it would be lucrative to invest in TV Globo, and assuming that they had a great deal to offer TV Globo, in terms of money, technology, programming advice, management expertise, etc.

One of the concepts applied to this from the U.S. point of view at the time was the product life cycle. A company, like Colgate-Palmolive, as party of an industry—in this case the combination of broadcasting and advertising, creates an attractive, commercially successful product, like the radio or television soap opera. Or a company, like Time-Life, creates or learns a successful business model, like commercial television station and network operation. They tended to expand to fill as much of their domestic market as possible, then expand overseas to international markets. Colgate-Palmolive did that by taking the soap opera model to Cuba, where they hired local professionals to localize the model to fit Latin American culture (Rivero 2009, Sinclair and Straubhaar 2013). Read observed in the 1970s that at least two U.S. television companies with somewhat limited prospects in the U.S. domestic market at the time, ABC and Time-Life, Inc. went looking to expand abroad as an alternative (Read 1976), assuming that what they knew could be successfully adapted or localized to new markets. However, neither ABC and Time-Life were successful in their attempts to invest in television in Latin America. Both projects failed, from the point of the view of the U.S. companies (Fox and de Cardona Fox 1997, Sinclair 1999), but as we will see Time-Life’s project in Brazil was very important in transforming TV Globo (Sousa 1998). The last phase of the product life-cycle was often that local competitors take the imported product that has been localized by the global company and learn how to create a superior version that is better adapted to the cultural and economic particularities of their local or national market (Read 1976). In fact, that superior national version may get re-exported, like the TV Globo (or Televisa) version(s) of the telenovela (Sinclair and Straubhaar 2013), or the TV Globo adaptation of Time-Life’s
business model, which was re-exported to Portugal in the formation of SIC-Portugal (Sousa 1998).

A key issue in localization is how much localization initially represents the agency from the outside actor. In this case, Time-Life wanted to invest in a firm or new venture, to sell and localize their expertise to another market. But they ended up localizing, i.e. adapting or hybridizing it to fit the demands of the local producers and audience.

**Glocalization and TV Globo**

In contrast to localization, glocalization initially represents agency or initiative taken by the domestic or national actor. As a term, glocalization is taken from a practice used by Japanese companies or government agencies of selectively borrowing or adapting foreign practices that they would find useful to incorporate in their own practices or operations (Robertson 1995). An example might be new television stations in the world that were not prepared to create most of their own programming when they started. In the 1960s-90s, they would probably have imported programming from outside the nation. Starting in the 2000s, many new stations have turned instead to imported genres, or formats, which they then glocalize or adapt to fit their own culture. Those glocalized or adapted formats, that contain successful outside ideas, but present local faces and stars, tend to more successful with audiences (Moran 1998) because they contain more local, familiar or culturally proximate elements (Straubhaar 1991).

Roberto Marinho, for example, felt unsure about starting his own television station or network without outside expertise, financing, etc. He wanted to borrow resources, money, technology, expertise, ideas, etc. from outside and glocalize it to create his own “local” product, to adapt the foreign ideas to demands of local audience, or at least that is what ended up happening.

**Impact of Time Life & Joe Wallach**

The agreement between Time-Life and Roberto Marinho to form TV Globo was signed in 1962. It went through a couple of different forms, but was essentially a joint venture, with both parties supplying different resources. It was also illegal under the Brazilian constitution (Calmon 1966, Hertz 1987). Time-Life had started sending advisors, money, and technology in 1964, with broadcasting in Rio started in 1965. There was a primary station in Rio and Globo had acquired a second station and facilities in São Paulo.
The initial Time-Life team, led by a Cuban émigré television expert, named Alberto Catá, had advised Globo to take a programming strategy heavy on the use of imported U.S. programming, with a couple of evening live shows, produced separately in Rio and São Paulo. In Rio, the station was in fourth place out of four competitors, seemingly stagnated in terms of strategy and momentum (Straubhaar 1981, Wallach 2008).

Both Time-Life and Roberto Marinho had a sense that major change was required, so Joe Wallach was sent to Brazil as the Time-Life representative in 1965. He gradually became the de facto administrative head of TV Globo by 1966, a position he essentially retained until 1980, when he retired to the U.S. (Wallach 2008). Having an American occupying that position also violated the Brazilian constitution, which prohibited foreign citizens from occupying top management positions in media (Calmon 1966), so Wallach was frequently denounced in the media, particularly those belonging to rival media groups, like the Diários Associados, and was called before several congressional investigative committees (Wallach 2008).

According to his own account, Wallach observed the operation for a few months, then began to conclude that a programming strategy based on imported U.S. programs was not going to work in Brazil. He observed what was successful at the stations with higher ratings, noting that local telenovelas, live variety, music, comedy, and news were all more popular than imported U.S. programs (Wallach 2008).

After six months in 1965, Wallach dumped a Hollywood import strategy. So he cancelled most of Time-Life’s contracts with Hollywood groups for programming, and used the Time-Life money to hire talent from other Rio stations. He convinced Roberto Marinho to hire in the best programmers, directors, writers from other Brazilian television competitors. He raided TV Rio, Record, etc. for talent. First he hired strong programmers and managers like Walter Clark, Jose Bonifácio de Oliveira (“Boni”), etc. They began to revise the programming strategy, focusing at first on variety shows and music (Wallach 2008). They hired some of the top variety show hosts, like Chacrinha, even though they had to participate in a bidding war to do so (Wallach 2008). Wallach and those he convinced Marinho to hire started doing more development, adjusting a gradually evolving mix of novelas, comedy, variety, music, and news. Then he and the emerging management team started building on the new programmers’ recommendations, particularly Boni’s, to hire key film directors, like Daniel Filho, and highly regarded play or screenwriters, like Dias Gomes (Wallach 2008).
Time-Life funds had also enabled the purchase of some keys pieces of technology, like better transmitters for Rio and São Paulo, where the station initially reached very few people. So, overall, one of the main impacts of the Time-Life deal on the success of TV Globo was the impact of funding from Time-Life. However, Wallach contends that new Time-Life funds were already running low in 1966, with Time-Life demanding to see success and profits, after several years of investment without return (2008). So many of the changes in the key time period for the development and transformation of the telenovela, from 1968 on, took place when TV Globo was essentially on its own financially, but before major profits began to come in, after 1970 (Wallach 2008).

A probably much more important transformation of TV Globo came through the adaptation of US commercial and network administration models. In his own narrative, Wallach emphasizes that he worked first to implement a budgeting system, since many stations essentially worked without budgeting either spending or income, leaving a lot of improvisation and chaos. Together with Bonifácio de Oliveira (Boni), who got on board with budgeting as part of getting the production process under better control (OLIVEIRA SOBRINHO 2011), they got TV Globo’s production process better funded and organized, which began to enable more sophisticated, higher quality productions. The internalization or adaptation part of this process was key. Boni had apparently wanted to create a better-funded, better-organized process, adapting the U.S. style budgeting process enabled him to develop it further. The eventual outcome was what came to be known as “The Globo Pattern of Quality,” with Boni becoming famous as its champion and implementer (Clark and Priolli 1991, OLIVEIRA SOBRINHO 2011).

This particular interaction between Wallach and Boni over budgeting and planning is very interesting theoretically. It began on the one hand with Joe Wallach, as the agent of Time-Life trying to adapt U.S. style budgeting techniques, to make the joint venture more successful for Time-Life. But it also began with Boni, as a Brazilian television professional, wanting to achieve a higher standard of programming through a more controlled, planned and better financed process. Boni came to see Wallach’s budgeting efforts as something that could be successfully adapted to achieve his own goals. We could argue that while the process ostensibly began as localization, with Wallach using his agency to implement budgeting. But it also began as, or quickly became, a complex parallel process of glocalization, as Boni saw something in the foreign idea or process that suited his purposes, that he wished to appropriate, and implement into his vision of how to make Brazilian television work better and achieve a higher level of quality. We could see this as a process
of global organizational hybridity. In terms of agency and power, it seems that although Wallach began the process, as a classic localization of U.S. knowledge, it also became a process of glocalization, as Boni exercised an agency that was crucial to the process’ long run success. Both the American and Brazilian sides of the process exercised agency and varying degrees of power. Very similar processes took place with advertising sales, the creation of an upfront advertising market (Wallach 2008), the creation of networked simulcasting of the main TV Globo newscast, Jornal Nacional (Straubhaar 1984), etc.

In some of these interactions, the Brazilian military government was also a key partner. Wallach could see, for example, the value of creating a true national television network, with simulcast programming and related network-wide advertising sales. While both TV Excelsior and TV Globo had attempted simulcast networking between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, it remained largely unachieved until 1969. In part, that required achieving control over local managers, which was a struggle with Globo’s São Paulo operation, for example (Wallach 2008). In part, it required technological capabilities that were only being made possible by government telecom structures in the late 1960s. Wallach said, “1969 was a decisive year, not only for TV Globo, but really for Brazil. In that year, we begin to see the unification of Brazil... Embratel built these microwaves around the country for telephone, but as a byproduct, they could be used for television. So they charged us heavy fees, but we were able to put our national news in 1969, Journal Nacional, which became a big, big, thing for us. Even though it was somewhat censored, we were still right there” (2008).

Joe Wallach and the New Hybrid TV Globo

Time-Life left the joint-venture in 1970-71 and withdrew from Brazil. There was continuing political pressure on Time-Life to leave, and on the military governments to push them out (Straubhaar 1984). At least some of Time-Life’s managers seemed to feel that they had been forced out, just when profitability was beginning to become likely (Zorthian interview, quoted in Straubhaar 1981). However, Wallach argues, in his own narrative, that they left because they were skeptical of it becoming profitable, and wanted to limit their losses (2008).

In any event, Wallach decided to stay with TV Globo, as Time-Life left, and naturalized as a Brazilian citizen to able work for TV Globo legally. In a 2008 interview, he said, “I was Time-Life's employee but I'd been working more with the Brazilians. He [Roberto Marinho] said ‘if you stay here, I'll make it worth your while. Let's see if we can
buy it [from Time-Life].’ So that started the process. Heiskill [of Time-Life] said they were interested in selling. Then they each agreed that I should be the man to do the negotiation between them on the purchase and sale of the network. So that’s what I did. In addition to running the place, I helped arrange the buy-out” [in 1969, final in 1970].

Hybridizing Brazilian programming within the modern network

After consolidating their model in economic/commercial, technological, and process terms, TV Globo’s new programming team began to take steps, like lowering the profile and number of live variety shows, which both the Brazilian military governments and Boni thought low quality and unpredictable, but which were also great showcases for Brazilian music and other aspects of popular culture (Straubhaar 1983). TV Globo moved strongly toward emphasizing nationally-produced telenovelas, which Boni thought would be a higher quality, more attractive genre to emphasize in prime time. The public and critical reaction to TV Tupi’s 1968 success of “Brazilian” Beto Rockefeller was very positive and strong, and seemed to point the way to a new type of Brazilian telenovela, more reflective of Brazilian society and popular culture, more willing to discuss issues like the broad popular desire for upward social mobility (Straubhaar 1982, Fadul 1993).

TV first got into telenovelas by hiring a Cuban exile writer named Gloria Magadan. She had a then very traditional pan-Latin American view of telenovela content, that they should be romantic fantasies in international settings. According to Dias Gomes, Magadan, a Cuban émigré, still head of telenovelas for TV Globo in 1970, did not like novelas set in Brazil. She apparently said, “Brazil is not a romantic country” (Gomes 1998). Dias Gomes’ first job was to finish a Gloria Magadan novela under a pseudonym. He “managed to introduce into the plot a subtle critique of the deposition of Joao Goulart,” (Gomes 1998), p. 258. She was let go, film director Daniel Filho took over as head of telenovela production and “Brazil was allowed into the Jardim Botanico.” (according to Dias Gomes). They hired film directors, like Daniel Filho, to change the visual style of telenovelas. Indeed a cinematic look and style became a hallmark of the TV Globo approach to telenovelas, using more outdoor shots, more realistic scenarios, etc. (Daniel-O FILHO 2001).

In part to maintain control, in part to control labor costs, TV Globo worked on developing their own acting talent for novelas (Wallach 2008). They worked on nationalizing telenovelas with the replacement of Cuban writers and scripts in TV Globo, and with the hiring of theatrical, or film writers, like Dias Gomes, who eventually became head of telenovela production at TV Globo. He had been a Communist Party of Brazil (PC
do B) activist, he was invited to be on the party central committee but left the party in 1970 to work for Globo. He had originally hoped to live from being a playwright, but had had several plays, like *O berço de um heroi* censored by the military regime after 1964.

Hiring Dias Gomes at TV Globo, a network that many critics saw as essentially allied with the military governments (Hertz 1987), seems a contradictory, curious choice. When asked who hired Dias Gomes, Joe Wallach said, “… it was Boni. I’m pretty sure, everybody knew everybody then. Because that was the big breakthrough when we fired Gloria Magadan, then Janete Clare came in first and Dias Gomes [her husband] came in after, and then there was a bunch of other writers that came… A lot of it was up to directors like Daniel Filho. Daniel Filho was a key man of the novellas. Key key key man. At the beginning…”

Dias Gomes had had huge success in theater and film until military censorship began, with plays like *O Pagador de Promessas* (1959), which was made into a very well regard movie. Another play in 1962, *O Bem-Amado*, was later made into a very successful telenovela in 1974. He wrote *Berço de um Herói* in 1963. It was being mounted for stage in 1964, but was prohibited by judges after being cleared by the official censors. He continued to write plays, wanted to focus on that, but began to realize that, "I was not going to be permitted to keep writing plays because my dramaturgy lived by questioning Brazilian reality, and this reality was banned from the stages, considered subversive in itself by the military regime" (1998, p. 255).

He had always wanted to do “teatro popular” (peoples’ theater). He thought his kind of theater could really only work with a large, working class ("popular") audience, an impossible dream because theater was becoming more elitist. Although many fellow artists criticized the idea of going to work for TV Globo, he saw a possibility of doing “teatro popular” there: "Now they were offering me a really large, truly popular audience, beyond our wildest dreams." (1998, p. 255) Dias Gomes’ ideas and hopes for doing a popular theater that could help educate the masses about social issues, the thing he had aspired to do as a communist activist, would become essential to the definition of the social telenovela at TV Globo.

**Social issue focus of telenovelas,**

According to Joe Wallach, “[It began] with the advent of [Janete Claire and Dias Gomes], really began. They were the primary movers – primary writers of social issues. You know, *O Bem Amado*, (1974) all of these…” Wallach, talking about Dias Gomes, said,
“most of the artistic people were left leaning. Most of the artistic people wanted to say more and more. And a lot of our novellas, they were censored but we did put through some things. A lot do with land reform. We had novellas that pushed land reform... There were all sorts of things that they would try and it was really Dias Gomez who was a communist. There was no question in my mind that he was strongly communist” (Wallach 2008). Dias Gomes’ first novela of his own at TV Globo was “Red Summer.” Set in Bahia, it had “coronels (authoritarian local political bosses), their goons, capoeira, popular poets and the controversial issue of divorce,” (Gomes 1998, p. 258).

**Dias Gomes’ view**

'I was engaged in taking the telenovela to my thematic universe and also looking for a unique language for the genre, even if, perhaps necessarily, it cut the umbilical cord to the folhetim', (Dias Gomes, p. 264). One of the producers, Borjala, did not want to shake up the telenovela that much, "you don't mess with a winning team." p. 264. But he pushed for themes he wanted, and the actors he wanted with Daniel Filho, Boni and usually got them. One example is O Bem Amado (1973). He had written Bem Amado as play, then film script, then rewrote fourth time as telenovela, first in color, “I saw it as aesthetic experiment, Would it be possible to create a true work of art on television?” (p.275). "In each of these episodes, I always looked for inspiration in political events, satirizing and criticizing 'the system,' in times when the Censorship did not permit that. O Bem Amado was a small window in the big wall of obscurity [or darkness] that the military regime created. Not that the censorship did not recognize that and mutilate the texts, but they had a certain difficult with that, because the censors were never the most intelligent. And when they acted, they made their stupidity patent. The novela was half over when they prohibited calling Odorico a coronel [slang for a brutal local political boss]..." Dias Gomes noted, “I learned to use a strategem. As the cuts and reasons for them were very varied, and censors changed often, I would put back in scenes cut earlier and often see them approved.’ (p. 286)

Dias Gomes noted that he had several goals for his work in telenovelas. “Saramandaia” had two goals, getting around the censors and introducing a new language of fantastic realism to novelas. Working with symbols and metaphors, I made the work of the censors hard, although that did not avoid cuts and more cuts.” He felt that, in the case of Saramandaia, the absurdity of the magical realism employed in the novelas was itself a critique of Brazilian society.
Dias Gomes was not the only writer to have literary, informational goals. Mário Teixeira [was] on a mission to bring some culture to his public, like he imagines Balzac was when he wrote his folletins. In *Os Ossos do Barão* he wanted to present to his public the history of the city of São Paulo, the history of coffee. To whom do you write?, I asked him. “To my mother,” he said. “I imagine my mother watching the soap.” Her parents were illiterate, and she herself was a Northeastern migrant. (Pait 2002, P. 102)

Dias Gomes was not the only leftist writer hired by TV Globo. Social, critical political issues were equally important for Lauro Cesar Muniz, who became just as well known, and had a longer career at Globo. For Lauro César Muniz, the chore is bracketed, but the political mission is paramount. He left the partidão, the “big party” as we affectionately call the Brazilian Communist Party, at a certain point of his career, like everybody else — he was harassed in Moscow after taking some pictures and that didn’t give him a good impression of the system — but in a certain way, the political vanguard was still somewhere there. The televisual writers might also be committed to some sort of social transformation or at least interrogation, but their focus is on the public, the constitution of a public. (Pait 2002, P. 106)

**Why did TV Globo want left-wing writers?**

Both TV Globo’s owner, Roberto Marinho, and top managers, like Joe Wallach and Bonifácio de Oliveira, were perfectly well aware of the views of writers like Dias Gomes and Lauro Cesar Muniz. Wallach observed, about Dias Gomes, “…when you read his novellas, if you watched them, all of them [were] social [activist]… you see how they tried to push the limit and, of course, on the one side Roberto [Marinho] would fight because he didn’t want to be told what to do, even though he didn’t like the leftists, he didn’t want the military to tell him what to do. He said, ‘you take care of your communists and I’ll take care of mine.’” (Wallach 2008).

Furthermore, the military did put pressure on such writers, but seemed to back off as Dias Gomes and others became prominent at TV Globo. In 1968-70, Dias Gomes was named in five separate Military Police investigations, as part of group of intellectuals warping country and by himself for harming image of Navy with a character who was a merchant marine captain with sexual fantasies. In one of the last Military Police investigations, after he was writing for Globo, the military policeman in charge told Dias Gomes that his wife wanted to know the ending of the telenovela, “who killed Nivea?”
Since it had begun to seem almost like a joke, Dias Gomes replied that they could torture him (which they could have), but he was not going to reveal the ending of the telenovela.

Wallach observed, “In those days the military was all over the place. Many of our newspaper people were retained and imprisoned. Many of them! We had to get them when we could find them, get them help. What we could put on the air was heavily censored. It was a battle. As you can appreciate, most of the actors [and writers] on television were left alone. The guys on the paper were revolutionaries. So we had a lot of that going on within our world. It wasn't all black and white.”

Bonifácio de Oliveira (Boni) made clear his interest in defending TV Globo’s artists when he was called to testify at a hearing in 1971 about the feared infiltration of television by leftists. He said, “My pre-occupation was to create a reserve of talent at TV Globo: To create a ‘reserved market’ to have the best artists, the best writers. The best authors had a certain communist view, from the left. But there was never anything organized [at TV Globo], no conspiracy or plot. [The fear of that by the military] was just paranoia.”

Another perspective on the relative looseness of the control exercised by Globo’s managers can be taken from some thoughts by Hesmondhalgh (2011), on the relative degree of control over producers by management within cultural industries. Hesmondhalgh builds from Williams's notion of the corporate professional to that of a complex professional, a move that expands the scope of a corporate professional to include a suite of activities that are part of the cultural production and consumption process. (Hesmondhalgh, 2011, p. 299) Hesmondhalgh characterizes the relationship between creators and owners as one where management exerts loose control over creative output and tight control over reproduction and circulation stages. That can perhaps be applied to ideological controls, as well as more general creative ones.

We would also argue that as the new approach to telenovelas began to become more and more successful for TV Globo in audience terms, the Globo management was appreciative of the need to give the writers and producers as much creative freedom as they wanted, as long as it did not threaten TV Globo’s core interests. A major concern was keeping their licenses to broadcast, in fact continuing to expand as far as they could with their owned and operated stations, then expanding further across Brazil with affiliated television stations. Fear of reprisal by government over content they disliked in novelas was a concern to Globo, at a couple of points early on, in the early 1970s, when censorship and

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3 “Minha preocupação era fazer uma reserva de talento na TV Globo. Fazer uma reserva de mercado para ter os melhores artistas, os melhores autores. Os melhores autores tinham um certo viés comunista, de esquerda. Mas nunca houve nenhuma coisa organizada, nenhum complô. Era paranoia.”
control were at their peak. The threat of pulling a license could have been a very powerful means of keeping broadcast television stations in line. However, in his interview, Wallach noted that the military never played that card with Globo. “We had to send all the scripts to Brasilia and so on. That was more, starting during the Medici regime. That was a hard… from ’69 to ’73… There were no threats to take over the network. I think maybe it was like a Mexican standoff between Marinho and the military” (Wallach 2008). This indicates to us that the military felt that they were also getting quite a bit of what they wanted.

**Government concern over leftists in the telenovelas**

According to Joe Wallach, it was “All after December ’68. December ’68 was when the [AI5—Institutional Act number 5, which enacted formal, prior censorship] went boom. But then it started strong and lasted for almost 10 years. I would say [it went on for ]8 years, pretty strong. After Figueiredo [became military president in 1979] was fine, we could do anything” (Wallach 2008).

According to Dias Gomes, the chief censor showed [Dias Gomes] a memo from Gen. Bandeira, Superindendent of the Federal Police, about him, ‘I recommend that all censors read with special care all the texts of Mr. Dias Gomes, line by line, and especially between the lines.’ Due to this recommendation, I had scenes and more scenes cut without the slightest reason, which obliged me to go to Brasilia frequently to talk to the censors, trying to liberate some cuts, for which, however much I tried, there seemed to be no explanation.’ (1998, p. 276-277)

**How writers got around censorship in the 1970s**

 “[Lauro Cesar Muniz] is also a very clever man. He told me of a few events when he negotiated successfully with censorship in Brasília. One was when he had a special, the 1972 O Crime do Zé Bigorna, entirely rejected by censors, but insisted in going to Brasília. “Just make sure I come back alive”, he asked Globo’s executives. There, he realized that only details and words were bothering the censors, but the plot itself, which was recognized as a major break in censorship, passed unnoticed. His anger with the new censorship surprised me: with the cuts from the production, with not being able to see his work whole. He spoke of mutilation.” (Pait 2002, P. 96-97).

In 1975, Dias Gomes and Boni were going to produce Roque Santeiro, Boni decided to change its position from 10 pm to 8 pm. Globo was surprised when it was completely prohibited by the censors, just before its opening. Dias Gomes was writing the 51st episode.
Censors said it was inappropriate for 8 pm, there would be too many cuts, better to stop the novela. Roberto Marinho tried to go the Justice Minister, Armando Falcao, who avoided him. The government told Marinho that ´with a subversive that they had prisoner, they had found a national plan for agitation, and one of the lead points of this plan was the novela Roque Santeiro. That is a lie,´ [Dias Gomes told Boni, ´Ask Dr. Roberto to ask them to show him the plan, I want to see it. A day later, Boni told me, ´I talked to Dr. Roberto. He thought it better to not ask to see the plan, it might be true.´ “Even though I had cut my ties to the Party, the stigma of being a subversive was and continued to be graven on my chest.”

Censorship was related to ideology and to personalities, according to Wallach. He noted, “

[on the censorship of the novellas]. We had to send all the scripts to Brasilia and so on. That was more, starting during the Medici regime. That was a hard… from ‘69 to ’73… There were no threats to take over the network. I think maybe it was like a Mexican standoff between Marinho and the military. Medici was not anyone who was close to Roberto. I don’t think he had much to do with Medici at all.” (2008). According to Wallach, “There was fighting back and forth [over censorship]. A couple of our news people disappeared, then they had to go through generals, trying to find them and even the generals couldn’t find some of them for a while until we were able to get them freed because there were all sorts of different areas in the country run by different generals.” (2008) Wallach noted that, “[Marinho] called up Golberry or any of these guys, and they’d call him… they would tell him something and he would say no, or he would try to influence them to do certain things because they were running the government, but there were a lot of things that they didn’t know what to do. Look at it this way, they thought that they were patriots. Most of them came from lower class, lower middle class. They were not upper class people. They didn’t have any money as such. They were not corrupt” (2008).

There was also internal censorship within TV Globo because of pressure from political or economic interests, for example on O Espigão, Boni called him [Dias Gomes] to come in quickly, ´I have a serious problem. Sergio Dourado complained to Dr. Roberto Marinho that you are writing a novela based on his life, and Dr. Roberto ordered the cancelation of the novela. Please come here quickly.´ So he changed the character to a big hotel developer, instead of an apartment developer. Then Boni called Roberto Marinho to say, ´Now there is no reason for your friend Sergio Dourado to complain,´ and the novela was liberated to proceed. (p. 278)
Dias Gomes noted, “In fact, I did not change anything about my story. The critique of the unbalanced development of the city and ecological pollution continued… For the first time, ecology issues were brought up on television, before that, the term ecology was totally unknown in the public at large, and the novela helped popularize the term and produce awareness of it. And it did not help the developer to change the story, because at that moment signs for the Sergio Dourado Construction Company infested the city, and the public immediately identified him with Lauro Fontana, the ambitious and predatory hotel owner, getting to the point where people threw rocks at him when he participated in the opening of one more building” (p. 279)

Conclusion:

**Soap opera writers and the military regime: an interpretation**

Soap operas celebrated a certain Brazilian way of life (Beto Rockfeller) and questioned traditional political elites (Saramandaia, Roque Santeiro), which was not diametrically opposed to the military regime ideology. The regime ideology was nationalistic, was a direct response to populist governments of the past and replaced them with a supposedly rational and impersonal administration (although very corrupt in practice). That might explain why censorship was selective, focusing on the most obvious connections between the plot and criticism towards the government and its values.

There was initial sympathy from the regime towards a national culture based on folk culture. Also, the targets of telenovela authors such as Dias Gomes and movie makers such as Glauber Rocha were the traditional local or regional political colonels which, to a large extent, were also the targets of the military ideology of “Brasil grande”. In that sense, the soap operas questioned a political regime that was already dead, although authors and public alike saw this criticism as a way to give voice to their dissatisfaction with the present military order. This ambiguity created a safe zone where both the regime and the public could establish some sort of national conversation, which at the same time might have helped the status quo and prepared for the long and relatively amicable transition that started in the mid-1970s. It was complex, because many of the kinds of local colonels critiqued in telenovelas like *O Bem Amado* (1973) or *Roque Santeiro* (1985-86) were also allies of the military, and could be seen as standing in for the military in stories that used small towns as parables for the national situation. But the military seems to have decided that this level of criticism was acceptable.
Much like the Polish student theater during communist regime, as described by Jeffrey Goldfarb (Goldfarb, Jeffrey C. 2006. The Politics of Small Things: The Power of the Powerless in Dark Times. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.), Brazilian soap operas offered a safe zone, that was neither pro nor against the regime, where society could think about itself as freely as possible giving the conditions. Differently from the Polish example, Brazilian soap operas were to a certain extent part of the state apparatus, given the relations between the State, the workings of the economy in the period (with heavy stimulus for production of consumer goods and therefore advertisement) and the network Rede Globo in particular. Even a critical telenovela like _O Bem Amado_ also promoted the consumer economy that the military wished to consolidate in Brazil. We would risk saying that Brazilian soaps offered a safe zone for public discourse, but one not completely autonomous from the State itself, thinking here in terms of the notion of patrimonialism as used by Raymundo Faoro. The telenovelas, while often critical, did reflect an overall positive vision of Brazil, as noted by analyzes and reviews by outside political correspondents, like the New York Times’ Alan Riding (Riding Dec. 1, 1984) or The Washington Post’s Larry Rohter (Rohter 1978).

It was not completely against the goals of the regime to offer a place for conversation that could be somewhat directed but most importantly monitored. What scared the hell out of the generals in the armed resistance was, understandably, that they didn’t know how many there were, who was behind them and what they were up to. They were also not completely comfortable with traditional, liberal forms of resistance as they appeared in academic discourses, in legal action, in the arts and in the enlightened press, and many of those in these fields were hurt by simply going about their work. Although open and transparent, these forms of action could give voice to silenced social movements or turn into direct action by themselves against what was dear to the regime as it progressed through the years: arbitrary control over people, the economy, and institutions. Moreover, although these forms of symbolic action were open by definition, their sophistication might have made the military establishment unsure they were able to monitor it appropriately. The military was certainly afraid of real thinkers, many of whom were forced into exile, and true political leaders who could present an alternative vision and were therefore silenced by force.

With the soap operas, the State could manage and monitor dissent, which is the dream of the patrimonialist State. A totalitarian State wants something very different: total adhesion and silence. The Brazilian generals merely wanted to know what they were up
against so that they could plan ahead with new regulations, tightening up the regime or loosening up control in various spheres as needed. It was this fine tuning that allowed the regime to last for two decades without a single massacre. If soaps worked as a thermometer of dissent for the military, that does not mean that soaps were a mere scape valve, or even worse, that writers and viewers were supporters of the regime. Not at all. Soaps still worked as a place to think critically about society in a patrimonialist culture under authoritarian rule. And this is by definition: they wouldn’t be a thermometer if all moves, speeches and codes were completely structured by the powers in place, if the television stage resembled what Hannah Arendt calls a “false public”.

Soap opera authors were genuinely ecstatic when they managed to dribble around dumb censors in Brasília, and genuinely hurt when the censors made sweeping cuts in their work. If the function of the censorship bureaucracy in the broad scheme of things was to impose self-censorship by writers and prevent direct criticism towards the government – if the function was largely ritualistic – that doesn’t mean that the individual acts of writers, with the backing of the network and the support of directors and actors as well, were futile. No. For the writers, each page was a product of a certain ideology, of principles, of goals, and of artistry in navigating a complex situation with unknown “desfechos”, much like the soap operas they were writing. Likewise, viewers were genuinely happy when they managed to read between the lines the criticism that their favorite authors included in the plot or in dialogues. The dialogue between writers and viewers existed, a silent dialogue that was convenient for the regime not because it worked as a scape valve, but because it was genuine, it was meaningful, it was productive, and it provoked change. And that is the paradox of the unique critical, socially-oriented Brazilian soap operas!

Bibliography


Cardoso de Paiva, C. Roque Santeiro, Uma alegoria do Brasil.


This essay examines the Cuban broadcasting industry’s prominent position in the 1940s and 1950s Latin American media landscape by analyzing the transformations of Havana-based radio and television and the media exchanges between Cuba, the U.S., and Latin America. The author pays special attention to the ways in which the concentration of creative talent in Havana, in addition to industrial, legal, economic, and cultural factors, fostered the growth of Cuba’s commercial broadcasting. In addition, the essay traces Havana media connections across the region and conflictive economic, industrial, and political moments that provoked the migration of Cuban media
professionals to various Latin American countries before the 1959 Cuban revolution. The project argues that during the 1940s and 1950s Havana was one of the most important commercial broadcasting centers in the region, which facilitated the incorporation of Cuban exiles into the Latin American and U.S. Spanish-language media workforce during the 1960s and 1970s.


