

## CHAPTER 13

## Mass Media and Politics in Democratic Brazil

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Brazil's current democracy was inaugurated in 1985 when the first civilian president took office after 21 years of military dictatorship. One of the watershed moments was 15 January of that year, when the indirect electoral college that was created by the military to perpetuate their power chose a moderate member of the civil opposition, Tancredo Neves, as the new president. On that historic day, while the people celebrated in the streets at the end of the dictatorship, Tancredo went for lunch to celebrate his victory. For the occasion he did not gather the leaders of the political parties that were part of the Aliança Democrática (Democratic Alliance), the coalition of opposition leaders and dissidents of the military dictatorship that launched his candidacy. Tancredo commemorated his election at the mansion of Globo Organisations, the main media conglomerate of the country, which includes the dominant television network (TV Globo). With him were Roberto Marinho, the owner of this powerful media empire, and António Carlos Magalhães, one of the military 'dissidents' participating in the coalition that elected Tancredo. According to several accounts, Marinho had a decisive influence in the formation of Tancredo's cabinet, especially in the appointment of Magalhães as the minister of communications.<sup>1</sup> The Brazilian media were, therefore, a key presence in the 'founding moments' of Brazilian democracy.

The dynamics of the Brazilian transition, and the struggles to define and consolidate the new democracy, have all been marked by the presence of a powerful cultural industry, particularly TV Globo. In Brazil, as in many other 'new democracies', modern electronic communication technologies were already in place when democracy emerged. This specific historical context raises some important questions that have been neglected by the academic literature on democratic transition and consolidation.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Hertz (1987), pp. 13–70; Lima (1988), p. 115; Motter (1994), pp. 126–7; Conti (1999), pp. 162–3.

2 Because of its focus on intra-elite negotiations, research on democratic transitions tends to ignore how the political environment in general, and the media in particular, constrain political choice, influencing the kinds of change that occur (O'Neil, 1998, p. 7). The study of democracy and politics requires attention to social structure, including the media, a fact that has been too often overlooked in recent analysis of democratisation (Power and Roberts, 2000, p. 236).

What role have the mass media, particularly television, played in the establishment and development of the democratic politics and institutions in Brazil? Have they helped to strengthen or to weaken the new regime?

This chapter seeks to offer some answers to these important questions. As a starting point, I propose to scrutinise the media in all its complexity, avoiding simplistic analytical devices. To this end it is necessary to consider different factors when evaluating the influence of the media in political processes. For analytical purposes it is possible to conceive of the media's role according to the following approaches:

1. *Media as instrument*: the media as tools manipulated by different agents (owners, elites, dominant classes, the state, etc.) to promote particular political aims. Studies in this tradition frequently seem to suggest that conscious political decisions or some kind of conspiracy determine media behaviour.
2. *Media as creators of culture*: the media as institutions that contribute to reinforce and/or change particular ways of making sense of the world. Studies in this tradition call attention to the values, representations and interpretative frameworks that originate from, or are promoted by the media, that become part of the political culture.
3. *Media as autonomous organisations*: the media as independent institutions with their own values and norms. This approach tends to focus on media content production processes, stressing the level of professionalism and the active and autonomous role of journalists, scriptwriters and others in the production of media messages.
4. *Media as audience-dependent*: the media as businesses that, at least in commercial systems like Brazil's, depend on attracting the largest possible audience to sell them to advertisers. This would constrain the activities of media institutions, since a partisan attitude in politics could alienate consumers and undermine their credibility as institutions.
5. *Media as mirror*: the media as institutions that simply reflect political reality, as neutral conductors of information. This approach is frequently presented in arguments about the norm of objectivity in journalism, and in those studies which argue that the media merely reflect the culture of the time.

This list is far from exhaustive. There are many other possible ways to conceive of the role of the media in the political process. The different approaches are also not mutually exclusive. Most studies consider a variety of factors and are not limited to a single framework. Nevertheless, these categories can be very useful in understanding the role of the media in

democratic politics and in identifying limitations in research agendas and frameworks. For example, most studies on media and politics in Brazil tend to emphasise instrumental manipulations, even when they consider other aspects of the role of the media. The five categories also point to different assumptions about the ability of the media to shape public opinion and political processes. The views of the media as instruments and as creators of culture tend to emphasise stronger media effects, while the approach that sees the media as a mirror suggests that their effects are limited or non-existent. The other two approaches (media as audience-dependent and as autonomous organisations) tend to occupy an intermediary position.

In the framework outlined in this chapter it is suggested that although instrumental manipulations are important aspects of media's political role, mainly in countries like Brazil with a tradition of partisan and politically active media, we also need to recognise the complex ways in which they affect political processes. Particular emphasis is placed on the following hypothesis: *the more the process of democratisation advances in society, the more important become the approaches that go beyond instrumental views of the media.* According to this perspective, when the organisations of civil society become stronger and more diverse, and the process of democratisation advances, factors such as the role of audiences, media professionals and cultural frameworks originated from the media become more relevant.

On the other hand, it is not enough simply to suggest that the media act in complex ways, combining different functions. The analyst should specify when and how each aspect becomes relevant. This chapter attempts to accomplish this difficult task by linking the media to the different phases of Brazilian democracy. The text is organised as follows. First, I present the main features of the Brazilian media landscape, stressing in particular the central position of TV Globo. I then present the main features of the relationship between media and politics in three periods: the transition period of José Sarney's presidency (1985–89), the crisis period of Collor's ascension and fall (1990–92) and the subsequent era under Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994–2000). Finally, I present some conclusions about the role that the mass media, especially TV Globo, have played in contemporary Brazilian democracy.

### The Brazilian Media Landscape: The Centrality of TV Globo

The following analysis discusses the role of the mass media in general, but focuses on television, particularly on the role of TV Globo. This choice is due to the limited scope of this chapter, but is also a consequence of the centrality of television as a medium — and of TV Globo as a network — in Brazilian society. Television has a dominant position as a source of information and entertainment for Brazilians. National surveys conducted

in 1989 and 1990 revealed that between 86 per cent and 89 per cent of those interviewed had television as their main source of information about politics.<sup>3</sup> The media in general, and television in particular, have also much higher levels of credibility among the mass public than do political institutions.<sup>4</sup> Television is the most important medium in Brazil and TV Globo is the dominant network. It has an absolute majority of the national audience ratings, and its dominance increases during prime time.<sup>5</sup> It also absorbs most of the advertising spending on television, has the highest number of affiliated stations and full coverage of the national territory.<sup>6</sup> Besides dominating the television market, Globo Organisations is characterised by vertical and horizontal integration, with businesses activities in several areas, including newspapers, radio, a publishing house, a recording company, cable and satellite television, telecommunications, internet, among many other sectors.<sup>7</sup>

Outside television the media has a more limited influence. The total penetration of newspapers is only 42 copies sold for each 1,000 inhabitants, putting Brazil among those countries with the lowest newspaper penetration in the world, behind some of its South American neighbours.<sup>8</sup> But since the national elite closely monitors newspapers, they have an important agenda-setting function.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the weekly news-magazines, particularly *Voz*, have a broader readership when compared to newspapers and thus a greater potential to influence the formation of public opinion.<sup>10</sup> These specific features lead them to play a different political role in Brazil, when compared to *Time* and *Newsweek*, their counterparts in the United States. Unlike these publications, Brazilian magazines also compete with television and newspapers for 'hard news', frequently providing scoops and leading the political coverage.<sup>11</sup>

- 3 Lima (1998), p. 213.
- 4 Figueiredo (1998).
- 5 TV Globo has 58 per cent of the audience in prime time, between 8:00 p.m. and 9:59 p.m., while SBT comes in second, with 24 per cent (Relatório AIP/IBOPE September 1999). The programmes broadcast by TV Globo in prime time, the news-cast *Jornal Nacional* and the telenovelas, are the main sources of information and entertainment for Brazilians.
- 6 TV Globo concentrates 49 per cent of the advertising investment on TV, while SBT comes in second with 20 per cent (Relatório Monitor/IBOPE, January–December 1999). It has 113 affiliated stations and covers 99.96 per cent of the dwellings with television sets, while SBT has 108 stations and covers 94.46 per cent of the dwellings (SBT já tem 108 afiliadas, 5 a menos que a Globo; *Folha de São Paulo*, 3 de janeiro de 2001).
- 7 Amaral and Guimarães (1994); Lima (1998); Brittos (2000).
- 8 The total circulation of the three main newspapers are: *Folha de São Paulo*, 472,000; *O Estado de São Paulo*, 367,000; and *O Globo*, 335,000 (World Association of Newspapers *World Press Trends*, Paris: 1993, 2000).
- 9 Kucinski (1998), pp. 24–6.
- 10 The total circulation of the three main weekly news-magazines is the following: *Voz*, 1,152,032; *Época*, 497,506; and *1ão É*, 381,256 (Instituto Verificador de Circulação – IVC).
- 11 José (1996), pp. 57–8.

I do not include radio in my analysis, since it has not developed a national character in Brazil and it is characterised by a fragmentation of formats and audiences.<sup>12</sup> Research with radio audiences suggests that it is the most important and popular source of musical entertainment, but that television and newspapers are preferred as news sources.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, radio does have an important political role in Brazil, mainly among the low-income population, as demonstrated by the increasing number of radio show hosts who become politicians and achieve success in electoral processes.<sup>14</sup>

### The Media in the Democratic Transition and in the New Republic (1984–89)

#### *The Media and the End of the Authoritarian Period*

The final collapse of the military dictatorship began in 1984 when opposition parties and social movements united in the Diretas Já campaign to demand direct elections for president. The campaign gathered the largest demonstrating crowds in the history of the country, with approximately ten million people participating in rallies in a period of little more than three months.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the campaign, TV Globo's prime time newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, either did not provide nationwide coverage of the mass rallies or presented them in a distorted way. Only two weeks before Congress voted and rejected the proposed constitutional amendment that would have restored direct elections for the presidency TV Globo changed tack and provided its audience with broad national coverage.<sup>16</sup> The network was forced to change its coverage due to the pressure of a popular movement and even advertisers threatened to pull back their ads if the network insisted in ignoring the campaign.<sup>17</sup> This episode suggests that there are some limits to the instrumental use of the media by their owners. When society is organised and active, and when partisan coverage may result in loss of audience ratings and advertisers, the media may have no other alternative than to abandon their political alliances.

Despite the pressures, Congress rejected the proposed constitutional amendment that would have restored direct elections. The opposition forces then split themselves among those who still wanted to struggle for direct elections and those who wanted to defeat the regime in the electoral college. This second group, which included the main opposition party (PMDB), decided to form an alliance with the dissidents within the regime

12 Straubhaar (1996), pp. 223–4.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

14 Esch (1997); Nunes (1998); Silva (2000).

15 Alves (1988), p. 51.

16 Ramos (1985); Lima (1988); Straubhaar (1989).

17 Conti (1999), p. 37.

(PFL) and launch its own candidate in the electoral college created by the military. This alliance launched the candidacies of Tancredo Neves for president and of José Sarney, one of the 'dissidents' of the dictatorship, for vice-president. TV Globo played a key role in mobilising support for the transfer of power via an indirect election, appropriating the symbols of the *Diretas Já* and linking them to Tancredo's candidacy.<sup>18</sup> Tancredo was elected president in the electoral college, but hours before taking office he fell ill. In a climate of institutional crisis, Sarney was sworn in as president on 15 March 1985, inaugurating the 'New Republic'. The country watched tensely as the health of the elected president deteriorated. After weeks of suspense, during which most of the media hid the seriousness of his illness, Tancredo died on 21 April. During all these traumatic episodes, TV Globo's news coverage was a major factor in legitimating the new regime. The network, which had been a strong ally of the military dictatorship, perceived the growing support for a new coalition and switched to support it, following its own interests and assuring its own legitimacy in the eyes of the public.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Media and Clientelism in Sarney's Presidency*

Sarney's presidency started the reforms that would define the institutional framework of the New Republic. One of the most important moments was the decision to give the Congress elected in 1986 the status of Constituent Assembly and the task of drafting a new constitution. Different forces in society, mainly those organised around the National Front for Democratic Communication Policies, hoped that the new constitution would bring democratic changes in communication infrastructure and policies, overcoming decades of authoritarian and monopolistic practices.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the main political actors during Sarney's presidency were linked to the media, particularly to TV Globo, and would oppose all major attempts to democratise the communication system. The New Republic was an era of democratic changes and hopes, but it was also a period in which the legacy of the authoritarian past was not only maintained in some areas, but even strengthened. One example was the expansion of 'electronic colonialism' during Sarney's presidency.

In a classical study of the Brazilian political system, Victor Nunes Leal (1978) used the term *coronelismo* to designate the system of political compromise that characterised the relationship between the state and local bosses, or colonels. But if in the 1940s, when Leal wrote his seminal study, *coronelismo* was a rural phenomenon in a predominantly rural country, the consolidation of urbanisation and of the cultural industry in the 1970s

18 Alves (1988), p. 53.

19 Guimarães and Amaral (1988); Straubhaar (1989).

20 Mottier (1994a).

originated a new kind of relationship between the state and local oligarchies. Political bosses began controlling the electorate not only through traditional coercive methods, but also by owning and using the local media, creating the new phenomenon of 'electronic colonelism'.<sup>21</sup>

Since the first regulations on broadcasting in the early 1930s the law has given the prerogative of approving and distributing the concessions of broadcasting licences to the executive power. The result was a total lack of public control over the licensing process and its politically motivated use by federal governments. These clientelistic practices reached a new level during Sarney's presidency. During the Constituent Assembly Sarney pressured its members to approve two key measures. He mobilised resources and allies to keep presidentialism as the country's system of government, against the tendency of the assembly to favour a parliamentary system. He also lobbied Congress actively to approve the five-year limit for his term as president, opposing attempts to limit his presidency to four years. To achieve success in both cases Sarney and his minister of communication, Antônio Carlos Magalhães, extensively used broadcasting licences as political currency to buy support. Over the course of his presidency Sarney distributed 1,028 radio and TV licences, a historical record, 539 of them (52 per cent) in the last nine months of the Constituent Assembly. Of the 91 Congress members who received new licences, 92 per cent of them voted to keep presidentialism as the system of government and 90 per cent voted in favour of a five-year term limit for Sarney.<sup>22</sup>

The New Republic consolidated a new structure of political power, a system of 'electronic clientelism' based on state oligarchies and their local media empires.<sup>23</sup> Several of the major political actors of the Brazilian transition to democracy were active participants in this new power scheme, including Sarney himself. When he became president, Sarney was already in control of the media market of his home state, Maranhão, owning the most important newspaper, three radio stations and one TV station.

21 According to Motter (1994a, p. 120), the term was coined by political scientist Antônio Lavareda and first applied to investigate the links between the media and state oligarchies by Stadnik (1991). Motter has provided the most comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon during Sarney's presidency (1994a, 1994b) and new studies have shown that the phenomenon has persisted even in the 'modern' presidency of Cardoso (Costa and Brenner, 1997). It should be noted, though, that the system of electronic colonelism is weaker in the main industrial and urban states, including São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In these states, newspapers, mainly the national ones, operate more independently, while local political groups do not exert strong control over the ownership of TV and radio stations.

22 Motter (1994a, 1994b).

23 As Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) argue, the concept of clientelism is crucial in order to understand the media systems of Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal) and Latin America, including the Brazilian case.

During his term as president, Sarney distributed 16 new licences to his family members.<sup>24</sup> His minister of communication, Antônio Carlos Magalhães, also built a media empire in his home state, Bahia, in close alliance with Globo Organisations. As minister, Magalhães was accused of promoting the bankruptcy of Nec do Brasil, a subsidiary of the powerful Japanese multinational NEC Corporation. Magalhães played an active role in creating the conditions for the purchase of the company by Globo Organisations, which took place in December 1986. Apparently, as a reward for his support, a few weeks later the TV station owned by Magalhães (TV Bahia), received the right to broadcast TV Globo's programming. TV Globo broke an 18-year contract with TV Aratu, owned by an opponent of Magalhães, and sealed a new alliance with the federal government and the local oligarchy.<sup>25</sup>

In the new era of 'electronic clientelism', consolidated by the New Republic, the path to power in most states requires the control of the local media. An analysis of 21 states of the federation has shown that in 19 of them leading newspapers were linked in ownership with radio stations and with a television station. In 12 of them, the TV station was part of the TV Globo network.<sup>26</sup> As several studies have shown, these local media empires are usually controlled by the oligarchy that dominates the local politics.<sup>27</sup> The dominance of the political situation in most states can be achieved through two basic steps. First, it is necessary to obtain licences for radio and TV stations from the federal government, offering political support in exchange. The second step is to win the right to broadcast TV Globo's programming, since it is the dominant network. Although the new constitution included measures that restricted the politically motivated use of TV and radio licences, electronic colonelism continues to be a key feature of the Brazilian political system.<sup>28</sup>

24 Motter (1994a), p. 191; (1994b).

25 Ilertz (1987), pp. 62–9; Motter (1994a, pp. 193–4; 1994b, pp. 108–9).

26 Amaral and Guimarães (1994), p. 32.

27 Stadnik (1991); Amaral and Guimarães (1994); Motter (1994a, 1994b); Costa and Brenner (1997); Lima (1998).

28 The 1988 Constitution established, for example, that licences needed to be approved by Congress. This change was an important step towards restricting the political use of the licences by the executive power. Nevertheless, the constitution also established quorum and voting rules in order for Congress to reject licences authorised by the Executive, making it very difficult for the Parliament to reject them (Motter, 1994a, pp. 296–7). The changes also left out of Congress control the *repetidores*, the relay stations that retransmit the broadcasting signals of the networks. This 'loophole' allowed presidents to continue using licences as political currency, as did Cardoso in his successful struggle to get Congress approval of his right to run for re-election (Costa and Brenner, 1997).

### The Media and Collor de Mello: Electing and Overthrowing a President (1989–1992)

#### *Electing the President in the Age of Television*

The first direct presidential election of the New Republic took place in 1989. The historical context of this important contest was very different from that of the previous presidential election, 29 years earlier. Besides higher levels of urbanisation and an immense growth of the electorate, a fundamental difference between the two elections was the emergence of a powerful and nationally-integrated cultural industry, dominated by television in general, and TV Globo in particular. These new audiovisual industries constructed a new 'electronic stage', replacing the direct contacts between the electorate and traditional political institutions by a political process mediated by the media.<sup>29</sup> A key aspect of the role of the media in democratic Brazil is the transformation of the ways campaigns are organised and conducted. These communication technologies have replaced several functions of traditional political institutions, such as political parties, strengthening the role of political consultants and marketing specialists.<sup>30</sup>

In a context of widespread dissatisfaction with the government, the front-runners of the presidential race in 1989 were all opponents of president Sarney. Early in the campaign the candidate of the leftist Workers Party (PT), Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (or simply Lula), enjoyed a strong lead in the polls. But an unknown politician, governor of the small state of Alagoas, Fernando Collor de Mello, would finally defeat Lula in the second round of the presidential election. This section considers the role played by the media in this important contest.

Collor's own political roots were linked to the media. Following the traditional pattern of the 'electronic colonialism', his family owned most of the media in the state of Alagoas. The clan was already in control of the main newspaper of the state when the big 'jump' came: the concession by TV Globo of the right to broadcast its programming.<sup>31</sup> After taking office as governor in 1986 Collor started a campaign for the moralisation of the public administration. He became known as the *maharajah hunter*, meaning an administrator who aims to get rid of public servants who are paid huge salaries and do not even go to work. He was also known for his strong opposition to president Sarney's policies.

Collor started to attract unusual levels of attention from the national media for a governor of a small and backward state. For some, these early appearances of the governor revealed an articulated plan or conspiracy of the media to elect Collor.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, these instrumental views about

the 1989 election tend to ignore how this early coverage was often contradictory, raising growing doubts about the effectiveness of Collor's moralising campaign.<sup>33</sup> They also ignore the fact that the political establishment, and not only the media, seemed to be impressed by Collor's anti-Sarney and oppositional rhetoric. In this early phase of the campaign, even Lula, who would be Collor's main opponent in the presidential election, praised the governor in the press.<sup>34</sup> Thus, instead of conceiving the role of the press in purely instrumental terms, it is important to stress how Collor was sensitive to the rules, norms and values that guide the functioning of the media, mainly journalists' notion of 'newsworthiness', using them to gain access to the public sphere. Collor had a sense of the importance of 'spectacle' for journalists' production of the news,<sup>35</sup> exemplifying the importance of approaches that award some level of autonomy to the media.

To understand the central role played by the media in the 1989 presidential election, it is necessary to stress their role as producers of culture, in elaborating particular ways of interpreting or framing the world of politics. In the case of the 1989 election this approach was developed by those who analysed the role of the media in the construction of the 'political scenario' within which the election took place. The reasons for Collor's victory have been interpreted as linked to the scenario that was constructed in and by the media, especially TV Globo, through newscasts, *telenovelas*, polls and marketing.<sup>36</sup> These studies have emphasised, for example, the role of such TV Globo *telenovelas* as *Vale Tudo* (Anything Goes), *O Salvador da Pátria* (The Saviour of the Homeland) and *Que Rei Sou Eu?* (What King Am I?) in the construction of a specific representation of the Brazilian nation in the period that preceded the 1989 election. According to this 'culturalist' analysis of the election, *telenovelas* established specific constraints to the campaign and Collor's marketing strategy identified the main features of the scenario, tailoring the candidate's style and discourse accordingly.<sup>37</sup> Collor became the 'outsider', the only candidate who could rescue the country from the 'moral, political, and ethical crisis' caused by bad politicians and *maharajahs*.<sup>38</sup>

The 'culturalist' interpretation of the 1989 electoral process has been contested by some authors, who suggest that TV Globo's *telenovelas* and newscasts basically reflected the audience's values and opinions, thus adopting the view of the media as a mirror. According to this perspective television was not a major force in determining the election results. Collor's victory was credited to his ability to reflect the electorate's aspira-

33 Latman-Welchman et al. (1994), pp. 29–30; Conti (1999), p. 108.

34 Conti (1999), p. 122.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

36 Weber (1990); Lima (1993); Rubim (1999), pp. 15–36.

37 Lima (1993), pp. 108–11.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

29 Lima (1998), pp. 210–4; Rubim (1999), pp. 15–16.

30 Avelar (1992); Carvalho (1999); Figueiredo (2000).

31 Conti (1999), p. 61.

32 See, for example, José (1996), pp. 27, 39.

tions and interests, the same aspirations and interests that were simply captured, and not promoted, by the *telenovelas*' scriptwriters.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, *telenovelas* have historically played an active role in discussing and interpreting political and social issues in Brazil. Through micro-cosmos that represent the nation, Brazilian *telenovelas* have both reflected and constructed a powerful idea of nationhood among their audience.<sup>40</sup> Thus the usefulness of the culturalist approaches.

Collor's illegal use of the annual TV and radio programmes, by which parties have the right to a party political broadcast once a year, was another major factor in determining his emergence as the front-runner in the polls. In April and May 1989 the candidate appeared in the broadcasts of two small and obscure parties (PTR and PSC), despite this being a clear violation of the electoral laws. Collor's standing in the polls grew after each appearance on TV and he gained the lead in April, just after the PTR's broadcast.<sup>41</sup> The weakness of media regulation in Brazil, as well as the lack of enforcement of the few existing provisions, were some of the factors that allowed Collor to publicise his imagery and rise in the polls.

Besides the programmes that political parties have the right to broadcast every year, all elections in Brazil are preceded by the free political advertising time (*Horário Eleitoral de Propaganda Gratuita* — HEPG). Since 1962 all television and radio stations are obliged by law to give 'free' time for the political parties and their candidates during electoral campaigns. No other democracy in the world gives more free time in the media to the candidates than Brazil.<sup>42</sup> Free political advertising is thus an important democratising element of the Brazilian media, giving to parties and candidates an unmediated access to the public sphere. In the 60 days of the campaigning on TV and radio before the first round,<sup>43</sup> the Workers' Party (PT) presented a dynamic and innovative programme, which was based on a parody of the country's dominant network. The PT launched *Ráde Povo* (The People's Network), making reference to the name and appropriating the symbolisms and language of TV Globo to promote the can-

didacy of Lula.<sup>44</sup> The programme was a success and had an important impact in the election. During the free electoral campaign on TV and radio, between September and November, Lula saw a 100 per cent growth in his performance in the polls, while Collor lost 36 per cent of his support.<sup>45</sup>

TV Globo's *Jornal Nacional*, the main TV news bulletin in the country, also shaped the outcome of the 1989 presidential election in important ways. One of the most important and controversial aspects of TV Globo's role in the election was the editing of the second of the two debates between Collor and Lula by *Jornal Nacional*. The second debate took place three days before the second round, on 14 December. Since this date was also the last day of the free political advertising of the candidates on radio and TV, they would not be able to present their own evaluations of the debate. Hence, the way that the most popular news programme edited and evaluated the candidates' performances became a central issue. The day after the debate TV Globo's lunchtime news programme, *Jornal Hoje*, presented a balanced evaluation of the event. Nevertheless, the prime time *Jornal Nacional*, which has a much broader audience, broadcast a quite different edited version of the debate. Collor not only appeared more frequently (eight times, one more than Lula), but spoke more (3 minutes and 34 seconds, compared to Lula's 2 minutes and 22 seconds), and Lula was shown in some of his most insecure and hesitant moments.<sup>46</sup> Although it is hard to measure the impact of *Jornal Nacional's* editing of the debate, polls conducted immediately after it suggest that it had an important effect in a very close election.<sup>47</sup>

#### *A Rupture with the Old Pattern? The Media and Collor's Impeachment*

After taking office, Collor established a 'spectacular' and 'media-centred' presidency. Although previous presidents had also relied on events planned for media coverage, Collor took the process to a new level. Two

<sup>44</sup> See Albuquerque (1999) on the campaign of the candidates on TV during the 1989 election. The decision to imitate Globo in the PT's party political broadcast was marked by intense internal disputes in the campaign command. Some members of the team wanted to distance the programme from and criticise the mainstream media. The group that prevailed insisted that 'TV Globo's language and pattern of quality' was already consolidated in the public's imagery and that the best strategy would be to appropriate its language. The aim would be to subvert the dominant discourse, using it to support the causes of the Brazilian workers (Conti, 1999, pp. 203–20).

<sup>45</sup> Conti (1999), p. 204.

<sup>46</sup> Conti (1999), p. 269.

<sup>47</sup> Strabhaar et al. (1993); Kuciński (1998), p. 113. According to Conti (1999, p. 267), the decision to replace the more balanced edition of the lunchtime newscast with *Jornal Nacional's* version favouring Collor was taken after the network's owner, Roberto Marinho, intervened. He ordered Alberico Souza Cruz, then director of TV Globo's journalism department, to prepare a report more favourable to Collor for the prime-time newscast. This episode is another example of the instrumental use of the media by their owners.

<sup>39</sup> Lins da Silva (1993); Marques de Melo (1992).

<sup>40</sup> See Porto (2000b).

<sup>41</sup> Lima (1993), pp. 109–11; Lattman–Weltman et al. (1994), p. 18; Conti (1999), pp. 143–5.

<sup>42</sup> Schmitt et al. (1999), p. 291.

<sup>43</sup> Since the 1988 Constitution a second round takes place in majoritarian elections (for president, governors and mayors) with the two candidates attracting the greatest vote, when none of them obtains at least 50 per cent of the valid vote (annulled ballots excluded) in the first round. In the first round of the 1989 election, in November, Collor obtained 28.5 per cent of the vote and Lula 16.1 per cent (with only a 0.6 per cent advantage in relation to the candidate in third place, Leonel Britzola). The second round took place in December and Collor defeated Lula 53 per cent to 47 per cent.

weekly ceremonies of his presidency revealed this new pattern. In the 'ramp ceremonies', Collor concluded his week of work every Friday by leaving the presidential palace in the company of personalities, athletes, comedians, cabinet members or children. On Sunday mornings he went jogging around his residency, wearing T-shirts with different themes, including anti-drugs, ecological and 'philosophical' messages.<sup>48</sup> The media provided extensive coverage of both events.<sup>49</sup>

In an apparent paradox, the 'spectacular president' did not have good relations with journalists and the press, developing good personal relations instead with television executives, especially with TV Globo's owner Roberto Marinho.<sup>50</sup> The president also attempted to intimidate the media and curb freedom of the press, establishing a major conflict with the main newspaper, *Folha de São Paulo*. Apparently as retaliation for the critical coverage that the newspaper had given to his campaign, the president ordered the federal police to raid its headquarters in March 1990, alleging irregularities in the way *Folha* handled its advertising revenues. The newspaper responded with strong editorials that compared Collor to Mussolini, the Italian dictator.<sup>51</sup> When *Folha* published several news stories in July denouncing corruption in the use of the federal government's advertising budget, including attempts to use it to buy political support from some media outlets, Collor's reaction was again fierce. He decided to sue the publication, becoming the first president to prosecute a newspaper in the courts. The case was later dismissed.<sup>52</sup>

Despite these conflicts, the media provided broad support to the new president and his neoliberal policies. Collor's first economic plan, *Plano Collor*, adopted radical and unprecedented measures, including the freezing of all current and savings accounts containing more than US\$1,250 dollars. In a clear contradiction to his neoliberal rhetoric, Collor did what, during the campaign, he had warned Lula would do. He promoted an unprecedented intrusion of the state in the private property of the middle and upper classes. More surprising than the measures was the reaction of the mainstream media. They gave full and unanimous support to the economic plan, despite

48 Conti (1999), p. 337.

49 Not all of Collor's media events went according to plan. After the president posed driving a motorcycle in Brasília, the press discovered that it had been smuggled. When visiting Sweden, Collor tried to drive a truck, but it skidded off the road. When Collor set fire to a pile of marijuana confiscated by the federal police, the excess gasoline caused an explosion that scorched some of the members of his delegation (Conti, 1999, p. 337). The press was also frequently very critical of the president's stunts (*Ibid.*; José, 1994, p. 42).

50 Conti (1999), pp. 436–7.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 301–13.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 349–50, 507–8.

their liberal beliefs and anti-state-intervention positions.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the commitment of the media to the new president and his conservative agenda, established during his campaign against a more radical alternative, proved to be stronger than fears of governmental intervention in the market.

Although the media supported the president's policies, they began reporting a growing number of charges of corruption against Collor. As early as October 1990 the press, mainly the weekly news magazines, started to publish stories about a corruption scandal involving the president's campaign treasurer, Paulo César Farias, known as PC.<sup>54</sup> These early exposés about corruption involving the president and his campaign manager did not cause a political scandal or major difficulties for Collor. The situation changed dramatically when the president's brother, Pedro Collor, gave an interview to the news-magazine *Vízia* in May 1992. The interview denounced the corruption in the federal government led by PC, and suggested that the president was also involved. As a result, Congress established a parliamentary investigative committee, or CPI, to investigate the charges. A few months later, in September, after the CPI presented its report accusing Collor of direct involvement in corruption, and after a new mass movement took over the streets demanding the end of Collor's presidency, the Chamber of Deputies voted in favour of his impeachment by 441 votes to 38. The Senate then began the trial of the president and a few hours before it gathered in December for its final deliberation, Collor presented his resignation. However, by a vote of 73 to 8, the senators decided not to accept the resignation and approved the impeachment, stripping Collor of his political rights until 2001.

The media were active participants in the heated struggles over the impeachment of the president they had supported in 1989. The two main weekly news-magazines, *Vízia* and *Isto É*, in particular, played a leading role in investigating charges, revealing new details of the corruption scheme and 'anticipating' the impeachment of the president.<sup>55</sup> One specific feature of this coverage was the fact that the press adopted the style of story telling of the Brazilian *telenovelas*, presenting the impeachment process as a family drama, focusing on personalities and ignoring institutional or structural factors that could help understand the dynamics of corruption in Brazilian politics.<sup>56</sup>

Television provided a much more restrained coverage of the impeachment process than the press, particularly in comparison to the weekly news-magazines. As in the 1984 Diretas Já campaign, TV Globo's initial

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 324–5; José (1996), p. 40.

54 Kucinski (1998), p. 174.

55 Fausto Neto (1994); Latman-Welchman et al. (1994); José (1996); Rubim (1999);

Conti (1999); Waisbord (1997, 2000); Herscovitz (2000); Jans da Silva (2000).

56 Waisbord (1997); Herscovitz (2000).

coverage of the pro-impeachment movement revealed its alliance with the government. In a first phase, *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the changes and of the CPI's work was characterised by a strong presence of government sources, with few references to the links between PC and the president.<sup>57</sup> The programme allocated minimum time to the coverage of the denunciations, focusing on 'facts' and avoiding political commentary.<sup>58</sup> But the mass movement for the impeachment was rapidly growing in strength and TV Globo finally changed its news coverage when the investigative parliamentary committee presented its report in August 1992, considering the president guilty and initiating the impeachment trial.<sup>59</sup>

But if TV Globo's journalism provided a 'cold' and sporadic coverage of the impeachment process, mainly before the CPI report was approved in August, one of its fictional programmes played a very different role. On 14 July 1992 TV Globo launched *Anos Rebeldes* (Rebellious Years), a mini series set in the late 1960s, in a time of growing political repression and of mass mobilisations against the military dictatorship. The mini series portrayed with some sympathy the life and dilemmas of young Brazilians who had chosen to join urban guerrilla movements in order to fight the authoritarian regime, causing the ministry of the armed forces to protest at the way the past was being 're-written'.<sup>60</sup> The fictional programme legitimated the street rally as a form of political expression for a new generation of protesters, who started to appropriate the music, the language and symbols of *Anos Rebeldes* in their pro-impeachment demonstrations.<sup>61</sup> There was a fundamental irony in the role played by TV Globo in the process of impeachment. While the *Jornal Nacional* news programme provided a restrained and 'cold' coverage of the political crisis, *Anos Rebeldes* contributed to strengthen the pro-impeachment demonstrations.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the active role of the media in the impeachment of Collor de Mello, his fall from power was not a simple result of the investigations and exposes presented by an autonomous media performing a watchdog role. In his excellent analysis of the role of investigative journalism in Latin American politics, Waisbord stresses, for example, the importance of the 'politics of sources'.<sup>63</sup> According to this author, the closeness between

57 Porto (1994).

58 Waisbord (2000), p. 76; Conti (1999), p. 626.

59 Porto (1994), p. 143-5. According to Conti (1999), p. 660, it was Roberto Marinho who ordered Alberto Souza Cruz to change *Jornal Nacional's* coverage and start emphasising the links between PC and Collor. This intervention of the network owner is an example of the importance of the view of the media as audience-dependent. Marinho knew that if TV Globo continued to protect the president it could lose audience and credibility.

60 Conti (1999), p. 627.

61 Rubin (1999), pp. 51-56.

62 Conti (1999), p. 650.

63 Waisbord (2000), p. 93.

journalists and official sources is indispensable for the media to be able to delve into wrongdoing. Cooperation of highly placed sources is a precondition for investigative journalism and the media frequently provide the stages for inter-elite battles in which information is leaked by powerful sources with the intention to harm rivals.<sup>64</sup> To understand, for example, why the president's brother, Pedro Collor, decided to give the explosive interview to *Véu*, it is important to consider his conflicts with Paulo Cesar Farias, or PC, Fernando Collor's campaign treasurer and a central figure in the corruption scheme. PC had started investments in the media market of the Collors' home state, Alagoas, threatening to undermine the media outlets managed by Pedro Collor. The president's brother started to consider PC his arch-enemy and felt betrayed by Collor because of his support to PC's projects.<sup>65</sup> Thus, one of the main reasons for the impeachment of Collor de Mello was the close relationship between the media and the dissatisfied sectors of the hegemonic bloc.<sup>66</sup> The media did not cause the impeachment or determine the outcome of the political process in a simple way. It would be more accurate to interpret their role as providing the central stage in which the intra-elite conflicts took place. In this process, the mass media publicised and supported the charges and interpretations put forward by those sectors of the hegemonic bloc that were unsatisfied with Collor de Mello.

### The Media and the New Consensus: Brazil Under Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994-2000)

#### *The 1994 Presidential Election*

After Collor's impeachment in 1992, vice-president Iamar Franco took office and led a new coalition of forces that was set to overcome the crisis. In an attempt to fight increasing inflation rates and a scenario of economic crisis, Franco nominated Senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a renowned sociologist, as his new minister of finances in May 1993 and put him in charge of developing a new economic plan. The result was the Real Plan, an ambitious plan aimed at eliminating inflation and bringing the much desired economic stability. The plan was successful in its main objectives and Cardoso emerged as the only candidate from governmental and centrist political forces that appeared to be able to defeat the Workers' Party (PT) candidate, Lula, who enjoyed a comfortable lead in the polls throughout 1993 and the first half of 1994. Cardoso, a member of the

64 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

65 José (1996), p. 53; Conti (1999), pp. 527-8; Hershovitz (2000), pp. 21-2.

66 José (1996), p. 117. Another major reason why highly placed sources started to leak information to the press about PC's corruption scheme was that entrepreneurs were angry with the increase in the value of the bribes they needed to pay to the scheme (Kucinski, 1998, p. 174; Waisbord, 2000, p. 99).



Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), established a coalition of conservative forces, including the 'dissidents' of the military dictatorship who had founded the Liberal Front Party (PFL), and left the ministry in April to launch his candidacy to the presidency.

The success of the new economic plan in reducing inflation was a major factor in the victory of Cardoso in the 1994 presidential election.<sup>67</sup> Research based on national surveys<sup>68</sup> and on focus groups<sup>69</sup> shows the strong impact of the Real Plan in the voting decisions of the electorate. Nevertheless, the interpretation of Cardoso's victory as a simple and unmediated result of the plan is misleading. The success of both the plan and of Cardoso's candidacy depended on how they would be publicised by the media.<sup>70</sup> They also depended on the capacity of Cardoso to build a sense of 'social order' in a context of high levels of popular frustration with previous and failed attempts to fight economic and social instability.<sup>71</sup>

In the 1994 presidential election TV Globo's prime time newscast favoured the candidacy of Cardoso, first through the usual explicit inequality in the treatment of the candidates and later on in more implicit and subtle ways. Between March and May *Jornal Nacional's* coverage dedicated more space to Cardoso and also framed the candidates in particular ways.<sup>72</sup> Cardoso was presented in terms of his ability to unify political forces and build consensus, while Lula was linked to interest groups (particularly to trade unions) and to conflict and discord.<sup>73</sup> Later on in the campaign, the news programme presented a more balanced coverage of the candidates in terms of space and time. Nevertheless, Cardoso was favoured in more implicit and indirect terms by an extensive and positive coverage of the Real Plan, which associated the survival of the economic plan with the person of the candidate.<sup>74</sup>

The way that *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the Real Plan influenced the 1994 electoral process was revealed by a curious episode. On 1 September, one month before the election, the minister of finance who replaced Cardoso, Rubens Ricúpero, was talking to the journalist Carlos Monforte at TV Globo's studios while waiting to give a live interview. Not aware that the conversation was already being sent to the satellite, Ricúpero started to tell the journalist how he was allowing the media to support the govern-

67 Fernando Henrique Cardoso overtook Lula in the polls at the end of July and was elected in the first round in October, since he obtained more than 50 per cent of the valid votes (Cardoso obtained 54 per cent of the valid votes and Lula 27 per cent).

68 Mendes and Ventura (1994).

69 Kinzo (1996).

70 Rubim (1999), p. 81.

71 Pinto (1996).

72 Albuquerque (1994).

73 *Ibid.*, pp. 34-8.

74 Fabricio (1997).

ment candidate in an indirect way. Ricúpero said that he was very useful to TV Globo because the network could give space and special treatment to him as the minister of finance, instead of supporting Cardoso openly, and nobody could complain. Some viewers who owned parabolic antennas recorded the 'informal' conversation and the candidates opposing Cardoso made it public. As a result of the scandal, president Itamar Franco fired Ricúpero, but the episode had no repercussion in the polls. Despite the fact that it did not affect the outcome of the election, the 'parabolic scandal' revealed how Ricúpero and the Real Plan were making it possible for the media, particularly TV Globo, to favour Cardoso in more subtle ways.

Besides the implicit and explicit ways TV Globo's news coverage favoured Cardoso, it also important to stress the role of the *telenovelas* in the electoral contest. As in the 1989 election, the prime time melodramas contributed to build a specific scenario within which the elections took place, representing politics as a dirty activity and establishing parallels between fictional characters and 'real' candidates. The *telenovelas Ramaccer* (Revival), *Fera Férida* (Wounded Beast), and *Pátria Minha* (My Homeland) discussed political and social problems explicitly and intensely, generating a climate of optimism and trust that contributed to increase the impact of Real Plan in the electoral process.<sup>75</sup>

There were new and important changes to the free political advertising time of the candidates in the 1994 contest. Law 8.173, which regulated the access of the candidates to radio and television, forbade the use of images generated outside the studios. By restricting the use of images in the programmes, legislators demonstrated a rationalist bias, suggesting that political ideas should be expressed discursively, not by images.<sup>76</sup> In this way the law made the programmes less interesting for the audience, greatly reducing their informative potential, and increasing the power of the news programmes to define the terms of the political debate.<sup>77</sup> Despite these limitations, the audience ratings of the free party political broadcasts on TV were very high and the programmes became a key space in which candidates built their rhetorical strategies and positioned themselves in relation to the new economic plan.<sup>78</sup>

### *Media and Social Conflict: The Case of the Landless Movement (MST)*

During Cardoso's first term as president one of the most organised and active social movements of the country started to gain more visibility, generating intense debates within and outside the media. The Landless

75 Porto (1998b).

76 Rubim (1999), p. 61.

77 Miguel (1997); Rubim (1999), pp. 61-2; Albuquerque (1999), pp. 50-1.

78 Porto and Guazina (1999).

Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra — MST) has been struggling for agrarian reform since its foundation in 1984 in close alliance with the Workers Party (PT). The basic strategy of the movement has been to move a cluster of families onto government-owned or unproductive private land and stay there until they are granted title to the land.<sup>79</sup> One of the most controversial aspects of the movement is the use of violence in some of these occupations, raising growing concern among elites and the media about MST's methods. Nevertheless, much of the violence is perpetrated against the MST by landowners and the military police, since elite resistance to land reform has remained one of the most persistent exclusions of the Brazilian political system.<sup>80</sup>

The land occupations promoted by MST have received growing media coverage, but this coverage has tended to frame the movement in very negative terms, although there are differences among different media outlets. For example, in 1997 TV Globo's *Jornal Nacional* and SBT's *TJ Brasil* covered the Landless Movement in different terms. *TJ Brasil* stressed the elements of violence, danger, conflict, adopting a 'dramatic frame'. On the other hand, *Jornal Nacional*, besides stressing these elements, added a moral critique of the movement, complaining about its irrationality and irresponsibility, thus applying a 'moral frame'.<sup>81</sup> A content analysis of the newscasts *Jornal Nacional* and *Jornal da Record* conducted in the following year showed that TV Globo tended to frame the movement as violent, with a particular emphasis on the pillages of businesses by landless families.<sup>82</sup>

But while TV news, particularly *Jornal Nacional*, has tended to frame the MST in negative terms, a *telenovela* aired by TV Globo in 1996–97 portrayed the movement in very different terms. The *telenovela* *O Rei do Gado* (The Cattle King), written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa, was a remarkable case of political intervention on the part of television fiction. In the second part of the story, which was set in contemporary times, Bruno Mezenga becomes the main protagonist. He is the 'Cattle King', the owner of several cattle farms around the country. When the MST invaded one of his farms, Mezenga met Luana, a lonely landless worker who immediately falls in love with him.

*O Rei do Gado* introduced into prime-time television the lives and dilemmas of the landless and their movement, frequently framing them in positive terms. The *telenovela* criticised some aspects of the movement, suggesting, for example, that it should abandon some of its radical attitudes and symbols.<sup>83</sup> Despite these critiques, the leaders of the MST stressed the

79 Hochstetler (2000), pp. 176–7.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

81 Aldé and Lattman–Weltman (2000).

82 Lima and Guazina (1998), pp. 16–7.

83 In the *telenovela* the members of the Landless Movement choose green as the colour of their flag, replacing the red flag that represents the socialist orientation of the 'real' MST.

positive contribution the *telenovela* gave to the cause of agrarian reform. João Pedro Stédile, member of MST's National Coordination, wrote in the press that 'the transformation of outlaws into *telenovela* characters ... is an important artistic contribution to the construction of a more equitable reality'.<sup>84</sup> The *telenovela* was therefore an important countervailing force to the traditional ways the mainstream media framed an important social movement.

Another important character in *O Rei do Gado* was the senator, Caxias, who distinguished himself from traditional politicians for his honesty and his relentless struggle for an agrarian reform. The fictional senator engaged in a direct dialogue with 'real' senators, in a striking mixing of fiction and reality. First, on November 1996 a progressive senator and well-known intellectual, Darcy Ribeiro, used his opinion column in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* to praise the fictional senator for his standpoints and president Cardoso for listening to them and for pushing Congress to increase taxes on non-productive lands. A few weeks later the *telenovela's* senator paid homage to his 'colleague' and great educator, Darcy Ribeiro.<sup>85</sup> When the fictional character was assassinated in the *telenovela*, Darcy Ribeiro wrote another column lamenting the death of 'his senator'. On 17 January 1997, the *telenovela* *O Rei do Gado* aired the episode in which the body of Senator Caxias was mourned in the lobby of the building of the National Congress. Two 'real' senators of the Workers' Party (PT), Eduardo Suplicy and Benedita da Silva, appeared in the episode to pay homage to the deceased fictional senator.

It is hard to know what impact the *telenovela* had on the public's views on the issue of agrarian reform and on the MST. Ethnographic research in low-income communities has shown that much of the audience of the *telenovela*, especially women, did not notice the references to 'real' politicians and political problems or found the political content to be boring.<sup>86</sup> Other viewers criticised the appearance of real senators as political opportunism.<sup>87</sup> When discussing the portrayal of the MST by the *telenovela*, inhabitants of a small north-eastern town mentioned news stories from *Jornal Nacional* revealing the contradictions in TV Globo's role. One of the viewers said: 'If these people [the landless] were going to get the land to work that would be OK. The senator left those writings that are beautiful, but the real side of the landless movement we see in the newscast'.<sup>88</sup> Thus, while *O Rei do Gado* helped to portray MST in more sympathetic terms, *Jornal Nacional* was a major source of negative projection that undermined much of the legitimacy of this important social movement.

84 Quoted in Hambrugger (1999), p. 311.

85 La Pastina (1999), p. 214; Hambrugger (1999), pp. 302–3.

86 La Pastina (1999), pp. 219–22.

87 Hambrugger (1999), p. 318.

88 Quoted in La Pastina (1999), p. 233.

*Cardoso's 1998 Re-election and the Media*

Before ending his first term as president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso started to pressure Congress into approving a constitutional amendment to allow politicians in executive office (president, governors and mayors) to run for re-election. As we have seen, Cardoso used the concessions of relay television stations as political currency to buy support in Congress for the amendment. On 13 May 1997 *Fólya de São Paulo* published a series of reports denouncing a money-for-votes gambit in Congress to gain support of the re-election proposal. The investigative reports were based on five taped conversations featuring influential politicians, including the minister of communications, Sergio Mota, a close friend and ally of the president.<sup>89</sup> Despite the charges of corruption on the basis of the president's political basis, Congress approved the constitutional amendment, and in 1998 Cardoso became the first president to run for re-election. As in his first election four years earlier, Cardoso defeated Lula in the first round.<sup>90</sup>

In the 1998 election Cardoso's most important asset continued to be the economy, since inflation remained low, but he had to face several challenges in the campaign. Between April and June there was wide criticism in the media over the way the president confronted urgent problems, including the drought in the north-east, a fire in the Amazon rainforest, the increase in unemployment and MST's land invasions.<sup>91</sup> Another major difficulty for the president's campaign was the growing evidence of problems in the economy after April, when the country started to experience negative growth rates in the Gross National Product, a decline in average income and growing unemployment rates.<sup>92</sup> Cardoso's re-election seemed threatened by this difficult scenario and between April and June he lost eight per cent of his support, establishing a technical tie with his main opponent (33 per cent for Cardoso and 30 per cent for Lula).<sup>93</sup>

But Cardoso had a privileged position and resources as an incumbent, attracting greater media attention than his opponents. A study of the four main newspapers in a seven-day period in August showed that Cardoso got 59 per cent of the campaign coverage, while only 38 per cent was dedicated to Lula.<sup>94</sup> Cardoso also dominated the television news coverage. An analysis of the news programmes of all networks in August showed that he obtained approximately three times more airtime than Lula.<sup>95</sup>

89 Waishbord (2000), p. 136.

90 Cardoso obtained 53 per cent of the valid votes, while Lula came second with 32 per cent.

91 Miguel (2000), p. 67; Azevedo (2000), p. 39.

92 Azevedo (2000), pp. 36–8.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

94 Kucinski (1998), p. 146.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

In the case of *Jornal Nacional* there were important changes in the 1998 campaign coverage. Deepening the changes that began in 1994, when the news programme supported Cardoso in more subtle ways, and in a clear contrast to the more explicit support given to Collor in 1989, TV Globo's main news report did not explicitly manipulate the campaign coverage to benefit one of the candidates. There was a reasonable balance in the space given to the candidates in terms of time and in the number of appearances.<sup>96</sup> On 30 September and 2 October, *Jornal Nacional* even gave a free and unmediated space for the candidates to present their proposals. Each candidate had the opportunity to speak for between 33 and 56 seconds, without journalists framing or interpreting their discourses.<sup>97</sup> But the more balanced treatment of candidates does not mean that *Jornal Nacional* did not affect the outcome of the election or that it provided neutral coverage. One of the most consistent and striking research findings regarding the 1998 election is the decline of *Jornal Nacional's* campaign coverage, which banned the social problems that had embarrassed the government in previous months from the screen. Greater emphasis was given instead to the *fait-divers*, banal news stories about curiosities, including trivial events involving media personalities and bizarre cases with animals.<sup>98</sup> Thus, *Jornal Nacional* helped Cardoso in more indirect terms, by de-politicising and shrinking the campaign coverage. In this way the negative social problems that had dominated the agenda in the previous months tended to disappear.<sup>99</sup>

The 'cold' and de-politicised character of the campaign was reinforced by changes in the regulation of the free advertisement time and by the absence of debates. The government's allies proposed, and were successful in having approved, the reduction of the time devoted to the campaign on radio and television. In 1994 the presidential campaign on TV lasted for 60 days, with four programmes a week. In 1998 the free political broadcast time was reduced to three times a week during a 45-day period, plus 15 or 30 seconds spots, which were aired during regular commercial breaks.<sup>100</sup> Another important change was the unprecedented decision not to hold debates with the candidates. Because of Cardoso's opposition to them, and because of the lack of interest on the part of the media, no debates were conducted in 1998. This

96 Miguel (2000), p. 73.

97 Miguel (1999), pp. 273–4.

98 Lima and Guazina (1998), Kucinski (1998), p. 141; Azevedo (2000); Miguel (2000).

99 According to some accounts, the change in the agenda of the media was a result of the intervention of the president. In May 1998, Cardoso gathered members of the national elite, including media owners, and expressed his concern over the negative tone of the media coverage and with the growth of Lula in the polls. The media responded by adopting a more optimistic news coverage (Kucinski, 1998, pp. 149–50; Ventura, 2000, pp. 117–8).

100 Miguel (2000), p. 73.

decision, together with the reduction of the free political broadcast time and the decline of the campaign coverage, made the 1998 election the shortest and most de-politicised electoral contest of the democratic period.<sup>101</sup>

The media constructed a scenario favourable to the re-election of Cardoso not only by presenting a reduced and de-politicised news coverage, but also by framing the economic crisis in particular ways. When by August 1998 the Brazilian economy began facing severe difficulties, a few months before the election, a major issue became how the media would project the causes of the crisis. Cardoso was in a vulnerable position and there was a growing awareness that the exchange rate of the national currency, the *real*, was artificially inflated.<sup>102</sup> Cardoso's campaign interpreted the economic crisis as a result of difficulties in the international sphere, mainly after the Russian crisis, and presented his candidacy as the only one with the necessary experience to overcome the difficulties created by forces that were beyond his control.<sup>103</sup> The media in general, and *Jornal Nacional* in particular, followed this line of interpretation, framing the economic crisis as a consequence of the difficulties facing the world economy.<sup>104</sup> There was a clear resonance between Cardoso's campaign strategy and the scenario constructed by the media.<sup>105</sup>

### Conclusions

In the first 15 years of the process of redemocratisation in Brazil the mass media were key actors in the political process. They have transformed the way political and electoral processes are conducted, increasing the role of marketing specialists and replacing several functions of traditional political institutions. Television in particular allowed 'outsiders', such as Collor de Mello, to reach the electorate without the mediation of traditional political institutions, including political parties. They have also altered the way that politicians govern, since the success of new policies and economic plans depends to a great extent on how they will be publicised by the media. Governments know the importance of the interpretations provided by the media on the causes and responsibilities of existing problems, mainly in times of social or economic crisis.

101 Azevedo (2000), p. 41.

102 Knowing that currency devaluation could threaten his victory, Cardoso postponed the measure until after the election. When he finally devalued the *real* in January 1999, the Brazilian currency fell approximately 40 per cent (Miguel, 2000, p. 79). As a result, the popularity levels of the president fell dramatically.

103 Miguel (2000), p. 79.

104 Lima and Gazina (1998); Azevedo (2000); Miguel (2000); Soares (2000).

105 It should be noted, nevertheless, that Lula's campaign was unable to build a credible interpretation of the economic crisis and to identify the responsibility of Cardoso for the difficulties the country was facing (Venturi, 2000, p. 112). This fact became evident in the focus groups conducted by Lula's own campaign team with voters (Almeida, 2000, p. 167).

The Brazilian media have played a contradictory role in the consolidation of the new democracy: The consequences of investigative journalism for the legitimacy of the new regime offer a good example. On one hand, investigations contribute to increasing political accountability, publicising wrongdoing and pushing Congress and the Judiciary to prosecute those involved in corruption.<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, the media exposés, which increased in number with the end of censorship and of the military dictatorship, have established a direct and harmful connection between corruption and democracy in the mass public, contributing to the undermining of the legitimacy of the new regime.<sup>107</sup> The role of the media explains to a great extent why the support for democracy among the population in Brazil is one of the lowest in Latin America.<sup>108</sup>

In democratic Brazil, media owners have used their power to intervene at decisive moments, pursuing particular political goals and supporting specific alternatives and candidates. Nevertheless, the power of the media in general — and of TV Globo in particular — to manipulate the political process should not be overestimated. As the campaigns for direct elections in 1984 and for the impeachment of Collor de Mello in 1992 show, there are limits to the ability of the media to sustain a hegemonic position, mainly in times of crisis. When facing the opposition of a stronger civil society in these historical moments, TV Globo was forced to change its news coverage and to abandon traditional alliances.

There have been also important changes in the role of the media in recent years and these changes cannot be properly understood in terms of the instrumental view. In electoral processes, for example, TV Globo's *Jornal Nacional* has replaced more explicit manipulations in favour of particular candidates, as in 1989, with more subtle forms of constructing favourable scenarios, as in 1994 and 1998. In other words, there are relatively less *quantitative* inequalities in the coverage, in terms of the time devoted to each candidate, and more *qualitative* differences in the way the national problems and the candidates are framed by the newscast. It is no accident that Brazilian researchers have found in the concept of framing a useful analytical tool to understand the political role of the media, partic-

106 Waissbord (2000).

107 Campello de Souza (1989); Porto (1996); Jins da Silva (2000).

108 Porto (1996), p. 48; Jins da Silva (2000), p. 191. This is not to suggest that journalists should not expose corruption and wrongdoing, but that journalists and the media organisations have the responsibility of developing news coverage that separates the dishonesty of particular politicians from the essence of democracy and its institutions. As senior advisors of the Inter-American Development Bank put it, the media should complain 'about dishonesty and inefficiency while at the same time acknowledging honest and efficient performance, thereby holding those who commit acts of corruption accountable without undermining the institutions themselves' (Jarquin and Carrillo-Jáñez (2000), p. 199).

ularly of TV Globo. Moreover, research involving TV viewers has shown that the way *Jornal Nacional* frames political issues and events has important effects on how audiences make sense of them.<sup>109</sup>

Media framing can be seen as just a more sophisticated or subtle instrumental manipulation. Nevertheless, when researchers explain interpretative frames solely in terms of conscious political decisions they neglect important aspects of the media institutions they analyse. The emphasis on manipulation stresses extra-journalistic factors, ignoring the professional values and routines that characterise the news production process.<sup>110</sup> As we have seen, one of the most important routines is the traditional reliance on official sources, which tends to give a privileged position to the points of view of the government. Social movements like the MST have to rely on land occupation and other forms of protest to gain access to the media, since they are not considered 'authoritative sources' in journalistic terms. Instrumental approaches also ignore the fact that explicit manipulations can alienate viewers and undermine the credibility of the media as institutions.<sup>111</sup> Thus, the media will usually avoid partisan news coverage when it can result in a decline in the number of viewers, readers or listeners. This fact can be illustrated by the changes that took place in *Jornal Nacional* in 1996, when Cid Moreira, who had been the newscaster of the programme during its first 27 years, was retired by TV Globo. Moreira was replaced by journalists who started having a more active and interpretative role as anchors and also to work as editors. One of the aims was to recover the credibility of TV Globo's main newscast, which was facing declining audience ratings.<sup>112</sup>

Instrumental views about the role of TV Globo in Brazilian politics have a particularly hard time explaining the political role of television fiction, mainly the *telenovelas*. As we have seen, fictional programmes have led TV Globo to play a contradictory role in the impeachment of Collor de Mello and in the portrayal of an important social movement, the MST. While *Jornal Nacional* has tended to side with government interpretations in these two cases, the mini series *Amas Rebelde*s and the *telenovela O Rei do Gado* presented points of view that were absent from its news reports or that conflicted with its news coverage. The role of television fiction in Brazil cannot properly be understood if the relatively autonomous role of scriptwriters is ignored. Although they are severely constrained by the media institutions for which they work, their own values and views affect the political content of the programmes.<sup>113</sup>

- 109 Porto (2000a).  
 110 Albuquerque (1998).  
 111 Almeida (1998).  
 112 Porto (1998a).  
 113 See Porto (2000b).

Returning to the initial hypothesis of this study, it is now possible to conclude that other variables besides political manipulation are central to a full explanation of the political role of the media. As we have seen, one of the main reasons why these other factors become more relevant is the consolidation of more democratic practices and institutions. When democracy advances in society, oligopolistic media conglomerates like TV Globo have greater difficulty in maintaining their old instrumental interventions. This does not mean that these powerful institutions will not intervene in the political process, particularly at times of crisis. The media institutions that dominate the Brazilian media landscape will continue to sustain hegemonic projects and alliances, frequently undermining the consolidation of more democratic practices and institutions. This will continue to happen mainly because of the lack of democratic regulations for the communications sector and the persistence of clientelistic practices. Nevertheless, it is impossible to understand fully the political role of the media in Brazil if the new conditions brought about by the democratisation of the country are ignored.