

Telenovelas and Politics in the 1994 Brazilian Presidential Election*

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Brazilian telenovelas (soap operas) have been playing a growing and important role in the discussion of political and social problems in Brazil. This specific role of melodrama in Brazilian culture imposes the necessity of exploring its influence upon the political process, avoiding the prejudice and indifference of the traditional approach to this problem on the part of political scientists. The objective of this article is to stress the importance of telenovelas for the interpretation of the Brazilian political process and to show their role as a key public forum in the discussion of political and social issues. A content analysis of three telenovelas that preceded the 1994 Brazilian presidential election is developed to identify the constitutive elements of the "scenario of representation of politics" (SR-P) within which the electoral process took place. The identification of the SR-P's constitutive elements is made on the basis of three telenovelas produced by TV Globo: *Renascer* (Revival), *Fera Ferida* (Wounded Beast) and *Pátria Minha* (My Homeland). The implications of the study for the analysis of political and electoral processes are discussed.

Few social phenomena in Brazil have achieved such growing success and influence among the population simultaneous with such indifference on the part of political scientists as have telenovelas. With the highest audience ratings in Brazilian television, they established the basis for the development of the commercial communication system (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1990; Straubhaar, 1982; Ortiz, Borelli & Ramos, 1989). Every day, the prime-time telenovelas

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of Rede Globo, the main TV network in Brazil, gather an audience of around fifty million viewers. Television melodramas have been central to the constitution of Latin American cultures (Martin-Barbero, 1991; Lopez, 1995) and became a popular genre around the world. Brazil's TV Globo began exporting telenovelas in 1975 and within a decade its annual profits on sales to nearly one hundred countries had risen to \$20 million (Allen, 1996). Besides the central place of telenovelas in Latin American broadcasting industry and culture, it is also important to call attention to a particular feature of the Brazilian telenovelas: the explicit discussion of political issues. Even in the period of the military dictatorship telenovelas discussed political themes despite official and internal censorship (Straubhaar, 1988; Porto, 1994b). The active role of telenovelas in the political process increased after the redemocratization in 1985, when the "New Republic" was established. In this year, the telenovela *Roque Santeiro* (Roque the Saintmaker) presented a political satire and a social parody of the first civil government after 21 years of an authoritarian regime (Johnson, 1988). In the 1989 presidential election, the political role of telenovelas was again stressed by some analysts (Rubim, 1989; Weber, 1990; Lima, 1993). Even Brazilian politicians have been concerned with the role of the television "entertainment" genres in the discussion of political issues. The law 8.713 of 1993, which established the rules for the 1994 general elections, states in its article 79 that the mass media are not allowed to show films, telenovelas or any type of program which presents criticism that can damage the image of candidates or political parties, even in a "subjective way". Brazilian legislators therefore recognised the right of political parties or politicians to appeal if they felt harmed by a scene of a telenovela during the campaign period.

As far as political communication theory is concerned, there have been some recent developments in the direction of recognising the importance of "entertainment" genres in the analysis of the political process. As Nimmo and Swanson (1990, p. 16) note, "One of the most important recent trends in the field has been expanding the categories of messages that are considered to be political." This trend has been particularly strong in the case of cultural studies, which has played an important role in the identification of the political values embedded in popular fiction and drama: these studies have demonstrated that "any concern with the influence of the media in the construction of political culture needed to operate

with a wider and more inclusive definition of the kind of media texts considered to be relevant" (Morley, 1990, p. 129). The relevance of melodramatic genres has led some scholars to recognise that entertainment should not be ignored as an integral part of the public sphere (Curran, 1992, p. 102; Hallin, 1994, p. 9). However, these recent theoretical developments don't seem to have affected political science research in Brazil where telenovelas remain an object of indifference and prejudice.

The objective of this paper is to stress the importance of telenovelas for the interpretation of the Brazilian political process and to show their role as a key public forum in the discussion of political and social issues. A qualitative content analysis of three telenovelas that preceded the 1994 Brazilian presidential election is developed to identify the constitutive elements of the "scenario of representation of politics" within which the electoral process took place.

The text is organised in the following way: I present initially the theoretical framework of the research, mainly the concept of "scenario of representation of politics (SR-P)," and the methodology used; then I present some basic information on Brazilian TV and the 1994 election and develop the analysis of representations of the "world of politics" built in and by three telenovelas produced by Rede Globo: *Renascer* (Revival), *Fera Ferida* (Wounded Beast) and *Pátria Minha* (My Homeland); finally, the conclusion stresses the ways the analysis of telenovelas could contribute to the study of voting behaviour.

THE SCENARIO OF REPRESENTATION OF POLITICS (SR-P)

The analysis of the representations of the "world of politics" built in and by the telenovelas *Renascer*, *Fera Ferida* and *Pátria Minha* has been made on the basis of some theoretical assumptions developed by Venício A. de Lima (1994, 1996). Starting with the Gramscian concept of hegemony, the aim is to develop a new theoretical approach that makes it possible to link media, particularly television, to the struggle for political power. The concept of hegemony directs our attention to the ways dominant groups justify and keep their domination and still obtain the active consensus of those governed (Gramsci, 1989, p. 87). It stresses therefore the importance of political and cultural command in civil society for the establishment and defence of political power. In contemporary societies,

characterised by the development of a powerful cultural industry, the mass media—particularly television—have become the main agents in the building of consensus and representations. Representations play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role, in a dynamic process established through “scenarios of representation” (Hall, 1988, p. 27).

Based on these assumptions, Venicio A. de Lima (1994, 1996) developed the concept of “scenario of representation of politics” (SR-P) to define the ways the mass media are related to the political process in general and the electoral process in particular. According to Lima (1996, p. 245), the SR-P is “the specific space of representation of politics in contemporary representative democracies, constituted and constitutive, place and object of the total hegemonic articulation, constructed through long-term processes, in and by the media, mainly in and by television.” The concept starts from the assumption that it is possible to unpack a hegemony, for analytic purposes, into different and specific “scenarios of representation” (of gender, of race, of violence, etc.). This procedure makes it possible: (a) to particularise, within hegemony, the representation of politics; (b) to emphasise the mass media, mainly television, as the most efficient “private apparatus of hegemony”; (c) to build a concept that, unlike the most general notion of hegemony, can be operationalized (Lima, 1994, p. 7). The concept of SR-P presents a hypothesis about the relation between television and the electoral process which affirms that a candidate, in national and majority elections, will not win if he does not “adjust” his public image to this scenario (Lima, 1996, p. 254). In this way, candidates and parties who “adapt” themselves tend to achieve success in elections that take place in societies where media have become consolidated institutions.

The present research attempts to identify the representations built in and by the telenovelas that were part of the SR-P within which the 1994 Brazilian presidential election took place and to consider how the candidates adapted or not to such scenario. A full test of the hypothesis about the relation between television and electoral outcomes is beyond the limits of the present study, as it would demand an analysis of other programs with high audience ratings, of the candidates’ strategies (mainly through their programs in the television Free Electoral Time—HEG) and audience research. Nevertheless, the implications of the findings to the interpretation of the 1994 electoral process will be discussed, in an

effort to contribute to the analysis of the relationship between TV entertainment genres and voting behaviour.

An important qualification about the concept of SR-P and electoral outcomes is the fact that the television representations depend both on long-term and “permanent” elements, such as political culture and hegemony, and short-term and “transitory” elements, related to the specific conjuncture of the moment (Lima, 1996, pp. 255–256). As we will see, the new economic plan of the Brazilian government which managed to reduce inflation and stabilize the economy, the Real Plan, played a key role in the 1994 presidential election. It is a good example of how transitory elements of the conjuncture mediate the constitution and role of the television’s representations. The dominant scenario—built in the long term—may lose effectiveness because of new and short term events. The concept also does not imply any conspiracy-based theory or ignore other elements of the political process, such as parties, the state and other social institutions and forces (pp. 265–266). Thus, television in general and telenovelas in particular are not taken as the only factors affecting the outcomes of political and electoral processes, but as central institutions in the building of the hegemony in contemporary societies.

Clifford Geertz (1977) argues that to understand charismatic figures, we must begin with the “active centers of the social order.” Stressing the symbolic character of power, he insists on the connection between the symbolic value individuals possess and their relation to such centers. In a similar way, the concept of SR-P relates the chances of individual candidates to the cultural frames and symbols that prevail in the most popular TV programs, such as telenovelas. In parallel to Geertz’s arguments, it is possible to conceive television as one of the “leading institutions” which, along with other institutions of the social center, serve to “create an arena in which the events that most vitally affect its members lives take place” (p. 151). To advance their claims and define themselves, candidates—as charismatic figures—depend on central cultural frames, and television has become a central institution in the constitution of such frames in contemporary societies. A variety of media and cultural influences can shape the SR-P, and it is hard to single out one source. Moreover, even if a candidate frames his persona to the themes in telenovelas, his victory is not guaranteed. Nevertheless, as we will try to show through content analysis, it will hardly be possible to understand political and electoral processes in Brazil if we ignore the central role of TV entertainment genres.

METHOD

One of the main features of the transition from the "limited effects" paradigm to the new theories of political communication is the assumption that the media's effects in the electoral process must not be reduced to the "official campaign" period, but would include the long period that separates one election from another (see Noelle-Neumann, 1973; Wolf, 1992, pp. 123–156). The search for motivational changes in the short period of the campaign cannot test the cumulative impact of exposure to media content (Lang & Lang, 1955). For these reasons, the present research on the telenovelas' representations of politics in the 1994 Brazilian presidential election covers a period much wider than that of the electoral campaign, from June 1993 to October 1994. The analysis includes the telenovela *Renascença*, starting from June 9, 1993, until the last episode (November 13, 1993) and the telenovela *Fera Ferida*, from the first episode (November 15, 1993) until the last (June 16, 1994), including, therefore 13 months and around 300 episodes. The analysis of the telenovela *Pátria Minha*, from its first episode (June 18, 1994) and the last one before the first round of the presidential election (October 1st, 1994), is based on the work developed by two researches of the Working Group on Media and Politics from the University of Brasilia (Melo & Oliveira, 1994). In the period analysed, the telenovelas *Renascença*, *Fera Ferida* and *Pátria Minha* were among the daily programs with the highest audience ratings in the three biggest urban areas of Brazil, as shown in Table 1.

With the aim of identifying the constitutive elements of the SR-P in the telenovelas, a qualitative methodological perspective is adopted. According to this perspective, the question must not be "How do the media affect us?" but "What are the interpretations of meaning and value created in the media and what is their relation to the rest of life?" (Christians & Carey, 1981, p. 347). Thus, the first step is the evaluation of the "interpretations of meaning and value" created in and by the media. In the case of the present research, this evaluation is developed through a content analysis of the telenovelas, in which I look to identify the "dominant" representations. The steps of the procedure are: (1) I take note of all the dialogues or scenes in which political or related issues have been presented; (2) I later arrange these elements according to some central themes.

Table 1 Daily Brazilian television programmes with the highest audience ratings in the metropolitan areas of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte (June 1993/October 1994)

Program*	Period**	Audience Ratings Average***
Renascer (telenovela)	06.21.93–12.05.93	60
A Viagem (telenovela)	03.28.94–10.09.94	57
Mulheres de Areia (telenovela)	03.28.94–10.09.94	55
Fera Ferida (telenovela)	11.08.93–07.17.94	54
O Mapa da Mina (telenovela)	06.21.93–07.18.93	54
Jornal Nacional (newscast)	06.21.93–10.09.94	53
JN (local edition) (newscast)	06.21.93–10.09.94	52
Olho no Olho (telenovela)	08.16.93–04.24.94	49
Patria Minha (telenovela)	07.18.94–10.09.94	48

* All programmes are from TV Globo.

** The period is that of the audience ratings research and does not necessarily coincide with the broadcasting period.

*** Percentage of dwellings.

Source: IBOPE (Relatório AIP).

One objection that could cast doubt on the validity of these methodological procedures arises from theories on polysemy and the active role of the audience.¹ Nevertheless, some scholars have been affirming the limits of polysemy (Condit, 1994) and the triviality of the concept of “resistance” in theories which stress the powers of the audience (Sholle, 1990). As noted by Stuart Hall (1980, p. 134), polysemy must not be confused with pluralism, as any society/culture tends to impose its classifications of social and cultural and political world, establishing a “dominant cultural order,” though this is neither univocal nor uncontested. Without ignoring the problem of polysemy and the audience’s active role, this article aims at identifying the dominant representations established in and by telenovelas that express a hegemonic interpretation of the political reality. Before presenting the content analysis, I will discuss some basic features of Brazilian television and political life.

TV GLOBO, POLITICS AND THE 1994 ELECTION

The 1994 presidential election was the second of the re-democratisation period, which started in 1985 with the first civil government after twenty-one years of a military dictatorship (1964–1985). In the first presidential election of the democratic period (1989), an unknown

politician, the Governor of the small state of Alagoas, Fernando Collor de Melo, was elected with no party structure backing him. The reasons for Collor's victory have been interpreted as rooted in the political scenario of representation that was constructed in and by the media, especially TV Globo, through telenovelas, newscasts, polls and marketing (Lima, 1993). Other studies, with similar points of view, have stressed the role of telenovelas in the 1989 presidential election (Rubim, 1989; Weber, 1990).

The 1989 electoral process was the first presidential campaign undertaken within a powerful communication system, in contrast to the previous presidential election (which took place in 1960). It was only from 1968, with the full development of the electric and electronic industry and the interconnection of television stations through satellites, that television became a consolidated and national communication system (Lima, 1988). During this process, TV Globo established a virtual monopoly. The domination of the audience ratings started in the city of Rio de Janeiro: the Globo TV channel had overcome the others by 1966 and had achieved 49% audience ratings by 1968 (Kehl, 1986, p. 176). In the 1990's, the Globo Network maintains its position as the leader of audience and advertising budgets: it has about 80% of the national audience ratings and absorbs about 60% of the total amount of money spent on advertising in the seventh largest advertising market in the world (Amaral & Guimarães, 1994, p. 29).

On October 3, 1994, 78 million Brazilian citizens (82% of the total qualified voters) voted for the President, the Governors of the States, the Senators and Deputies of the Congress, and the Deputies of the state parliaments. In the case of the elections of the President and Governors, a second round was scheduled for November 15 if the leading candidate did not achieve an absolute majority of the valid votes in the first round. Table 2 presents the candidates for the Presidency in 1994 and their vote totals.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso won the presidential election in the first round with an absolute majority of the votes. Cardoso is an internationally-known sociologist, and was a Senator before the election. When the Congress voted for the impeachment of President Collor in December 1992, the Vice-President, Itamar Franco, took over the office and chose Cardoso to be his Minister of Foreign Affairs. Later on, Cardoso became Minister of Economy and developed a new economic plan, the Real Plan, which managed to reduce inflation and stabilise the economy. He was finally

Table 2 The candidates in the 1994 presidential election and their vote totals

Candidate	Party	Valid Votes	
Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC)	PSDB	34,377,198	54.28%
Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula)	PT	17,126,291	27.04%
Enéas	PRONA	4,672,036	7.38%
Oréstes Quércia	PMDB	2,773,793	4.38%
Leonel Brizola	PDT	2,016,386	3.18%
Espiridião Amim	PPR	1,740,210	2.75%
Carlos Gomes	PRN	387,927	0.61%
Hernani Fortuna	PSC	238,323	0.38%

Source: Prodasen.

nominated by the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), being supported by a conservative party (PFL) and by President Itamar.

Cardoso's main opponent was Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. Lula had become nationally known and the leader of the strongest leftist party in Brazil (PT) after organising a new trade union movement which challenged the military dictatorship in the late 1970's through strikes. He was leading the polls until July, 1994, when Cardoso surpassed him in his striking ascension toward a massive victory.

The third place was taken by Enéas, an unknown doctor who presented himself in the previous presidential election (1989) as an "outsider" and not as a politician. In that election, he became known because of his comic participation in the few seconds of his TV electoral program, when he only had enough time for introducing himself saying "my name is Enéas," the phrase that identified his candidacy. But if in 1989 Enéas was merely a joke, in 1994 he achieved an impressive third place, having defeated traditional politicians, such as Quércia, Brizola and Amim.

THE TELENÓVELA *RENASCER* (REVIVAL)

(a) The delegitimation of politics

The telenovela *Renascer* (Revival) of Rede Globo constituted an important forum for the discussion of political issues, including in its plot a number of episodes and themes concerning the national political process during the analysis period (June 9 until November 13,

1993). The main character of the telenovela is José Inocêncio, a land owner in the Cacao production region of the state of Bahia. The narrative is built around José Inocêncio, his property and his family.

Politics is introduced in *Renascer* through one of the sons of José Inocêncio, João Bento, an unsuccessful lawyer who depends financially on his father. João Bento decides to become a candidate for the local parliament in the next elections, establishing contacts with the Governor of the State and other political leaders with the aim of getting a party nomination. As his father refused the idea of "buying" a nomination, João Bento finally gives up his project, admitting his lack of "party militancy" and "theoretical background."

The candidacy of José Inocêncio's son builds a kind of representation common to other telenovelas from Globo (see Rubim, 1989; Weber, 1990; Lima, 1993; Porto, 1994a; Guazina, 1997): the "delegitimation of politics."² In Brazilian telenovelas, all politicians are corrupt or use political activity in an illegal way, constituting an extremely negative general image of the political class. *Renascer* gives a vivid illustration of this delegitimation as it is exactly one of the "worst" characters of the plot, ambitious and parasitic, who decides to start a political career. That becomes clear when José Inocêncio tells Noberto that he has sold a farm to a politician, signing a receipt with half of the amount paid because the politician could not explain where he had got so much money. Noberto then states: "It is because of this and other reasons that I think doctor João Bento could be a great politician." He explicitly links, therefore, political activity with corrupt individuals, parasites or those who act illegally as they pursue their self-interest. This delegitimation of politics also becomes evident in a dialogue between the priest Livio and José Inocêncio, when the latter affirms that there are worse places than "*quengas*" (prostitutes) houses, but he prefers not to speak about politics. Politics is therefore worse than prostitution from the point of view of the main character of the telenovela.

(b) The delegitimation of the government and the state

Another important theme in the telenovela is the delegitimation of the government and the state, revealing strongly negative representations of these social institutions. Another son of José Inocêncio, José

Augusto, affirms the following in one of the dialogues:

If you leave things in the hands of the government it is very hard. Everything becomes more expensive, everything becomes more difficult. If one person is needed to fulfil a task, you have ten in the government. And even the one you need ends up doing nothing because he doesn't want to feel like a fool around the other nine, who receive much more than he does and hang around doing nothing.

His father, José Inocêncio, replies: "We, the people" who pay taxes are supporting those who don't do anything. José Augusto then develops an analysis about the reasons for the failure of communism in Brazil and in the world, evaluating the significance of the Russian Revolution. According to him, the cause of this failure lies in the fact that people insist on discussing nonsense, being attached to the past. It is also important to stress here a similar delegitimation of the political positions of the left, which is presented as discussing obsolete ideas, doomed to failure, in their defense of a big and ineffective state.

Another relevant aspect of this dialogue, present in other scenes of the telenovela, is a nearly explicit encouragement of tax evasion. Francisco Weffort (1992, p. 50) has already pointed out that the mass media, under the pretext of criticising the tax laws, openly encourage evasion. In a dialogue about "street children," poor children who live in the streets of big urban areas, José Inocêncio says that he does not know where the money he pays through the taxes is going. João Bento says that it is not going to public health service, and the priest Livio argues that it is not going to the educational system either. Inocêncio then asks: "Who is to be blamed, the citizen who evades taxes or the one who robs the tax from those who pay correctly?" The priest answers that both are to be blamed and José Inocêncio finally agrees, but his question seems to legitimise the position of those who evade taxes, arguing that the money will go into the hands of corrupt people.

(c) The discussion of current events

In the same dialogue, another relevant feature of the telenovela *Renascença* appears: the discussion of current events in the country's political life. The characters debate the problem of the fight against corruption and mention the fact that they "ordered the capture of

one of them," referring to the warrant to arrest Paulo César Farias, who was at that time a fugitive.³ José Inocêncio affirms that these corrupt people were warned by somebody and were "very far from here with the money in their pockets and laughing at us."

During a conversation between João Bento and José Augusto, the first criticises the decision of the brother to return to his medical career, using the argument that the country is "floundering" in the intensive care unit. João Bento mentions a television news story about the waste of medicines by the government and his brother answers: "and they are already discussing who will be the next President." The presidential election is included in the plot in a discussion which stresses the ineffectiveness of the government and a pessimistic attitude toward politics and the political process.

In one episode, the characters criticise the constitutional revision, saying that they are "toying with the people," and mentioning that "one of them" said that the Congress was full of *picaretas* (idles), in a clear reference to the statement of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, the candidate of the Workers Party (PT) to the Presidency.⁴ José Augusto explains that "the problem is that our country is not politically conscious, and it is a rare voter who is conscious of the importance of his vote." José Inocêncio affirms that he believes that democracy is in danger because of politicians' incompetence.

Discussion of the national political process increases as the telenovela proceeds. In one of the most important scenes, the characters engage in a very long dialogue, lasting six minutes and twenty seconds, about the political situation, including such topics as the impeachment of President Collor and the parliamentary commission established to investigate corruption scandals in the Congress Budget Committee. The scene starts with Globo's own newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, presenting news on the work of the parliamentary commission. José Inocêncio affirms then that he doesn't understand how such a corrupted Congress voted the impeachment of the President and the priest Livio says that it was the people who removed the President, not the Congress. The priest says that closing the Congress is not the best solution because when the dictatorship used repressive measures against the Congress the result was twenty years of silence, of missing people, torture and killings. José Inocêncio then states: "the best solution is not to close the Congress, but to clean it, to get rid of all the crooks and throw them in jail".

The president of the Progressive Party (PP), Álvaro Dias, opened the television programme of his party on December 22, 1993 showing this last statement of the telenovela's character. Dias stressed that "this indignation of José Inocêncio, from the telenovela *Renascer*, is a national one. It seizes the whole country." The inclusion of a scene of a telenovela in the broadcasting time of a political party is an important example of the process by which television "invades" the domain of politics, making some politicians try to adapt themselves to the representations and images of the telenovelas.

(d) The social crisis

Renascer included in its plot the discussion of controversial issues that were rarely present in Brazilian television. Based on the character Tião Galinha, the author of the telenovela, Benedito Ruy Barbosa, debated such questions as the necessity of an agrarian reform and the problem of poverty. The sociologist Herbert de Souza Betinho, coordinator of an important non-governmental movement which is fighting against hunger and poverty in Brazil, called attention to the important role of the telenovela in the discussion of social problems: "Benedito Ruy Barbosa spoke about hunger in the telenovela *Renascer*, through the character played by Osmar Prado. We need more things like that."⁵ Based on the character Teca, the telenovela discussed the issue of the street children, including a television newscast about the Candelaria massacre, when several children were killed by para-military groups in the center of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Another social issue which was debated in *Renascer* was education, mainly through the teacher Lu. She mentions the poor salaries of teachers in Brazil, saying that this situation is caused by indifference on the part of the power holders. In a reference to the strike of teachers of the State of São Paulo, Lu affirmed that when the teachers protest they are treated as hooligans and beaten by the police. Responding to a rumor spread by the Governor of São Paulo, Luiz Antônio Fleury Filho, that the trade unions linked to the Workers Party (PT) had paid a promotional fee for including the issue in the telenovela, the author of *Renascer*, Benedito Ruy Barbosa, said: "Dealing with such an issue is a result of the consciousness of the author, who is not alienated from the poor

conditions of the teachers in São Paulo and in the whole country... It takes the author nine months to tell a story. It is his obligation, as an intellectual, to leave some trace in the head of the audience."⁶

THE TELENÓVELA *FERA FERIDA* (WOUNDED BEAST)

(a) The delegitimation of politics

Fera Ferida (Wounded Beast), written by Aguinaldo Silva, followed *Renascença* as the 8:30 pm prime time telenovela.⁷ The plot, which takes place in the imagined city of Tubiacanga, included several characters, themes and episodes that had an important role in the building of representations about the "world of politics".

The main character of the story is Raimundo Flamel. This name was adopted by Feliciano Filho to return to the city and to take revenge after his parents were killed. When his father was the mayor of the city, he discovered a mineral that appeared to be gold, provoking a mass rush to the city by people who wanted to find the precious metal. It was then discovered that the mineral had no value and the money collected by the population of Tubiacanga to establish a municipal mining enterprise had disappeared. Some members of the city elite encouraged a popular revolt and the persecution of the mayor's family. When trying to escape, both the mayor and his wife were killed. Only his son is left alive, and returns later to take revenge on the killers.

The "world of politics" pervades the story. One of the features of such representation of politics is its delegitimation, constructing negative stereotypes of political activity and politicians. One of the main characters in building such representations is Demóstenes Maçaranduba, the city mayor. Demóstenes is a corrupt politician who uses different schemes to take over the public funds. His is the image of the politician as an individual who sees politics only as a way of achieving his personal interests. His image is clearly presented when he inadvertently drinks the "dead's urine." This was the "popular" name of the liquid which appeared in the place where Flamel's parents had been buried. The liquid possessed a magic capacity to make people tell the truth. After drinking it the mayor says in the main square of the city: "The people are useful only to vote and to pay taxes. The people are trash. I will rob. I will make the most corrupt government this country has ever seen".

Demóstenes is also presented as a politician with good rhetorical skills, which he uses to deceive people. In one of the chapters, the mayor affirms: "Sometimes I think that the life of a politician is nothing more than preparing speeches." In this and other episodes politics is associated with simulation.⁸

Another character important in constructing the negative image of politics is the city councilman Numa Pompílio de Castro. He is the leader of the so called opposition, but he is always submissive to the "power holders" of Tubiacanga. The city councilman also uses politics as a means for illicit enrichment. As he affirms, "the habit of making promises without keeping them is part of politics." In another episode, he says that it is necessary to take the opportunity of a major storm to visit the periphery of the city: "That is the moment for the politician to appear, speak about giving support, make a promise, speak about solidarity. The bigger the tragedy, the stronger the effect of the promise is." The city councilman also uses the money of the local parliament for various private aims, such as buying suits.

But it is not only the "power holders" of Tubiacanga who consider politics to be a dirty activity, building a negative stereotype of the whole political class. The city inhabitants speak in the same way about politics. After receiving a newspaper with denunciations against the mayor, one of the characters with high credibility in the plot, Margarida Weber, exclaims: "That only confirms what I always say. What is the use of politicians? Nothing... The majority are rogues, they're corrupt; and if they are not robbers, they are incompetents and incapables." In the same series, some inhabitants of the city state: "That's how these people live. They only know how to lie and to deceive;" "Politicians should not exist. They never deliver anything; they are a plague;" "They are good for nothing, except for robbing those who work and pay taxes like us."

The positive characters of the story, who struggle against evil, have the same opinion about politics. Flamel speaks to the spirit of his father in the cemetery: "You know that there isn't justice in this city... You know that the mayor, politics, politicians are corrupt, robbers... Who will punish these people for their crimes?" In one of the dialogues, the poet Afonso Henriques says to Flamel: "Your father was a good man. He was a kind of politician who doesn't exist any more, who believed in the happiness of the people. He believed that politics was only a tool, a means to bring happiness

to others." The main character of the telenovela replies: "Yes, Afonso Henriques, I want us to become allies because I came back to this city to eliminate this rabble of politicians." In this way, politics as a means to bring happiness to others is something from the past, something that doesn't exist any more. Linda Inês, Flamel's lover, compares politicians to her sheep, saying that "sheep are much cleaner than politicians."

(b) The delegitimation of the government and the state

In *Fera Ferida*, the state and government are represented as places of incompetence and corruption, institutions of no use to the lives of the inhabitants of Tubiacanga. The city hall is a place without any sign of busy activities. The mayor stays all day long cutting pieces of paper because he doesn't have anything to do. In one episode, he tells Ilka Tibiriçá, his sister-in-law and an employee of the city hall: "If you stay until the end of the working day, which I anticipated to 3:00 pm, please close this greengrocery." Ilka is an employee who pays for various private purchases with the city funds and conceives of mayors as idlers. In one episode, she says that no mayor in the country works. These stereotypes about the local government extend to government in general. For example, Lucineide, Flamel's servant, affirms in one of the episodes that nobody works in government.

The local parliament is also constantly deprecated. There is a constant attack against the permanent lack of quorum which paralyses the institution. The only thing which attracts the city councilmen to work are the *jetons*, a supplementary payment for their presence at the sessions. It is only when reminded of these *jetons* by his wife, Rubra Rosa, that the councilman Numa Pompílio de Castro goes to fulfil his duties.

(c) The discussion of current affairs

The telenovela *Fera Ferida* played an active role in the representation of facts and episodes of the political process in Brazil. Recent historical events were repeated in Tubiacanga. A parliamentary committee was established to investigate the activities of the mayor, initiating his impeachment proceedings—a clear parallel with the proceedings against President Collor de Melo.

One attempt to portray episodes of political life resulted in conflict between the authors of *Fera Ferida* and Globo Network directors. There was an intention of repeating in the telenovela the episode in which a model was photographed without panties at the side of President Itamar Franco in the city of Rio de Janeiro during the Carnival. The authors wanted to put the mayor Demóstenes and the actress Perla Menescal in the same situation that provoked a scandal with President Itamar. The Vice-President of Globo, José Bonifácio de Oliveira (Boni), ordered the scene cut, arguing that the political situation was very complicated.⁹ One of the co-authors of *Fera Ferida*, Ricardo Linhares, said that he believed the scene enriched the story and didn't go beyond a mere "circumstantial comment" that would be gone with time. But due to the pressure on the part of the network management, the episode was finally changed. Instead of showing the actress without panties, the telenovela established a scandal when the mayor gave her a bad check for 150,000 dollars. But the similarity with the "real" episode was preserved: the mayor then affirmed that he didn't notice that the actress was wearing a very short mini-skirt.

(d) Fictional characters and the "real" candidates

Fera Ferida presented characters that combined various standard images of the political class, particularly of electoral candidates. These characters allowed some parallels, to a greater or lesser degree, with the candidates of the 1994 presidential election, or at least contributed to building representations of the "ideal candidate." One of these characters was Fabrício, a street sweeper, employee of the city hall. Always wearing a red cloth, he was identified as a leftist militant, sometimes called a communist, sometimes a socialist, and he presented himself as the president of the street sweepers' trade union. As the story unfolds, Fabrício faces important changes after falling in love with Isoldinha. A dilemma is built around the character, who seems to face a choice between his leftist ideals and his passion. The relation with Isoldinha makes him give up his radical and socialist ideas. One of the co-authors of the telenovela, Ana Maria Moretzonh, said: "Fabrício will lose his socialist ideas. We don't want a Lula in the story."¹⁰

The quotation is revealing: there was a Lula in the story! The character of Fabrício was constructed as a close parallel of one of

the real candidates, attributing to Fabrício, and through him to Lula, such features as radicalism (sometimes even armed struggle); obsolete rhetorical skills; the image of somebody linked to the people because of his origin, but the one who admits his lack of administrative experience.

Áureo Melo was an important character who represented an "ideal candidate." The son of the city councilman Numa never got interested in politics until his trip to the capital of the state, where he had studied politics. He comes back to the city completely changed, behaving like an experienced politician and a candidate prepared to take over the post of mayor. During a conversation with Praxedes, he says that he has studied a lot and is well aware of the city's problems. Áureo also starts the struggle against the "power holders of Tubiacanga", preparing the documents which initiated the process of impeachment against the mayor.

Besides these two characters, Raimundo Flamel, the protagonist of *Fera Ferida*, also played an important role in building representations about politics. Though not a politician, Flamel embodied the role of a defender of justice struggling against evil.¹¹ After collecting some documents against the two villains, Salutiana and Cassy Jones, he states: "Now that I have these documents I will do with these two what Brazilians would like to do with those who have swindled the public and gotten away with it." In another episode, he says: "People must see me like this: the saviour of good people and the exterminator of rogues;" "I am the spokesman of these people here;" "I am the avenger who is to bring about as much justice as possible."

The character personifies, therefore, the image of the defender of justice. It is he who keeps the people's hopes, not the politicians.¹² Flamel controls the political process in the city and the election of the mayor. He is the one who nominates Áureo for the position of mayor and Fabrício for the position of vice-mayor.¹³ While announcing his support for their candidacies, he gives them 100,000 dollars for the campaign. Accepting the money, Áureo affirmed that he would keep part of the sum for future campaigns. Thus, even the politician who is supported by the defender of justice manipulates campaign funds, since in telenovelas the delegitimation of politics doesn't know exceptions. The candidate Áureo Melo, supported by Flamel, will succeed in the elections. As far as the vice-mayor Fabrício is concerned, he has already lost his "socialist ideas."

(e) The beginning of the climate of optimism

The end of *Fera Ferida* marked the beginning in the telenovelas of the climate of optimism that started to develop in the country during this period (the new currency began to circulate July 1, 1994). In one of the last episodes of *Fera Ferida*, on July 16, 1994, Linda Inês states: "A new era will start in Tubiacanga. It is high time to do away with ambition, delirium, this fever to get rich quick. Money doesn't fall from the sky. We must plunge into reality and start working."¹⁴ This statement therefore stresses the idea that Tubiacanga is entering a new era, is approaching new optimistic horizons. A complex aspect is the possibility that the audience linked the phrase "plunge into reality" (*cair na real*) to the new currency, the "Real," which would create a climate of trust in the economic plan. In spite of the lack of data which could confirm this kind of decodification by the audience, there are signs that such representation of the economic plan was emerging and, as we will see later, became dominant in the next telenovela, *Pátria Minha* (My Homeland).

THE TELENÓVELA *PÁTRIA MINHA* (MY HOMELAND)

(a) The climate of optimism and confidence

The 8:30 PM prime time telenovela *Fera Ferida* was followed by *Pátria Minha* (My Homeland), written by Gilberto Braga. A key element of the telenovela was instilling a spirit of optimism and confidence in the country's future. This climate was further strengthened by the fact that the telenovela started right after the winning of the world soccer championship by the Brazilian team. In the first episode, the couple Pedro and Ester have started the discussion about the atmosphere of confidence in the country. Living in the United States, the couple faces a dilemma: Pedro wants to go back to Brazil and believes that the prospects there are good, while Ester is against returning, arguing that the country is facing crisis and the living conditions are rather poor. The couple finally comes back to Brazil, but the struggle between both points of view will continue. Though it should be said that their experience in Brazil helps Ester to overcome her pessimism.

The climate of optimism is not built, therefore, as a monolithic discourse, one without contradictions. Instead, the hegemony of optimism is established through challenging pessimistic arguments.

A good example of this is a dialogue between Pedro, Dirceu, Ester and Carmita, when the last two start a heated discussion about the country's future. After each critical remark by Ester, Carmita replies with a counter-argument: when the former speaks about the drug traffic in Brazil, Carmita replies by saying that it exists only because the developed countries consume the drugs; when the destruction of Brazilian rain forests and the killing of the Indians are mentioned, it is said that the forests have already been destroyed and the Indians killed in the developed countries. The scene ends with Carmita expelling Ester from her house because she doesn't allow anyone to "say bad things about her Homeland in her house." The optimism is established with special strength because it challenges every pessimistic argument.

(b) Social problems and solidarity

Pátria Minha brought back the discussion of social problems first introduced by *Renascer* but nearly absent in *Fera Ferida*. For example, Gilberto Braga included in the plot of the telenovela the campaign against hunger, a national movement initiated by non-governmental organisations. The campaign and the issue of solidarity gained attention mainly through the collapse of the Figueirinha slum after a heavy rain, when the characters organised a broad movement to help the poor people who lived there and lost their houses. A piece of land was given by Gustavo, the son of Raul Pelegrini, a businessman and the villain of the story. Pressured by his father, Gustavo decides to invade the area to drive out the slum inhabitants. The invasion is one of the strongest moments of the telenovela. Having as the background the music "Haiti" of Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, which established a parallel between the scene and the American intervention in the Caribbean country, the people try to block the path of the tractors. The moment when one of the main characters of the telenovela, Alice, stands in front of a row of tractors recalls the scene with the young Chinese in front of the row of tanks during the Tien An Men massacre. There are no sounds at this moment, only the gestures and brave expressions of the young girl fighting in defence of the poor people from Figueirinha Slum. As a result of the tumult, Gustavo Pelegrini, the leader of the invasion, and Ester, who is participating in the resistance, die after the crash of their vehicles.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this paper is to stress the importance of telenovelas for the interpretation of the Brazilian political process and to show their role as a key public forum in the discussion of political and social issues. The content analysis of the telenovelas that preceded the 1994 Brazilian presidential election identified some of the main constitutive elements of the "scenario of representation of politics" (SR-P) within which the electoral process took place. What were, in general terms, the constitutive elements of the SR-P of the 1994 presidential election built in and by the telenovelas? We can stress the following elements:¹⁵

- (a) the delegitimation of politics and of politicians;
- (b) the delegitimation of the government and the state;
- (c) the delegitimation of ideas and leaders of the left;
- (d) the emphasis on the importance of the candidate being well prepared and educated;
- (e) the emphasis on the social crisis;
- (f) the climate of optimism and confidence.

These were some of the representations built in and by the telenovelas between June 1993 and the first round of the presidential election (October 3, 1994). The analysis shows the active role of Brazilian telenovelas in the discussion of political issues. It also suggests that any study of the political role of television in Brazil that ignores the representations built in and by the telenovelas will fail to understand how political action is played out in the cultural terrain. The content analysis of telenovelas indicates that entertainment genres are an integral and important part of the "information sphere" of Brazil's social and political life.

What are the implications of these representations for the explanation of the voting behaviour during the 1994 Presidential election? How were the candidates positioned in relation to this scenario? Which candidate best adapted to it? With the aim of contributing to answer these questions, it will be useful to analyse the reasons presented by the voters to justify their choices. Table 3 presents the reasons of the vote in the 1994 presidential election, according to a national survey conducted by DataFolha institute between 20 and 22 September 1994.¹⁶

The reasons for the ascension of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) must be understood also as grounded in the scenario of

Table 3 Reasons presented by the voters to justify their voting intentions in the 1994 presidential election

Categories*	Percentage of the voting intentions of each candidate:					
	FHC	LULA	ENÉAS	QUERCIA	BRIZOLA	AMIM
Made the Real Plan	55	1	3	2	0	2
Competent/qualified	7	3	6	4	4	6
The best platform	7	9	10	15	6	15
Will improve the country	6	13	6	4	7	3
Supports the workers	0	26	1	1	3	1
Represents the new	1	9	13	0	1	3
Intelligence	3	0	17	2	1	2
The only one trustworthy	4	5	12	4	2	5
The most honest	4	6	12	7	7	12
The most experienced	5	2	1	35	24	35
Left/progressive ideas	0	3	1	0	1	1

*Not all the categories are presented, only some of the most cited.

Source: DataFolha, "As Razões do Voto"

representation of politics built in a long-term process, in and by television, especially in and by the telenovelas. Cardoso was the candidate best adapted to the representations of the telenovelas. A fundamental aspect of his candidacy was the climate of optimism and confidence established by different factors—such as the new economic plan and the winning of the world soccer championship—but which was strengthened by the telenovelas, especially *Pátria Minha*. As the Table 3 shows, the Real Plan is presented by Cardoso voters as the main reason for their choices. The building of a climate of optimism and hope surely played an important role in increasing the impact of the economic plan in the voting decision. Moreover, Cardoso was the candidate best adapted to the image of the qualified candidate, as indicated by the second most cited reason by his voters to explain their choices (competent/qualified).

The delegitimation of ideas and leaders of the left put important obstacles in the way of the candidacy of Cardoso's main opponent, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. This delegitimation is important in explaining why only 3% of Lula voters, the leader of the most important leftist party in Brazil, mentioned as their choice reason the fact that the candidate belongs to the left or has progressive ideas. Also in this case, as in other elections (see Porto, 1994a), the representation of all politicians as being corrupt imposes a situation in which the main available criteria to choose a candidate are their competence (Cardoso) or experience (Quercia, Amim and Brizola),

features that were nearly never associated with Lula (3% and 2%). One of the SR-P constitutive elements that would better favour Lula—and that may contribute to explain why he was leading the polls until July 1994—was the emphasis on the social crisis, demonstrated mainly in *Renascença* (Revival). However, the concentration of the campaign on the issue of the economic plan, promoted by the media and some political forces, diminished the relevance of the discussion about social problems, one of the key aspects of the Workers' Party (PT) platform.

The delegitimation of politics has another important consequence: it creates an atmosphere favourable for “outsiders,” candidates who present themselves as not belonging to the traditional and corrupt political class. The media made it possible for Enéas to achieve success. The PRONA candidate is chosen mainly because of his “intelligence” (17%), but a preference for the new (13%), the lack of confidence in the other candidates (12%) and his “honesty” (12%) are categories indicating that Enéas benefitted from the delegitimation of politics promoted by television.

Finally, the analysis of the telenovelas preceding the 1994 election raises important questions on the television's role in the construction of the hegemonic order. In the present study, it was possible to verify that important contradictions are inscribed within the telenovela's text, as these texts included themes and characters that contributed to building counter-hegemonic scenarios. The identification of these alternative representations is one of the most relevant and difficult problems of the analysis of the hegemonic process (see Lima, 1996, pp. 259–260). As far as the present study is concerned, some characters embodied counter-hegemonic ideas, as did the priest Livio, Tião Galinha and professor Lu in *Renascença*, and Fabrício in *Fera Ferida*. Some of the themes presented by the telenovelas did not fit hegemonic views. These included the issues of the agrarian reform and of the street children in *Renascença* and of the campaign against hunger in *Renascença* and *Pátria Minha*. Therefore, it will be very important for future researchers to identify “non-hegemonic” forms in telenovelas texts, including both “emergent” and “residual” elements (see Williams, 1990, pp. 121–127). The alternative scenarios built by some of the telenovelas's characters and themes indicate how hegemony is an active process which is constantly challenged and modified and which must constantly incorporate and re-signify new elements to maintain its effectiveness. It will hardly be possible to understand

the hegemonic order in Brazilian society in its plenitude without considering the representations of the "world of politics" built in and by the telenovelas, the most popular genre in TV broadcasting.

NOTES

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1. In the specific case of telenovelas, the works of the second part of the book edited by Fadul (1993) are examples of this affirmation of polysemy and the active role of the audience. A more detailed discussion of audience studies is beyond the limits of this text. I developed a more specific criticism about this tradition and proposed an alternative model somewhere else (Porto, 1996b).
2. It is important to stress that television in general, and telenovelas in particular, are not the only cause of the delegitimation of politics. As Campello de Souza has properly pointed out, the media "reinforce a traditional aspect of Brazil's political culture—a deep-seated mistrust of politics and politicians—thus reinforcing the lack of faith in the very structure of party-parliamentary representation" (Souza, 1989, p. 366). I have developed elsewhere (Porto, 1996a) a more specific argument on the obstacles created by such delegitimation to the consolidation of the democratic process.
3. Paulo César Farias (known as PC) was the campaign treasurer of Fernando Collor de Melo, the candidate who won the 1989 presidential election. He was accused of establishing a powerful and corrupt scheme within Collor's government. A parliamentary committee was established in 1992 to investigate the denunciations of President's brother, Pedro Collor, about this scheme. After a mass movement in the whole country against President Collor, the Congress voted his impeachment in December 1992 and the justice declared a warrant to arrest PC. He tried to escape by travelling abroad, but was finally captured in Thailand.
4. In 1993 there was an unsuccessful attempt to start the revision of the Brazilian Constitution, but the Congress did not manage to pass anything before the end of the legislature and only after the new legislature took over in 1995 did the revision process start. The media criticised strongly the members of the parliament for the delay in voting this revision. It was during the first try to modify the Constitution in 1993 that the PT candidate declared that more than 300 members of the Congress were idlers.
5. Campanha contra a fome precisa de mais apoio, *Correio Braziliense*, 3 de janeiro de 1994, p. 8.
6. Fazendo a Cabeça, *Veja*, 10 de novembro de 1993, pp. 138–139.
7. TV Globo presents four telenovelas daily, from Monday until Saturday. The first, at about 2 pm, is a re-release of a telenovela which has already been shown. The other three are shown at about 6 pm, 7 pm and 8:30 pm.

8. Paul Corcoran (1990) argues that the notion that rhetoric skill (talk) and political action are mutually exclusive shows an anti-democratic bias: "Thus, the adage 'politics is all talk' is both sophistic and cynical. It expresses an impatience with democratic life and doubts the efficacy of popular government" (p. 52).
9. Boni impede paródia ao escândalo do Sambódromo, *Correio Braziliense*, Correio da TV, 27 de março de 1994, p. 7.
10. Tubiacanda não ficará imune ao clima eleitoral, *Correio Braziliense*, Correio da TV, 10 de julho de 1994, p. 9.
11. Martin-Barbero (1991) shows how the "Justiciero" is one the traditional characters of melodrama, with the function of ensuring that the truth will prevail (p. 130).
12. Ribeiro (1994) affirms that *Fera Ferida* presents the perspective of a moral solution, a possible way out for society without politics. According to him, "This incapacity to understand politics as the sphere in which society acquires and raises its voice can be very costly. This is the kind of culture for authoritarian regimes."
13. For Ribeiro (1994), the candidature of Fabrício as vice-mayor meant his cooptation: "The character which is presented as an allegory of Lula, the garbage man Fabrício, finally accepts being coopted, in a subaltern position (vice-mayor), by the dominant scheme."
14. In Portuguese, the expression "plunge into reality" (*cair na real*) means to become realistic. At the same time, Real was the name of the new economic plan and its currency. I am thankful to Afonso de Albuquerque for calling my attention to this episode.
15. It is important to stress that the SR-P is a dynamic process established not only by the telenovelas, but also by other spaces of TV broadcasting. The broader research project within which this analysis is developed includes the analysis of *Jornal Nacional*, Globo's prime time newscast, and the electoral television programmes of the parties/candidates. The analysis of television's role in the 1994 presidential election, which has the telenovelas as a key element, must be complemented by other works.
16. I am thankful to Gustavo Venturi, director of DataFolha, for his critical remarks and for sending me the report "As Razões do Voto."

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