

**Ethnography as an approach to investigating media practices –
from Macambira to Texas***

Interview with Antonio C. La Pastina**

by Lírían Sifuentes***

Despite being from São Paulo, many Brazilian communication researchers quote him without knowing his birthplace. Likewise, there are people who think of his studies as anthropological, though he graduated in Journalism and always developed his research in Communication. The first bit of misinformation is justified by his scholarly trajectory having happened in the United States, where he moved to 25 years ago, after finishing the Journalism course at Universidade Metodista. As for the second, it is assumed that it happens due to the depth reached in his empirical research, which is vital among ethnographic studies.

Antonio La Pastina, Professor at the Department of Communication of the Texas A&M University, though geographically distant, still keeps an eye on Brazil. His main research interest is still the Brazilian telenovela and its audience, a theme that he tackled in his thesis *The telenovela way of knowledge: An ethnographic reception study among rural viewers in Brazil*. In this investigation, he conducted an ethnographic research in a small community in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte, with which he has kept in touch for 17 years, developing a longitudinal study that observes the evolution of the relationship between people and media.

In this interview, La Pastina speaks of themes like ethnography in Communication, field research, telenovelas and his scholarly career in the United States. He also comments

* This interview took place in June 2013, at the College Station-Texas, when interviewer Lírían Sifuentes was working on her doctorate at the *Texas A&M University*, under professor Antonio La Pastina.

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on the difficult entry of Brazilian studies in the United States, highlighting as a barrier, other than language, the lacking distribution of Brazilian periodicals in other countries, which he sees as a current challenge to the area.

MATRIZes: What sparked your interest in Communication research and why do it in the United States?

La Pastina: I studied journalism in Brazil, at Metodista, during the 1980s, from 1984 to 1988. Curiously, one of the books I read, *A leitura social da novela das oito*¹, by Ondina Fachel Leal, fascinated me. At that moment, I did not expect to work with telenovelas, but that book had a major impact in my future career. I had studied with very interesting people during that time, but my plan was to work as a journalist. Due to personal reasons, I moved to the United States after finishing college. I worked at Folha de S. Paulo for a while. I ended up studying at the University of Illinois, for a time, in a then-recent Communication master's program. I had been living in Chicago, where I worked with a Venezuelan professor who studied themes – mainly media and political representation in Mexico. He was very interested in matters of race, minorities, the Spanish community in the US. Honestly, at that point, I did not know what I wanted to do, I was young, finding my own path, switching from journalism to an academic career. Working with him, reading, I decided that what really interested me were matters of audience, to know why people consume what they consume and what happens when they do. This was in the early 1990s, when issues of race, racism and minorities were serious in the United States, which they still are, and have never stopped being. As a foreigner, immigrant, working as a waiter in a restaurant, I had that concern myself. So, my first study, my master's thesis, looked at the Latino population – I interviewed Mexicans and Puerto Ricans – understood the issue of racism through a television show, *True Colors*, in which the starring couple was formed by a black man and a white woman, and spoke of reverse racism. It was a somewhat long interview, in which I played the show, a 23-minute long sitcom. I was interested in seeing how the Latino public perceived racism amongst black and white people, because the United States has always struggled with that dichotomy, you are either white or black, and Latinos are sort of separated, like Asians. Issues of racism are always boiled down to black and white. In this study, the issues with which I was concerned were seeds of what would disturb me for the rest of my career to this very day. First, issues of minority representation,

¹ LEAL, Ondina Fachel. *A leitura social da novela das oito*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1986.

issues of minority identity, of groups that stand in the outskirts, that are outside of the production center, that are outside of representation and consumption. At that moment, I was not thinking of what they liked necessarily, or what they chose, but what I had chosen, I would show it to them, they would all watch the same show. So, I would say that was my first audience study. In 1993, I started my doctorate at the University of Texas at Austin, working with Emile McAnany², who was a very important person in the field of communication and development, Latin American, someone who was respected and famous. And I lucked out – more than anything else – when I got to the university, he was participating in a large project to study the relationship between telenovelas and demographics in Brazil, with grants from several foundations. As a Brazilian, interested in issues of audience, and experience in interviewing, I joined this research group. So, this concern with Brazil had started, the access to resources to enable research in Brazil and a solid intellectual outline to think about how the telenovela – media in general as well, but mainly the telenovela – participates in the process of social transformation, which is concrete, for it is known that Brazil changed a lot from the 1960s to the 1990s, when this group had started studying the issues of telenovelas. It coincided with my concerns, since it involved matters of groups in the outskirts of Brazil, and the group that studied telenovelas is, without a doubt, one of the main ones, it is the main text in Brazil, because I believe it's hard to think of the country without thinking about telenovelas. Despite being a journalist, my concern was never about news, news is important, but it never seduced me, the idea of studying news did not interest me. What does interest me is studying instances in which news relates to fiction. Maybe because a part of this process that interests me is the issue of entertainment, people watch it as entertainment, not that news can't be entertainment, but it's different. So, this project with Emile McAnany was associated with several groups in Brazil, including the Universidade de São Paulo, CEBRAP, Unicamp, as well as the Population Research Center at the University of Texas. It was an ambitious process and I had the opportunity of conducting an ethnographic study in Brazil. This project included surveys, discussion groups and ethnography in three communities. One of these places was São Paulo, as well as a medium-sized city and a small-sized city. I was born in São Paulo, I grew up in a big city, but I was always fascinated with issues of the countryside, of small

² With McAnany, La Pastina published an article, commonly quoted in Brazil, of rhetorical revision and methodology regarding audience studies of telenovela: McANANY, E.; LA PASTINA, A. As audiências das telenovelas: Uma revisão da literatura e crítica metodológica das pesquisas na América Latina. *Intercom*, v. 17, n. 2, p. 17-37, 1994.

towns, which is associated with this outskirts thing, of those outside of the production center. So studying the rural community was something that really interested me. I ended up spending a year in a city I call Macambira, which is not its real name, it's a pseudonym for this community. It was a small town, two thousand, on the countryside of Rio Grande do Norte, in Seridó. And from there my career has developed to where I am today³.

MATRIZes: That amounts to 16 years in contact with said community. What are the advantages of this kind of timespan, in which it is possible to compare that community from the late 1990s with the one from today?

La Pastina: To be frank, when I started this research, continuously dealing with this community was not part of what I imagined. What happened is that, after a year in that community, I developed, firstly, strong ties with members of the community, of caring, comprehension, of well wishing. I mean, a deep ethnography allows the development of relationships, which become strong ties. These relationships also help you understand the community better. This is one of the big advantages: when you develop a long-term ethnographic project, you are constantly constructing, always increasing your knowledge from that starting point. So, I started in 1996/1997. When I came back, in 2001, some of those younger kids are now in school; some of the children I taught when I had been there – the year I was there I taught English – were married, with kids. So, you see that life-forming process of people, while you follow the transformation of the country, economy, politics and media. It allows one to understand how people deal with this material in a processual, historical way, expanding the richness of context. This is one of the advantages. In 2006, I only spent a month with them, but in 2010, I was there for a semester. The change in those ten years was amazing. Internet had reached Macambira in 2007, a moment in which the Brazilian economy was growing, and the cellphone become popular. Basically, the transformation in those ten years in that community was tremendous. When I started, in 1996/1997, lightning had destroyed the city's antenna, and to solve that problem, everyone used their savings to buy satellite dishes. From early 1996 to the end of that year, life in the community changed wildly. Before, you depended on the reception of a public antenna, and then, you start having satellite dishes that allowed people to watch other channels. From a complete dominance of TV Globo, you start getting Marimar (SBT), and Marimar becomes

³ The subject is dealt with in: LA PASTINA, A.; STRAUBHAAR, J. Multiple proximities between genres and audiences: The schism between telenovelas' global distribution and local consumption. *Gazette*, v. 67, n. 3, p. 271-288, 2005.

incredibly popular, first because it was different from what people were used to, but also because it had proximity, to use a concept from one of my counselors, Joseph Straubhaar, *cultural proximity*, with the traditional values of this community, with the patriarchal values of community⁴. Fast forward to 2010, the internet makes people think of the possibility of relating local and global simultaneously, which did not happen in 1996/1997, neither did it exist in 2001 or 2006. Why? Because, through the internet, people connect as much to the local, through blogs, local information, message boards; but also with the national and global scopes, through consumption, for instance. They have a credit card that allows them to buy what they see on TV, what they see on the internet. To understand what is happening today in this community is a lot richer because I can understand what happened in 2006, 2001, 1996/1997. It is the traditional ethnographic study, I am not doing anything different from what anthropologists have been doing for more than a century or more, which is to follow the process of cultural transformation in the community and understand how some of the rituals of community transform over time. My interest, my focus in this process, is the media: how media and the different technologies of communication that exist enable this community to transform, how the culture of this community transforms itself and how they use this forms of communication to understand their world and the one outside.

MATRIZes: Other than Macambira, did you survey any other communities?

La Pastina: I had done some small work, before starting my thesis, in another community in the Northeast part of the country, with some 700 inhabitants, but I never wrote about it, it was sort of a pilot to test the methodology. I also did some research at the border of Texas and Mexico, in some small communities, especially with Mexican immigrants, usually non-documented, regarding issues of information access, use of new technology. I did some work in Italy, analyzing the reception of the Brazilian telenovela *Terra Nostra*, from Rede Globo. I was seeing how a community from which several migrants portrayed in that show had watched it when it was aired in Italy. Also, I did some research in China, when I lived and taught there. I worked with some communities, conducting interviews about memory, how people remember the beginning of television during and after the Cultural Revolution in the country. But what brings me pleasure and what I feel strongly about, are two things:

⁴ Among the articles written based on that thesis, we highlight some: LA PASTINA, A. Telenovela reception in rural Brazil: gendered readings and sexual mores. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, v. 21, n. 2, p. 162-181, 2004; LA PASTINA, A. Selling political integrity: Telenovelas, intertextuality and local elections in Brazil. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, v. 48, n. 2, p. 302-325, 2004.

one is telenovelas in Brazil and how it develops over time and transforms itself; the other is to think how Macambira changed over time. The first is much more connected to the issue of text, production, to understand history and the development of the genre; the other is to think about this community as a long-term ethnographic project. Without a doubt, one of the models for such research is Richard Pace's, who wrote, under Conrad Kottak, about Grupá, in the state of Pará, studying the implementation of television in that community. Now, some twenty-something years later, he just released a book looking how the relationship between that community and television has developed over 25 years. There are few longitudinal study models in our subject matter, partially because it is so new, and partly because long-term studies demand a lifetime connected with it. This does not preclude us from other studies and publishing material regarding other issues. To conduct ethnographical interviews, ethnographic work, takes time, you need to move, all your obligation are brought to a standstill, and after you are back, it takes a lot of time to analyze the data and give it meaning. It's a costly process in several aspects, personal, professional, and financial. That is possibly why they are not frequently conducted.

MATRIZes: So, your main study is, and has always been, in Brazil. Being outside, living in the United States, what is it like to study a Brazilian subject – the telenovela, Brazilian culture? What is it like to keep the connection to that culture? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having this perspective, which is, in a way, that of an outsider?

La Pastina: The disadvantage is huge, and the advantage also exists. The disadvantage is that you are always running after it. I do not watch telenovelas, as well as the Brazilian news in my daily life, I depend on watching some over the internet, reading news over the internet, talking to my contacts and my trips. I try to go to Brazil once a year, sometimes more, sometimes less, but generally I go once a year and do something I call *immersive unstructured participant observation*, which is to talk to people, that I might or might not know, and talk about Brazil and listen to what they are saying. The advantage of not being in Brazil, I feel, is that when I get there, I am open to any information. Therefore, I am very receptive to understand what is happening, noticing trends and, likewise, when it comes to the telenovela issue, the relationship of telenovelas with cultural issues. This is an advantage. Even the disadvantage, which is lack of access to information, when you are studying another culture which you are not part of, on a daily basis, allows you to focus on some main issues within that culture. However, I am also Brazilian, lived there until I was

22, I keep going back there, and I have a fairly sizeable contact with the country, so this allows me to be both insider and outsider. One of the reasons I was interested in the idea of working with such a small community and I didn't know is that I was always concerned with the issue of being an insider. I do not believe you can be an insider doing research. The moment you take the role of researcher, you separate yourself from the community, even if you are part of it. You are an insider, but you are stepping out in order to understand it. So, nowadays, my research in a countryside town in the Northeast is not much different from a southerner researching the same city. The difference is that I do not have daily and direct access to the information regarding Brazil, or telenovelas. But the US has a long-lived tradition of international communication studies. I studied with Emile McAnany, who has studied Latin American media since the 1960s. Joe Straubhaar, my other counselor at the University of Texas, has studied Brazil since the 1980s. It's part of – and I will say our – our imperialist project, the American imperialist project of understanding the rest of the world. Thus, I was trained to be part of a scholarly group that studies other nations. But I have the big advantage of it being a nation I understand very well, from which I am part of, one which I have more access than if I studied in China, for instance. What is troublesome is, I am inside and outside. My understanding of Brazil is increasingly filtered by my way of understanding the US, my living in the US. Another advantage that I might have in studying another nation is that I lived a rather nomad life these last 20 years, teaching and researching in many countries. So, this issue of not being from a place allows me to get in it and look at it curiously, maybe.

MATRIZes: Regarding ethnographic research, what was your theoretical, methodological and even personal preparation, to spend 13 months in a community with a culture that was completely different from your own? And what does that immersion add to your work?

La Pastina: Before starting my field work, I had practically read everything that existed at the time regarding ethnography of the telenovela, qualitative study of telenovela, ethnography of media. Something that was clear at the time was that a lot of people, when they spoke of ethnography of audience, ethnography of media, spoke of qualitative studies, short term, interviews, with few exceptions, and, in general, the exceptions were people who had anthropologic training, but no media knowledge. So, there weren't many models on how to develop work within our subject field, and my training was that of a journalist, that was my foundation. For the thesis, I did a pilot test, I spent a summer, around two

months, in a very small community in Ceará, called Pasqual. It was a transforming experience. I had never lived in such a small place. I was born in Santo André, right outside of São Paulo, where I grew up, so the idea of 700-person town, with dirt roads, was downright *exotic*. When I arrived in Pasqual, I had, actually, idealized it a bit, creating an idea of the colonial ethnographer going into a village, living there and having that kind of adventure. I had some of that rancid traditional ethnographic bias, of studying another culture, studying a distant place. After two months there, I noticed that such bias has no basis and I thought to myself: “if I come here for that, I’d rather stay at home.” What made me decide that I really wanted to keep working on ethnography was realizing how much information I could get in two months time, thinking of the relationships I developed with people from that community, people I still think of to this day, and the possibility of understanding that community and its relationship with media. Those were strong bonds that allowed me to understand why television was so important to these people’s lives, their aspirations and desires. It was a powerful relationship, on living every day, 24 hours a day. You wake up in that community, go to sleep in that community. It’s that process of becoming intimate. The only way to truly develop ethnographic tools is to live through it. So, after two months in that community, I came back to Texas and reread a lot of classics, like Geertz, *Writing culture*, a collection of essays that Marcus and Clifford had edited. Eight months later, I moved to Brazil to start my field for a year. I arrived three months before the premiere of the telenovela, and would stay for its entire duration. The problem is that said show – *Rei do Gado* – was so successful that they kept extending it, which ended up lasting for nine months⁵. So I was there for almost thirteen months. Some issues: the only prerequisite was the said community was near a hospital, which was something my mother demanded (laughs). When I told her I’d live in a small community, she said “no problem, it will be great, but you need a hospital nearby because otherwise I won’t sleep.” This town was 15 miles from another city with a hospital, not that this meant much, but it was a hospital. And it was something important to me, I joke that it was my mother’s demand, but when you decide to do fieldwork, there are limits to think of: what is my tolerance for uncertainty? What is needed to survive in that context? Emotionally, more so than physically; physically isn’t so hard, but emotionally, I believe is always the greatest problem, because you’ll be isolated. At the time, the internet was horrible, and within the

⁵ In average, the eight o’clock telenovela for Rede Globo will air for seven months. Its length is usually dictated by its popularity with the audience.

community downright impossible, you had to lug your computer to another town and, rarely, would be able to get a connection. Using the phone was still expensive, so that limited things. This emotional process is extremely important. What I used to do was leave the community every three months, spend a week away, travelling. Once I went to São Paulo, the other times I went to the Northeast, it was a time I was able to relax, think about my own life, do other things that interested me. Then I'd go back and keep going. But I had that moment of recharging my batteries. As time went by, many people became friends, with a major problem: everyone thought I was married, with a wife. In truth, I had just broken up with a man. This tiny bit of information, which to me wasn't as insignificant, to them wouldn't be either, and never allowed me to feel completely at ease⁶. Nowadays, when I go back there, people look at me and say "ah...". They are much more connected and know, there is that somewhat informal thing of me being, probably, gay, but they don't speak of it, neither do I, but that original concern is gone, that they had at first. They were very curious, "who is your wife?", "where is your family", "why don't you have kids". That was a major problem being in the field, the issue of my personal life and how much I had the guts, or not, to reveal.

MATRIZes: And how did all of that, the field experience, helped in your thesis?

La Pastina: My first thesis was downright insane because, when I got back from the field, after 13 months, I had 30 interviews of roughly 1h45 each, plus another 20 interviews between 30 and 60 minutes, as well as some thousand written pages with observations on the computer, from my field diary. The way I keep a diary was discussing with other people, reading, and partly created by myself. I separate the field diary in three parts: in one, I write everything that happened, and I had a fairly defined routine, to which I will come back later; in a second one, I put down questions – which is now a lot easier with the feature of placing comments in the text itself – things I didn't understand, things I want to get back to and ask again, tasks that I have to get around or think about regarding a specific topic; and, thirdly, theories, metatheories, theoretical questions, that help explain what is happening. Then, I divide it all and have all that happened, the narrative; I have something that is more pragmatic, what I need to do to better understand what happened or questions that appeared but I hadn't thought of before; and later, I start analyzing all the data, I

⁶ The researcher develops discussion regarding the theme in: LA PASTINA, A. The implications of an ethnographer's sexuality. *Qualitative Inquiry*, v. 12, n. 4, p. 724-735, 2006.

theorize, think about what I need to read, what I have to search for, a theory that will help me understand, or, for instance, “it’s obvious that this has to do with what Bourdieu says”... I prepare my analysis. When I got back to the field, I had no idea of what I had to do, the amount of data was huge, so it took a while. Took me two years to analyze and write the thesis. I imagine that a good deal of the difficulty was due to, during field work, I did not think of what I would like to write, I was too open-minded, my sin was going there without having a focus for my data. I thought I wanted to study telenovelas in that community and understand the process. I had a very defined project for that grant, the process of understanding the relationship between the public and telenovelas, but for my thesis I didn’t have many questions, I had not defined if I would work only with that genre, or with relationships between men and women, or political issues. So, it took me a while to get around all that material. The big advantage was that, once it made sense, I had tons of material. After writing the thesis, I published several articles regarding the community, because I had a lot to say and even today I think “damn, I should have written that and I didn’t because I screwed up”. Thus, what ethnography does is allow you to have such a volume of material that favors a much wider analysis of a process, of a community. Ethnography, the good ones, that create good material, allow you to create deeper, more detailed analyses, and allow you to unfold several pieces of work. When I wrote the thesis, I thought of political, social and economic issues. However, I could have thought, as I later did, of other issues that were in the narrative. That is one of the advantages of ethnography, it entices, firstly, a richness of information, which can be paralyzing, but can also be transformative, offering great possibilities to understand the process better. But it is also not for everyone, they don’t have to use ethnography, you require a certain personality type. To do it is not different from studying statistics, which requires a certain way of thinking, a way to see the world. Methodology has some to do with your skin, your way of seeing the world. Ethnography, to me, is a way of conceiving the world that is very specific. You are not interested in a single question, you are interested in the immersion, in the multiplicity of questions within a wide context. Not everyone is interested in that. I am not saying that everyone should do it, or that it is the best way to study an audience, no. Ethnography helps to answer specific questions that have to do with the context of information you are seeking. In other questions, ethnography won’t help. And this is a pet peeve of mine; many people say they do ethnography, when they are actually doing interpretative, qualitative studies. You interview deeply, make participatory observations or discussion groups. But

ethnography is something much wider. Ethnography does not mean qualitative, you can survey in one, you can rely on photography, documents. Methodology used in collecting data when within ethnography is not what defines it. What defines it is a way of conceiving the field, it's an approach to research⁷. For instance, in these 15 years that I have been working with it, I have employed photography, video, archives, participatory observation, different kinds of interviews, life story, discussion groups, surveys, analysis of text and diaries. That is, all these forms of information collection are relevant depending on the question I am seeking to answer. And it all happens from within a context. Nigel Barley has a book called *Notes from a Mud Hut*, in which he speaks of working ethnography, of the time you are doing it, when you are in the field, 1% of the information you collect regards what you are interested in, and will actually be useful for your analysis; 99% is context that help you understand that 1%. And it's true. Most of the time I was in the field, collecting information that helped me understand people, comprehend the culture of the community, know their daily lives, the rituals, the moral values, the genre relationships, everything that allowed me to write and understand this relationship between telenovelas, media and community. But what I wrote is, actually, nothing, 1% may be too much.

MATRIZes: You mentioned a very stable routine at the field, what was it like?

La Pastina: I hate waking up early and I hate routine. I didn't have much of one in my daily life. When I am in my office, it's somewhat erratic, sometimes I come in early, sometimes late. In the field, I am someone else. Routine is the most important thing in the ethnographic experience, in my opinion, because routine allows people to count on you in a predictable way, so that people understand how you belong in that community, that you are part of that community. So I woke up at 5am, because my neighbor woke up at 5 and opened the window and started smoking his straw cigarette, and the smell would wake me up. The reason why people woke up so early is because everyone naps in the afternoon, because it's too hot to be outside. Noon, one, you close your window, it gets dark, you sleep for a couple hours. My routine, thus: I woke up at five, greeted my neighbors, sat with my computer and wrote, drinking coffee, and what I would write at this time would be higher ideas, reread what I'd written the day before, to be sure I had not missed anything, analyzing some of my writing, rethinking about the previous day. After that I left at about

⁷ Among the publications that reflect ethnographic research, we highlight: LA PASTINA, Antonio. Audience ethnographies: a media engagement approach. *Global Media Journal*, v. 4, n. 6, 2005.

eight-thirty, nine-ish, to walk around, which usually took me until lunchtime, around noon. And I always had lunch at a family's house, that cooked for other people in the community, and I ate at their house, over a big balcony, in truth, because they became my informants – I still have contact with them, they are people I care about, I saw their kids growing up. Basically, it became an important part of my ethnographic experience. In this 9 to 12 routine, let's say, I would go out and pass by corners where men were talking. It's interesting, because the morning was when I usually dealt with men. They were at the doors of businesses, the café, or city hall; sometimes I'd go to some rural area. I'd talk to the men, get up to date with the happenings, hear their side, talk about telenovelas; they, in general, denied watching, but ultimately they'd always admit to having watched it. It was important to understand that connection in order to stay connected to the masculine side of the community, which was a bit marginalized, because many were unemployed, didn't have a certain position within the community, but would still hold political power and held to the former patriarchal order. Lunch was the moment I learned of all the gossip within the community, everything that was going on, because this family had good connections, whatever was to happen on the weekend or that night, they would know and tell me. And this was done over the sound of the radio program regarding crime in that region. After that I went back home, and would sleep for one hour approximately, and then would write about everything that happened that morning, it was my field diary for the morning. At around 4pm I would leave, when everyone was up already, and then I'd visit several women, who were sitting, many of which outside the house, or in their living room with an open window, listening to the radio talk about female issues and telenovelas, embroidering. That was the moment in which I talked to women, with some kids that were coming back from school, playing. It was amazing how the city had a certain temporal and genre segregation. Of course, many times I'd talk to women during the morning, and with men in the afternoon, but they were more available at these times because they were, in a way, stuck to the machine, but they could talk while they embroidered, so they were a dedicated audience. The town was small, it was very easy to walk around, cross town by foot. I'd dine and watch the telenovelas. Each day I watched in a different house, sometimes at the town square, sometimes through someone's window. During the first four months, I'd visit houses, and by the fifth month I would have decided the people with whom I'd keep researching more deeply, so I'd go to their houses more often. I'd try to visit these people during the month. Sometimes, I'd visit two houses on the same night; sometimes, I'd watch

the seven o'clock at one house and then the eight o'clock at another. Sometimes I'd sit outside with people, and they wouldn't actually be watching the telenovela, but listening to it. Then, I'd go home and write until 11pm, everything that had happened that night. The next day, by morning, I'd review everything. I had to take notes, because if I didn't, I'd lose it, it was hard to separate what had happened the day before from the current day. And I had nothing to take my time, family, no other obligation, no internet, my diary-making was field work. I taught English two or three times a week at the middle school, which was also field work, because I was teaching, talking about music, discussing TV shows, it was a big part of it, and these youths became contacts.

MATRIZes: During your doctorate research, *Veja* magazine wrote a piece on that community while you were there, discussing the relationship of the Brazilian with telenovelas. How did the magazine deal with the theme and what was the local response?

La Pastina: Actually, *Veja* heard about the project because it was well financed, by several American foundations, with important scholars from Brazil and abroad. So they decided to run a piece about the project, not about my work, but they were so interested that they sent a reporter to this small town in Rio Grande do Norte. What happened is that the *Veja* reporter had a fairly limited vision, in my opinion. Since we were doing field work in a small town, a medium one and a big one, the journalist's idea was that the small one was more representative of the traditional and stereotypical of that relationship between audience and telenovela. There was an expectation that people were very poor, that they watched it at the town square publicly, and that they were very dependent on television. And that was not what I was interested in, that's not what I found there. I tried to show something more complex. But it's hard to describe and write the complexity of a field, in which I had been for nine months, into a *Veja* article, which, in turn, thought of the project in broader strokes. I was very worried, because if a bad article or a negative view of that community was portrayed, they would think I was part of the problem, that I represented the Northeast and Macambira in a negative way. And that's what happened. *Veja* published this major article and had a half-page picture of some people watching the telenovela at the town square, saying the place was so poor that some people didn't even have a TV and watched it in a public place. Which wasn't true. People would go there because they wanted to, everyone had a TV set at home. But the idea of the Northeast as poor, of the rural community as poor, prevailed. And obviously, people there were mad at me and the magazine. Those were hard

times. Emotionally, I felt guilty, the community, as many there, had been represented in a traditional, primitive, poor stereotype that, in general, people have regarding the region. The fact that the magazine decided to write that article there, because I was there doing research, did not help the community. The *Diário de Natal* ran an article in which I, among other people, said that, actually, that was a national media problem, that had a stereotypical vision of the Northeast and rural regions. So, the damage was done. It's one of those moments in which the ethnographic experience grows. I grew up as an ethnographer, I understood much better what it feels to be part of the outskirts of national media. My relationship with the community transformed itself, some people would not talk to me anymore, while others understood, supported me. It was a transformative moment.

MATRIZes: Even when you do media studies, the media has a hard time reporting it. Is it the same in the United States? Is there an isolation from what is produced by academics, even when it comes to thinking of the media, in regards to what the media portrays?

La Pastina: It's true, it's an interesting question that you ask, because it does happen. A good chunk of the knowledge that we generate in the academic environment does not go beyond scientific publications. Many times we are unable to be part of the media we are studying. There is a transformation, especially when it comes to Brazil, if you think about how research groups of telenovelas have access to their producers in the country, at least you have an in. In the case of news production, this is much more troublesome, it's still a bit of the ethos of the journalist, the idea of news as something objective, while most of the academics, especially when it comes to media, already know there is no such thing as objectivity, which is created socially. However, many journalists think of news as something objective – “I am narrating what actually happened” – and forget that there is a frame that we use to narrate facts. So, this separation does exist, it's very noticeable when we study the issues of the groups on the outskirts, minorities, which are *unempowered*. It is then that you see how the knowledge we developed, that is acquired, about these negative and stereotypical representations influence people who are consuming these products, that does not get media representation. However, Media changes little and slowly. The representations you see today are still very stereotype-heavy. It's frustrating, I think it's frustrating, yes. It's important that what we “discover” be useful for the society to which we belong. Historically, that is not the case. In fact, it is still said that “academics sit in an ivory tower,” separated from the rest of the world, and that's a problem. Nowadays, in the United

States, it's a major problem, especially in public school, like the one where I work, in which there is a big concern to make it clear that we serve the society to which we belong, as we serve the State, by teaching, but also by researching. The idea of knowledge for knowledge sake doesn't work anymore because financial resources are restricted, you have to demonstrate the validity of what you do. It's a problem, because not everything we research has immediate meaning. We have the right to research what we are interested in, without censorship, without control. However, at the same time, it is valid to think about how I justify this research within an organization that has the role of serving the community and is financed partly by public funds.

MATRIZes: Still on the subject of isolation: is there an in for Brazilian research, or for the rest of the "Third World", in the United States, or isn't it, in some way, a source?

La Pastina: There is very little of it, and it is indeed very little because Americans do not read other languages, and if the text is not in English, it's very hard. And if it's not in the periodicals that are published in English, that circulate abroad, it's equally difficult. I know that Brazilian magazines are now publishing in English, the question is: where are they being circulated? What libraries are they reaching? What electronic distribution systems are they part of? As important as publishing in English is bringing these publication to European and American libraries, and from other parts of the world, so that people can have access electronically. It is necessary to have a process of promotion outside of Brazil for these publications that are releasing articles in other languages, not only among people who are specialized in Brazil, because they, in general, know where to look for said information, have access to it, and many times, can read the language. So, for instance, it's vital that some group that is publishing in Brazil thinks of, for instance, going to ICA and make a stand and say "these are our publications, we are publishing in English, here are the websites." Otherwise, there is no penetration, which is a very serious problem. For example, cultural studies in Brazil and Latin America started before than they did in the United States, the appropriation of the studies of Birmingham or French theorists, such as Baudrillard, happened in Brazil before it did in the United States. So the circulation of information is still very restricted, very limited, and has to change.

MATRIZes: To conclude, we'd like you to speak about plans for future research. Also, we'd like to know if you consider returning to Brazil or if your career is, definitely, to continue in the United States.

La Pastina: Currently, I am the “administrator”, much of my time has been devoted to the issue of administration, which takes more time than I would like. But I am in the process of going back to the research, I am writing what I expect to become a book, it's a series of articles regarding this last field work I did in this community in Rio Grande do Norte, thinking over this issue of internet in Brazil and the relationship between internet and issues of national and local identity. Another thing I want to do is to write a little more about telenovelas. Recently, I conducted a series of interviews with telenovela writers in Brazil, which I am not sure if it will become a book or a series of articles regarding telenovelas in the country. One of my concerns is that there is very little about the subject in English. These are two short-term projects. As for the long term, I'm not sure, I have a project I have been fantasizing about, which involves work at the border of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, dealing with cultural and political identity issues and the media in that region, which is a very complicated one, with an extremely volatile identity. It's a project I've been thinking of, preparing myself for, maybe in some years it will be the time to go to the field. Coming back to Brazil, I'm not sure, I never had the opportunity. I love Brazil, I'd love to teach there for a while, but I don't know if it is permanently viable. I've been here for 25 years, my career is here, it's happened here, but that doesn't mean Brazil is not a possibility. Who knows?

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