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Developing subalternity: side effects of the expansion of formal education and mass media in Guaribas

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Abstract

This article investigates the social impact of the Zero-Hunger Program (Programa Fome Zero, henceforth PFZ) in its pilot-community, the village of Guaribas in Northeast Brazil, particularly with respect to the expansion of public education and mass media. I attempt to show how the PFZ development project went beyond the delivery of financial aid, basic infrastructure, and economic technology in Guaribas, and sought to reform its beneficiaries' conducts, capacities, aspirations, and psychological dispositions. To that end, PFZ's concerted effort included workshops, the extension of public schooling, as well as increased exposure to mass media artefacts and pedagogical soap-operas. This enterprise, however, generated adverse "side-effects" such as the devaluation of local knowledge, the decline of farming, the aggravation of intergenerational conflict, the substantial emigration of the younger generations, and Guaribanos' increasing internalization of subaltern status in relation to other national communities.

Keywords: Programa Fome Zero, development, public education, mass media, subalternity

Resumo

Este artigo analisa o impacto social do Programa Fome Zero em sua comunidade piloto, o vilarejo de Guaribas, no sertão sul do Piauí, especialmente no que tange a expansão da educação pública e da mídia de massa. Em Guaribas, o Programa Fome Zero foi muito além do provimento de recursos financeiros, infraestrutura básica e tecnologia econômica, e objetivou reformar as condutas, capacidades, aspirações e disposições psicológicas de seus beneficiários. Para atingir tal fim, as ações do programa incluíram oficinas (workshops), a extensão da educação formal e o aumento da exposição a artefatos da mídia de massa. Essas iniciativas, entretanto, geraram efeitos colaterais adversos, tais como a desvalorização dos saberes tradicionais locais, o declínio do trabalho agrícola, o agravamento do conflito intergeracional, a expressiva emigração das gerações mais jovens e a crescente internalização de status subalterno por parte dos guaribanos em relação a outras comunidades nacionais.

Palavras-chave: Programa Fome Zero, desenvolvimento, educação pública, mídia de massa, subalternidade

Developing subalternity: side effects of the expansion of formal education and mass media in Guaribas¹

Marcello Sorrentino

The village of Guaribas sits in the midst of the *Serra das Confusões* (lit. Mountains of Confusion), an ecological reserve of sandstone highlands in Northeast Brazil, on a plateau enveloped by deciduous vegetation. It is a rural village of about 1.000 people in a remote region of the semi-arid Backlands (*sertão*) of Piauí, where I conducted fieldwork from January 2006 to April 2008, of which 17 months were spent living in the village itself.² The people of Guaribas (*Guaribanos*) are primarily farmers and herders of goats, pigs, and cattle, who cannot be said to practice integral subsistence agriculture only because they sell a small surplus of beans and corn to outside merchants. Guaribanos descend mainly from three families, the Alves, the Rocha, and the Correia da Silva, the first of which settled in Guaribas sometime in the mid-eighteenth century. Since these *sertão* uplands have always been sparsely populated, a very low demographic density obtains for the municipality (1,41 inhabitants per km²), and accounts for the fact that almost all Guaribanos own a fair amount of land, passed on through generations, which they farm and show with pride. Even though the village's isolation should not be overplayed, until 1964, when a dirt trail trod only by animal caravans was slightly broadened, Guaribas was unconnected to the national road network, and no vehicles had ever reached the village. This precarious dirt road remains Guaribas' only connection to the national highway system, and the full trip from the closest town usually takes more

1 I have made use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of collaborators who have boldly disclosed information which might put either their jobs or their standing in the community at risk.

2 It is worthwhile to note that I have returned to Guaribas every year since completion of fieldwork, save for 2011 and 2015.

than four hours in the overcrowded backs of private trucks, for no public transport makes the complete journey to the village.

In 2003 the Brazilian government launched the Zero-Hunger Program (PFZ), a poverty reduction and social inclusion national development project, with Guaribas as one of its five pilot communities. Eventually, however, the village would become the flagship of PFZ and the government's social policy. PFZ articulated financial aid through conditional family grants called *Bolsa Família* (lit. Family Grant) on a massive scale: in 2006, 11.1 million families with a per capita monthly income below R\$120 received direct cash transfers totalling 8.2 billion Reais.³ In rural areas such as Guaribas, PFZ's main objective was to improve the livelihoods of poor farming families by introducing agricultural extension, drought-resistant crops, minor irrigation, micro-credit, livestock development, cooperatives, in sum, technologies to enhance productivity and income generation in general.⁴ Other typical PFZ interventions focused on infrastructure and its management; these included the building of model houses by COHAB (Popular Habitation Company), water supply capabilities by *Sede Zero* (lit. Zero-Thirst), hygiene and sanitation training, rural electrification, road improvement, land and population registration, and health and nutrition orientation (Programa Fome Zero 2002: 42; Programa Fome Zero 2003: 47).

Whilst the reason why Guaribas was specifically chosen by PFZ policy designers to be the project's main target community remains unclear, government statistics most probably influenced their decision. According to IBGE's (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) 2000 census figures, Guaribas was ranked third worst in Brazil in terms of the quality of life of its inhabitants, and even though monthly per capita income jumped from R\$44 in 2000 to R\$78 in 2005, Guaribas still retained the sixth position in FGV's (Fundação Getúlio Vargas) national poverty ranking (Murakawa 2005: 90). Information concerning the municipality's basic infrastructure supplemented the disquieting scenario conveyed by the above. Before 1997, when Guaribas and its surrounding settlements became a municipality, the village

3 Since then, *Bolsa Família* cash transfers have been separated from PFZ initiatives. Whereas *Bolsa Família* is still an active policy of the Brazilian government, most of PFZ's original interventions have been dismembered, and are now carried out by distinct government programs and institutions.

4 For more details, see "Fome Zero: O que pode ser feito" 2005; "Fome Zero: Como a sociedade pode participar" 2005; Betto 2004.

did not have a police station, a post-office, public schools, nor any local establishment for the administration of justice. Importantly, until 1998, the village did not have electricity, and there were no means of telecommunication with the outside world besides a few scattered and undependable public telephones (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 12, 16, 22).

Guaribas thus became PFZ's very own "laboratory of development"⁵, receiving more programs, project focus, and media attention than any other locality in Brazil. However, even given the actual set of circumstances that qualified the village as a beneficiary of the development project, with its campaign to establish Guaribas as an emergency area in dire need, the government contributed to fixing the village as a trope of misery and backwardness, thus stigmatizing it in the eyes of the nation. For the images of Guaribas that reached the rest of Brazil first through official government releases, such as the program's mission statements, and later through the media, by way of newspapers, tele-journalism, magazines, and internet articles were of poverty, hardship, and shocking lack of basic infrastructure. Thus, in the course of four years making the headlines in magazine, internet, and newspaper articles such as "Misery in all corners: Guaribas, synonymous with hunger"⁶, "Misery Museum"⁷, and "Guaribas, the city symbol of Zero-Hunger, still in misery"⁸, the village became analogous with the word through which it was continually evoked: misery. This sort of publicity, together with the immediacy with which the program was launched, and the portentous names of ministries especially created such as "The Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security and Fight Against Hunger" formed an atmosphere of drama and urgency around Guaribas and PFZ, on which the government capitalized in order to convert social policy into political propaganda.

The bleak picture one is led to imagine through the Brazilian government development campaign and the national media coverage, as well as through IBGE and HDI (Human Development Index) reports, however, is not what one encounters in the village. To begin with, the well-known claims concerning chronic famines in the village were, at best, incorrect. Excepting

5 "Rede de Educação Cidadã" 2009.

6 "Miséria em qualquer canto: Guaribas xará da fome" 2005

7 Murakawa 2005: 90

8 "Guaribas, cidade símbolo do Fome Zero, ainda na miséria" 2007.

sporadic drought years, there has never been starvation in Guaribas, and its very proposition seemed odd to the several Guaribanos with whom I discussed it.⁹ Regarding the physical aspect of the village itself, there is nothing inherently unattractive in the architecture of houses and the geographical occupation of space, but modest and functional structural design which makes use of local geotic materials, such as adobe mud bricks and stockades, adapted to local environmental conditions. The projection of misery into those structures and materials is the responsibility of journalists, travellers, and PFZ teams that ventured into the area, carrying their own aesthetic notions about the built environment with them — i.e., which designs create comfort and the impression of the beautiful, which building materials display status and wealth, how social and private space should be ordered and experienced, and so on. Moreover, since they own their lands and properties, Guaribanos are able to escape the more exploitative work and living conditions that a great part of the peasantry in Northeast Brazil must endure as tenant farmers instead of small property owners. In effect, the types of crops typically cultivated, beans and corn, and the regime of labour in the fields allows for great latitude in choosing when and how much to work. There is plenty of spare time, which can be spent with family, friends, or in much-loved activities such as hunting, playing domino, climbing the mountains in groups (especially during the rainy season, when the rock pools are brimming with clear rainwater), meeting and talking at the square just after nightfall, or playing pool at the modest bars in the village. Finally, restricted local infrastructure, purchasing power, and ownership of consumer goods, some of the main criteria for HDI assessments, render local material living conditions difficult, but are not necessarily definitive in judging the quality of life of individuals.¹⁰ Yet, the focus on the negative aspects of local life so dominated the publicized image of Guaribas that little space was left for any notion of wellbeing in the village.

9 Guaribas has never experienced a food crisis except for a *sui generis* drought in 1954, and its yearly bean harvest has consistently surpassed, on average, 300 tons, according to local EMATER (Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Enterprise) officials. In fact, Guaribanos iterated to me that before the village became a municipality in 1997, when the keeping of livestock was not forbidden within its more populated perimeter, “Guaribas was rich with animals”, and “the mountains were white with goats and sheep”.

10 HDI measurements consider three crude indicators for its composite index: life-expectancy, educational attainment, and average income. These and other “objective” criteria selected as indicators of people’s quality of life have been widely questioned (c.f. Du Toit 2005; Hulme 2010: 61; Sacks 2005).

If the government constructed a particularly unsavoury image of the village by simply assembling and divulging depressing statistics, it went further by rendering an unfair depiction of Guaribanos and their social lives in PFZ Sustainable Development Plans. Preliminary PFZ studies from 2002 and 2003 describe Guaribanos as “passive”, “apathetic”, “isolated”, “unaware of any form of social control”, “lacking skills and information”, “with a weak power of organization”, and “deferring their destinies to external agents such as God and the government” (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 19, 32-3, 35-6, 38-9; Programa Fome Zero 2002: 4). Concerning the local quality of life, PFZ reports state that “there are no structures or activities that valorise culture and promote leisure”, and that “the population has as its only form of recreation watching television” and “local football matches” (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 19, 40). Thus, they affirm, “local culture is latent”, the youth “has no interest in local customs”, and “cultural activities are no longer practised and families are losing their cultural memories” (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 19, 39).

In order to address this alarming state of affairs in Guaribas, a specific branch of PFZ was called into action. TALHER (Equipe de Capacitação para a Educação Cidadã - Team for Capacity Building and Education for Citizenship) was PFZ’s section responsible for coordinating and delivering social policies which aimed to transfer “social technology” and “eradicate social exclusion”.¹¹ Among its stated goals at the official PFZ website were: “universal access to the rights of citizenship”, the socioeconomic emancipation of disadvantaged families, “the expansion of public schooling”, and “the reduction of the social deficit”.¹² Its mission statement in the Brazilian government’s official PFZ website read:

For the Zero-Hunger Program, TALHER doesn’t only concern physical, but also mental and spiritual nourishment. (...) The Zero-Hunger Program does not only want to satiate the hunger for bread. It wants to satiate the hunger for beauty, promoting the citizenship education of its beneficiaries.¹³

¹¹ Fome Zero: o que é” 2005.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Matar a fome de pão e saciar a sede de Beleza” 2005.

Interestingly, the vagueness of this formulation, without any further definition of “citizenship education” and “beauty”, was repeated throughout official government websites.¹⁴ In the Federal Public Ministry website there could be found an assertion about what it means to “sate the hunger for beauty”. Yet, it is unclear and only multiplies variables, introducing new notions such as “self-esteem” and “the perception of life as a biographical process” that remain just as indefinite as “beauty”:

To sate the hunger for beauty is to propitiate to the undernourished not only the satisfaction of his stomach, but also of his *conscience* and his *spirit*. To emerge from the perception of life as a biological phenomenon to the perception of life as a biographical process. To form citizens, men, and women with regained *self-esteem*, enjoying existence as people who feel, and know themselves to be *happy* (Betto 2005: 1) (my italics)

Though more remains to be explained than is understood in these enunciations, PFZ notions of “social technology”, “self-esteem”, and “beauty” are significant because they were involved in the deployment of models for the construction of specific identities among local actors, potentially reproducing “hierarchies of knowledge and society” (Mosse 2004:4) whilst simultaneously depoliticizing such an enterprise (Ferguson 1990). Even though these essential concepts were not sufficiently defined in official PFZ policy descriptions, they were definitely at play in PFZ pedagogical discourses, in the social impact of the project’s policies, and in the everyday practices of program managers, consultants, technicians, and villagers.

At the outset, one may already perceive a common denominator among the enunciations above. They describe PFZ beneficiaries as individuals who “hunger” for beauty, happiness, and self-esteem, which implies that they both lack and yearn for them. In simple terms, they imply that in their present condition these individuals are, to some extent, unattractive, unhappy, and suffering from low self-esteem. An analysis of PFZ’s Sustainable Development Plans for Guaribas shows that the assertion above does not push the project’s propositions too far. These plans cite as

14 “Matar a fome de pão e saciar a sede de Beleza” 2005; “Fome Zero: Programas” 2005; “Presidência da República” 2005. See also Betto 2004, and Betto 2005.

obstacles to development the prevailing local “feeling of negativity, fear, and low self-esteem”, the “dependency on government programs”, and a common “fragmented outlook, that is, the population refer[ring] to the municipality not as a whole but as parts” (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 6). According to these documents, local knowledge is marked by “the insufficiency of qualified human resources”, meaning that villagers “lack information”, “education”, “skills”, and “an adequate knowledge of technology” (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 18-9, 38, 46).

Assertions of this kind are of particular significance not only because they authorize intervention, but also because they enshrine stereotypes and make explicit what PFZ and development planners think is wrong with the village and its people. Thus PFZ proposes first to “sensitize” the population to its needs and inadequacies, and then to “capacitate” them by means of a comprehensive reform of their attitudes and competences (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 7). Project activities seek to “rouse reflection, awakening in the community the need to leave the stance of RECEIVING to SEEKING [sic], introducing the notion of citizenship, and attempting to elevate self-esteem” (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 7). PFZ programs, courses, seminars, and workshops aim to “structure and strengthen civil society”, and to “capacitate” and “socialize” Guaribanos by imparting technical expertise and “social technology” (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 41-2; Programa Fome Zero 2002: 36). They are to “inform the population”, “restructure family institutions”, “restructure community association”, familiarize villagers with national “political institutions”, impart “adequate economic technology”, and, ultimately, “articulate a new vision of the future” (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 40-3, 45-6, 48-51).

Therefore, beyond the provision of infrastructure and financial aid to locals, PFZ aimed to effect nothing short of a major reconfiguration of the person in Guaribas — her skills, capacities, attitudes, aspirations, and self-esteem— in the psychological, social, economic, and political realms. In this sense, following Gledhill (1996), Hobart (1993), Escobar (1997), among others, it is plausible to characterize PFZ as the instrument of a bona fide “civilizing” program tied to a project of governance (c.f. Ferguson 1990: xiii; Nash 1994; Pigg 1992; Woost 1993, 1997).

PFZ workshops in Guaribas

One of the main instruments employed by PFZ in its campaign to reform local human capacities took the form of courses and workshops. Most PFZ workshops and meetings I attended as part of the audience in Guaribas consisted to a large extent in attempts to persuade villagers' of their own inadequacies. For in order to convince Guaribanos of the desirability of contemporary urban values, aspirations, and attitudes they must first dissuade them of the appropriateness of their former competences. Therefore, in seminars about the "World Scenario", for instance, Guaribanos were confronted with their own insularity regarding knowledge of other countries' peoples, cultures, and histories, reinforcing their sense of possessing very limited "knowledge of the world". In alternative income generation courses, development workers made constant reference to the local under-exploitation of available man-power and resources, often criticizing villagers for their lack of initiative, energy, and ambition to "prosper". From their experience in "Potentiality Fairs", where Guaribanos were encouraged to suggest local aptitudes and propose ways of increasing their income and wealth, development workers concluded: "people are indolent (*acomodado*), misinformed, and do not know how to act" (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 38). Likewise, in TALHER "Citizenship Education" meetings to boost mobilization and participation, government workers censured the villagers' "lack of agency" to demand benefits and improve the local "unsavoury living conditions" (Programa Fome Zero 2003: 32-3). In "Hygiene Workshops" numerous local habits were frequently singled out as unclean and unhealthy, and participants were lectured, for example, on how disgusting (*nojento*) was their common custom of eating "loose animals" — that is, the chicken, pigs, and goats allowed to roam free close to the village. And, finally, "Beauty Workshops" attempted to transform the physical appearance of Guaribanos by introducing "new" and "urban" techniques of beauty, from trendy haircuts and fashionable clothing to the regular use of cosmetics and perfumes.

For instance, a TALHER "Beauty Workshop" called *Cidadania Ativa* (Active Citizenship) took place in a public school during a weekend in June 2006. The classrooms had been prepared for TALHER contracted aestheticians, hairdressers, and manicurists to work on the appearance of Guaribanos. There, villagers went from sector to sector, having their

hair cut and styled in one room, their nails done in another, and make-up and cosmetics (in the case of women) applied in yet another.¹⁵ Guaribanos were manifestly amused by the experience: they smiled as they sat down to be groomed, and teased and complimented each other as they met in the corridors between sectors. All these services were offered gratuitously by TALHER.

In addition to fashion and physical appearance, demure and comportment also indicate, and embody, cultural transformation (Elias 2012 [1939]). Hence, besides being coached in styles of dress, accessories, and grooming in beauty workshops, Guaribanos were also encouraged to assimilate etiquette and manners which reflect prevailing cosmopolitan standards of grace, *bon ton*, and propriety. For instance, villagers, and especially local girls, were constantly reminded not to spit in the streets, blow their noses directly onto the ground, sneeze and cough without covering their noses and mouths, sit with their legs uncrossed, walk barefooted, and look for lice in each other's hair in public. They were also urged to sport clean and untorn clothes, tend to wounds and scars in their legs, avoid skin aging due to exposure to the sun, and remove traces of dirt from their bodies, all of which are very common in rural contexts. These workshops, then, sought to clean up, as it were, the signs of rural life from Guaribanos, many of whom came to invest heavily in beauty products following the advice of TALHER instructors.

Hence, in these workshops, Guaribanos were lectured on the kinds of selves they should seek to be, and on what they must do to themselves — the practices and standards by which they should act upon themselves to reform or improve themselves — in order to become prosperous, free, and fulfilled. Typically, Guaribanos were encouraged to maximize work and production, reinvest profit, and accrue wealth; to acquire formal education and technological knowledge; to assimilate as much as possible cosmopolitan aesthetic, hygiene, and etiquette paradigms; to be ambitious in the sense of seeking new personal goals and career ideals; and to be more self-assertive, at least, in the interest of agency and political participation. Above all, in these workshops, strong messages

¹⁵ It is worthy of note that the hairstyles suggested to, and accepted by most Guaribanos were generally much shorter than the lengths typically worn by men, women, and children in Guaribas. Hairdressers conveyed these as having a “cleaner”, more modern look.

were sent associating diligence and entrepreneurship with wealth and worth. Underlying this discourse is the principle of meritocracy whereby opportunities for social mobility, career enhancement, prestige, and affluence may be seized by those who are proficient in the required moral and technical competencies. On the other hand, poverty, ignorance, and lack of success were connected to a chain of other negative signifiers, such as the apparent “laziness” or “sloppiness” of locals, which several development workers characterized as one of their most detrimental moral weaknesses. The means through which these directives were posited ranged from instructors’ explicit recommendations, cautioning tales, and derision, to the reification of these propositions in illustrated course packages and the calculated use of media artefacts, such as *Tecendo o Saber* (Weaving Knowledge), a government sponsored pedagogical soap opera which will be considered below.

The partnership between PFZ and the media

PFZ initiatives and state rhetoric were but one element in a complex assembly of forces and authorities that included, among others, mass media and popular culture artefacts — multiple circuits of influence that throw grids of perception and judgement over personal conduct and competencies. Thus soap operas, tele-journalism, daytime talk shows, pop music, magazines, and advertisements act as relays in the projection of aspirations and desirable lifestyles, presenting myriad normative models “no less powerful from being de-coupled from the authoritative prescriptions of the public powers” (Rose 1999 [1989]: 229). In these and other vehicles of persuasion, signs and images of the good life are inscribed: template lifestyles imbued with the ideals of autonomy, self-assuredness, self-realization, freedom, material prosperity, and success. Along the same line, the recent penetration of mass media in Guaribas intersected with PFZ’s policies and initiatives to transform the personal competencies, conducts, and social lives of villagers.

It has been widely observed that interactions between development and the media are mutually reinforcing, and that social development can be accelerated by the acquisition of information from the media (Beckett and Kyrke-Smith 2007: 12; Deane 2005: 177; Francis 2009: 62-4; Nassanga

2009: 57; Schramm 1964: 115; Sparks 2007: 3; Tufte 2005: 160; Wainsbord 2005: 77; Zeleza 2009: 21). As a vehicle for the transmission of ideas, images, normative behaviours, and information, the media can contribute to the development of beneficiaries' "social capital", so that mass education and behaviour change via the media grew as a concern and ambition since the 1930's, but accelerated in the 1970's (Tufte 2005: 162-3). This has led to the emergence of "development media" and "entertainment education", and their employment as a communication strategy in development projects has grown significantly over the past decade (Sabido 2004; Singhal and Rogers 2004; Tufte 2001, 2005). Their model of social transformation is premised on the assumption that "continuing contact with another culture leads to the borrowing of customs and beliefs" (Schramm 1964: 114), and thus based on "the dissemination through the mass media of the psychic attributes of the modern personality as defined in the developed Western countries" (Sparks 2007: 47).

Authors who advocate the use of the media in the service of development usually stress the positive effects of the sector in improving good governance, transparency, and accountability by building public awareness and exposing issues of public concern to open discussion. In this view, mass communication, mass transmission techniques, and educational radio and television primarily reinforce democratic institutions, ensure good governance, and empower citizens, becoming important tools for the development of beneficiaries and their sociopolitical contexts (Deane 2005; Ramírez 2005; Schramm 1964; Tufte 2005; Wainsbord 2005).

Other authors, however, argue that while the proliferation of media in many developing countries was initially marked by an upsurge of public debate, "evidence is growing that, as competition intensifies, content is increasingly being shaped by the demands of advertisers and sponsors who pay for the newly liberalized media" (Deane 2005: 184), and that "the result is more urban biased, consumer oriented media" (Nassanga 2009: 58). Nassanga reinforces this point by providing examples of how the media in Tanzania, Zambia, Nigeria, and Francophone West Africa target a middle-class audience with disposable income, and gives more attention to urban affairs, urban problems, and urban culture, thus greatly "alienating some African populations from their cultural norms, values, and customs" (2009: 55).

Besides development media, “entertainment and advertising, along with educational and public informational programming, play a critical role in changing or generating individual and collective perceptions and behaviour” (Aseka 2009: 87), defining “new forms of etiquette and social dispositions” (James 2000: 36). Through its focus on wealthy urban elite interests and the promotion of the ideas of more powerful social classes, the media produce new worlds of experience and imagination for poor rural populations as they “represent ways of living and provide models of how one might appropriately relate to others, as well as how recognition, status, honour, and prestige are given or withheld” (Kimani and Middleton 2009, xi-xii). Within these core-periphery relations in the flow of media content, less affluent rural populations are often “pressured to shape social institutions to correspond to the values and structures of the dominant representations”, and “collectively strive to acquire the media-produced images of ‘the good life’ [such as portrayed] in movies and soap-operas” (Aseka 2009: 90; c.f. Schiller 1976).

In effect, drama has been, and continues to be, an important means of communicating messages and marketing social behaviours. Tufte has studied entertainment-genres used for the promotion of individual behavioural change, particularly serialized TV narratives such as telenovelas and soap operas in Brazil. He believes that these can serve the agendas of social movements by making core problems (such health issues and social inequality) visible, “putting pressure on politicians, and empowering audiences comprised of marginalized groups to collective action” (2005: 160). Nevertheless, Tufte acknowledges that telenovelas also maintain “the hope and aspiration of the audience — some would say delusion of the audience — for social change and ascent” by inserting in the melodramatic narratives stories of social mobility and personal success that would seldom be realized by marginalized and low income social actors in real life (2005: 170). Thus, through a particular aesthetic that “avoids the ostensible exposure of social inequality”, telenovelas can contribute to an internalized acceptance of the status quo (Tufte 2005: 168):

the physical portraits of the lower classes in telenovelas tend not to be as physically explicit as in real life. Slums are seldom seen, and worker’s boroughs are always built almost beyond recognition, being cleaner, more beautiful, and always more bountiful and richer than in real life (2005: 169).

In the same vein, I argue below that the penetration of mass media in Guaribas not only acted as a relay in the transmission of certain values and attitudes advanced by PFZ, but also contributed to normalize the vision of a docile lower-class workforce through what Souza has called “the myth of meritocracy” (Tufte 2003: 169).

In the first place, the recent penetration of mass media in the village is complicit in the process of Guaribanos’ increasing “awareness” of subaltern status vis à vis other national and international communities. For its introduction in the village gave Guaribanos a new dimension of the disparity between village life and metropolitan social standards. Since 1998, when a few households were first connected to the electrical power system, the village experienced a gradual though steady expansion of access to mass media as more villagers bought appliances such as TV’s, radios, and satellite dishes. This expansion culminated in the construction of an 120-metre telecommunications antenna thrust in the middle of Guaribas, an initiative articulated by PFZ in 2004 which made satellite dishes in the village unnecessary for TV reception. Thenceforth, the diffusion of mass media inaugurated a traffic in significant symbols — representations and imageries of desirable (urban) lifestyles, standards of behaviour, models of success and self-realization, as well as paradigms of family orientation, career enhancement, and economic prosperity — imparted by the ethical scenarios of soap operas, daytime talk shows, radio chat programs, advertisements, cinema, sport, fashion, tele-journalism, tabloids and show-biz magazines, pop music and artefacts of popular culture, and so forth. Their impact on the social lives and psychological dispositions of Guaribanos should not be underestimated. For as Rose and authors from various disciplines point out, these “cultural forms may stabilize in a more profound manner than specific norms”, thus playing a vital role in remodelling behaviour and reshaping aspirations and capacities:

Life is to imitate the images of life, the simulacra of joy, warmth, and achievement presented in advertisements, television chat shows, soap operas and other public imaginings of personality, conviviality, and winning ways. These images provide the template against which the mundane dissatisfactions of our lives (...) are to be judged and found wanting. According to this meta-world of images and values, more luminous and real than any other world we

know, the self is to be remodelled so that it can succeed in emitting the signs of a skilled performance (1999 [1989]: 242).

The assimilation of these new cultural forms and values generates the accumulation of cultural capital, and was locally seen as key in the internalization of a modern, cosmopolitan identity (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]).¹⁶ By the same token, the unequal competence at, and familiarity with these cultural forms also led to new modes of social exclusion or demotion. The mastering of this novel cultural capital was so critical during my stay in the village that an example of its sensitivity can be grasped from the internal downclassing and upclassing in local teenage girls' groups, which occurred on grounds as subtle as a girl failing to understand or employ correctly a new slang introduced by the female protagonist of *Malhação*, an afternoon soap opera aired by the Globo Television Network where famous young actors portray teenagers in an upper-middle class school in Rio de Janeiro. Girls would assemble in the square at night exchanging views on the last show, pioneering, working out, and trading the cultural concepts gathered from that afternoon, from sociolect and fashion articles to their favourite characters' "stylish" attitudes and ideals. In these groups, such concepts became a sort of currency for "cultural jockeying", that is, for an internal competition for popularity and prestige based on cultural capital transmitted by mass media objects.

Most likely, it was a strategic decision by PFZ designers to integrate the expansion of mass media and telecommunications to other development initiatives. In fact, Rose (1999) maintains that these vehicles often act as relays in the promotion of certain types of career enhancement, lifestyle maximization, maxims of comportment, identity construction through consumption patterns, and desirable "ways of thinking, feeling, wanting, and doing" (Markus et al. 1997: 16). PFZ in Guaribas provides an example of this partnership between the mass media and the development enterprise. Almost every TALHER "Citizenship Education Workshop" I attended was conducted at the newly built Social Services for Commerce (SESC - Serviço Social do Comércio) complex's AV room, and consisted in the showing of an episode of *Tecendo o Saber*, followed by a group discussion. *Tecendo o Saber* is

16 Coleman uses the term "human capital" to describe the same set of personal resources: "human capital is created by changing persons so as to give them skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways" (1990: 304).

a pedagogical soap opera created by the Brazilian Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Roberto Marinho Foundation (the non-profit branch of the Globo Network) and the Vale do Rio Doce Foundation (the non-profit branch of the Brazilian multinational, the second largest mining conglomerate in the world). The soap opera comprises 65 episodes, divided into four modules, which were, and continue to be aired by four TV channels, Rede Globo, TV Cultura, TV Escola, and Canal Futura. In *Tecendo o Saber* figure famous actors of Globo soap operas, household names like Camila Pitanga, Bruno Garcia, Alexandre Borges, Giulia Gam, Letícia Sabatella, Benvindo Siqueira, among others, who are well known to the Brazilian public. Besides the presence of Globo telenovela stars, episodes are split into three eight minute blocks with two intervals, which makes for an easy viewing experience for audiences.

The plot orbits around the lives and struggles of six main characters who represent stereotypical individuals from lower-class backgrounds, most of whom were born in the Northeast of Brazil and moved to a public housing project in the periphery of a large, unspecified Southeastern metropolis where the action takes place.¹⁷ The main protagonist is Francisco, a middle-aged Northeastern migrant who decides to try his luck in the metropolis, and faces unemployment and hard living conditions as a result of his own underqualification in the city's competitive labour market. Besides lacking formal education, Francisco is illiterate, but chiefly thanks to his gradual acquisition of formal education and an entrepreneurial attitude, he is finally able to find stable work and adequate housing. Valdete is a black middle-aged street sweeper who dreams of being a famous singer, and recurrently tries (in vain) to help her husband, the “eternally unemployed” Januário, to stop moving between temporary jobs and find a permanent occupation. In effect, Januário, a white middle-aged man from Rio de Janeiro, often provides the storyline with comic relief: he is a passive, indolent character who has nearly conformed to his regular unemployment, and usually advances unfashionable conservative ideas that are always proved wrong at the end of episodes. For this reason, Januário is the only character to have his own “music theme” in the soap

17 The soap opera was filmed at Conjunto Habitacional Bandeirantes, a housing project in suburban Rio de Janeiro.

opera, a humorous tune of trumpets and trombones reminiscent of burlesque comedy. Celestino is a Northeastern migrant in his early sixties who arrived at the metropolis many years before the time of the action, and who was able to establish himself as a bar and bazaar owner in the community through a mixture of diligence, money saving, and honesty. His love interest in the plot is Socorro, also a migrant from the North of Brazil, and a middle-aged single mother who regularly sells baked goods and cleans middle-class households to generate income. Bruna, her daughter, is a black teenager who represents the first generation born of migrant workers in the metropolis. She is a dedicated student at the local public school, speaks in “correct” Portuguese with a Rio de Janeiro accent, and is knowledgeable in contemporary matters, such as environmental issues, energy conservation, sex education and contraceptives, and world events, so that she frequently instructs grown-ups on the importance of being attuned to, and pro-active in these topics. She is also actively engaged in community problems, often encouraging other residents to mobilize against unfavourable aspects of living conditions in the neighbourhood (the institution of a polluting factory nearby, the creation of a landfill in the district, the lack of a local sewage system) and to demand their rights through official means (petitions to the mayoralty, open letters to the press, community radio announcements, etc.).¹⁸

Hence, the cast of characters of *Tecendo o Saber* captures precisely the constituency at whom its stories are directed: lower-class Brazilians with little or no formal education, of Northeastern *sertanejo* and/or black racial background, speaking with their dialectal accents and expressions, and facing the common problems of migrating from a rural setting to a large city in the country’s more metropolitan Southeastern region. In effect, the very opening sequence of the soap opera suggests this transition: a Northeastern *forró* theme song plays as we see the images of *jangadas* (fishing boats with triangular sails typical of Northeast Brazil), a panorama of semi-arid vegetation also emblematic of the Northeast region, a scene from the *Bumba-meu-boi* Northeastern traditional feast, followed by large city scapes, such as a wide downtown avenue busy with the traffic of people and cars. In fact, the very first episode opens with Francisco leaving his

¹⁸ *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 2, DVD 2, Episode 12; *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 1, DVD 1, Episode 6.

small village in the Northeastern state of Maranhão for a large city in the Southeast, and as he watches through the bus window the images of his native land go by, we hear in off:

Since people have always left their places of birth in search of a better future, those who have moved from their native land know how difficult it is to miss family and friends left behind. And, at the same time, to adapt to completely different places, peoples, and ways of life. To face these changes means learning, discovering, winning challenges, and growing. (...) Most names have a meaning; our friend who now travels by bus, for example, is called Francisco, which in Latin means “free man”.¹⁹

It is hard to miss the laudatory notes with which this transition from the rural to the metropolitan is depicted. As Francisco’s story unfolds, he works hard at a construction site and in a string of badly paid temporary jobs from which he is regularly laid-off, until he is taken to an employment agency by Socorro. There, Francisco finds out that the clerk is the long lost love of his life, a young woman who had left his hometown some time before him, and with whom he had corresponded until she finally broke up their engagement in a letter. Francisco, ashamed of having to admit being illiterate, cannot work up the courage to address her, and runs away from the agency at the first opportunity. But illiteracy does not only harm Francisco in hindering his chances at finding a job. Later in the episode we learn that his ex-girlfriend never ended their relationship: being illiterate, Francisco delegated the reading of his letters to a girl in his village who was in love with him, and who wilfully deceived him into thinking that the relationship was over. Consequently, in this little scenario, shame, thwarted prosperity, and the irreparable loss of love are equated with illiteracy and the lack of formal studies.

Similar stories and ethical narratives are deployed in the course of the soap opera, associating the acquisition of formal education, the development of pro-active and “go-getter” attitudes, as well as diligent work and career-enhancement with happiness, success, and prosperity. Importantly, economic viability and distance from want are not the main or sole recompenses for these kinds of entrepreneurship. The scenes and the plot

19 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 1, DVD 1, Episode 1.

are familiar from soap operas, as are the repertoire of moral lessons and rewards driven by simple, universal, wholesome needs: love, affection, attention, dependency, reassurance, intimacy, and social recognition. In this fashion, throughout *Tecendo o Saber* we follow Francisco working and studying hard to obtain a high-school diploma and qualify to ever better occupations, being finally able to rise from the position of builder to mason to electrician. Yet, apart from achieving economic stability, Francisco's career enhancement is also rewarded by the increased attentions of local young women, as well as by winning his mother's admiration.²⁰ We also watch Socorro, Bruna, and Valdete creatively envisaging and succeeding in alternative income generation enterprises, such as buying a stand at the local fair and wholesaling baked goods, selling an aunt's lacework production to a salesman for considerable profit, establishing a local baked goods cooperative, and helping a family in the community to overcome their economic difficulties by retailing recycled artefacts such as ashtrays, purses, and toys made from refuse. However, economic viability is not the sole end-result of entrepreneurship. As Bruna and Socorro make the baked goods to be sold at the fair, they are looking at each other and smiling cheerfully, thus strengthening the bonds of love and solidarity between mother and daughter.²¹ As Bruna's aunt embroiders the lacework to be commercialized, we are shown a convivial and optimistic work environment in the family living-room, where all admire with great satisfaction the beauty and quality of the products.²² As Bruna and Socorro labour at the local baked goods cooperative, we are presented with images of happiness at work, people joking with each other, merrily covering cakes with sugar and candy, smelling the bread with closed eyes and a contented smile.²³ And finally, as Bruna and Socorro join forces with their neighbours in the recycled artefacts enterprise, they are able to prevent Bruna's boyfriend's family from having to move away from the community due to its financial difficulties.²⁴ Therefore, the pursuit of love, friendship, familial tenderness, and even a satisfying sex life, as described momentarily, accompany

20 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 3, DVD 1, Episode 8.

21 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 3, DVD 1, Episode 5.

22 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 2, DVD 2, Episode 16.

23 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 3, DVD 1, Episode 7.

24 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 1, DVD 2, Episode 9.

increased prosperity as persuasive reasons for changes in behaviour, values, and ideals.

In one of the most compelling illustrations of the rewards of energetic entrepreneurship, gratifying in social and psychological ways far beyond the enhancement of income, Valdete urges Januário, her unemployed husband, to be innovative and resourceful in order to find a way to complement her street sweeper earnings. As she gets ready to leave for her job in the morning, Januário lazily watches TV; she turns to him, rather aggressively, and says:

Ideas [for making money] don't fall from the sky, Januário. You have to dig deep, to go for it! You won't achieve anything by remaining "planted" in this sofa. (...) I need to go because I'm the one who "makes it rain on my garden". And turn off that TV, it won't help you at all!²⁵

As a result of their conversation, Januário gets the idea of starting an organic vegetable garden in his backyard, an initiative that meets with instant success as he is able to place his produce at Celestino's bazaar, so that both men profit. Significantly, the episode closes with Valdete putting an end to the "sex strike" through which she had decided to punish Januário for his idleness, and in the last scene we see husband and wife embracing in bed as the light fades out.²⁶

Apart from the eulogy of entrepreneurship and the acquisition of formal education, *Tecendo o Saber* is replete with imageries of ideal registers of sociability, family and neighbour solidarity, and widespread community cooperation. Characters help each other find jobs and cope with financial difficulties, they collaborate in economic enterprises, lend and borrow from each other, exchange relevant information and knowledge, give and take advice, share food and resources, visit each other frequently and are received with great hospitality, in sum, they make up an active, solidary, economically progressive lower-class community. Yet, these images convey more than a contented underprivileged neighbourhood: they normalize the vision of a docile lower-class workforce which, no matter how low in the

25 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 1, DVD 2, Episode 10.

26 *Ibid.*

scale of occupational hierarchy, is optimistic, proud, and ultimately happy.²⁷ For example, as Francisco mixes cement and sand at a construction site, sweating profusely under the sun, he remarks to a fellow builder, “Damn hard work, isn’t it, Rivaldo?”, to which the latter replies, “Yeah, but don’t you complain. I was unemployed for two months. This city swallows us!”.²⁸ In a similar scenario later in the episode, a panting, tearful man thanks Francisco for having recommended him for construction work at his site: “I’m sorry, but I needed to thank you. They hired me, I start tomorrow. I’ll have a salary again! Now I can find a place to live!”.²⁹ Likewise, upon being asked by a local newspaper reporter about living at the housing project, Celestino declares: “It’s very good indeed, because we get to know our neighbours, we help one another. Look, I’ll tell you something: I wouldn’t trade my little place here for none of these fancy condos for rich people!”.³⁰

However, the most forceful examples of contented conformity with low-grade jobs and modest living conditions come in the form of short documentaries inserted in every episode where real people are interviewed and tell their life stories. For instance, a black street sweeper in his forties offers an account of his job in Rio de Janeiro. (It is worthwhile to note that street sweepers in Rio are sometimes scornfully called “little oranges” [*laranjinhas*] in reference to their bright orange uniforms, hinting at the stigmatization of their low-grade profession.) He declares:

I believe that one cannot be picky about jobs nowadays, right? When a job comes up, one has to grab it with “teeth and nails”, and value what one does. I value what I do and I’m valued for what I do. And I like what I do. My job is important because I keep the city clean for its residents. Here, I make the difference. Here I beat racism, I beat prejudice.³¹

27 This idealized image of a fraternal, socially mobile, heterogeneous yet harmonious community resonates with a broad interpretation of Freyre’s portrayal of Brazilian society as a congenial hybrid of different races and classes since colonial times (Freyre 1986 [1933]). For a discussion of how “racial democracy”, a concept developed from Freyre’s classic *The Masters and the Slaves*, has become a pervasive “master narrative” for the construction of national identity, see Sheriff (2001: 4). For critiques of the “myth” of racial democracy, i.e., how it effectively camouflages and underplays racial inequalities and class divisions, perpetuating passivity and neutralizing political struggle in Brazil, see Silva (1995: 54).

28 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 2, DVD 2, Episode 14.

29 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 3, DVD 1, Episode 6.

30 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 4, DVD 1, Episode 5.

31 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 1, DVD 1, Episode 5.

Although the street sweeper seems conscious of the low position his job takes in the local occupational hierarchy, he gives us such a dignified, idealized version of his work's worth as to border on overcompensation. This trend is picked up by the soap opera's narrative, which proceeds to show the street sweeper smiling, samba-ing around his broom, sending kisses in an emulation of carnival male dancers [*passistas*], as he is applauded by three smiling elderly ladies sat in a park bench behind him. Likewise, in the very first episode of *Tecendo o Saber*, which focuses on the experiences of work migrants, the interviewee is a skinny, wrinkled woman of mixed descent in her sixties, dressed in a French maid uniform, and sat on a plastic stool in the pantry of a middle-class household. Behind her, crammed in the pantry's small space, we notice a gas boiler above her, baskets of dirty clothes at her feet, and a noisy washing machine at work, so that she must talk loudly to be heard. This is what she has to say about migrating to Rio de Janeiro to work when she was only 15: "I've always had a strong will to learn, to win. I consider myself a winner. I adapted, learned. It was a new experience for me. I never let my head down, I always kept my head up, and won."³²

Though the deep irony of these portraits render them almost bizarre, the message is clear: at the same time that one must desire and strive for career and status enhancement, material comfort, and increased prosperity in general, one should be happy and proud with what one can have should her dreams not come true. The appeal of this proposition lies in that it appears to be a contradiction in terms, but it is not. It evokes instead a "win-win" narrative which caters for both success and failure in fulfilling aspirations, whilst advancing an entrepreneuristic attitude and an agentic stance that are crucial to the neoclassical ideal of social and individual evolution, whereby the continual desire to develop sanctioned competencies is stoked and maintained. This discourse, which several authors have associated with the "myth of meritocracy", is crucial to the shaping of governable subjects and the management of a docile workforce in contexts of marked social inequality, such as in Brazilian society (Sheriff 2001; Souza 2003). For, in practice, the gap between what citizens with lower-class and minority racial backgrounds, inferior educational capital, and low-grade occupations are encouraged to achieve and can pragmatically achieve would present, in the

32 *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 1, DVD 1, Episode 1.

absence of the “myth of meritocracy”, a potential source of widespread frustration and social unrest (Fontaine 1995: 2; Guimarães 2002; Hasenbalg 1995: 25; Mitchell-Kernan 1995: ix-x; Tôrres 1965).

Therefore, the intersections between the production of cooperative subjects in a national project of governance and mass media objects, such as *Tecendo o Saber*, are not insignificant. Whilst its calculated use by PFZ initiatives demonstrates by itself the extent of this relationship, *Tecendo o Saber* also reinforces the importance of energetic entrepreneurship, formal education, and ambitions of career enhancement which inhabit both official state rhetoric and PFZ programs. The pedagogic soap opera is also tied to the expansion of state capacity in that it stresses the importance of bureaucratic registration, personal documents, and participation in national censuses.³³ Finally, in line with PFZ directives to “modernize” the competencies and skills of beneficiaries, a whole episode of *Tecendo o Saber* is devoted to familiarizing viewers with information technology, showing them how to access internet websites, write e-mails, shop online, and consult bank statements via the internet.³⁴ The celebration of these particular competencies, attitudes and lifestyle aspirations in mass media artefacts was echoed by values and ideals imparted through the public education system, to which I now turn.

Adverse effects of the rapid expansion of formal education

Lieber (1981), Inkeles (1983), and James (2000) have focused on how public education inculcates “modern” values and promotes “modern” attitudes not only through its specific forms of knowledge, but also through “common principles of organization, procedures for assigning power and prestige, and modes for allocating rewards and punishment” (Inkeles 1983: 20). Lieber, in particular, has studied how, in Trinidad,

Euro-American ideas and ideals enter the society most pervasively and influentially through the educational system. Here they are instilled, often obliquely, as the standards of right and wrong. It is here that youthful hopes and ambitions are engendered and directed — but are too often left unfulfilled (Lieber 1981: 231)

³³ *Tecendo o Saber*, Module 3, DVD 2, Episode 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Similarly, the expansion of public schooling in Guaribas constituted a major platform for the transfer of “social technology”, and was one of TALHER’s main stated objectives. As a vital moralizing instrument for shaping the subjective capacities of future citizens, public education is to equip the individual with specific ideals and forms of knowledge which, in Guaribas, have come to be perceived as fundamental, both as a path to status enhancement and as valuable new cultural capital. From 1997, 17 public schools were constructed in village, and parents have since then enrolled their children en masse. Besides parents’ recognition of the importance of educational opportunities, more practical concerns such as eligibility to *Bolsa Família* cash transfers, which are conditional to a family’s offspring being enrolled in the public education system, and whose benefits increase with the number of children attending school, were probably involved in their decision.

Even so, by 2008, Guaribanos of all generations already associated formal education, scientific knowledge, and technological proficiency with the formation of a capable, modern individual, and contrasted the latter to typical villagers in the past, who, as “uneducated” farmers, were mostly illiterate, comparatively untrained in scientific knowledge and formal schooling, unversed in new technologies, insular regarding contact with mass media artefacts, and poor in relation to other communities concerning access to services, public infrastructure, purchasing power, and ownership of consumer goods. Adão Rocha, a farmer in his late fifties, conveyed in an interview how the lack of formal studies became associated with an inferior position in the balance of knowledge:

Guaribanos are a sort of humble people, hard-working farmers who don’t have education. (...) I’m a man of my own effort, and this same profession I taught my children. Because there was no study here. We didn’t know outsiders, no. (...) How can a place not have studies and know anything at all? We don’t know because there’s no-one to teach us, isn’t it? Now any kid anywhere already gives us a lesson. Because they have schooling and we didn’t have it.

Adão’s quote shows how Guaribanos’ greater isolation and lack of formal education in the past translates into an evaluation of deficiency in the balance of knowledge. It also reveals an admission of inferiority in relation to the (allegedly) better informed, educated, and more

cosmopolitan residents of the rest of the country. An illustration of the centrality of formal schooling and new forms of knowledge in the village is the malaise which the majority of Guaribanos revealed when asked about items of traditional knowledge and local folklore, associated as they now were with a past of ignorance and backwardness. One of my greatest difficulties during fieldwork was collecting detailed accounts of local knowledge from informants, such as legends, proverbs, songs, old customs, and so on. In semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, Guaribanos of all ages, but especially adults, showed a noticeable amount of hesitation and discomfort as I insisted on eliciting details about objects of local folklore, like the *Caboclo do Mato* (the “Indian of the Forest”, a mythical deity of the wilderness taking the shape of an Indian), the *Mãe d’Água* (the “Water Mother”, a deity who protects water sources and sings by the rock pools in the mountains), as well as children stories, lullabies, and old popular sayings. All of these were, more often than not, dismissed by adults with a smile and some nonchalant remark about the credulity of people in the past. The same obtained with older customs such as arranged marriages and bride-abductions, which were rebuffed by most villagers with the same suspicion of being “utter foolishness”. It is reasonable to speculate that a sense of embarrassment or shame underlay this reluctance to treat these articles of indigenous knowledge as significant, or even worthy of discussion.

Likewise, traditional healing knowledges and practices in Guaribas have been devalued and all but fallen into disuse. For instance, fat from giant anteaters (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*), jaguars, and castrated black lambs without spots, formerly employed in massaging fractures, are now extremely rare in the village. Though many locals have iterated to me their effectiveness as anaesthetic and curative pomades, only one Guaribano I knew declared having some of those ingredients at home. A similar end befell the bark of the *camaçari* tree (*Terminalia fagifolia*), used in the treatment of indigestion and stomach aches, the rattle of the rattlesnake, and local chili pepper ground in *cachaça* (a Brazilian sugarcane spirit), used for myriad purposes and therapies. Yet, it is not simply a question of efficacy that causes Guaribanos to increasingly entrust their health to modern medicine and gradually disregard their traditional healing practices. For one, these cures have not almost fallen into disuse because villagers have

suddenly “realized” their inefficiency, since most Guaribanos I spoke to still believed in the potency of these traditional remedies. For another, pharmacological drugs and products, from sun-screen to cough medicine, are not always locally made use of according to their actual properties and functions, which does not help their efficacy. Thus adults and children who had burned themselves or who were suffering from mild sunburn regularly borrowed my sun-screen lotion for it to, as I was told, “suck the fire out”. My cough medicine was also popular for several unorthodox applications, such as leg bruises and the *potó* insect (*Paederus Irritans*) skin burns. Whatever the results of these alternative applications of pharmacological products, one is led to suspect that the issue of efficacy is not, at least, the main driving reason for this assimilation of modern medical products to the detriment of traditional treatments. It merely provides an instance of the valorisation of an extraneous, modern body of knowledge to the detriment of an “outdated” indigenous one. To be sure, the creativity of Guaribanos in the unconventional use of these products by itself suggests a notable level of syncretism rather than the straightforward superimposition of modern medical knowledge over former healing practices. The latter, however, would be the stated object of TALHER’s health and hygiene workshops, where traditional healing knowledges were both discouraged and dismissed as mere superstition.

As mentioned above, Guaribanos were all too easily identified by PFZ, the Brazilian government, and the national media with the incompetent and the impoverished within Brazilian society. By conveying Guaribanos as a deprived, isolated, and uneducated people “who can’t help themselves”, PFZ justified intervention and helped reproduce the relationships through which these people were seen as disadvantaged and inferior. From the perspective of development workers, imbued with the progressive cosmopolitanism by which mainstream Brazilian society judges the “rural provincialism” of a community such as Guaribas, Guaribanos were indeed “at the margins of society”. Therefore, perhaps unsurprisingly, there were signs of an internalization of subalternity in the village related to differential access to formal education and its extraneous body of knowledge. Whether Guaribanos were actually deficient in “self-esteem” before the arrival of PFZ, or interference from external knowledges and aesthetic paradigms that set their culture as poor, ignorant, and inferior have caused it, the fact is that a significant

number of adult Guaribanos seem to have internalised subaltern status in several domains, portraying themselves as uneducated, destitute, and backward in relation to other communities. Adão provided a definitive illustration of this in an interview. When I asked him about Guaribas in the past, he spontaneously embarked on a comparison between Guaribanos and “people like me”, that is, outsiders from larger cities, emphasizing how it would be very difficult for me to imagine how life in the village was in former times:

You were born in the light, we in the dark. Donkeys were our cars, hammocks, our beds (...) Before, people rose in life by wealth, but not today. The fellow today... it's by knowledge, by intelligence, by letters. In those times we could read letters [of the alphabet], write some, but it's not like today, when things are accepted, are changed, by proof of this and that. These are your things, since you have other, better knowledges, [that are] more refined, do you understand? And ours isn't like that: we read, write, tell [stories?]. You take in fast, grasp quickly... You have that “follow through” of other studies, another civilization [sic]. Not us, we are weaker.

Whilst the value of educational qualifications and accreditations is made obvious by their consequences for economic life in the metropolises to which villagers regularly migrate for temporary work — eligibility to more jobs, better paid occupations, and an increased prospect of prosperity in general — in the village, too, literacy, basic information technology skills, and secondary school diplomas are necessary requirements for the much coveted office jobs at the mayoralty made available since Guaribas' emancipation in 1997. Because these salaried desk jobs are better remunerated, lighter than manual work, and can only be taken by the more qualified local labour force — those who are better educated and somewhat computer savvy — they easily convert into social prestige and cultural capital, conferring a higher status on those who hold them. This can be demonstrated by the increasing desire of the younger generations of Guaribanos' for these municipal jobs and their concomitant lack of interest in farming, as well as by the increasing stigmatization of agricultural labour as the only option for “backward” (*carrancista*), “rustic” “peasants” without education.

Even though some village elders lamented rather categorically that “the young only study and don't want to work anymore”, others approved

of the local expansion of formal education, but believed it did not offset what they perceived as the prevalent lack of interest of young Guaribanos in farming: “Guaribanos are hard workers who don’t like wrong things”, Careca once told me, before proceeding to revise his statement, “I mean the older [generations]. Now, these novices [sic], they’re not too keen on [agricultural] work at all”. For instance, Tiago, Roxo, and Iracema were all villagers in their late teens who had graduated recently from high-school and had either municipal posts or salaried jobs in commerce. Whereas Tiago evocatively stated that he was “more pen than earth”, Roxo was unequivocal about his dislike for manual labour, playfully calling the hoe “his enemy”. Iracema worked at the small pharmaceutical drugstore in the village, and was so fascinated with the glamorous lives of national media celebrities that she could always be seen leafing through the pages of old glossy and tabloid magazines throughout the day. Returning from work in the fields, I often stopped by the drugstore in my soiled clothes to chat and rest for a few minutes before going home to wash. She would instantly leap up, throwing her arms in the air, and jokingly scream: “Protect me, Lord, from this man who’s dirty all over!”. When we finally sat together, she would beseech me to go home and only come back after having bathed, for she did not want to be seen next to a soiled man returning from the fields. Behind Iracema’s playfully exaggerated aversion to being spotted with a man grubby from farming lies the emerging local stigma of agricultural labour, the latter seen as an emblem of backwardness, lack of education, and poverty. Iracema, with her mind on the cosmopolitan world of soap opera stars and its sophisticated parties in the Southern metropolises of Brazil, wishfully declared several times not wanting to marry a farmer despite dating one. Similarly, Valda, Ceissa, and Luzia, unmarried young women in their late teens, often sat at the square after dark criticizing those young men who, even after washing, still looked like farmers. Their targets typically wore flip-flops and old-fashioned shirts sometimes slightly stained or torn, and these were accused of smelling, having rough skin, and not cleaning the dirt from their bodies (especially from under their fingernails) — all direct traces of agricultural activity.

In effect, the more I asked Guaribanos about their “aspiration models” and “life-careers”, their paradigms of “the good life”, the more I began to

notice a significant discrepancy between the ideals of teenagers and those of adult and elderly villagers.³⁵ Take, for instance, a few typical answers from middle-aged or senior Guaribanos to my standard question “what are/were your dreams in life?”. João Caititu, a villager in his late forties, replied as follows:

My dream was to be a well-liked person, a popular person. A person who didn’t go about idly. My dream was to be peaceful, and not harm anybody else. (...) I never had difficult dreams, no. My dream, really, was just to work. And maybe be a motor biker too...

Likewise, Chefinho, a farmer in his late sixties, asserted that he “only thought of the fields for a career, and to buy, perhaps, a few head of cattle”. Sorriso, a villager in his seventies, told me in an interview that he didn’t “even remember what [he] wanted to be, what [he] wanted in life”. Then, after a pause, he resumed: “Well, from the time I was old enough to remember, my dream was to make bird traps [*arapucas*], catch blue ground doves [*juritis*], and ‘gain’ a day’s labour in the fields”.

Now compare these modest aspirations in the context of the village (to be a farmer, to be well-liked and popular, to hunt birds — rural, sociocentric, and even bucolic in nature — with answers to the same question by teenagers. Iracélia, who was 17 at the time, replied that she wanted to be a veterinarian, and suggestively added that this was *her* dream, not her parents’. Neginho, then 18 years-old, straightforwardly stated that his dreams were “to have a car, a big house, and a lot of ‘dough’”. Tiago, 19, wanted to be a lawyer at first, but would settle for being a judge or a doctor: “I’m more pen than earth, anyway”, he would often say, alluding to his disinclination to be a farmer like his father.

These are but a few of the several accounts I collected in the course of fieldwork indicating that a gap had opened (or widened) between the dreams and career aspirations of the different generations of Guaribanos. This discrepancy in values and ideals led to new issues of intergenerational conflict. Though Guaribanos of all ages recognized the value and wide ranging applicability of formal education, adults openly associated the undermining of parental knowledge and authority with the expansion of public schooling.

35 These are Redfield’s formulations (1960: 62).

For instance, Vermelho and Torinha, villagers in their late fifties, believed, respectively, that

the best thing about development is education. A great beauty, [to see] the son graduating. (...) But here, when it wasn't a town, children were obedient. You'd send them somewhere and they'd go. Today, they say that they won't. They go by their studies, by what's in the books.

Some of the things I thought didn't bring good development are due to education, because it's bringing much vanity... [sic] The children, who didn't know, are now knowing what I didn't know in the days of my youth. Disrespect. The son doesn't respect his father properly, the daughter doesn't respect the father, the child doesn't respect the adult.

Therefore, the significance of the expansion of formal education in the village is such that Guaribanos themselves not only assert that, as a set of novel and essential kinds of knowledge, it is at the root of their offspring's increasing independence, but that it also underlies new issues of inter-generational conflict. Parents complained that their children dodged agricultural work, slept in, and refused to submit to the temporal framework required for farming activities. Teenagers, on the other hand, complained that parents "live off the past and not the present, and don't make use of the knowledge already available". Accordingly, Tiago affirmed that teenage Guaribanos "learn more from their friends (...) technology, and television, than from their parents at home. (...) They see things on TV and think: 'if it's like that there, why can't it be [like that] here?'". A significant test of the balance of power between parents and their offspring is the latter's refusal to obey orders, fetch things for senior relatives, and ask for permission before leaving the house. "Not today", Tiago maintained, "the son only lets the parents know where he's going and when he's coming back. If they say 'no', well, it's the same, he goes anyway". As Tiago suggested, at the bottom of these new instances of intergenerational conflict is the dissemination of new lifestyle aspirations and prescribed forms of affluence, as well as the acquisition of new sets of knowledge and attitudes through mass media and formal education.

This brings us to a fifth, yet unmentioned, and perhaps more serious, side effect of the expansion of public schooling and mass media in

Guaribas: the emigration, particularly, of young Guaribanos. I was fortunate to befriend several young men and women who belonged to the first cohort to graduate from high school in Guaribas. Villagers then in their late teens, this generation was the first to grow up devoting significantly more time to formal education than to work in the fields. Of a close-knit group of nine seniors with which I associated during my time in Guaribas, only one remained in the village after my departure, and another returned recently after spending a brief period living in the São Paulo suburb of Jaguaré and working in metallurgy and construction. Moreover, in my last visit to Guaribas in February 2014, several Guaribanos complained that the younger generations now want to leave the village upon concluding their studies, and I learned that three out of the five young men my host family boasted as offspring had recently left for São Paulo.

Conclusion

This article addressed the social shaping of human subjects through pedagogies of personhood and images of deportment imparted by a variety of vehicles, from PFZ workshops in “beauty”, “hygiene”, and “citizenship education”, through mass media, to public education. Even if these vehicles are rarely formalized into a unified body of knowledge, and often contain elements from diverse discourses, they comprise a web of channels deploying values, ideals, patterned behaviours, and visual imageries, as well as common assumptions about selfhood and social life. More specifically, I attempted to show how PFZ went well beyond the delivery of financial aid, basic infrastructure, and economic technology in Guaribas, and sought to reform its beneficiaries’ conducts and capacities. Its unexpected “side-effects” ranged from the devaluation of artefacts of local knowledge, the decline of local farming, and the aggravation of intergenerational conflict, to the emigration of the younger generations, and Guaribanos’ increasing internalization of subaltern status (however partial or partially discursive it may be) in relation to other national communities.

Whilst some authors tend to regard development as a hegemonic framework that constructs social order and imposes appropriate ways of thinking and acting (Woost 1993; Hobart 1993; Escobar 2001; Mosse 2004), others emphasize the agency and decision-making strategies of social actors (Pigg

1992, Rossi 2004, Nash 1997; Grillo 1997). The fundamental problem, in my view, is not to decide which position is correct, but to account for the fact that both are. As Thompson proposes, even compliance is acceptable to clients if it achieves the desired results, and in strategically acquiescing to norms and procedures, clients demonstrate their agency (2005: 191). In Guaribas, in spite of the comprehensive reforms envisioned by PFZ, the limited success of project policies owes much to the reluctance of locals to assimilate the different values, ideals, and techniques that inform them (Sorrentino 2011). Guaribanos, therefore, are not simply passive subjects, but social actors actively crafting and making use of new opportunities. Hence, I have attempted, as much as possible, not to dichotomize the impact of PFZ in Guaribas by hypostasizing an extraneous system of knowledge and its “penetration” into an indigenous, traditional one. To that end, I have foregone the use of “systems of knowledge” altogether and gone straight to the description of the specific ideals, values, practices, customs, and attitudes that, in being (however partially) discrepant, underlie the development encounter in Guaribas.

Under PFZ, Guaribanos were primarily a target for economic and “social” technology, but hardly a population with the means for capitalizing on their use. Having acquired certain values and aspirations, and hence a demand for “developed” lifestyles which at least bear the outward semblance of urban modernity, it is questionable whether Guaribanos will come to possess the capacities to fulfil those aspirations. I particularly recall Fidélío, a villager in his late teens who had just graduated from secondary education, but who could read and write only to a very basic level, hopefully asking me if he would now “make it in São Paulo”. Neither his ambitions nor his limited qualifications to achieve them were surprising since in many fourth grade classes I attended in the village the teachers were still calling students to the blackboard to write their full names. This generation of Guaribanos will probably experience more directly the gap between imparted desires and the given means to achieve them. The probable outcome of this contradiction is that Guaribanos’ inability to indulge their preferences will tend to leave them with a sense of frustration and disappointment.

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