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THE AMERICAS

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"The Globo*-ization of Brazil"*

October 20, 2000
Belém, Pará, Brazil

Peter Bird Martin
Institute of Current World Affairs
Four West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

Dear Peter,

My Italian has improved since moving to Brazil. I'm not alone, thanks to the evening *telenovela* (soap opera) *"Terra Nostra"* ("Our Land") broadcast by the Rio de Janeiro-based media giant, TV Globo. The drama told the story of the great Italian immigration to Brazil.[1]

Every night from 8-9pm the nation followed the romantic saga of Matteu (Thiago Lacerda) and Giuliana (Ana Paula Arósio), two young immigrants on a shipload of Italians destined for the coffee fields of São Paulo state in 1896.

In the first month of broadcast the *novela* was said to be the harbinger of Brazil's re-entry into international dominance of soap operas. For *"Terra Nostra,"* no penny was spared to create an epic. The initial chapters on the ship were filmed on a turn-of-the-century steamer anchored in England. As the story unfolded each scene transition was hinged on vintage black-and-white photographs and film clips of early 20th-century Brazil.

Initially, the idea of the *novela* was to tell the story of the Italian immigrants in three generations spanning 100 years. But, the country became so nutty about the story of Matteu and Giuliana that the subsequent generations were dumped and the initial romance dragged out over ten months. The *novela* deteriorated into the who-slept-with-whom drama typical of prime time.

The most interesting aspect of *"Terra Nostra"* was the effect it had on the public. That I knew the plot without having watched more than a dozen episodes speaks volumes about television as a community experience in Brazil. The influences of the *novela* crept into daily life. Young women were wearing crocheted kerchiefs to pull back their hair, á-la-Giuliana. All around me Brazilians were speaking of *bela regatzzas* (beautiful girls), *caspita*... (dammed!), *ecco !* (exactly!)

Italian restaurants opened overnight. Italian pride surged. A mattress store marketed its deluxe king-size bed as the maximum for romance, calling it the *"Giuliana e Matteu"* model.

My husband and I spent Christmas Eve at the home of a friend, Rita Ippolito, an Italian working with Pommar, a USAID-funded program for

[1] Over 1.5 million Italians immigrated to Brazil from the 1870's to WWI.

strengthening the rights of children and adolescents in Brazil. Rita is Sicilian, and for Christmas she re-created a typical 19-century Sicilian meal. The table overflowed with *beccafico* (eggplant rolled around pine nuts and breadcrumbs), *polpa di manzo all' orientale* (veal layered with egg, parsley, parmesan, bay leaf and crushed nuts) and a *lasagna di melanzana* (eggplant lasagna) and plenty of red wine.

It was a feast. But as the dishes were passed around the table a conflict arose. Agusto, a successful Italian fashion designer and a man given to studying Jung and art history in his spare time, could not bear to remain seated at the table. He slipped away and in a few seconds we heard the opening strains of *Tormento D'Amore* the theme song for *"Terra Nostra."* He ate Christmas dinner during commercials, giving us updates on the evening's drama.

When a Formula-One race was broadcast from São Paulo, the cast of *"Terra Nostra"* was trackside to expound the virtues of Italian-Brazilian driver Rubéns Barrichelo and the Ferrari team. It was, as the actors exclaimed, the great meeting of two beautiful traditions — Brazilian driving and Italian cars. And as proof that Brazil is connected to the motherland, this week *"Terra Nostra"* will debut on Italian television.

Perhaps the most curious meeting of cultures was the concert of Gal Costa, Maria Betânia and Pavorotti given in Salvador, Bahia last April to kick off the official quincentennial celebrations. Standing in line, I could hear members of the crowd humming strains of music featured in *"Terra Nostra"* like *"Funiculí Funiculá"* and *"Comme Facette Mammeta."*

The audience responded enthusiastically to Gal and Maria Betânia, but was lukewarm to Pavarotti. Likewise Pavorotti seemed chilly and disinterested. The tension was rooted in *"Terra Nostra."* People grumbled that they wanted to hear him sing "something good" and "something we know." Finally, when Pavarotti belted out an emotionless *O Sole Mio,"* the crowd was jubilant. All was forgiven — at least on the part of the audience.

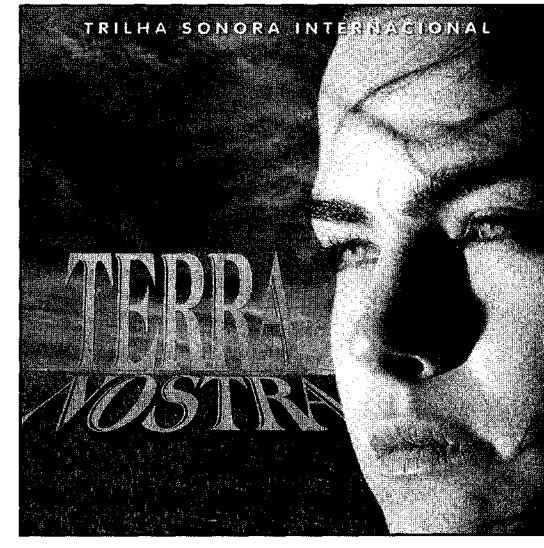
Even in the Pernambucan *sertão,* where poverty is hidden behind ubiquitous parabolic antennas, Giuliana and Matteus permeated the hearts of Brazilians. Standing on a dirt path in the middle of scrub slightly to the west of the middle-of-nowhere, my friend Valdete waved to a man passing on a donkey. They shouted out a conversation and agreed to visit each other the following Sunday. As the man turned to go he waved and called over his shoulder, *"Va bene, Va bene!* " (Alright! Everything's o.k.!) Italian was everywhere.

WHO'S WATCHING

Whether in urban or rural areas, the glow of the television is constant in Brazil. In the morning the television is clicked on and often left to run until someone turns it off in the middle of the night. Most restaurants have several televisions suspended above their dining tables. It's not uncommon to see dozens of couples and families sitting side-by-side, chewing and staring up at a glowing screen.

As I think over my nearly two-year stay in Brazil, I can not recall a household that did not have a television. Even in the very modest homes of working-class or poor friends there was always a television. Sometimes they were old black-and-white models, but they were nearly always on and blaring away. In the homes of middle-class friends there were at least two televisions, if not more.

Television, particularly the *novelas,* IS a thread of common experience in Brazil. Unlike U.S. soap-operas, *telenovelas* are broadcast nightly and have short runs of six to eight months. Everyone knows at least the basics of the current dramas and most individuals will cite a favorite *novela* of times passed. The nightly soaps are escapism, to be sure. In the years of political censorship, which ended formally in 1977, few social issues were explored extensively. Since the 1980's more social themes and criticism have been worked into *novelas,* usually as sub-plots. With the spread of parabolic antennas, satellite dishes and satellite broadcasting in use since the mid-1980's, Brazilian television reaches nearly everywhere in the country, creating a parallel community. (At the same



time, this common experience is diluted by the booming cable and Direct-TV industries. Those who can afford it tune into U.S. sitcoms, CNN and subtitled movies from around the world.)

In May, Tyrone and I spent a few weeks visiting rural communities in the western half of Bahia. For several days we attended community meetings in a *quilombo.* (Loosely defined, a *quilombo* is a community of slave descendents.) Forty of us crammed into a tiny cinderblock schoolhouse. On the walls hung prayers, lists of student and teacher responsibilities and the "abc's."

One of the first things I noticed was that I was in an

Afro-Brazilian community and all of the illustrations on the walls were of happy Caucasian children. A community member drew attention to that very issue, but added a twist. He was angry about the "Globo-ization" of his children. He pressed others to recall positive television roles for Black Brazilians. For him television in Brazil reinforced the exclusion of minorities and the poor from society. Heads nodded in agreement.

Outside the schoolhouse, as everyone helped themselves to cold watermelon, one of the meeting facilitators, Djanete, picked up the conversation about Globo,. saying some of the influences were positive. She cited a community of sharecroppers near Bom Jesus da Lapa, Bahia, near the mighty São Francisco river, that actually took inspiration from the 1996 TV Globo hit *Rei do Gado* (Cattle King) to organize and fight for the land their families had been sharecropping for decades.

In the *novela*, a group of landless rural workers of the *Movimento do Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) organized against a powerful rancher and successfully fought for a piece of land. The *novela* was a real boost to popular support for the MST. The Bahian community watched the *novela* every night and was inspired by the fictitious victory. Today their case is being considered by the state's office of *Instituto de colonização e reforma agrária* (Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform, Incra).

During a visit to Pernambuco, I asked my friend Neta da Silva, a 40-year-old mother of three sons, if she worried about the amount of time her boys spent watching television. I cited the couch-potato syndrome of U.S. youth. Neta shrugged. From her point of view, as the mother of three teens in a violent *favela* in Olinda, Pernambuco, where drugs and guns are the number-one killers of boys 15-25, the television was a blessing. It kept her sons Péu, Lucas and Teco distracted, and out of trouble.

I came across the same sentiment in Paragominas, Pará in Brazil's north. Paragominas is a small town founded in the 1960s when the Federal Government built the Brasilia-Belém highway to open up westward expansion. The area boomed as a ranching area and then as one of Latin America's biggest centers for hardwood harvesting and charcoal production. The town has the nickname Parago-balas. The "*balas*" part of the name means "bullets." The town initially earned the nickname for its Wild-West atmosphere in the early days and has maintained the moniker as employment has declined and violence increased.

Sitting in a shady lean-to at the entrance to a charcoal field, a group of men, all of whom looked like they could single-handedly win simultaneous bar brawls, declared they preferred to stay shuttered in their wooden shacks watching television at night. The previous night a colleague of theirs had been killed while walking to another's home to watch a soccer match. And what was the moral of the story? Watching a game alone was better than risking a walk across town.

In general Brazilians don't seem uncomfortable with high rates of television consumption. Those that are, however, blame the evils of society on TV Globo (regardless of the channel, Globo wins criticism since it is the most dominant) and movies purchased from U.S. distributors. One friend, Nara Costa, a Guarani Indian descendent and social worker in Belém, Pará, identifies the arrival of TV Globo to Marajó Island ten years ago as the moment when her extended family's indigenous lifestyle ended. Conversation died and values once based on nature and a collective lifestyle were subverted. Nara takes it a little further and links the growth of youth violence and gang activity to U.S. films broadcast nightly on television and available in Brazilian cinemas.

I don't know how direct the link is between imported programming and increasing violence, but the impact on pop-youth culture is impressive. Last year in Recife, Pernambuco, while my husband was learning about youth culture, he became friendly with a group of rap musicians. At their concert, where the temperature was easily over 90 degrees under the show tents, fans were dressed in baggy pants with chains, knee-high tube socks, wool ski-caps and bandanas. Obviously, these were not typical characteristics of local tropical attire. The fashion trend was probably from São Paulo where it was taken from New York and California groups via MTV and cinema. While these kids were not violent, (in fact many of the lyrics protested poverty, and violence against youth) they certainly had taken their fashion cues from outside their culture.

THE "QUEEN OF THE LITTLE ONES" AND OTHER SAVIORS

While traveling recently I was waylaid by a series of nasty flus and found myself curled up in a hotel bed riding out fevers by watching television. After a few days my eyes were bleary, but wide open.

It all started with Xuxa (Shoo-shaa), *Rainha dos baxinhos* — Xuxa, Queen of the Little Ones. Maria da Graça Meneghel, 36, blonde and blue-eyed and a single mother, is Xuxa. She began her career as a teen model and girlfriend of soccer legend Pele, and parlayed it into her current 15-year run as the most successful children's program host on Brazilian television. Xuxa's Saturday and Sunday morning marathons begin around 8am and continue until 1pm. It's exhausting to watch.

Xuxa's prominence in children's programming is not without polemics. Her name has become synonymous with children, privilege, whiteness, wealth, marketing and beauty. It all gets piled on. In a country in which people who look like Xuxa are not in the majority, her long tenure in the entertainment limelight makes many uncomfortable. Supporters argue that Xuxa's charms

transcend race and class and cite her high ratings and adoring fans. But then, what alternatives are broadcast and nurtured? And there are hints that Xuxa is not universally adored. Her name is often used as a pejorative, i.e., " I was talking to that *Xuxa*, but she thinks she's too good for me." It can also be used to call to any blonde woman, "Pssst! *Xuxa!*"

The show is split into two segments. The earlier one, "Xuxa Park" is geared toward young children. The set is filled with sparkly playground equipment and big puppets. In her raspy, almost squeaky voice, Xuxa invites children from the audience to play silly games — girls against boys! There are lots of burp jokes, too. A few lessons on health and life are sprinkled into the fun. It's as commercial and geared toward product sales as any similar program for children in the United States.

It was the other segment that caught my eye. The later hours are called *Planeta Xuxa* and target, as far as I can tell, the female viewer from pre-adolescence to grandmotherhood. The set is filled with wild colors and giant screens in the background glow with huge images of Xuxa's face. Xuxa is surrounded by scantily clad dancers — mostly young men. There are always a few celebrity guests and a popular music group to highlight the day. When the camera scans the studio audience, screaming fans wave cards, flowers and presents for Xuxa, their queen.

The quintessential Xuxa moment is the celebrity interview. A big couch floats onto stage and Xuxa has a quiet heart-to-heart in front of millions of viewers. Special lighting and music pace the interview and are geared to elicit teary confessions or inspirational tales from the interviewee's life. Guests always cry on the couch. It's mandatory. Sometimes when the show is really good, Xuxa cries, too.

I was recently at a birthday party for the 16-year-old daughter of a friend of mine. The party was held on the patio of her Fortaleza, Ceará apartment. When I arrived the bulk of her huge, six-sister family had nestled around tables scattered on the terrace. I found an empty chair at a table of half a dozen women, all educated and between the ages of 35 and 65. Three of them had demanding careers outside the home. What did we talk about? Xuxa!

They all loved her and knew details about her personal life. They watched her show and bought magazines whenever she was on the cover. They liked her because she was in charge of her life, beautiful, creative and a mother.

The other great success of Xuxa's show is the segment in which she chooses a letter from one of her fans asking for some sort of help. I'm not sure what the criteria are for Xuxa to choose the person, but she extends a challenge to them. She sets up four "obstacles". If the person successfully completes all four, his or her wish is granted.

I was riveted the first time I saw this. A struggling working-class woman burdened with crushing debt was chosen based on a letter she had written to Xuxa. A video showed her gamely working her way through absurd obstacles. As a final challenge, the woman was locked in a chicken coop with 20 chickens she had to separate and secure by size and color within two minutes. She missed by one chicken.

With an orange chicken in her hands the woman collapsed, utterly disconsolate, "Oh please, Lord! I needed to win! I needed to win!"

The program cut back to the live stage with Xuxa. The defeated woman walked onto stage her face dark with tears. The lights dimmed. The crying-music started. (Uh-oh!) Xuxa chided in her best mother-of-the-country-tone, "This is a contest. When the person starts she knows

it's all or nothing. We can't just give things to everyone."

The woman sobbed. But she had shown so much pluck that the production crew had voted to pay part of her debt themselves. In gratitude the woman clutched Xuxa and thanked her over and over again for the opportunity to at least visit Rio (if not escape crushing debt).

Xuxa has stepped into the role of the great mother. The public turns to her for help. They look up to her, idealize her, imitate her. Xuxa is thought to have such influence in popular culture that the national Minister of Health, José Serra, blamed her choice to have her daughter Sasha, 2, without marrying the father as one of the principal reasons teen pregnancy has surged in Brazil.

I don't know if Xuxa is every teen's idol. What is apparent is that Brazilian viewers are addicted to the tear-jerking confessions and personal dramas of Xuxa's guests and contestants. The show is something of a collective Cinderella saga. Xuxa has put her finger on a nerve and others are following suit.

While Xuxa and TV Globo may own Sunday morning, Sunday night belongs to SBT *(Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão)* and "Gugu," Gustavo Liberato. It's another marathon show beginning mid-afternoon and lasting until... well, I've actually never made it to the end of his show.

Gugu is a small industry of his own. Any happy viewer can choose from dozens of Gugu Toys, clothing and games for their children. His face even graces lottery tickets.

Gugu packages his show with a lot more sex. Throughout the live broadcast two women are positioned on raised platforms. One wears a white t-shirt while taking a shower, and the other, clad in a leopard-print bikini, snarls and poses for the audience. However, the most-watched segment is the "little bathtub" in which male and female guests are invited to don a bathing suit and get in a jacuzzi with a beautiful regular of the opposite sex. One person has to feel for bars of soap in the tub while the other tries to prevent the action. Bodies slip and slide over each other. Camera angles are neither shy nor modest. The real marvel of this segment is that the women's scanty bikinis always stay in place.

Gugu does his bit for humanity by responding to personal pleas he receives in the mail. On one particular show Gugu highlighted the plight of a five-year-old boy critically ill with liver problems. The story was sad and moving especially when framed by the mother's plight of living on donations.

However, the fascinating part was not the boy, nor the mother, nor even the corporations that lined up to donate 10,000 *reais* checks. It was the way the camera followed Gugu's response to everything. With every tear-jerking scene the camera zoomed in on Gugu as he dutifully displayed the appropriate emotions. It was the engineering of sainthood. Everything would be o.k. Trust Gugu.

Even the Minister of Health, José Serra (the guy seems to watch a lot of tv) called Gugu to guarantee that the hospital care would be first rate. That's pull! And that's why Gugu's show is number one — it's a release valve. The hard-up feel like someone cares. Individuals and businesses (and ministers) have in Gugu a secure, high-visibility place to donate their cash. The dependence on the efficiency or charity of the government, middle class and higher-ups gets bypassed.

The public has latched onto the hip maternity of Xuxa and the empathy of Gugu. But when they want quick action they turn to *Ratinho* (little rat) Carlos Massa, a police officer turned tv host for SBT. Everything Xuxa is as a Barbie-Doll mother, Ratinho is not. He's loud. He's aggressive. He's rough around the edges. He doesn't photograph well. He doesn't cry.

Ratinho carries a foam billy club on stage. His sidekicks are little rat puppets armed with little-rat billy clubs to beat each other. And while there are parody acts, regular talent contests and guest appearances, the big draws are the on-stage confrontations between individuals with bones to pick. Ratinho does the mediating, and the inciting.

What gained Ratinho a following is his brand of social activism based on video exposées of miserable conditions, unjust treatment, and even government neglect and corruption. I knew little about Ratinho before the day Carla, a woman we had hired mostly to help her out since she was due to have her fifth child and her mother was very ill, saw me typing an e-mail and launched into an elaborate speech on the virtues of Ratinho. She concluded with a plea for me to write an e-mail to Ratinho. Carla was certain Ratinho just needed to know her name and help would be on the way.

Instead of an e-mail I helped her write a letter and gave her the *reais* to send it registered to São Paulo. Ratinho never answered. But the fact that he has a website (www.ratinho.com.br) offering a menu of how to tell your story, find a loved one, get justice served, etc., indicates that the same people who scoff at Ratinho's popularity with the "masses" secretly log on at night.

PLAYBOY AND FAME

Women dressed in scanty outfits and dancing on television have carved significant careers for themselves. Three of the most recent examples are Carla Perez, Tiazinha and Feiticeira. Carla Perez launched herself into the national limelight as one of the two dancers for the music group *É O Tchan.* From there she posed nude for a magazine — thereby cementing her route to fame and

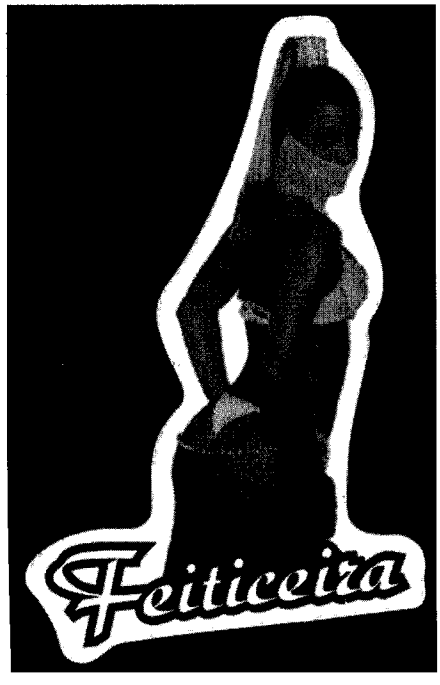
wealth — and landed a spot as a host for a children's show. It's the same route *Xuxa* took to fame, although she started as a teen model and is not known for her dancing ability.

Tiazinha (Auntie) and *Feitceira* (Charmer) were the creations of Luciano Huck while he was the host of the variety show "H" for SBT (he's since been bought by Globo). "H" was the hottest program targeting teens and young adults. Huck pulled in young male viewers with sexy gimmicks. *Tiazinha* (Suzana Alves, 22) and other barely-dressed dancers highlighted the studio stage — dancing with the crowds and providing explicit fodder for the cameras.

"Little Auntie" had a special role. She wore miniscule black hot pants and bra, a Lone Ranger mask and carried a riding crop. Young men were selected from the studio audience to answer trivia questions. If they erred, *Tiazinha*, after much hip swiveling and suggestive mouth pouting, would pull a hair from the legs of the participant. If the answers were correct, the S and M princess would wave her hinee in the contestant's face, or sit in his lap.

Tiazinha's rise to fame was meteoric. In 1999 the most popular Carnaval costume sold to women was a *Tiazinha* mask. *Tiazinha* even stole the limelight from the stunningly beautiful official Globo poster-girl Valeria Valenssa, who for the last nine years has worn only body paint to dance as Globo's *Globeleza* (Globo Beauty) during carnival in Rio and on television. From the suburban Rio working-class neighborhood of her childhood, *Tiazinha's* mother, when asked about her daughter's sudden fame replied, "I think it's great she has a job, but I wish she would put on some real shorts."

Tiazinha's view of her role was different. On a special guest-appearance on the Gugu show (it's a small, self-affirming world) to promote her spread in Playboy magazine, Tiazinha said she sincerely believed her "work" to be vital in helping women find the courage to embrace their sensuality from behind the black mask. She saw her self as a great liberator, and a savior of stale marriages.



That particular issue of Playboy magazine turned out to be the highest selling of all time in Latin America. It's said that both men and women scrambled to buy the edition — latter to check out her body, and the former to see what she looked like without a mask. (!)

Tiazinha's fame was too much for her to resist. She recorded a bad album and left "H". Luciano Huck hurriedly found a substitute, the muscular blonde Joana Prado. To keep ratings up, Prado donned an even smaller bikini, this time all white, and hid her face with a white veil. History repeated itself and before long "*Feiticiera*" had charmed her way into Playboy.

But Brazilians mete out adoration sparingly. Staying power has eluded many stars, and Brazilians are quick to move on. Not everyone earns the status of Xuxa. Tiazinha has fallen on hard times. She's trying to keep her career limping along with an afternoon super-hero show. Occasionally she's joined by Feiticeira, her partner in near-naked goodness, and together they save the world.

The career trajectories of the likes of Xuxa, Carla

Perez, *Tiazinha* and *Feiticeira* are not flukes, or out of the ordinary. As my husband jokes, the way to become a children's show host is by way of Playboy. There isn't the tiniest hint of scandal linked to it; unlike in the United States, where Vanessa Williams had her Miss-America crown stripped from her after nude photos surfaced in Playboy in the 1980's. The idea of nudity (separate from virginity) and wholesome-ness, or good character are not opposing notions in Brazil. It's more the practical demonstration of a career asset.[2]

There are thousands of girls hoping to ride the same wave to stardom. Just as young boys chase illusions of catching fame with brilliant performances on the soccer field, young girls fancy themselves the next mega model, dance sensation or tv host. Globo and its competition have helped bring this dream to even the most improbable places.

While living in an MST settlement in the interior of Pernambuco, I joined friends hanging out on the front porch of a settlement house serving as a temporary dental clinic for the day. Present were the teenaged sisters Ana Cleide and Ana Cleice. I always liked the way they sort of lounged on each other when relaxing. I had a camera with me and started making a few pictures. They wanted to know if I would get the images published in the States. I replied that the images were more for myself than anything. They were disappointed. Ana Cleide and Ana Cleice's great dream was to be models.

Without crushing their self-esteem I tried to question them about their grasp on the reality of living in a community without education or basic health-care. Even after they each had rotten molars yanked from their mouths, they held firm that they would get a big break and enter the world of glamour and financial ease. What blew my mind was how much the adults around them agreed it could happen. The great savior of television would pluck them from poverty and make everything happen. So the girls preened themselves and dressed as closely as possible to the examples the parabolic antenna captured and carried into their family's two-room, mud-and-stick house.

And this was pre-Giselle. Gisele Bündchen, 20, is from a family of six children from the town of Horizontina, Rio Grande do Sul. She's currently at the forefront of a wave of Brazilian models surging onto the international market. Though the lanky, busty knockout has been making her mark in the international fashion world for the past year, it wasn't until she landed on the cover of *GQ, Newsweek, Rolling Stone* and *Harpers Bazaar* as as the cover story, that the Brazilian media really celebrated her accomplishments.

Brazilian women and girls have been watching her for some time. The success of Gisele and Brazilian beauties following her is fueling the dreams of wanna-be models and starlets. Gisele's look is coveted by Brazilian women — long golden hair, lanky legs and ample bust — especially since she claims to never exercise and always eat whatever she wants. Her look is underscored by the body images imported to Brazil via U.S. television, movies and MTV.

Whereas Brazilian television was once noted for home-producing most of its content, in recent years the balance of domestic-versus-imported programming has been tipping the other way. For example, to go head-to-head with Globo productions, SBT president Silvio Santos closed a contract with Warner and Disney (to the tune of $150 million) for the broadcast rights of films through 2005. It was a move to dominate the rating race. But it has contributed to the increased influx of U.S. culture into Brazil.

Tyrone once struck up a conversation with a Brazilian security guard. The conversation wound its way around to cultural differences. "Why are you Americans so into *peitão* (big boobs)? Brazilian men prefer *bundão* (big butt)!" That may be changing. Whereas the idealized beauty in Brazil has long been the stereotype of the mysterious *morena* — thick cascades of dark hair, small breasts, flat stomach and rounded, full hips and thighs — things are changing. At one time the most frequently performed plastic surgery on the body was breast reductions. Now, (along with lipo-suctions and butt implants), it's breast augmentations. It's the rage. Everyone's done it: Xuxa, Carla Perez and more.

It's not discreet either. Unlike the Hollywood tendency to disappear into seclusion before surgical alterations, or to swear surgeons to secrecy, here going under the knife is status-earning.

When Xuxa had a few inches sucked off her waistline and a couple hundred cc's of silicon pumped into her breasts it was big news, happy news. In a post-transformation interview, Xuxa said she saw no problem in a woman changing her body if it made her happy. What's more, she was relieved to be free of the times when women were slaves to the fashion world and pressured to alter their looks with make-up. Today's world is healthier and more natural for women, she said. The irony was suffocating, but her attitude was not unique.

As Brazil is *Globo*-ized, it is globalized. Indeed the influence of television is incredible in Brazil. In a country that puts little value on leisure reading (newspapers, books and magazines are expensive) and that has a huge population of functionally illiterate adults, television is a primary source of infor-

[2]It just makes it all the more poetic to me that the Brazilian Consulate in Los Angeles, through which I secured my visa, is housed in the Flynt Publications building, i.e., *Hustler, Penthouse.*

mation and entertainment for the majority of the population.

And tonight as they do six nights a week, Brazilians will cozy-up to the blue glow of the television and take in a variety show, a dubbed U.S. movie or the latest chapter of the hottest *telenovela*.

The current hit is *"Laços da Família"* (Family Ties) a drama centered in the super-chic neighborhood of Leblón in Rio de Janeiro. One of the main characters is Helena, a widow (Vera Fischer — Playboy's January 2000 cover girl to kick off the century of the "mature beauty") in love with a man 20 years her junior. Her daughter, Camila, is in love with the same man, carrying his baby and slated to marry him soon. Counted among the intimate friends of this triangle is Capitu (Giovanna Antoneli), a middle-class call girl working successfully to support her young son and parents. What trends will this *novela* spark?

But the pendulum just may be swinging the other way for Brazilian television. The Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro has threatened to interfere with the filming of *"Laços"* in protest of the "immoral" family relations (although it has remained silent about one character's repeated sexual violation of women on the program). At the end of last week the Ministry of Justice ordered Gugu to dump the "little bathroom" segment in an effort to clean up prime time. And, some viewers are calling for selective censorhip after Ratinho broadcast a video of an unrepentant criminal abusing and sexually molesting the four-year-old daughter of a rival.

Those interested in a little Brazilian viewing, TVGlobo is now available in the U.S. for less than $20 per month.

Don't touch that dial,

Susan

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