



Global Media Journal

Volume 4, Issue 6 Spring 2005 ISSN 1550-7521

[Exploring the World
of Communication](#)

Audience Ethnographies: A Media Engagement Approach

Antonio C. La Pastina

[Texas A&M University](#)

ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that audience ethnography needs to be repositioned as a fieldwork-based, long-term practice of data collection and analysis. This practice allows researchers to attain a greater level of understanding of the community studied while maintaining self-reflexivity and respect towards those one is attempting to understand within the everyday life of the community. Relying on my work in rural communities in Brazil over the last decade I discuss some of the ways in which ethnography, as a long-term, in-depth practice, can benefit our understanding of the reception dynamic as well as provide insights otherwise impossible to attain. I will propose a model for audience ethnography, which I term media engagement, to discuss how the process of ethnography functions to apprehend the complex dynamic that evolves between consumers and cultural products.

Audience Ethnographies: A Media Engagement Approach

In the last two decades, ethnography has acquired a central role theoretically and empirically in media studies. It also has acquired a rhetorical function. Rhetorically, ethnography has come to represent an

opposition to positivistic paradigms towards data collection and analysis as well as the relationship between research and the researched. Ethnography represented a shift from empirical practices of data collection, pushing scholars to introduce non-objective strategies to audience analysis and a greater level of self-reflexivity among researchers.

This turn however, led to a problematic situation. The term has acquired great currency among media scholars at the expense of a focused coherence to its meaning, a critique that has been advanced by other scholars. Murphy (1999) outlined the dilemma of ethnography use in reception studies. He argued that cultural studies scholars have theorized about the importance of ethnography to an understanding of media and cultural practices at the same time they have reached an almost paralyzing position in which the political and epistemological debates regarding the role of the researcher have limited rather than promoted the production of ethnographic media studies.

In this paper I argue that audience ethnography needs to be repositioned as a fieldwork-based, long-term practice of data collection and analysis. This practice allows researchers to attain a greater level of understanding of the community studied while maintaining self-reflexivity and respect towards those one is attempting to understand within the everyday life of the community. Relying on my work in rural communities in Brazil over the last decade I will discuss some of the ways in which ethnography, as a long-term, in-depth practice, can benefit our understanding of the reception dynamic as well as provide insights otherwise impossible to attain. I will propose a model for audience ethnography, which I term media engagement, to discuss how the process of ethnography functions to apprehend the complex dynamic that evolves between consumers and cultural products.

Murphy and Krady (2003), in their edited book, demonstrated how ethnography can provide a solid understanding of the engagement process between viewers and cultural products. Taking into consideration the complexities of location and the dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity and class, the

different chapters in that anthology showed how media/audience ethnography could be done as a long-term, in-depth project that allows for solid knowledge about media practices.

Ethnographers immerse themselves in a culture to retell the lives of a particular people, to narrate the rites and traditions of that people, and to understand and explain their cultural practices. In doing so, ethnographers contain, even if unintended, the experiences lived, giving form and coherence to a multiplicity of experiences, to simultaneous events, sensations, feelings, and emotions. The ethnographer is trying to order the chaotic world in which theory and praxis are jumbled. According to Geertz (1973), this is accomplished through thick description:

Ethnography is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with . . . is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render (p.10).

For Geertz, "understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity [...] It renders them accessible: setting them in the frame of their own banalities, it dissolves their opacity" (p.14). As ethnographers, Geertz explains, "we begin with our own interpretation of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those." In this sense, what we observe and write is a retelling, from the researcher's perspective, of what happens in the locality. The intent of the ethnography must be to allow the systematization of these accounts, so the reader can understand the events described, knowing full well these are the accounts of one observer who has framed and perceived the events within his or her limitations.

Rosaldo (1989), in discussing the work of Geertz and Turner and their role in developing methodologies for processual analysis in ethnography, argued that the danger of thick descriptions is that they may end on thin conclusions. His view is that the focuses on social control placed on most of these authors' earlier works "exclude precisely the informal cultural practices whose study they elsewhere advocate and whose work their case studies so effectively illuminate" (p. 98). Rosaldo was not arguing against thick

descriptions; he was developing an argument against the notion of culture as a form of orderly structure and controlling force: "One often equates culture with order (as against chaos) and social norms with regulation (as against anarchic violence)" (p.99). For him, when culture was equated to a "control mechanism, such phenomena as passions, spontaneous fun, and improvised activities tend to drop out of sight" (p.102). As ethnographers, we must be prepared to look at culture not as a system enclosed in itself but rather a system in continuous motion.

Abu-Lughod (1993), in the introduction of *Bedouin Stories*, wrote that the concept of culture seemed to work as an essential tool for making "other." The author argued that in producing a discourse on culture that explains the "difference," "anthropology ends up also constructing, producing and maintaining difference" (p.12).

In his radical argument that "natives" are a figment of the anthropological imagination, [Appadurai] shows the complicity of the anthropological concept of culture in a continuing "incarceration" of non-Western peoples in time and place. He argues that by not looking to their histories, we have denied these people the same capacity for movement, travel and geographical interaction that Westerners take for granted. The fluidity of group boundaries, languages and practices, in other words, has been masked by the concept of culture (Abu Lughod 1993, p.11).

The importance of the concept of culture in ethnographic work is that in gathering data or facts one inevitably will select and, in doing so, will present a certain view of a group's "culture," creating a representation or a construction of a group's lived experience. As Scheper-Hughes (1992) argued, "all facts are selected and interpreted from the moment we decide to count one thing and ignore another, or attend this ritual but not another, so that anthropological understanding is necessarily partial and is always hermeneutic" (p.23). This selectivity that the ethnographer inevitably engages in may result in generalizations that, according to Abu-Lughod (1993), lead to the creation of "coherent, self-contained" others, allowing for the "fixing of boundaries between the self and the other" (p. 7).

Still, these narratives that represent a particular segment of a group's life provide a deep understanding of the dynamics that form that group's practices and, for our purpose in this essay, their particular engagement with media and popular culture. The diversity of methods and theoretical approaches delineated by Drotner (1994) clarifies the strength of the ethnographic method for the study of media practices. A method as open-ended as ethnography provides space for the researcher to incorporate information and build upon it, as well as to recycle and re-evaluate it the next day based on newly acquired information and renewed perceptions.

The advantage of using ethnography to engage in audience studies rests on its potential to provide both a domestic and a communal context of television and telenovela reception among the different groups in the community. It also facilitates an understanding of how the reception context can affect the interpretation of the message by viewers, individually and in groups (La Pastina 2003b). Ethnographic research also allows the examination of the phenomena not only in its immediate social, political, and economic contexts, but also in a larger historical framework, as well as its insertion in the broader regional, national, and global context.

Morley and Silverstone (1991) argued for the advantage of ethnographic methods in studying media audiences, explaining that they provide an "analysis of multiple structured contexts of action, aiming to produce a rich descriptive and interpretative account of lives and values of those subjected to the investigation" (p. 149-150). The importance of ethnography lies in the possibility of assessing the different elements involved in the reception process and how these elements interact within the context of the locality in which the observation is taking place, along with the culture and identity of the community members.

Television audiences are fluid; they present different characteristics in different situations and toward different programs. "Watching television should be seen as a complex and dynamic cultural process, fully integrated in the messiness of everyday life, and always specific in its meanings and impacts" (Ang 1991,

p.161). According to Ang (1991), ethnographic research is the appropriate methodology to better understand the viewing behavior in the specific concrete situation in which it takes place. She argued that ethnographic research can account for situational practices and experiences of those who must make do with television provision served them by institutions -- an open-ended discourse that conceives quality as something relative rather than absolute, plural rather than singular, context specific rather than universal, a repertoire of aesthetic, moral and cultural values that arises in the social process of watching television rather than through criteria imposed upon from above (Ang 1991, p. 167-68).

For Drotner (1994), media ethnography “draws on a variety of classical anthropological and ethnological methods of investigation: participant observation, informal talks and in-depth or life course interviews, diaries kept by the informants as well as self-reports kept by the researcher. In addition, he or she may apply textual analysis of, for example, selected television programmes, musical scores or magazine genres.” She argued that these methods and theoretical approaches do not necessarily provide a more veridical picture but rather it is the “discrepancies that are most significant and revealing.”

The practice of audience ethnography remains a challenge. The need to focus on the complexities of the surrounding environment and on personal ideational values and attitudes makes this a process fraught with limitations. To observe and participate in the process of media consumption might limit a more general analysis of the societal process and the general trends that can be observed in a sociological study. Nevertheless, the understanding of individual and communal media consumption practices might help to apprehend the role of media texts.

The engagement between viewers/consumers and texts needs to be investigated as a process located in a context broader than the immediate site of the viewing interaction. I have identified four stages of this engagement process: reading, interpretation, appropriation, and change. The first phase is when the actual reading happens, normally in the home within a family context. This phase is best understood in terms of a factual explanation of the narrative structure and content. The second phase is when the text is

interpreted, which happens not only at an individual level but also through social interactions that might impose norms, values, and beliefs shared by the community upon the text. After interpretation, the third phase involves appropriation, where the issues brought up by the text and interpreted through mediating forces are used to explain one's own life or the social relations and cultural dynamics one is inserted in. The processes of identification and catharsis are normally at work in this phase. Resistance also happens in this phase. The final stage in this engagement model is behavior change, which in most cases is the hardest stage of this process of engagement to be documented. Ethnography has the potential to observe community and social changes that might be related to media presence due to its ability to develop longitudinal investigations. While these four phases are an artificial attempt to impose an analytical frame to this unruly process, these stages are not discreet or present in all textual engagements (see figure I).

Figure I – Media engagement model

With this model, I propose that ethnography allows investigators to grapple with the complexity of the relationship between viewers/media consumers and media texts as an ensemble that connects all the available media sources.

I espouse the view that when viewers engage in this reception process, several things happen at the same time. The interaction between viewer and text is complex, multidimensional, and multi-layered. No single term can explain this process. Viewers engage in several processes, many times simultaneously: the text becomes part of a routine; it is used for gratification and leisure; its meaning is negotiated with family and community; some images, topics, and characters are rejected -- others embraced; the text is inserted in a context that also mediates the process (Martin-Barbero, 1993); and this process is continuously evolving due to social interactions. Identification happens; interpretation happens; use for pure gratification happens; use for access to information happens; passive viewing happens; and highly active reading happens. Chatting about these texts might lead to interpretations and consequent acceptance or negation

of values and attitudes presented in these narratives. Although they occasionally are nomads, subjects normally are predictable in their interpretative strategies.

The challenge in the study of audiences is that we are stepping into a field where no clear unified structure is at place. In this research I am trying to go beyond the analysis of interpretations alone to discuss that transition where text becomes reality and sometimes reality seems to be the text. I am using engagement here to imply the totality of the media experience -- from reading about the show, to watching it, to talking about it, to remembering it, and so on.

Telenovelas in Rural Brazil: A Case Study of Media Engagement

To explain the advantage of the ethnographic process to apprehend what I have termed media engagement, I will present an analysis of the confluence between a particular telenovela text and viewers' lives in a specific context. Telenovelas are layered structures of signification, with different sets of meanings associated with different aspects of the creative and production process. Telenovelas are melodramatic texts that favor traditional notions of class ascension and romance inherent to the genre. Nevertheless, in recent years the Brazilian telenovela, especially as the genre has been developed by Globo network, has become much more attuned to the national reality, discussing current affairs and the social and political structure of the nation (La Pastina, Rego, Straubhaar 2003; Hamburger 1999). In doing so, telenovelas have become a space in which authors' agendas, and many times those promoted and supported by the network, become an important sub-plot in the narrative (La Pastina 2004a; La Pastina, Patel and Schiavo, 2003).

In *The Cattle King* (*O Rei do Gado*), the particular telenovela discussed here, adultery, pre-marital sex, and pregnancy raised important issues to viewers in Macambira, a small rural community that was struggling with more visible teen sexuality and changing codes of moral behavior. It also underscored the large number of women who questioned traditional norms that limited women's sexuality while allowing

men to retain their sexual freedom, even after marriage (La Pastina, 2004b). The sub-plot of land reform and political integrity included in the narrative clearly touched the local reality. In 1996, during the broadcast of the telenovela, *Macambira*, the site of this fieldwork, was split by the rivalry between two political parties in the community. In this scenario of political rivalry, the notion of integrity, honesty, and land rights prompted viewers to discuss the images presented in the telenovela in relation to their own reality (La Pastina 2004a). The commercial nature of telenovelas pervaded the narrative as well, with commercial insertions and tie-ins with material advertised during commercial breaks. Viewers, however, did not necessarily decode the commercial content of telenovelas evenly. Technological limitations reduced the access to commercial messages, and the remoteness of the community impacted the engagement with the commercial messages, clearly establishing a hierarchy of viewer desires based on each individual's cultural, economic, and symbolic capital (La Pastina 2001).

In *Macambira*, located in the interior of the Rio Grande do Norte state in northeastern Brazil, television was perceived as the ultimate form of entertainment. Years of savings were invested by some families in satellite dishes that allowed them to tune into 14 channels instead of the single one available to the majority of the population. But television was more than entertainment. For many viewers, it was the main, if not the only, source of information. Television and telenovelas provided access to a modern and urban reality where male and female roles appeared to be different. Through television, viewers in *Macambira* knew what was going on in Brasilia, the nation's capital. They also knew the latest fashion trends in the industrialized South and the misery of communities a few hundred miles away. Television reminded these viewers about the gap between their lives and the lives of people in the urban centers of the South. Whether decadent and dangerous or "modern" and exciting, the lifestyles of other families were brought to those in *Macambira* through the telenovelas that featured conflicts, struggles, emotions, and romance.

Macambira was distant and isolated, not only physically and culturally, but symbolically and emotionally, from the urban and modern representation of the nation, the Brazil constituted in the political and social discourse of school textbooks and the news and entertainment media. This was reflected in physical distance, economic disparity, and large differences in values and daily life routines. These structural differences created a breach or perceived gap between viewers in Macambira and the modern, urban Brazil of the telenovelas (La Pastina, 2003a).

This gap created a fracture in the national identity, producing a regional/local sense of not belonging to the nation, generating diverse readings of the reality consumed through the media. For most in Macambira, television and radio remained the main sources of information about the outside world. Only very limited interpersonal contact with outsiders complemented that media knowledge. Migrants, particular temporary ones, represented a bridge to the outside world, providing personal stories on the opportunities and vicissitudes one had to confront to survive in the South. This lack of direct experience severely limited the cultural capital rural Brazilians brought to understanding the telenovelas, such as many of the more unfamiliar consumer themes and product placement exposures, but also instances of intertextuality between news and the telenovela plot.

In the year I spend in Macambira, I talked to men and women about their lives and the lives of the characters in one particular telenovela, *The Cattle King*. These viewers' views of their lives and those of the fictitious characters at many times resembled each other. At other times they were totally dissonant. Discussing the telenovela with males was almost always preceded by a disclaimer that this telenovela was an exception. Male viewers tended to deny enjoying watching telenovelas, except for those with realistic portrayals. The definition of realistic portrayals varied, however, from *The Cattle King* to *Brothers Courage* (*Irmãos coragem*) to *Isaura, the slave* (*Escrava Isaura*), but mostly, males attributed realistic characteristics to those texts that dealt with rural lifestyles.

Men and women's roles in Macambira were defined and influenced by the economic setup of the community. The embroidering industry, an informal economic system, was the main source of income. Most of the people engaged in embroidery were women, with a few men peripherally participating in this industry. Overall, men in the community had a limited number of job opportunities. They could try to get one of the few public jobs, mostly at the municipal level with a very limited income, or they could work in agriculture and struggle with limited water resources, limited access to the land, and the rising cost of production compared to the decline in selling prices. Through the years a segment of the population migrated. And temporary migration to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro had become an important source of income for many males. This limited access to job opportunities had, according to some residents, led to an imbalance in which many men were powerless and women were empowered, a shift of power that led to conflict.

Erivaldo's family was from São Fernando, a small community 15 miles away. Every time I met with his relatives, they would tell me how different Macambira was from São Fernando. One big difference was that in Macambira women sat down at the bar and drank beer and cachaça without being intimidated. In São Fernando, they said, this would not happen. In Macambira, women went out to the few bars, drank at parties, and many times drank at home with friends. To many in Macambira, these behaviors were the result of women's ability to secure their own income. Dona Bezinha had no doubts: "Women have to work to be able to be independent. They need to secure their income so they don't have to ask their partners for money to do anything." What about the husbands that had to ask their wives for change to go have a beer with their friends? While gender relations were colored by the local economic culture, undeniably there were clear leftovers from traditional patriarchal structures, where men's rights and women's obligations were articulated. The reverse, women's rights and their partners' obligations, was the terrain of conflict. Males, in many cases, wanted to maintain their culturally granted rights, while women wanted to acquire what they perceived to be their conquered rights. It was in this struggle that telenovelas were located in Macambira. Males and females watched these shows, some more than others

depending on the particular show and the time of broadcast, but over time telenovelas had become part of many community members' lives. For some, telenovelas were just entertainment; to others they provided insights into another reality, into a world far away, into a world where men and women related differently, where women had more freedom, where parents and children talked about their problems, where affection was displayed.

What became clear through this ethnographic work was that viewers engaged with the different narrative plots within the telenovela, but the attention devoted to some elements was much greater than to others. Gender was one of the most powerful elements in the process of interpretation and engagement with the telenovela text, far overshadowing cultural capital and other elements influencing the reading of the text.

Established gender norms and attitudes in Macambira structured in many ways the levels of engagement and the readings of viewers. Women's increasing economic empowerment created a fracture in the established traditional male-female domination patterns. This allowed women to question their role and men's role in the household and the community. The telenovela seemed to be one way through which women observed alternatives, which they then used to evaluate their own lives and the lives of the community in relation to those of the characters in the South. This supported earlier reception finds by Leal (1986) and Vink (1988).

But gender constructions also hindered the ability of males to engage with the text in a more complex manner. For many, there was a perception that their masculinity, many times questioned by their inability to provide for their households, could be damaged even more by their association with a telenovela, a text still perceived as a women's program. This distancing that many males presented in relation to telenovelas was even more present when discussing certain elements in the narrative. Males watching the telenovela preferred to talk about issues associated to land reform and rural lifestyle discourses.

Consequently, many males presented a limited cultural capital regarding knowledge of the telenovela narrative structure and an inability to use situations in the telenovela to discuss their own reality as many

women did. Cultural capital in this context relates to the knowledge of certain elements in the telenovela such as: a) narrative conventions and strategies employed by telenovela writers; b) an awareness of previous roles played by a certain artist that can provide a framework to understand his or her current role; c) the career trajectory of writers and directors that allowed viewers to notice stylistic threads from one telenovela to the next that they worked on; and d) intertextual information regarding the telenovela relationships to other TV programs, other media texts, and real-life characters. The last two items are in many ways not only the result of telenovela watching but also exposure to other media texts, the total available media ensemble, that provide contextual information about telenovelas.

Even if the text were perceived as feminine, males did use the rural lifestyle and the political narrative to think about their lives in relation to the urban, modern South. The images of farming and the technology associated with the big cattle-raising and milk-producing farms in the telenovela caught most males' attention, as did the discussion of politics and land reform. Males also were prone to comment on and rejoice over scenes of cattle herding and the lifestyle of the *peões* (herdsmen), including their singing and story-telling. This engagement with this element of the narrative seemed to indicate that perceived gender norms did in fact hinder the level of engagement with narrative layers, such as the more traditional melodramatic elements of love and betrayal. This, however, does not mean that males did not pay attention to those elements or were totally oblivious to them. It means they had a greater interest in talking about elements locally associated with the male sphere, such as politics and farm techniques, rather than engaging with other elements in the narrative normally associated with the female sphere, such as raising children and romance.

Due to the rural nature of *The Cattle King*, it was easily perceived as a text pertaining to a male sphere. For women, telenovelas -- and *The Cattle King* was no exception -- were about romance. Women viewers in Macambira perceived the melodramatic roots of the genre and expected melodramatic genre conventions to be followed by the writers. The incorporation of a more contemporary social context in the

telenovela's narrative seemed to be distancing these texts from their melodramatic roots, apparently making it harder for women to identify with the characters. Males, on the other hand, saw in this process of contemporization a bridge with what they perceived to be a realistic narrative, which justified their viewing and enjoyment of the telenovela. However, the established norms and attitudes regarding gender roles in the community still limited the possibilities of males to acknowledge the melodramatic as enjoyable. Telenovelas, for those males, were valued according to their perceived informational and/or realistic content.

The political and commercial layers of signification in the narrative were not always available to all viewers in the same fashion. The newness or distance from Macambira's reality of these political and commercial themes and images clearly established a certain hierarchy of meanings available, based on cultural and social capital. Very few viewers successfully decoded the instances of political intertextuality, such as when the telenovela characters interacted in the plot with real-life politicians or when real-life politicians acknowledged in the news media the importance or relevance of the telenovela subplot on agrarian reform. Few also were able to decode many of the commercial product placement insertions. The available knowledge of the political debate in the nation and of a larger range of commercial goods seemed to have limited the access to those sequences of many viewers with less cultural capital. The male identification with the rural plot line led many to see in the commercial insertions the kind of information they said they enjoyed in telenovelas. What was puzzling was that even viewers aware of Globo's merchandising strategy did not see an attempt to advertise in the placement of agricultural products (La Pastina 2001). This may demonstrate that the pleasure derived from the rural imagery, even if it reinforced their perception that they lived in the periphery of this modern world, reminded them of their own rural traditional values and identities.

The local political structure also hindered the readings of the political message within the telenovela. The electoral disputes in town and the tradition of local political fights and accusations of corruption and

mismanagement served to create a local climate in which politicians were perceived as corrupt by definition. Residents questioned the honest politician in the telenovela, seeing him as one who did not understand how the system worked and, therefore, could not accomplish anything.

Media Engagement and Audience Ethnographies

This paper attempted to demonstrate how an ethnographic approach to media engagement between viewers and text(s) allows for a better comprehension of this complex process. Structural elements within the narrative, as well as within the viewing context, mediate the process of reception and appropriation of the narrative into viewers' lives. It became apparent that gender, both as social norms that are culturally based and as elements within the narrative, were key in the process of hindering and enabling viewers to engage with the text in their lives. Gender as a socially constructed category also was used to provide an element of comparison between male and female viewers and their expectations regarding the text and their willingness to engage with certain narrative layers.

This ethnographic approach also contributed to providing a better understanding of the role of the local (versus the national/global) in the process of media engagement. It clearly established that the perception of the telenovela text as a representation of urban reality hindered the process of identification; at the same time it created a bridge between the two realities, allowing viewers to engage with a discourse that they perceived to be modern. These representations of difference may lead in some instances to a desire to question one's life in relation to the lives of those on the screen. Men also questioned their limited power to farm and raise cattle, comparing their reality to the modern rural technology used in the telenovela farms. In that process, consumer items, lifestyles, and particular behaviors, as well as norms that challenge the local traditions, may become part of the local cultural capital that will be used to interpret situations in their own lives.

In the long term, telenovelas, as well as other media text, have provided viewers in Macambira with an array of images and ideas about what the world beyond its borders looked like. In that process, it has allowed local teenagers to challenge the established local norms, led males to perceive their role in the community as one that could be changed and questioned, and given women an array of role models that strengthened their perceptions of their own rights. Ethnography allows researchers to investigate patterns of telenovela engagement that permit scholars to question how this process -- from reception to appropriation of those messages into viewers' lives -- may lead to an awareness about self and community and may ultimately promote social change.

On Evaluating Good Ethnography

I would like to end this text by discussing some of the challenges to good ethnography. Evaluating ethnographic media research is tricky. In our discipline ethnography has been a hodgepodge of possibilities. As I argued in this paper, media ethnography needs to return to a sense of commitment to traditional practices: a long-term, in-depth, site-specific, multi-method approach. A good ethnographic study must provide evidence that the data reported, the analysis, and the processes described are the result of a long and careful process of maturation of the information collected. This return to sound methodology does not preclude, nor should it, a greater level of self-reflexivity and an awareness of the ethical implications of conducting fieldwork.

Ethnography is time-consuming and costly. It is hard for most researchers to devote an extended period of time away from other job obligations and family. It is also still quite difficult to secure funding to conduct extensive ethnographic research. The inability to generalize from ethnographic data should not be seen as a weakness but rather as part of a methodological process that allows scholars to attain a deeper understanding of particular processes. Nevertheless, generalizability might be reached in limited ways through replicability of ethnographic studies across several sites.

Ethnography requires a high level of commitment and a willingness to share your work and your life with a particular group that you care about. Many, such as Schepper-Hughes (1995), have argued that we should always engage in militant ethnography. I agree with her that once we are on the site, our presence affects the work we are conducting and the community we are working in. I believe that good ethnographic work has to make that self-reflexive relationship clear, building on that knowledge of our own limitations and the role we have in the research process but also acknowledging the central and vital role community members have in the final research product.

References

- Abu-Lughod, L. (1993). *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ang, I. (1991). *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. New York: Routledge.
- Drotner, K. (1994). Media Ethnography. *Communications* 19(1): 87-103.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Leal, O. F. (1986). *A leitura social da novela das oito*. [The social reading of the eight o'clock telenovela]. Petrópolis (Brazil): Editora Vozes.
- Hamburger, E. I. (1999). *Politics and Intimacy in Brazilian Telenovelas*. Department of Anthropology. Ph.D. Dissertation, Chicago: University of Chicago.
- La Pastina, A. (2001). Product placement in Brazilian prime-time television: The case of a telenovela reception. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45, 541-557.
- La Pastina, A. (2003a). Does national programming promote national identity? A case study of rural Brazil. *Media in Transition - 3 conference*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, May 2-4.
- La Pastina (2003b). "Now that you going home are you going to write about the natives you studied?" Telenovela reception, adultery and the dilemmas of ethnographic practice. In Murphy, P. and Krady, M. (eds.) *Global Media Studies*. London: Routledge.
- La Pastina, A. (2004a). Selling political integrity: Telenovelas, intertextuality and local elections in Brazil. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. 48, 302-325.
- La Pastina, A. (2004b). "Telenovela reception in rural Brazil: gendered readings and sexual mores." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21(2), 162-181.

La Pastina, A., Rego, C. & Straubhaar, J. (2003). The centrality of telenovelas in Latin America's everyday life: Past tendencies, current knowledge, and future research. *Global Media Journal*.
<http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/contents.htm>

La Pastina, A., Patel, D. & Schiavo, M. (2004). Brazilian telenovelas: The social merchandising approach. In M. Cody, M. Sabido, A. Singhal, & E. Rogers (Eds.), *Entertainment-education and social change: History, research, and practice* (pp . 261-279). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Martín-Barbero, J. (1993). *Communication, culture and hegemony: From the media to the mediations* (E. Fox & R. White, Trans.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage. (Original work published in 1987)

Morley, D. and R. Silverstone (1991). *Communication and context: Ethnographic perspectives on the media audience*. In K. Jensen and N. Jankowski (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative methodologies for mass communication research*. London: Routledge.

Murphy, P. D. (1999). *Media Cultural Studies' Uncomfortable Embrace of Ethnography*. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 23(3): 205-221.

Murphy, P. and Krady, M. (1993) (eds.) *Global Media Studies*. London: Routledge.

Rosaldo, R. (1989/1993). *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon press.

Scheper-Hughes, N. (1992). *Death without Weeping: The violence of everyday life in Brazil*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Scheper-Hughes, N. (1995). *The Primacy of Ethical: Proposition of a Militant Ethnography*. *Current Anthropology* 36(3): 409-420.

Vink, N. (1988). *The telenovela and emancipation: A study on television and social change in Brazil*. Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute.