

# Television and politics: the myth of Tancredo Neves – between death, legacy and redemption<sup>1</sup>

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## RESUMO

O artigo aborda a produção cultural da televisão brasileira, em especial da Rede Globo de Televisão e de seu telejornalístico *Globo Repórter* no deságua da chamada ‘abertura política’, tendo como mote a veiculação da imagem política de Tancredo de Almeida Neves e os processos de construção simbólica que envolveram a sua mitificação. Num contexto marcado pelo ‘transformismo político’, a pesquisa enfoca a centralidade da mídia eletrônica como elo de contato entre a sociedade civil e a sociedade política e como privilegiado ‘lugar de memória’ da cultura nacional, ajudando a urdir sentidos em torno de imagens políticas e de certa concepção de história.

Palavras-chave: política; mitificação; televisão brasileira.

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the cultural production of Brazilian television focusing in particular on Globo Network, a television network, and one of its programs called *Globo Repórter*, a weekly documentary show, concentrating on the rise of so-called ‘political opening,’ adopting as a guide the diffusion of the political image of Tancredo de Almeida Neves, as well as a symbolic construction processes which involved his mythification. Against a context of ‘political transformation,’ this research focuses on the centrality of electronic media as a link between civil and political society and as a crucial ‘place of memory’ of national culture, helping to make sense of political images and a particular conception of history.

Keywords: politics; myth; Brazilian television.

Although all mythified political images are constantly remade in the arena of symbolic disputes in the form of multiple resonances and significations – it should be remembered how the image of Getúlio Vargas is used by the most divergent political party groups possible –, it is plausible to say that the constructions related to the theme obey a narrative architecture whose traits are based on a practically organic ordering.<sup>2</sup>

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In the year in which the centenary of the birth and 25 years of the death of the Minas Gerais politician Tancredo de Almeida Neves is being celebrated, this text has the intention of examining the symbolic constructions related to this image and the messages disseminated by the national media during the political transition of the country and specifically through the analysis of the *Globo Repórter* program, from Globo Television Network (*Rede Globo de Televisão*).

Understanding the period in question through what Gramsci called “political transformism,”<sup>3</sup> the conservative transition which reconnected the dominant groups and guaranteed the accumulation progressed in parallel to the consolidation of a media culture within the country, especially in relation to the hegemony of *Rede Globo de Televisão* and its television journalism.

As well as the technological innovations in its production structure, the television journalism of the station bifurcated at the beginning of the 1980s between the national network and local programs, intensifying the dialogue between the affiliates and the *Central Globo de Jornalismo* (Globo Center of Journalism), thereby integrating the Brazilian public in a news industry with a more wide-ranging nature, though narrative formats based on the central figure of presenters and reporters, the ‘spokespersons’ of an ‘imagined community’ with an electronic basis.<sup>4</sup> With a deliberate omission in the coverage of the participation of various sectors of civil society in the political process of that moment,<sup>5</sup> the schedule of the station supported the indirect electoral process plotting meanings around the image and later the political mystification of Tancredo Neves, mediating through screens the most immediate space of contact between political society and civil society. A privileged space for the formation of public opinion in its many changes and symbolic re-significations, and above all the production of a determined national memory, in a country which was increasingly used to ‘recognizing’ itself through television.

For the television journalism program *Globo Repórter* the set of special programs about the Mineiro politician (a total of five between 17 January and 15 August 1985) represented a watershed in a context of the internal transition of its professionals, its format and its language. The logo of *Globo Repórter* was seen for the first time in April 1973, as the result of a project of a series of 24 programs sponsored by *Shell*, under the general direction of Paulo Gil Soares, *Globo Shell Especial*. The program which was transmitted monthly at 11 pm was found to be a critical and public success and a short while later it gave rise to *Globo Repórter*. Initially composed of a team of filmmakers and professionals

who in the 1950s, in addition to the Brazilian New Cinema, had very close ties with the Popular Centers of Culture (*Centros Populares de Cultura* – CPCs), leftwing parties and organizations (Eduardo Coutinho, João Batista de Andrade, Renato Tapajós, Hermano Penna, Maurice Capovilla and Walter Lima Jr., amongst others), in its first decade the program imprinted, despite internal and external censorship a differentiated tone to the station's television journalism. Organized in small teams and working in an isolated form from the journalistic sector of Globo Network – despite its submission since 1974 to the Department of Journalism, in the figure of its director Armando Nogueira –, the first group produced works whose language opted to break the rules, innovating forms and contents and also dealing with polemical subjects. The influence of documentary cinema was brought to electronic screens, not rarely exhibiting a representation of Brazil and its people which clashed with the station's own patterns of aesthetics and its 'standard of quality.' At the beginning of the 1980s, in parallel to the developments of the political transition, the station took a harder line, and although some new productions showed evidence of greater social criticism (such as *Carga Pesada* and *Malu Mulher*), journalistic programs suffered severe censorship. Among the many *Globo Repórter* programs archived without ever having been aired and among the many stories related to censoring, I would like to highlight the program that was going to be aired on 19 April 1982, in commemoration of the anniversary of Getúlio Vargas. Eduardo Coutinho told me that this production was a significant moment in which he recorded an interview with Tancredo Neves:

The first program we did about Getúlio Vargas had very good material. I had an interview with Tancredo Neves. You can imagine what this was at that political moment and I went with my mouth watering to interview him. Evidently Tancredo did not say anything that would compromise the regime or the situation in itself, of course not! He already was the figure on whom I was betting for this transition, and while I was thinking about this, Tancredo had already been intriguing and then some... So much so that this was not the problem. Some time later we did another program, also about Getúlio, and we used this material, and at the end of the program a letter of testament of Getúlio's had been prepared. But it did not happen. I was beside Paulo Gil when the telephone rang. It was Roberto Marinho. Obviously I did not hear what he was saying to Paulo Gil, but based on Gil's attempts to get around the situation I already knew that the program would not air in that manner.<sup>6</sup>

Paulo Gil, until then director general of the program, told part of the same story and his attempt to negotiate with Roberto Marinho himself: “Dr. Roberto, this letter is now just historic. At the time it caused a great stir, but why would it do so now?” The response was: “My son, it will not cause trouble. Getúlio is dead, but there are many people alive who it would bother. Thank you very much for asking for advice.”<sup>7</sup> As well as the implications of the ‘places of speaking’ of the subjects involved, it is important to highlight that this happened in 1982, two years after the letter in question had been aired in another program without any problem. What was at play at this moment were the state elections, in which the *Trabalhista* Leonel Brizola was running for governor of Rio de Janeiro. He ended up being the victim of an unsuccessful attempt at electoral fraud in which Rede Globo would be accused later, as an accomplice of the Proconsult agency.

After successive clashes between the Globo Center of Journalism and the director general of the program and his team *Globo Repórter* changed. Assuming a form closer to the American model of ‘spectacle journalism,’ it adopted an editorial line in tight harmony with political agenda more verticalized with the political position of the station and with variety themes,<sup>8</sup> also presenting a more standardized television journalism language, accompanying and the same time directing the expansion of its target public. Its team was changed and it began to include trained journalists whose names are still part of Brazilian television journalism, such as Jorge Pontual, Ernesto Paglia, Caco Barcelos, Carlos Nascimento, Ilze Scamparini, Sandra Passarinho, Marcelo Rezende, Carlos Dorneles and Sílvia Sayão. Respecting the limits of the objectives of this text, I will constrain myself to stating that the internal changes in the production of *Globo Repórter* were linked to the meanderings of disputes and interests between its subjects, as well as the policy of restructuring Globo Center of Journalism and its close dialogues with the national political scenario in the figure of its president Roberto Marinho.

It is important to highlight here how much this new configuration of the program and especially the productions made in relation to the profile of Tancredo Neves opened up a singular perspective of contact with the public in that context. A profile that owed much to the fusion of narratives of spectacle with melodrama, whose script I will analyze below in the ‘chapters’ on death, martyrdom and redemption.

## DEATH: THE ‘PROVIDENTIAL MAN’ AND TIRADENTES

The program transmitted by *Globo Repórter* shortly after his death (*Tancredo Especial*, on 24 April 1985)<sup>9</sup> defined the construction of the profile of Tancredo Neves in such a way that made him memorable for Brazilian political history, giving the politician characteristics of a guardian authority for the nation. As proposed by Girardet, the image transmitted approximated the ‘providential man,’ the politician who is affirmed through a ‘rupturing of time’ (Girardet, 1987). Tancredo Neves’ image was thus associated with the symbolic legacy of Tiradentes, both introducing in distinct moments a feeling of achieving a threshold of liberty for a new nation.

The narration at the beginning of the program already denotes this perspective, in the voice of Eliakim Araújo:

Tonight when the historic São João del-Rei buries its president, it will join in destiny two illustrious children of its land: Tancredo de Almeida Neves and Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, Tiradentes, civic patron of the Brazilian nation.

At this instant the image focused on the statute of Tiradentes from bottom up, creating a sense of grandiosity and paternal support. The report continued, and a second analogy was made:

Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, the martyr of Independence, was born in Pombal, which belonged to São João del-Rei, in 1746. It was also in São João del-Rei, where, four years after the death of Tiradentes, Ensign José Antônio das Neves, great-grandfather of Tancredo Neves, arrived.

After this take, the reporter Ronald de Carvalho continued with the narrative direct from Ouro Preto, constructing links of intimacy between the leader and the viewer. There are reports about how much of a Mineiro Tiradentes was, that he was good humored and famous for being an expert narrator of ‘*causos*,’ someone who had knew the secrets of mineralogy, who had been a trader, a drover, a guard on the roads along which the gold from Minas Gerais passed. Within Casa dos Contos the reporter began to describe the *Inconfidentes* movement, staging the historic time of Vila Rica in the eighteenth century:

Vila Rica das Minas Gerais. From here there left tons of gold for the king of Portugal ... In silence the Brazilians organized to give their shout of liberty... An *Inconfidência* which was created on the streets of Minas Gerais.

Along with the words of the reporter, the images constructed meaning with ‘travelling’ cameras running alone along the narrow alleys of stone in the historic city in the shadows of the houses hidden by the strong mist of the morning. The soundtrack here is *Coração de estudante*, though only the voice of Milton Nascimento is heard pronouncing the word ‘heart’ in rhythm and in a dramatized tone, as if in a religious litany. A mood of suspense looms on the border between the reconstitution of historic scenarios and the almost mournful appeal of the music.

Following this, the take continues describing the meetings of the *Inconfidentes* and the ‘predestined’ place of Tiradentes in the movement. At this moment the third reference to Tancredo Neves is now directly to the political transition itself:

Even among those who fought for liberty there were traitors... The meetings of the *Inconfidentes* were in danger. 15 March 1789, the early morning in which Tiradentes was denounced...

Later Eliakim Araújo, *offscreen*, narrates in the middle of image of the Brazilian Congress celebrating:

It was also 15 March, 196 years after Tiradentes was betrayed that President Tancredo Neves was to be inaugurated as President of Brazil. The victory of a political vocation. Tancredo Neves, a man of missions.

Here the reference to treason is the motto for the re-signification of the enemy faced by Tancredo: the military dictatorship. The explicit indication of this enemy is closely tied to the construction of the image of the political leader who holds the incarnation of some psychological needs conditioned by a conjunctural situation that is historically defined. As suggested by Girardet the political myth tends to sustain itself as a response to a form of popular expectation, a “certain type of demand” (Girardet, 1987, p.82). In this way the affirmation of the political myth tends to resort to the project of hostile feeling towards a regime, an institution or figure transformed in reference to what can be collectively abominated (it is enough to remember the struggle of Americans against terrorists and previously against the communists, these against the imperialists, Hitler against the Jews...), being operationalized through a dimension that is complementary to its opposite. According to Ferrés this involves the use of the negative stereotype as the inversion of processes through which the seduction of the myth comes to be more easily read and accepted.<sup>10</sup>

In his analysis of the Brazilian military period, for example, Carvalho, working with the print media before the enactment of AI-5, shows how within the regime both *situacionistas* (supporters of whoever was in power) and *oposicionistas* used the figure of Tiradentes as a catalyst of an anti-communist imagination. The same dual structure highlighted in the source cited – both in the direct comparison with distinct historic moments and in the struggle of hero against enemy – can be found in records analyzed by the author, who looks at the centrality of the *Inconfidente* in speeches which built him as the hero who wearing the ‘same military uniform’ fought for the freedom of the nation against Soviet imperialism. Thus, the inspiration of what was called the 1964 ‘revolution’ was linked with the lesson left by the past of Minas Gerais and especially the ‘lineage of Minas.’<sup>11</sup>

In our context, following the abortion of *Diretas já* and the development of the conservative transition pact, guaranteeing the correction of directions creating as a counterpoint, as Novais states, the illusion that the serious national problems were only due to the military dictatorship.<sup>12</sup> During the different sections of the program it is in the struggle against this enemy that Tancredo Neves, as the representative of this ‘Mineiro lineage,’ moves away from the field of the ordinary in direction of the crowning of its capacity of sublimation to the collective in harmony with the image of Tiradentes. The reference to the ‘dictatorship enemy’ is correct and is emphasized in Eliakim’s voiceover:

The most symbolic gesture of his political coherence was having been the only PSD parliamentarian who did not vote for the nomination of *coronel* Castelo Branco for the presidency in 1964.

In the third part of the program, the image of the painting *Tiradentes esquartejado* by Pedro Américo (a work that belongs to Mariano Procópio Museum in Juiz de Fora, MG) occupies the screen. The off-screen narration sentences and complements the imagetic appeal of the dismembered Tiradentes in his symbolic connection with the Catholic universe of the Christian Calvary, at the same time that it once again constructed an analogy with Tancredo:

Of all the *Inconfidentes* only Tiradentes was executed. 21 April 1792 ... of the body of Tiradentes nothing was left, it was divided into pieces and exhibited in the cities of the country as an example for all those who wanted liberty. 10.30 pm on the night of 21 April 1985. The martyred body of President Tancredo Neves could not stand any more.

What must first be emphasized is the symbolic force consolidated in the popular imagination, whether with the dates and historic facts officially constructed as ephemera, as is the case of the *Inconfidência Mineira* and Tiradentes in particular, or in the religious reference to Jesus Christ. Bretas et al., examining in the heat of the events of the transition the emphasis given to the figures of Tiradentes and Jesus Cristo, drawing on Laclau to emphasize which elements present in popular traditions – and which in principal are used as forms of reinforcing ‘the order and the established’ – are not circumscribed to its ‘conservative’ mould, establishing to some extent a transgressive boundary to the same perspective that they evoke. Thus, the authors cite the figure of a Tiradentes who subsisted alongside the ‘popular man in his struggle against tyranny’ and the Christ of the ‘pompous and rich Church’ who had lived in the reports with the Christ of the poor and oppressed of Liberation Theology, as well with that of the *Crentes* (Evangelicals) and *Umbandistas*.<sup>13</sup>

Marcelino, in turn, emphasizes this media coverage – in which the population was emphatically transmitted praying and doing penitence for the politician during his illness and hospitalization – based on the logic of the construction of a discourse of a ‘natural ecumenism,’ which at the same time that it presents a nation without conflicts converges meanings for a maximum of an ‘undivided unity of support for Tancredo.’ Both Marcelino and Barbosa, in their research look at the news programs of *Jornal Nacional*, highlighting that the transmission of the fragility of the body of Tancredo Neves, equalizing him to a ‘man of the people,’ accentuated his heroization under the auspices of a media which established its flux ever more through national commotion, of the registers of pain and faith in tones of drama.<sup>14</sup>

Although the special reports of *Globo Repórter* involving the popular commotion during the politician’s illness occur prior to the focus of this article, this perspective of greater drama in the ‘Calvary’ of Tancredo Neves is found in the program analyzed here when it shows part of the speech made on 21 April 1984 in Ouro Preto. Telling viewers that, based on this speech and on *Romanceiro da Inconfidência*, by Cecília Meireles, the program paid tribute to Tancredo Neves, Eliakim Araújo’s narration explains that a scene would be staged with the actors Mário Lago e Rodrigo Santiago: an imaginary dialogue between Tancredo himself and Tiradentes. I reproduce here part of the dialogue interpreted by the actors. The scenario is simple, two chairs placed face to face, with the lights focused on the actors. They are seated with their backs supported on the back rest, using modest clothes in pastel tones. The

emphasis of the take is the dramaturgical expressiveness given by the rhetoric. Mário Lago plays Tiradentes, and Rodrigo Santiago, Tancredo Neves:

Tiradentes: I come to work for all, but for me, who works? My body has fallen in this forgotten battle... Where did the glory go?

Tancredo Neves: Tiradentes, your holocaust was not a dramatic and useless gesture. We made ourselves worthy of honoring your memory and your ideals. Do not extinguish in the heart of the people the faith which you instilled in them...

Tiradentes: What did you do with the patria of which I dreamed? For which I was soiled in body and in soul?

Tancredo Neves: Despite everything, here you are whole. The patria we made under the foundations of your blood... Your struggle consecrated the permanent meaning of the struggle: 'Liberty even if late.' If we want we will make a great nation of Brazil.

Shortly after the redeeming tone of the enactment, the images which followed it resumed the intention: Tancredo's face is merged with the statue of the *Inconfidente*, in the identification of the 'Mineiro lineage.' A message which converges on the whole set of speeches offered by Tancredo Neves during the transition process: the unity of the nation emerges as a sub-product of Mineiro conciliation, of the spirit of tradition and liberty inherited from Minas Gerais. For this there is the tribute of the sacrifice of its children, who are the authentic bearers of ideals capable of making the patria 'a great nation.'

## THE LEGACY: THE CONCILIATION

Looking at the analysis which Nietzsche made of the sacerdotal exercise, Bourdieu showed the seminal appeal that the notion of sacrifice or 'personal abnegation' exercises on the construction/legitimation of the authority figure: "When I become Nothing – and because I am capable of becoming Nothing – of annulling myself, of forgetting myself, of sacrificing myself, of dedicating myself – that I become Everything."<sup>15</sup> In recovering the image of the *Inconfidente* who gave his life for the country, the death of Tancredo and his martyrdom accompanied and 're-actualized' by electronic screens has the purpose of the referencing of this politician who became 'Everything,' through the highest possible degree of personal abnegation. In other words with death we have the final element in the construction of the hero: he becomes a myth.

The following takes were concerned with this point exactly. The presenter

who until then had a reserved expression changes his physiognomy and in a tone of renewed spirits states:

Brazil saw a new popular hero born: Tancredo Neves! In the schools, children now know: 21 April is the day of two heroes of liberty- Tiradentes and Tancredo Neves.

Immediately after his call there was a long piece in Escola Parque in Rio de Janeiro, scanning the games during the break, the civic songs, the corridors and inside the classrooms, where statements are collected with typically infantile spontaneity, reinforcing the various manners of constructing a new hero of the national pantheon. For example:

Tancredo was a politician who held various positions, but never managed to complete them. So when he managed to become president of the Republic, he had to have many operations, suffered, was unable to resist and died.

It is interesting to note the emphasis given to the notion of martyrdom and the death of the politician. Similarly, three years later the historian Paulo Miceli, researching the symbolic strength of heroes in the area of Teaching of History, discovered the importance of Tancredo Neves at that moment: in his research the *Mineiro* politician drew with Pedro II in the preference of students, despite losing to no one other than Tiradentes. In his conclusion:

The draw between one of the most venerable national heroes and a contemporary politician can at first sight even be surprising, but there exists an evident for this: nowadays who performs the old role of history in the creation of the event is the means of communication, and the mythification of Tancredo Neves is directly due to TV ... Children try to explain principally through the image of martyrdom and the fatal outcome, one of the strongest appeals of all beliefs: he fought for a New Republic, a democratic republic, and he died before occupying the position.<sup>16</sup>

Returning to the program and the thought of Bourdieu, it can be said that his appeal to the 'fatal outcome' made more potential by television, as cited, gains in the development of the narrative the configuration of what the theorist calls the 'oracle effect.' Let us look at this: in a medium shot, with a blue background, the psychoanalyst Hélio Pellegrino gave his statement to the

cameras. More than this, it lent credibility of his place as a specialist to this imperative argument:

Tancredo and Tiradentes are myths. Tancredo and Tiradentes are authentic fathers of the Patria. Tancredo and Tiradentes are heroes. A hero is anyone who has died for a noble cause, and dying for a noble cause he achieves a value in life which transcends death. He achieves and incarnates this utopia which is as old as man: the victory of life over death.

Shortly after this text, the presenter continues off-screen, with images of Tancredo speaking in the Electoral College: “But before becoming a myth Tancredo Neves built a political career over fifty years. During these years he left various lessons for the country.” The take then continues selecting excerpts from a speech made on the day of his victory. Among these the appeal for conciliation is repeatedly transmitted. In Eliakim’s voice: “Whenever he could Tancredo Neves defined himself as the defender of conciliation. He thought Brazil should follow this lesson.” At this moment, the images opened a panel. Beside this the central podium in Congress and in huge letters the word: conciliation. The soundtrack is the national anthem being played on piano. After the board, Tancredo appears once again talking:

If Brazil knew how to contain its positions of radicalism which led to unequal and dismal confrontations, it would place national aspirations above sectarian interests or personalist ambitions...

The following section continues to link the perspective of conciliation with the ‘mission’ of the politician to promote changes, which above all should be legally based, which implied an institutional reorganization of the state: “I come to promote changes, political changes, economic changes, social changes, cultural changes...” It can be noted that these narrative moments complement each other. The argument of the rhetoric of the psychoanalyst leaves it clear – even in the verbal imposition which is used – that the myth exists and is eternalized by beating death, while the presenter focuses on the meaning of this victory for the lessons left by the myth. It is through the intermediation of these that the myth lives. It is through them that they are canonized symbols capable of becoming operative in a specific conjuncture. It is in this direction that the myth gains the shape of ‘oracle effect’: “the individual person, the I, is annulled in the benefit of a morally transcendent person” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.196-197). In other words, the political myth becomes the reference of

universal values, becoming sacred and can be triggered in distinct historical circumstances, being re-signified in the time and space of the arena of interests in which it is convoked, closing what Rüsén calls the exemplary constitution of historical meaning.<sup>17</sup>

It is in the condition of spokesperson of the people that he produces simultaneously the message and the deciphering of the message. This is what Bourdieu calls in a general manner within the political field ‘usurping ventriloquism’: the people feel and want what that representative says is to be felt and wanted (Bourdieu, 1990). From this perspective the emphasis on the primacy of conciliation as a value of the political life of Tancredo Neves tends to be aggregated in the media construction of a given ‘national memory’ in this period as a universal value accepted and manifested by the nation itself. Remembering that both in the approach given in the programs analyzed here and in the speeches given by the politician during his career, the concept of conciliation appears linked to a missionary and always pragmatic perspective, trying in turn to free this from a possible association with the idea of conformism. In his own words: “One thing is to be a conciliator, another is to be a conformist. The Mineiro is always a conciliator, always was a revolutionary. All Brazil’s revolutions came from Minas, from Tiradentes until 1964.” The broadest sense of the legacy of the Mineiro politician transmitted on the screens follows this direction exactly: the principle of conciliation/moderation as a fundamental element that provides order and social balance in relation to the so-called “sectarian and radical interests.” In other words the political parties, groups and leftwing social subjects who were not part of the dominant block and the politico-social project which then began through the proclaimed *Nova República* (New Republic). Duarte, who analyzed the discourse of *Veja* magazine between 1982 and 1985, demonstrates how much the apology for ‘conciliation’ went alongside *pari passu* the creation of a frightening image of the left in a discursive context where economic and social chaos reigned.<sup>18</sup>

The final part of the program has a more rationalized counterpoint of the lesson to be learnt through the myth of a strong reference with sentimental appeal. Images of Tancredo Neves lying in state and his funeral are shown, which were accompanied by the station in real time. I would like to open parenthesis now for the statement given by Carlos Nascimento to *Memorial Globo* about this coverage, repeated in the program:

The burial was in the evening, more or less at 7 pm. During the afternoon Boni wanted to ‘spice up’ the programming and ordered me to narrate what was

happening. However, nothing was happening because the politicians would only start to arrive later. He told me to speak anyway. I went up on the roof and thought: “What am I going to say, my God?” So I talked about the mountains of São João del-Rei, the sunset, I described and talked about Tancredo and the bells tolled ... so it was that poetic thing. And Boni said: “Ah, this is great!” It was like this the whole afternoon. *So that finally at night there was the burial and that incredible scene of the guy with the shovel. When I began to speak Boni said: “The only time that is not to speak is now! Stop, stop!” So all there was what that sound of the gravedigger.*<sup>19</sup>

What calls attention in the statement is not only the construction of the context which helps to mobilize the country which saw on the screens the burial of the politician, but the projection constructed around the images which came to add value to a symbolic universe of the ‘providential man.’ Alongside the popular songs, the bells, the unplaced presidential sash, the doll which went up the ramp to Planalto palace, the gravedigger and his shovel, became equally representatives of the relationship of the people with the myth. The mentions which the journalist made of the description of the context (with mountains, sun, sky, bells ...) suggest what Girardet calls the ‘syntax’ of symbols of purification which are associated with the myth, in which its image as a redeemer or ‘the one who liberates’ almost always uses images of light (gold, the rising sun, the twinkle in an eye) and images of verticality (the scepter, the centennial tree, the mountains) (Girardet, 1987, p.17-18). A narrative exercise whose symbolic network – as well as professional pragmatism by covering gaps in live programming – actually constitutes, selecting in its fashion elements capable of giving logic to a complex of psychic elements in which it is inserted.

From the point of view of the streets, thousands of people mobilized around a civic moment over the loss of a political leader. On the electronic screens the crowd became a ‘nation-audience’ and watched the steps of the martyrdom of the politician through the suspension of a present time, or what Barbero calls ‘an autistic time,’<sup>20</sup> which perpetuated the electronic ritual of making pain more potential. The narrative image then focuses on the crying and the popular commotion, while the song *Coração de estudante* served as the musical backdrop alongside the national anthem sung by Fafá de Belém and the macabre tolling of the bells of the small city of São João del-Rei. Of all the manifestations, the farewell of *Mineiros* in Palácio da Liberdade is what gets greatest projection. It also provoked four deaths and 217 injured. The journalist Ernesto Paglia, in the middle of the uncontained crowd narrated: “Tancredo

Neves once again brought the *Mineiros* to Praça da Liberdade, only now for a sad farewell.” His commentary gave space for strong images of people breaking through the barriers and the scenes of people being trampled which followed: “It was impossible to hold back so many people...”.

Following this the intervention of Dona Risoleta Neves was shown asking the people to calm down, as well as people praying and crying all over the country, fragmented edits of various of Tancredo’s speeches, the official ceremonies in Brasília and finally the return to his small Mineiro city. It was the return of an illustrious son who had become a hero. The closing text resumes and reaffirms the ‘moderating’ lesson left by the myth:

And here the journey ends. The final journey of Tancredo Neves to São João del-Rei ... We can be certain that the people do not run after death. Today Tancredo Neves is a vivid presence and illuminates this possible path for us. A *modest path, without utopias, without demands for revenge, without exaggerations*. A path which will be follow, at whatever cost. (Italics added)

Ronald de Carvalho, direct from the ruins of Tiradentes’ ranch, speaks of the ideal of the liberty of the persecuted *Inconfidente* reconquered by Tancredo Neves. In the background a Minas flag slowly makes space for the superimposition of the national flag. The staged dialogue between Tiradentes and Tancredo is repeated and ends the program:

- What did you do with the blood I gave for liberty and for democracy?
- Despite everything, here is the patria whole. The patria we made on the foundations of your blood. We will have to make this country a great nation!

## REDEMPTION: THE SACRED BECOMES ETERNAL

In this scene, however, the process of the narrativization of Tancredo Neves did not have its last chapter. It was on the program *Romaria a Tancredo*,<sup>21</sup> shown four months after his death that *Globo Repórter* finished what the station’s journalist department had ordered. In this program the tragic tone of his death won his redemption. The ‘oracle effect’ projected metaphysical shapes in the real sense of the word. Tancredo not only represented the people ‘who authorized him in the multiple reappropriations to which his image passed in gathering the symbolic universe of the politician, but also came to be

a mediator of his own religious belief. The journalist Ronald de Carvalho in his final visit to São João del-Rei traced the return of people to the city, this time as pilgrims. In the centrality of the image of the many letters sent, sustaining the credibility of the interview, he interrogated the *síndico* of the Third Order of St. Francis, Alfredo Carvalho, at the same time that he explains to the viewer:

Ronald de Carvalho: These are the messages, the letters which the people leave on top of the grave of Tancredo Neves. On some of them, written on the envelopes is simply 'For Tancredo Neves, by hand,' Sr. Alfredo is the *síndico* of the Third Order of St. Francis, which administers the church and the cemetery. He collects these letters and intends to make an album. Sr. Alfredo, what do these letters generally say?

Sr. Alfredo: The letters vary in accordance with the social condition and the intellectual level of the person. Some ask for a job for a son, others ask to give up drink, other for a disease to be cured, and afterwards come him to fill a promise, having a mass said for Tancredo.

In the narrative as a whole images of Tancredo are shown in the middle of catholic saints, t-shirts, key rings, dolls, baseball caps, savory and sweet snacks, the shouts of street vendors and pilgrims fighting for space on the narrow streets of the city, which is transformed before the cameras into a real *Asa Branca*.<sup>22</sup> As in the steps of the Calvary of Christ, the saga of the hero is exposed in the pictures and verses of the *cordel*:

*Tancredo e Tiradentes tiveram a mesma sorte  
Pelo povo deram a vida  
Pelo Brasil deram a morte.  
[Tancredo and Tiradentes had the same luck  
For the people he gave his life  
For Brazil they gave their death.]*

Samba and *chorinhos* disputed the soundtrack with *Coração de estudante*, evoking the meaning of a Brazilianness more typically recognized, by referring to the message of the Brazilian able to move between festivities and faith, the sacred and the profane. The gravedigger mentioned by Carlos Nascimento is thus redeemed as a guardian not only of the cemetery, but of the national memory in his devotion to the leader. As a result he was disputing with the

*síndico* of the Order of St. Francis for the shovel used in the burial, as well as the wideranging report made in relation to the personal objects which became relics alongside the statements about the ‘graces’ received by pilgrims, have acquired an almost fictitious narrative, refusing to separate in watertight places the facts and the staging, the immediately palpable and the belief. Everything becomes a fetish of a greater universe of narrativization of the nation in relation to the politician made into a myth. In his statement the editor in chief of the program, Jorge Pontual, pondered upon recollecting the total set of these productions:

The programs about Tancredo were staged by the direction of Globo. At that moment Tancredo became a symbol of citizenship, of democracy, of the nation itself, and this ended up resulting in the near sanctification of the person. Even when he died and we made a program which was aired followed the burial. Under these conditions it was difficult not to sanctify.<sup>23</sup>

In this final program the meaning of ‘sanctification’ literally cited by Pontual finally occupied its place of expression in the sophisticated architecture of ‘adaptations of memory’ raised until now. To the contrary of an idea of arbitrary construction, for Pollak the notion of adaptation functions based on the criteria of certain requirements for justification and consequently identification with the subjects.<sup>24</sup> Thus, we can say that television not only helped to promote this exercise of orchestration it deserved to be registered as memorable, but it reinforced it increasing its strength in the popular imagination. The symbols repeatedly transmitted here are examples. From the bells and the mountains of São João del-Rei to the monumental building of Brasília (in a rediscovery of the power by the architecture of the Brazilian capital); from the song *Coração de estudante* to the national anthem in a new arrangement, passing through the presidential sash; the images of the crowd breaking through the barriers around Palácio da Liberdade to the eternalized minutes of the gravedigger closing the grave. And amalgamating everything, the ‘preferential feeling’ – in accordance with Hall’s concept<sup>25</sup> – of the entire narrative set: ‘conciliation’ as the greatest expressivity of the analogy with Tiradentes, consumed on the civic date ‘chosen’ for the death of the politician.

In this process what became clear were the investments in what Pollak calls the essential aspects from the point of view of psychoanalysis related to the construction of a collective identity: the feeling of unity, of coherence and continuity (Pollak, 1989). In the media narrative analyzed here there is not

only the construction of ties of the politicians with the nation which authorized it– ‘unity’ –, but equally that of the ‘coherence’ of its identity elements carefully tied with national political history and finally its temporal ‘continuity’ through the legacy of conciliation. It is when in the catharsis of the purgation of the pain created by loss, the reappropriation of the television narrative redimensions the fears and sadnesses, recovering the game of contraries to the equilibrium of pleasure. As in the novelesque fiction, here the narrative leads to the redemption of a happy ending: the myth transcends the frontiers of death and consecrates itself as moral value to be followed.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This text is an adaptation of part of Chapter IV of my doctoral thesis entitled *A Rede Globo e o seu repórter: imagens políticas de Teodorico a Cardoso*. Universidade Federal Fluminense, Programa de Pós-Graduação em História. Niterói (RJ), 2008. Research financed by Capes.

<sup>2</sup> GIRARDET, R. *Mitos e mitologias políticas*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> GRAMSCI, A. *Maquiavel, a política e o Estado moderno*. 4.ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1980.

<sup>4</sup> ANDERSON, B. *Nação e consciência nacional*. São Paulo: Ática, 1989, p.45.

<sup>5</sup> I refer here to the *Diretas já* campaign in which the station ignored the principal rallies organized in the country in the two weeks before the voting of the Dante de Oliveira Amendment. The rally in Praça da Sé, São Paulo can be especially mentioned, as it was reported by JN as just a commemoration of the anniversary of the city. In relation to this, see, LIMA, Venício. *Globo e política: tudo a ver*. In: BRITTOS, Valério; BOLÃO, César. (Org.). *Rede Globo: 40 anos de poder e hegemonia*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2005; and for the position of the station itself, see MEMÓRIA GLOBO. *Jornal Nacional: a notícia faz história*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2004, where the reader can also see statements about the Proconsult case, also cited in this article.

<sup>6</sup> Interview held in Rio de Janeiro on 9 May 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Interview cited in MUNIZ, Paula. *Globo Repórter: os cineastas na Televisão*. Available at: [www.mnemocine.com.br/aruanda/paulogill.htm](http://www.mnemocine.com.br/aruanda/paulogill.htm); Accessed on 23 July 2004.

<sup>8</sup> In relation to the verticalizing themes, the programs about Tancredo Neves are an example, but we can also cite productions involving disputing political projects/profiles related to the 1989 and 1994 elections. Cf. PALHA, 2008, cit. In relation to variety news (*fait divers*), we agree with Bourdieu that these consist of an elementary type of information which mobilize through the appeal to themes of general interest based on more immediate entertainment: “it is of interest to everyone without having consequences and because it

occupies time, time which could have been used to say something else.” BOURDIEU, P. *Sobre a televisão*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 1997, p.23.

<sup>9</sup> Fita T13 – *Tancredo Especial*: Série Globo Repórter, 46’, 24 abr. 1985, Cedoc/Rede Globo. The citations involving audiovisual sources used in the research will be mentioned a single time per program analyzed.

<sup>10</sup> FERRÉS, Joan. *Televisão subliminar*. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> CARVALHO, Aline. A liberdade, os inconfidentes mineiros e a ditadura militar entre 1964 e 1968. *Revista Tempos Históricos*, Maringá (PR): Ed. Unioeste, v.12, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> MELLO, João M. C. de; NOVAIS, Fernando. Capitalismo tardio e sociedade moderna. In: NOVAIS, Fernando (Dir.). *História da vida privada no Brasil: contrastes da intimidade contemporânea*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1988, p.651.

<sup>13</sup> BRETAS, Maria Beatriz et al. Meios e mitos: a morte e as mortes de Tancredo Neves. *Religião & Sociedade*, n.12-13, 1985. The theoretical reference used in the paper is LACLAU, Ernesto. *Política e ideologia na teoria marxista: capitalismo, fascismo e populismo*. Trad. João Maia e Lúcia Klein. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1979.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. MARCELINO, Douglas. A morte de Tancredo Neves pela TV: algumas reflexões sobre rituais, memória e identidade nacional. *Revista Mosaico*, ano 1, n.1. Available at: [cpdoc.fgv.br/mosaico](http://cpdoc.fgv.br/mosaico); accessed on 10 Nov. 2010; e BARBOSA, M. O dia em que o Brasil parou: a morte de Tancredo Neves como cerimônia midiática. CONGRESSO BRASILEIRO DE CIÊNCIAS DA COMUNICAÇÃO, 27. *Anais...* Porto Alegre: s.n., 2004.

<sup>15</sup> BOURDIEU, P. *Coisas ditas*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1990, p.196.

<sup>16</sup> MICELI, Paulo. *O mito do herói nacional*. São Paulo: Contexto, 1988, p.20.

<sup>17</sup> RÜSEN, J. *História viva: formas e funções do conhecimento histórico*. Brasília: Ed. UnB, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> DUARTE, Gesner. O herói conciliador: a construção da imagem de Tancredo Neves na revista *Veja* (1982-1985). In: PRATA, Nair; CAMPELO, Wanir. *Tancredo Neves: 100 anos de nascimento, 25 anos de morte*. Perspectivas midiáticas. Belo Horizonte, no prelo.

<sup>19</sup> MEMÓRIA GLOBO. *Jornal Nacional*: a notícia faz história. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2004, p.174, emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> BARBERO, M. *Dos meios às mediações: comunicação, cultura e hegemonia*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. UFRJ, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Fita R13 – Romaria a Tancredo: Série Globo Repórter, 45’, 15 ago. 1985, Cedoc/Globo.

<sup>22</sup> The famous city of Dias Gomes in the novel *Roque Santeiro* (1975-1985), which after having been censored in 1975, opened two months before this program on a national network. In the plot the economic and political universe revolved around devotion to Roque Santeiro, a young altar boy who became a saint by saving the local people from the bandit Navalhada.

<sup>23</sup> Interview given to this researcher on 4 March 2005.

<sup>24</sup> POLLAK, M. Memória, esquecimento, silêncio. *Estudos Históricos*, Rio de Janeiro, v.2, n.3, 1989.

<sup>25</sup> In the words of Hall: “when we speak of preferential or dominant meanings, we are not referring to a one way process, which governs how all events will be signified... This process consists of the necessary work to make it obeyed, to win plausibility to demand legitimately a codification of an event within the dominant definitions in which this event has connotatively signified.” HALL, Stuart. *Da diáspora: identidades e mediações culturais*. Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG, 2003, p.396-398.