

# Under the Long Shadow of Getúlio Vargas: A Research Chronicle

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The old U.S. National Archives building in Suitland, Maryland is, in some respects, as far from Brazil as one can get. Ironically, it was here, dredging information about Brazilian education in U.S. State Department records, that I found the pamphlet that took me on a surreal journey into the private world of Darcy Vargas and her husband Getúlio, *Chefe da Nação* (Chief of the Nation). The pamphlet, published in 1942 by the Darcy Vargas Foundation, detailed the work of the Foundation's Casa do Pequeno Jornaleiro (Home of the Paperboy). It was a sort of Boystown for the Rio de Janeiro streetchildren who lived under the awnings of newspaper buildings near the Praça Mauá dockyards and hawked tabloids on streetcorners.

According to the pamphlet, first lady Darcy Vargas was saddened by the sight of these abandoned children living on makeshift cardboard bedding on the streets of the warehouse district, and organized the Casa to provide the children with a home, adult guidance, and an education in vocational skills and the norms of order and discipline. It was a home for boys; they dressed as cadets, drilled with mock rifles in the Casa's patio, and many went on to military careers. The pamphlet's photos showed clean-cut boys marching, or lined up with military precision, white boys in front, black in back. The Casa do Pequeno Jornaleiro brought the promise of order and progress, Estado Novo-style, to these kids who were the harbingers of Brazil's gigantic crisis of the *menino da rua*, or street child.<sup>1</sup>

This pamphlet, carried by the currents of Pan-Americanism to the State Department and granted a quiet burial in the archive of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, elicited my curiosity. I was beginning dissertation research on the construction of national identity through

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education during Brazil's Vargas era (1930-1945), and the pamphlet opened the possibility of looking at another type of institution involved in youth socialization aside from public schools. As I sought research funding and prepared for a trip to Brazil the next year, I kept the pamphlet in the back of my mind. I wondered whether I might someday find the records of the Casa do Pequeno Jornaleiro and the Darcy Vargas Foundation, but imagined that they had been discarded after the regime was deposed in 1945.

For the next year, my research project evolved along its own logic. The early concern with national identity and youth socialization became a wider study of the public school as an outpost on the frontiers of race, class and gender: What were the normalizing goals of the state in creating universal public educational systems during the Vargas years? How did groups with growing stakes in public education – women teachers, students of color, the poor, the Church, or the military – appropriate and redefine the schools built in the early 1930s by secular and modernist intellectuals drawn into Rio de Janeiro's Department of Education?

I latched onto a historical moment in which the hopes for Brazil's economic, national and social development were pinned to education. The years of political volatility that followed Vargas's rise to power in 1930 opened space for reform at both national and local levels. A federal Ministry of Education and Public Health was established. Locally –first in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, later in the rest of the country– the zeal for reform was written into new educational policies and cast into a rapidly expanding educational system.

In Rio de Janeiro, the focus of my research, education reform was initiated by social scientists trained in the United States. As Director of Public Education in the capital, Anísio Teixeira modelled the city's schools along the patterns of education in the U.S., as he perceived them from his studies at the Columbia Teachers' College: technical, democratic and secular. But just as political volatility created space for reform, Teixeira's project soon fell prey to attacks from rival political groups. As a case study for the Vargas era, public schools mirrored the broader political arena.

By seeing the public school as an arena for negotiating social and cultural power, an increasingly contentious period of Brazilian history can be understood in a new context. As the transitions that characterized Brazil's modernity –rapid industrialization, growing political centralization and urbanization driven by huge internal migrations– gained momentum, public schools and education policy became battlegrounds upon which borders of the modern nation would be forged.

The school served as a kind of outpost on the frontier of social values: reformers envisioned an educational system that policed and normalized

values of nation, class, race and gender. But the debates that ensued between policy-makers defining these values yielded within the school to yet another rift: the gap between policy implementation and public expectation. The local agendas of the communities and individuals who received public education often diverged from those of school system administrators. The accommodations reached between the public and the system reflect a curious tension between modern forms – a school system built on social-scientific paradigms imported from the United States –and traditional practices– a public which responded to the technicism of public education through the time-tested language of patron-client relations.

My research plan called for getting as close to the schools as possible: re-creating the local transactions which, when repeated on a grand scale, shaped societal values. The papers of educational policy-makers such as Anísio Teixeira and Gustavo Capanema provided the institutional scaffolding necessary for understanding educational politics. Their archives could also, at times, bring one eerily close to daily life in a school. Under the mix of populist and corporatist doctrines that guided government, a parent's letter to the mayor about a child's unfair grade –along with a copy of the test and veiled hints that the offending teacher was conducting an illicit affair with the principal– would open an internal inquiry at the highest level and leave a lengthy paper trail. But aside from such exceptions, the archives of politicians and bureaucrats were more of a path to institutional and intellectual histories than a key to popular culture.

More intriguing than the task of reconstructing an institutional history from these collections was the possibility of visiting the actual institutions that were the subject of the study. Could the Institute of Education, the Colégio Pedro II, the Getúlio Vargas and Marechal Hermes Elementary Schools still possess records that were closer to daily life than did the archives at which the papers of ministers were stored? Even just a few eddies in the stream of discarded classroom materials might be enough to re-capture the historical moment: to see the tracking of students, the value judgments, the local decisions that flowed with the currents of racial ideology, secular modernism, fascist tendencies, or Catholic nationalism.



Today, the Rio de Janeiro Department of Education is wrapped in the smoked glass walls of the 30-story Prefeitura, or City Hall, in Cidade Nova, or 'New City', the urban rehabilitation project at the dilapidated end of Avenida Presidente Vargas. The education floor is unmistakable thanks to the teeny desks and the construction-paper wall hangings. The third-grade



styling sets the stage for the waves of teacher-training workshops in what is now the largest school district in the world.<sup>2</sup> One of these offices held the Centro de Memória de Educação (CME - Historical Memory of Education Center). Created under the administration of mayor Marcelo Alencar, the CME was designed to inventory and aid in the preservation of historical materials found in the city's more than five hundred schools.

Like much of the city government, the CME was virtually paralyzed during my visit in 1995. Following the mayoral elections, Alencar's appointees had been replaced by César Maia's, and the current staff of the CME knew little of the findings of their predecessors. While they awaited city funds to begin their own survey, they assembled displays promoting the reinstatement of the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases em Educação ("Law of Directives and Bases in Education," LDB), a progressive national educational code developed by Anísio Teixeira and passed into law in 1958, and quickly discarded by the military regime after 1964.

The LDB would restore as national policy the educational philosophy introduced in Rio de Janeiro during the Vargas era, projected nationally in the Kubitschek years, and stricken by the dictatorship after the 1964 coup. Despite the passage of a decade since redemocratization began, in 1995 Brazil continued to use the curriculum the military had approved in the early 1970s. Adoption of the LDB meant another turn in the cycle of mainstream Brazilian educational philosophy.

The staff of the CME generously arranged permits to visit schools built during the Vargas era that were rumored to still possess ancient pedagogical materials. The first school I visited, the Escola Municipal ('municipal school', E.M.) Pedro Ernesto, was named after the city's popular and populist mayor, a *tenete* who played a key role in the Revolution of 1930 and was rewarded with the mayoralty of the Federal District.<sup>3</sup> Pedro Ernesto Batista's sweeping reforms included appointing Anísio Teixeira to direct the city's schools, and under Pedro Ernesto's political protection, Teixeira introduced the radical pedagogy of the "New School" and secularized education. Both were swept out of power after the Communist uprising of 1935 – Teixeira was exiled to his home state of Bahia under pressure from Catholic nationalists, while Pedro Ernesto, who fell victim to his popularity and President Vargas's jealousy, was imprisoned in 1936.

Until the 1980s there was an archive in the E.M. Pedro Ernesto library, but it vanished along with the library in order to make way for new administrative offices. In fact, the flow of information was reversed: the principal asked me what information I could provide about the school's namesake. Still, despite Teixeira's exile, Pedro Ernesto's imprisonment and death, and countless other traumas, the school clung to two mementos from

its founding: a bust of Pedro Ernesto, and the spare remnants of Brazil's first children's playground, forged from U.S. steel and bought by catalogue to introduce the concept of "active learning" to Brazil. Once in the country, the playground set was reverse-engineered and reproduced throughout Brazil.

The next stop on the tour was the E.M. Getúlio Vargas. Unlike the E.M. Pedro Ernesto, located in affluent Lagoa, E.M. Getúlio Vargas was located in impoverished, outlying Bangú, an hour's ride out on the Central do Brasil rail line. No other school better epitomizes the metaphor of the school as frontier outpost as much as the E.M. Getúlio Vargas. Its construction in 1935 realized the drive to bring the often barefoot, usually nonwhite children of Rio's far-flung suburbs into the school. Like other suburban schools, E.M. Getúlio Vargas manifested the long arm of the state in concrete to an area where public power was ephemeral. Both waves of schools built during the Vargas era (over 100 across the federal capital) were architecturally consistent: the state's normalizing and modernizing presence expressed in stylish, if homogenizing art deco.

In 1935, though, Bangú was no ordinary stop along the dreary Central do Brasil, and the decision to name the school after Vargas reflected more than a simple drive to establish a normalizing state presence. Bangú was the political seat of Padre Olympio de Mello, a demagogic Catholic priest and city councilman who led the battle against Teixeira and the "New School." As a reward for his services to Brazil's emboldened right wing, he was appointed mayor following Pedro Ernesto's imprisonment, though his administration was short lived. Building a "New School" in Bangú and naming it after the nation's unimpeachable political authority was perhaps intended as a blow to Padre Olympio by Teixeira.<sup>4</sup>

Today Bangú remains impoverished. The E.M. Getúlio Vargas needs paint and new window glass. A fire recently destroyed its library, and any trace of leftovers from the Vargas era. Still, the trip to Bangú, like the equally fruitless visit to nearby Marechal Hermes, were of great pedagogical value. The visit put a face to the place. More important, however, it gave me a sense of the distance between Bangú and the center of the city, magnified by the languid pace of the Central do Brasil and by the doubtlessly worse roads that would have connected 1930s residents to the rail stations. This distance is significant, because it shows the commitment and sacrifice that students—like Waldyr Pinheiro Alves or Glaucio Soares de Souza, among scores of others—made to study at the prestigious federal model high school, the Colégio Pedro II.<sup>5</sup>

The Colégio Pedro II, which during the Empire and much of the Republic educated the flower of the elite—including four presidents of the Republic—, remade itself during 1920s and 1930s into a uniquely meritocratic institution, given its social and historical context. It became fully coeducational and



began to operate in morning, afternoon and evening sessions, opening the gateway to opportunity that its degree conferred to the greatest number and diversity of students. Arguably the only democratic educational institution of its time in Brazil, the Colégio Pedro II waived the nominal fees for the poorest students and allowed others to divide them into smaller monthly payments.

Aside from the all-girl Instituto de Educação, the Colégio Pedro II offered the only public, affordable, classical secondary education in the nation's largest city and capital. Its education was highly prized by the city's working poor who could not afford the private academies and gymnasiums. By 1932, most of its students came from the suburbs along the Central do Brasil and Leopoldina rail lines, some recording the railroad station itself as their neighborhood when they matriculated. The personal sacrifices these students made for this education only became clear to me when I retraced their steps, riding the Central hours out to the far *suburbios*. I can think of no greater example of historical agency than that measured by the steps these students took just to make it to school.



Though the visits to E.M. Pedro Ernesto and E.M. Getúlio Vargas did not net the lost cache of student essays about the meanings of race, gender and nationhood that I secretly wished for, they were invaluable excursions that brought me closer to the past I studied and allowed me to draw connections I otherwise would have overlooked. On the other hand, a visit to the E.M. Darcy Vargas, near Praça Mauá in Rio's docklands, at first seemed futile but paid off beyond expectations. Had I not scheduled time with the principal in advance, I would have just walked away when I first saw the school and realized it had been built in the 1960s. The only thing it possessed from the Vargas era was the name. Thus I nearly walked right past the most enthralling moment of my research.

The visit to the school was drawing to a close when the principal asked: "Given the nature of your research, wouldn't you be interested in the Casa do Pequeno Jornaleiro?" Remembering the enticing pamphlet from the National Archives in Washington, I replied that I would love to see the records. She said: "You can find them at the Darcy Vargas Foundation, they are patrons of our school." The Darcy Vargas Foundation still exists? How do I get there? "If you go through that gate, the Darcy Vargas Foundation *and* the Casa do Pequeno Jornaleiro are just on the other side." It was like Alice entering Wonderland.

By walking through the gate, I walked back through time. I found myself in a well maintained tropical garden outside of the administrative offices of the

Foundation. The offices were, to the historian, magical. Their material culture, from the phones to the mimeograph machines, was original to the 1940s. Protected from the vicissitudes of time and vices of Praça Mauá by its high walls and gates was an oasis of time, a space which, in the name of Darcy Vargas, enshrined the past. Jamil Hermes, a graduate of the Casa and now a coordinator of the Foundation, offered to help with my research, and pulled some brochures about the Foundation from a pile on the shelves to give to me. Published in 1942, they were handed to me as though they were brand new.

The waves of retro hit with such frequency and intensity that it was hard to stay balanced. Hermes offered a tour of the Casa, which continues to function in most regards as it had since its foundation. Even the boys' uniforms are the same khaki conserved in the photos at the National Archives. As we walked past the band during practice, they honored my visit with some notes of John Phillip Souza. The fixtures and appliances of the kitchen, the clinic, and the woodshop were all vintage and all lovingly cared for. If it had not been for the one ahistorical mural of soccer stars along the poolside, I might have expected Ricardo Montalbán of "Fantasy Island" to appear and gently guide me back into the 1990s.

After the tour, my host asked if I wanted to take a look at Darcy Vargas's papers. He grabbed a key and led me to the second floor of the Foundation building, to a door marked "Darcy Vargas Museum." He opened it and led me into –her bedroom! When an aged Darcy Vargas could no longer care for herself, she moved into a room in her Foundation. When she died, the room was left intact, closed, and labeled 'museum.' At one end was her bed, beside it her address book, with the six-digit phone numbers of the likes of former presidents Juscelino Kubitschek and João Goulart, or Vargas's Foreign Minister, Oswaldo Aranha. Against another wall was her dressing table, still covered by her perfumes and hairbrush entangled with her hair. Across from this was an ancient floor-standing radio with a plaque dedicating it as a gift to Getúlio from Franklin Roosevelt.

I sat at her desk, surrounded by disorganized boxes of her papers, and set up my laptop computer. I cautiously perused the contents of the boxes, which mostly comprised personal correspondence. As I worked, I grew curious about the cedar box I kept eyeing behind the screen of my laptop. When I opened the box, I froze. Inside was the plaster-of-paris death mask of Getúlio Vargas.

Years later, I still get chills remembering the moment. Suddenly I found myself face to face with the man whose imprint on his era had been the center of my studies. I could literally touch the likeness of Vargas at the moment in which his presidential suicide defused a military coup in 1954 –here, right before me, was the death that defeated his enemies.

When I began my research on the Vargas era, I did so with the understanding that this was a time that had come and gone, that had been lived and was done. But suddenly I found myself standing in the midst of this past that I had for so long pondered obliquely and abstractly. Days later I realized that what I lost at that moment was the protection that came from seeing the past from the present. The clinical detachment that allowed me to move comfortably through all kinds of morally complicated issues was now gone.

I shuddered. Unable to put the moment aside, I closed the cedar box, packed up my computer, and returned the desk to its original state. I thanked my hosts for their kindness, and fled to the comfort of present-day Praça Mauá. Three years passed before I could return to the Foundation. When I did, it was during a *feita juninha*, Brazil's traditional winter festival. Friends and relatives were there, the khaki uniforms were briefly traded for jeans, and a DJ played dance music. Surrounded by the present, the return was not so difficult.



Face to face with Getúlio Vargas, in Darcy's bedroom, some of the assumptions I unknowingly made about my work were laid bare. I realized I had taken for granted the distance between myself and my subject. In the days after inadvertently losing the distance, I reflected on its importance. On the surface, this distance provides the detachment needed to think of Vargas's creation of the Volta Redonda steel complex favorably while not forgetting his decision to deport communist leader Olga Prestes to Germany, where she died in a Nazi concentration camp. The Vargas era is morally complicated.

But that experience of being face to face with the past highlights just one way in which distance plays into historical research. What I came to appreciate is that distance is a tool historians employ liberally. This tool is elastic. Distance grows or diminishes based on factors both within and outside the control of the historian. Though historians are often aware of the role of distance in their work, they very rarely acknowledge it in their public presentation of this work.

The momentary, accidental collapse of the distance in Darcy's room raised questions that led me to rethink the role of the distance in my research. But more importantly, the experience led me to wonder how distance, in all its variations and peculiar dynamics, can (or should) be acknowledged in my writing. I was faced with the question: to what extent should historians acknowledge their own role as protagonists in their research—as the actors who expand or collapse distance to adopt the perspective they present?

Historians of early modern European history have been particularly active



in exploring this distance. Natalie Zemon Davis, Robert Darnton, and Carlo Ginzburg are examples of historians who draw attention to the act of finding sources, and the choices and strategies employed in reading meaning into the sources.<sup>6</sup> In part this stems from the paucity of resources on which they depend. Yet the approach also reveals a clear joy in the hunt.

Even when the distance goes unacknowledged, historians often manipulate distance to situate themselves strategically with relation to their subject. At times the historian is an insider, at others an outsider. Can ethnic and national histories be best expressed by members of the ethnic or national group? On the other hand, can morally complicated histories, like those of Vargas era Brazil, be more easily handled with the comparative neutrality of history? Historians play their hand both ways.

In many regards, the Vargas era marked the beginning of contemporary Brazil. It was a rupture with the past characterized by a relentless drive to build public institutions. These institutions continue to serve as an integral part of the scaffolding of Brazilian society. That the Vargas regime continues to reach so far into the fabric of society makes that distance hard to achieve. In the end, perhaps what makes the Vargas era so morally complicated is that it continues to touch contemporary Brazil.

One of the most explicit examples of the modulation of this distance lies in the organization of archives. Aside from some noteworthy exceptions like the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City, located in a 19th century prison, national archives often afford a lavish amount of clinical detachment. The hum of air conditioning and the smooth gloss of formica create a kind of Cartesian plane upon which a document can be examined completely apart from its historical context. Nothing in the place links the researcher to the world where that fragment of text was once tied to life and lives.

Some institutions assert greater control over their records. Context and distance are possessions wielded assertively by presidential, military and billionaire/ philanthropist archives.

Having the researcher consult the document on the grounds of a military base could tender a more sympathetic reading. So, too, can working in the library of a past president—often ensconced in a museum that pays tribute to the magnitude of the leader—render a more generous interpretation. These archives intentionally deny the historian the comfort of clinical detachment.

The distance between scholar and subject is largely metaphorical. Ultimately, the past never ceases to be the past, and time does not bend to the historian's whim. But there are ways in which historical distance can close tangibly. Rio de Janeiro is filled with spaces time has forgotten. The Saara still evokes turn-of-the-century commerce. If you squint in the right way, the cityscape of Rio seen from the ferry to the city Niteroi across the bay seems

almost colonial. When the capital moved from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília in 1960, the federal government treated its former offices with benign neglect. Moving the capital meant stopping the remodeling clock on lots of federal buildings, like the Palácio Capanema, the former Ministry of Education. Its furnishings and décor remain the same ones that were in place when the building was opened in 1945.

These spaces are important to the historian because they help spark connections. The situational epiphany is a product of the proximity between the scholar and the subject. The ability to draw conscious and unconscious connections between the sources and the physical places they relate to is something historians may soon be called upon to defend. Imagine how different any monograph might be if its author had access to the exact same set of sources over the internet, and never left the office and lived in Puebla or Fortaleza for eight months... A more public acknowledgement of the ways historians use distance helps make the case for lengthy and costly fieldwork.



How does the historian represent the role that distance(s) play in their research? Historians widely acknowledge that history is not just the facts, and that good history places ambiguity at the forefront of scholarship. What is more, most authors preface their work with a detailed roadmap of their research process. They tell us where they worked, who helped them, and more often than not, why they have put years of their lives into the book we now hold in our hands. But once the roman numerals end and the arabic ones begin, that voice is often silenced.

Cultural anthropologists have cleared a promising path for those interested in writing the distance into their text. Anthropologists today are expected to be quite explicit about the circumstances under which their research was possible. One classic example comes from Clifford Geertz's ethnographic studies in Bali. Geertz recounts how he overcame the outsider's isolation in a Balinese village by fleeing a cockfight when the illegal event was raided by the police. While behaving like other members of the community in the face of the police did not transform Geertz into an insider, it did give him social credibility and the community opened to him. What the variable Geertz negotiated was his distance from community life as an outsider, and he prefaced his account of Balinese social organization and cultural values with a detailed discussion of the way he closed that distance.<sup>7</sup>

Debate within anthropology about the extent of such reflexivity in scholarship helps define the limits to which such approaches might be appropriate in writing history. Peter Wade's discussion of his dating life while

conducting fieldwork in Afro-Colombian communities offers one such critical analysis of self-reflection in anthropology.<sup>8</sup> Wade takes issue with a dichotomy between what Carol Warren defines 'analytically salient' 'personal experiences,' which are appropriate for scholarly discussion, and 'personal odysseys,' which are not. For Wade, this is a false dichotomy since all fieldwork is a 'personal odyssey,'" and in this sense, the personal and analytical feed into each other."

Still, Wade recognizes that "a reflexive account of intimate personal relations can move from the apposite to the merely gratuitous," and proposes that the real challenge is not avoiding the personal, but knowing how personal factors influence analysis. He goes on to discuss the ways in which two relationships with different women affected his interaction with the communities he studied, and the ways these relationships replayed some of the power relations that were the object of his study. Far from proposing that historians narrate their sex lives, I instead suggest that historians can find in their 'personal odysseys' something that lies at the heart of what we consider analytically salient: an understanding of the ways history is embedded in the present.

But historians have more frequently drawn from the tendencies of self-reflection developed in literary criticism than they have that of cultural anthropology. Though this has made historical scholarship more sentient of the ways in which knowledge is contingent upon context, such self-reflection has tended primarily toward more nuanced analysis of the ambiguity of source text. Reflection on scholarship as an action has not tended to come from this arena. Interestingly, this appears to be changing within literary criticism. Edward Said speaks to scholarship as an action that merits greater self-reflection when he explains:

In the study of literature... specialization has meant an increasing technical formalism, and less and less of a historical sense of what real experiences actually went into a work of literature. Specialization means losing sight of the raw effort of constructing either art or knowledge; as a result you cannot view knowledge and art as choices, commitments and alignments, but only in terms of impersonal theories and methodologies.<sup>9</sup>

Said's argument resonates as much with history as it does with literature. He reminds us that, as the final product, writing represents the accumulated experiences and layers of analysis whose inter-relationships themselves make the writing possible. Just as these experiences drive the scholar, they constitute a part of the dynamism that can drive the reader.



Abandoning the safe and air-conditioned cushion of distance courteously provided by the archives and universities made for an intellectually exciting yet perilous series of experiences. I lost a discipline over my subject that I had believed to be automatic. No longer was the distance regulated, and I found myself unexpectedly in contact with a past. For some fleeting moments, the sixty years of time, the 4,000 miles of space, and even the seemingly immutable distance of death, briefly melted away. I found myself literally face to face with the past.

The collapse of this distance as a constant in my research raised a series of questions that this article represents an opportunity to explore. Understanding some of the ways in which the distance between the historian and the subject of inquiry is elastic makes it difficult to write of my subject independent of these experiences. More broadly, the question of distance and the role of personal experience in research raises questions about the ways in which historians present and represent knowledge. Behind this question lies a bigger one—that of understanding the complex ways in which history remains embedded in the present.



One final research episode will illustrate the relationship between the contemporary research experience of the historian and the past that we study. While I worked at the library of the Institute of Education, the school where many of Rio de Janeiro's teachers continue to be educated, two items of conversation were directed to me as a foreign scholar. The first remark was made by a white teacher at the Institute, and the second was a response from the black photocopy machine attendant who overheard her. The exchange captured the social tension that had drawn me to the Institute.

The Institute spearheaded pedagogical innovation during the Vargas years. To further the Institute's goal of serving as a national beacon of education reform, a research library was organized in the early 1930s. This library collected information about the operation of the Institute that offered a detailed vision of the process of teacher training in Rio de Janeiro. The library's holdings are now anachronistic. Instead of attracting educators from around the country to study contemporary educational issues, it attracts historians curious about the professionalization of teaching in the past. Still, it is a curious feeling to sit in the reading room as a scholar of education, studying the way the reading room was created to cater to educational scholars.

Among the sources I worked with were yearbooks that included photographs of the graduating *normalistas* of the teacher's college. Several

years of books revealed a clear trend: of each of the 100-student graduating classes, only 1, or 1%, were dark skinned. The screening processes for admittance included many criteria that could be used to discriminate between white and black candidates: health exams, decisions about appearance and carriage, and IQ exams. The subtle selective criteria which throughout the educational system divided white from black were wielded with ease in the Institute's operations. Reformers aimed to create a modern school system, and invested liberally in the training of a technical elite of teachers. During the Vargas era, a modern and technical teacher corps was a white and mostly upper-class teacher corps.

Today, the picture at the Institute of Education is different. Students from wealthy families almost universally attend private and parochial schools. The Institute now provides a quality education to poorer, often nonwhite students. Since it is no longer a training ground for the rich, the Institute has decayed from institutional neglect, and its staff make do with increasingly scarce and dilapidated resources. The decadence of the Institute of Education is subject, however, to two very different interpretations.

A white teacher who helped me with my research at the library took me to the photocopy stand in the building to copy some books. She had attended the Institute, as had her mother. While we waited for the copies to be made, she pointed to a group of black girls playing in the school-yard and said: "This institution really has fallen. It wasn't like this before. There are all kinds of people here who don't belong."

I didn't reply, nor did the black woman who was making the photocopies. But when the teacher left, the woman making the copies turned to me to set the record straight. She said: "That teacher does not know what she is talking about. Those girls have worked hard to be here. All of these students here have worked really hard for what they have." In a sense, this was a conversation between past and present. The teacher remembered a whiter and more glorious time. The black attendant admired the dedication of students of color whose entrance to the school ironically, yet inevitably, accompanied the flight of prestige and resources.

Ultimately, this illustrates the complexity of researching history through living institutions. While much has changed in the sixty years between what I studied and my study of it, the present at the Institute remains tethered to the past. In much the same way as I served as the conduit in that conversation, my research is a conduit between that past and that present. No clinical distance could separate me from either of those worlds or their moral implications.

## NOTES

1. The Estado Novo, literally 'New State,' was the corporatist dictatorship that Getúlio Vargas established in 1937 when he overthrew his own government with the help of the military. Loosely modelled on Iberian and Italian fascism, the Estado Novo lasted until Vargas was overthrown in 1945.
2. The schools of Rio de Janeiro remain under the jurisdiction of a single administration, while those of larger metropoli such as São Paulo and Mexico City are organized into several distinct districts.
3. Was Pedro Ernesto Batista the first Brazilian elected official known to the public only by his first name?
4. For a discussion of the rise of Pedro Ernesto and his conflict with Padre Olympio, see Michael Conniff, *Urban Politics in Brazil: The Rise of Populism, 1925-1945*. (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 146-149.
5. Archive of the Colégio Pedro II, "Matrícula do 2o Ano," 1932.
6. See Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1984); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
7. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 412-473.
8. Peter Wade, "Sexuality and Masculinity in Fieldwork Among Colombian Blacks," in *Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography*, Diane Bell, Pat Caplan and Wazir Jahan Karim, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 198-214.
9. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 77.