

Narrativizing Education, Violence, and Epistemic Emancipation in Brazil

Summer 2023 Tinker Field Research Grant Report

My summer 2023 pre-dissertation research centered on joint analyses of education, violence, and cultural citizenship as negotiated in Brazil's "peripheral literature," a mid-twentieth- through twenty-first-century literary movement in which authors from marginalized urban areas write about issues in their communities to a larger audience. While many accounts of contemporary literature in Brazil portray new movements oriented towards self-representation as divorced from canonical predecessors, I sought to investigate continuities between contemporary movements and the nation-building canon. In particular, my research shows this movement's recurring preoccupation with public education in Brazil, including increasing literacy rates, violence in primary and secondary public educational institutions, and access to higher education, which would suggest connections to older literary traditions dealing with similar topics. Using archival research and interviews, I attempted to answer: in the thinking of these authors, is education a process of emancipation and self-realization constituting a linear path to citizenship, or is it a process of assimilation, enslavement, and self-effacement? To what extent do emergent literary discussions of education dialogue with the histories and theories of education present in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Brazilian literature that preceded them? To begin to address these questions, I aimed to read nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century authors, such as Lima Barreto (*Recordações do escrivo Isaiás Caminha*, 1909), whose writing depicts racialization within educational institutions over a hundred years before many of the contemporary authors I was studying, alongside both contemporary authors and the broader cultural, historical, and theoretical context with which they entered into dialogue.

The Tinker Field Research Grant facilitated my pre-dissertation research into these questions in several key ways. It allowed me to visit archives such as the Biblioteca Mário de Andrade and the Biblioteca Brasileira Guita e José Mindlin, where I was able to conduct archival research with materials such as historical periodicals that gave me insight into discourses surrounding the development of public educational institutions and ideas of national emancipation. Equally generative were the informal interviews I conducted with local academics, contemporary authors, and other relevant professional contacts, which provided me with a more holistic view on perceptions of the trends I studied within academic and literary circles. I was especially privileged to have conversations with prominent authors associated with peripheral literature, including Jeferson Tenório (*O avesso da pele*, 2020) and Marcelino Freire (*Contos negreiros*, 2005), both of whose work has received the Prêmio Jabuti, Brazil's most traditional literary award, and Paulo Scott (*Marrom e amarelo*, 2019), the second Brazilian ever nominated for the International Booker Prize. While the critical acclaim these authors receive speaks to a heightened national and international fascination with their perspectives, I wondered how often these perspectives are deliberately misunderstood, overlooked, or appropriated within these discussions. The chance to speak with authors whose artistic and social thought had caught my attention in Berkeley is the kind of unique and immersive experience from which I couldn't have benefited without international travel. I continue to maintain relationships with professors from the University of São Paulo through invitations for virtual collaboration with a working group I coordinate at Berkeley.

In tandem with my academic research, traveling to Brazil gave me the ability to immerse myself in current cultural discussions within and beyond academic circles, making connections I would not have been able to make in the U.S. Throughout my grant period, I attended lectures at

the University of São Paulo and visited museums, literary festivals, theaters, and other cultural venues. For instance, after meeting with an editor at Companhia das Letras, a major publishing house that has promoted the careers of several of the authors I studied, I had the opportunity to attend the premier of a play adaptation of Tenório's novel *O avesso da pele*, which centers on racial violence within the Brazilian public education system, at the Theater of the University of São Paulo. In another case, I was invited to attend an event held at the Fábrica de Cultura in Jardim São Luís with authors such as Ferréz (Reginaldo Ferreira da Silva) celebrating the legacies of peripheral literature in São Paulo.

Although I will continue to refine the contours of my eventual dissertation project, I left my field research in Brazil with valuable new insights into my project and a more panoramic view of cultural discussions surrounding my topic, which positioned me to select the most productive areas for my Qualifying Exams. I am immensely grateful to the Tinker Foundation and the Center for Latin American Studies at UC Berkeley for the financial support that made this exploration a reality.



Reviewing archival materials at the Biblioteca Mário de Andrade



Meeting contemporary author Jeferson Tenório