

# A Brazilian anthropologist at a United States university<sup>1</sup>

*Ruben George Oliven*<sup>2</sup>

From September 1943 to June 1944 the Brazilian writer Erico Verissimo was a Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He was invited by the U.S. State Department to teach Brazilian Literature. The book in which he describes his second stay in the United States, *A Volta do Gato Preto* (“The Return of the Black Cat”), describes some of his experiences as a professor in Berkeley.

One of the events reported by Erico in this book is a lunch at the Faculty Club’s restaurant, the centerpiece of the university faculty’s social facilities. There, he met celebrities such as the discoverer of Vitamin E, or the Nobel Prize-Laureate inventor of cyclotrone, and found out that they behaved and were treated as extremely simple people. Erico compared them to Brazil’s notables: “It made me think of certain presumptuous men from my own country who, just because of fortune, status or some important relative, think of themselves as the Salt of the Earth, and are always asking: - Do you know who you are talking to?” (Verissimo 1987: 170).

My interest in *A Volta do Gato Preto* stems from the fact that between August 1993 and December 1994 I was a Visiting Scholar in Berkeley myself, in the Department of Anthropology of the University of California. Both United States and Brazil obviously have changed considerably during this half-century; nonetheless, it will be interesting to resume the question of the differences between these two countries regarding their respective university systems.

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2 Professor in the Department of Anthropology of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil. E-mail: oliven@uol.com.br

Although Erico Verissimo was one of the most popular writers in Brazil, he was never invited to teach Letters<sup>3</sup> at the Rio Grande do Sul University (UFRGS)'s Philosophy College (created in 1942), in the city where he lived, Porto Alegre. Besides ideological suspicion of his philosophical and political stances (Trindade 1983/84), there was, and still is, a legal constraint against him being a professor at a Brazilian university: a college degree is required, which was not Erico's case. During the Military Dictatorship's ironrule "lead years", UFRGS decided to award him the *doctor honoris causa* degree, but he refused on the grounds that he would not accept this honor from an occupied university.

According to the Ministry of Education, in 1994 only fifteen percent of Brazilian university professors held a PhD. In federal public universities, this rate rose to 21% (*Folha de São Paulo* daily paper, 1996: 7). The Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, ranking second amongst Brazilian federal universities' best graduate programs, recently succeeded in increasing its Ph.D. faculty to 32.33% (UFRGS 1994: 72). In Brazilian federal universities, any professor holding a doctoral degree is automatically promoted to the level of associate professor, the third rank in an academic teaching career.<sup>4</sup> In North-American universities, almost the entire faculty is made up of doctors. As a consequence, it is virtually impossible to apply for a position of assistant professor (the initial academic career rank) without holding a Ph.D. However, this does not mean that a literature department cannot hire a great writer without any academic qualification. The same is true for a great pianist in a music department.

The procedures for hiring faculty are also very different in both countries. In general, there is a strong tendency in Brazilian universities towards hiring their own alumni. For quite a while, the recruitment of professors by federal public universities was by invitation to an alumnus who was "temporarily" hired. The actual hiring would take place much later, in a rather pro-forma competitive examination in which, as a rule, the already active professor was the sole candidate. There are notorious cases in which the professor remained "temporary" during virtually all his career, for fear of failing the examination. At the University of São Paulo, this system still operates in some depart-

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3 Letters is the name usually given to a school of language & linguistics in a Brazilian university. (Tr. N.)

4 Ranking in the Brazilian federal university system is: auxiliary (*professor auxiliar*), assistant (*professor assistente*), associate (*professor adjunto*) and full (*professor titular*) professors. (Tr. N.)

ments. This way of recruiting faculty ultimately results in considerable endo-geny, with little renewing of knowledge. When the “cátedra” system<sup>5</sup> which prevailed until the late sixties was criticized, it was on the grounds that the chair holder could choose whomever he/she wished, and that usually meant choosing someone who would not obfuscate his/her own shine.

Currently, entry into federal public universities occurs exclusively by means of public competitive examinations, announced in the National Official Daily Journal and in newspapers of wide local circulation. All those holding the required academic title can be candidates (Bachelor’s degree for auxiliary professor, M.A. degree for assistant professor, and Ph.D. degree for associate and full professors). The examination’s content often comprehends all knowledge encompassed by a science. Since the candidate has to undergo a written and an oral test which are chosen at random at the time or twenty-four hours before the examination, he/she needs to demonstrate knowledge of the whole field covered by the discipline to which he/she is a candidate.

These competitive examinations are ruled by a huge legal concern (everything is specified, from the minimal and maximum time for the teaching exam to how results are announced). Any irregularity can render the whole examination void. Members of the examining committee should not talk to each other, and are supposed to ascribe a grade to the candidate right after each exam. This grade is kept in a sealed envelope, and cannot be changed after it is written down. Considering the usually large number of candidates, the grade attributed to the first one becomes a parameter vis-a-vis which the following grades are assigned.

After being hired, the new professor undergoes a two-year probationary period, after which he/she is granted tenure. It is extremely rare for a professor to fail this process. Once this phase is accomplished, it is no longer necessary to publish or even to be a good teacher in order to keep the position until retirement. Career promotion occurs by academic title and output or by service time. Promotion to the positions of assistant or associate due to the awarding of an M.A. or Ph.D degree occurs irrespective of the existence of a vacancy. However, access to the top career rank, that of full professor, depends on the existence of a vacancy and on a new competitive examination.

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5 The “cátedra” system meant that for every subject there was one *catedrático*, i.e., holder of the professorship. He/she would have complete control over things and could choose his/her assistants.

Since each federal university has a limited number of full professorships set up by the Ministry of Education, a professor with an excellent *curriculum vitae* can remain as associate for years because his/her department lacks a vacancy for full professor. Conversely, a relatively young professor with a modest *curriculum vitae* may become full professor because his/her department has an opening. The subject of a full professorship exam usually encompasses the discipline's entire field of knowledge (this is known as "God and his work"). This means, for instance, that someone who specialized for years in economic anthropology would have to revisit religious anthropology textbooks, since this may be one of the items which he/she will be required to address.

North-American recruiting system is fairly different. As a rule, a good North-American university as a matter of principle does not hire its own alumni in order to avoid endogeny. Recruitment begins with the announcement of an opening, through professional newspapers and magazines, as well as through letters sent to various universities. This process is called *search*. Since the department is looking for someone with a particular profile, this announcement usually specifies what is wanted from the candidate: academic characteristics, expertise, geographical area of interest, etc. There is a deadline for the candidates to send letters about themselves, accompanied by a *curriculum vitae* and of a list of people from whom letters of recommendation could be asked. Such material is organized by the Search Committee and made available to all faculty in the department. The Search Committee examines the candidates' documents and makes up an average list excluding those who do not fit the profile wanted and/or whose curriculum is considered as inappropriate. This list eventually narrows down to about five names. These candidates (sometimes from other countries) are usually invited to visit the university with all expenses paid by it. Then the selection's toughest phase begins. Each candidate delivers an open lecture on a topic of his/her own choice to be attended by professors and students. Next, candidates are interviewed by both the Search Committee and by any professor and sometimes student who wishes to. This often means a long succession of meetings. After all candidates have undergone such process, the department meets, discusses, and decides whom to choose. This screening process, although apparently more open, may allow for greater bias from the professors' subjectivities. It may also happen that a department ends up selecting candidates bearing more personal affinities with its current professors.

Once the new professor's hiring is approved, a discussion over his/her salary starts. Although some universities have a wage scale, each hiring involves a negotiation both in terms of salary and of other benefits as outside-wages bonus. This may include covering moving-in expenses (since the professor usually comes from other state or country), a personal computer, reduced teaching load during the first year, and other fringe benefits. Depending on the intensity with which a department wants a professor, he/she is able to further negotiate several other perk-like items. There are professors who teach very little. And there are those who posit as a condition for their hiring that his/her spouse also be hired. This is an intricate matter, since it implies that the university has to offer a spot in the respective department without the spouse undergoing a selection process. The head of the department is in charge of negotiating all the items with the university's central administration. He/she not only negotiates the professors' wages, but has at its disposal the department's own budget – something which does not occur in Brazilian universities. In the latter, a department head has very little power (usually stemming from his/her own academic prestige) and is limited to performing bureaucratic activities.

A university job announcement in the United States usually indicates whether the position is tenure-tracked, that is, if it leads to stability or is just a temporary job. A job leading to stability normally stipulates a time period (something like six years) during which the assistant professor is supposed to meet certain conditions in order to earn tenure and to be promoted to the rank of associate professor. This usually includes publication of a book, several papers, presentation in conferences, a good evaluation by the students, and so forth. If the professor is not considered as meeting the standard required for tenure, he/she has the right to remain at the university for one more year only.

In North-American universities, promotion to the rank of full professor occurs regardless of whether there is an open spot available. At any moment a faculty member can be promoted to full professor as long as his/her academic production justifies it. In order to judge the request for stability or promotion to full professor, the department sends his/her brief data to members from the department and from other American or foreign universities. I had the opportunity of receiving such data related to a request for tenure and promotion to full professor in North-American universities. I received the

candidates' main publications and a report on their activities in order to evaluate them. The whole process is confidential.

In North-American universities, "publish or perish" prevails. It is not possible to improve one's own academic career without a trajectory of continuous publishing. This often makes professors more concerned with quantity rather than with quality. What could have been a good single paper ends up becoming several small papers. In Brazil, the situation is somehow reversed. The amount of publications is relatively small, and many professors are able to ascend to the career's pinnacle with an insignificant academic production.

Professors' wages are very different in the United States and in Brazil. In Brazil, universities usually follow a scale in which the same value is prescribed for all professors within a same rank. Thus, one university may pay better than another, but the same university will pay an identical salary to all its same-rank professors, even though they may have quite different performances. In federal universities, wage isonomy was established in response to claims by the faculty's movement. This means that an associate professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro has the same salary as an adjunct professor at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, although living costs in both states are different. Even if one of these professors has a very expressive academic production and the other almost none, their salaries remain the same. Once one reaches the career top, there is no possibility of having a wage increase, except for annual bonus-like pay rise dependant on years of teaching. The only incentive a federal university provides to attract professors I am aware of is at the University of Brasília, which offers subsidized housing to their professors as a way to compensate for the high rental and mortgage rates in Brazil's federal capital.

In the United States, wages vary within each university. The principle is basically the market's supply & demand rule. This means that a medicine or law professor will probably enjoy a higher salary than an anthropology or literature professor holding an equivalent curriculum. Within the same department, salaries are negotiated according to each professor's curriculum and productivity. Promotion to all ranks occurs irrespectively of vacancies. Any faculty member may become a full professor at any moment, as the exclusive result of his/her own academic productivity. And even in public universities with wage scales such as the University of California, a highly

distinguished professor may be paid off the scale. Professors are also very attentive to opportunities for better jobs in other universities. It is common for a professor to change universities. Geographic mobility amongst academic centers in the United States is much higher than in Brazil. During the time I was in Berkeley, I witnessed the case of a professor who received a very tempting offer from another university, including a higher salary and an endowed chair (i.e., a chair with research funding provided by the university). Meeting a request from the department, the University of California made a retention offer, that is, an equivalent or superior offer in order to retain this professor.

Berkeley has more Nobel Prize laureates than the whole Soviet Union had. To be awarded a Nobel Prize means, besides distinction and money, an additional advantage to a Berkeley professor. He/she is given the right to park his/her car in the campus for free, in a reserved parking space. Considering that parking within the campus is extremely disputed during class hours (costs adding up to a thousand dollars per year), this is one of the ways the university has come up to render homage to its Nobel Prize laureates.

American universities, even when public, are paid for. It is estimated that four years in a good college cost around a hundred thousand dollars. Many parents open time-triggered Stock Funds savings when their children are born, and use such funds eighteen years later for their higher education costs. There are several fellowships to which students can apply, and they frequently pay for their own studies by working during the school year or holidays. Any job is valid, and it is very common to find students working, for instance, at restaurants.

Money is a central concern in any university. In the United States, a core role of a University President is to act as a fund raiser. American universities usually have a fund raising sector and often hire specialized firms to raise funds for specific purposes. Industry is summoned to contribute with money to engineering and business schools, and the like. Several North-American universities were first chartered by means of a donation by an individual or a family. In Brazil, donation of private money to universities is virtually absent. Notwithstanding the neo-liberal ideology prevailing in the country, there is no tradition of individuals or companies donating funds or resources to universities. Neither are there earmarked tax-deduction mechanism for such purpose.

The Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley has one of the world's richest anthropology museums, harboring material

from all continents. The museum was originally set up through donations made by Mrs. Phebe Hearst, mother of the tycoon Randolph Hearst, who inspired the notorious movie by Orson Welles, "Citizen Kane". She sponsored all anthropology activities at the University of California, Berkeley until 1906. The museum's name was, until recently, Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology in memory of one of the most distinguished members of the department during its early phase. Recently, the Hearst Foundation donated one million dollars to the museum, whose name was then changed to Phoebe Appertton Hearst Museum. The name change engendered protests by faculty and students.

I had the opportunity of witnessing yet another episode involving money. The Department of Anthropology has its own library, with approximately 70,000 specialized books. When I was in Berkeley the university administration tried to incorporate it into the central library. This ran against the department's will, which regards its library as a fundamental asset for the work of faculty and students. One of the department's former professors, a wealthy person, decided to anonymously donate US\$ 300,000.00 to the library, provided that the university agreed that it remained autonomous. And that was indeed what happened.

North-American university libraries are usually impressive for someone from Brazil. In Berkeley's libraries, it is possible to find not only Erico Verissimo's works, but also his contemporary and fellow-countryman Cyro Martins', including the *Dicionário de Regionalismos do Rio Grande do Sul*. All this is in computerized digital format, and it is possible to access the directory by modem. At the time the future of the Anthropology Library was at stake, I donated a book edited by the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul's Social Anthropology Graduate Program. After a while, I noticed that the book was already electronically catalogued, but I could not find it on the shelf. The book was lost. When I told this to the head librarian, she told me this was unacceptable, and apologized for it. I thought the episode would end there. Later on, when she let me know that the book was on the shelf; I thought it had been found. The librarian told me she had ordered the book directly from Brazil, since it was unconceivable that I had donated a book and it had disappeared within the library.

In a Brazilian university, professors often end up having to perform a series of administrative activities for which they are not prepared, and which

could be carried out by appropriately-trained staff. But what actually happens is that Brazilian universities usually pay poorly their staff members, and some of them are not well prepared. It is thus common to find professors exchanging their own academic career for an administrative one, in which they perform functions which could be better executed by competent staff. In such process, it often happens that the university loses a professor/researcher, who comes to act as part of the staff.

In North-American universities there are also professors who eventually turn to administrative careers. But this does not happen before the professor has achieved an academic career, and is invited to occupy high-level administrative positions which cannot be held by staff. In general, North-American universities have a body of competent staff. I could attest to that when I delivered a lecture at the University of California's Anthropology Department. I received a sheet with a catalog of academic videos which could be ordered for courses and lectures. I filled the form out several months in advance and handed it to a staff employee. Fifteen days before the lecture, I asked her whether everything was "OK" with the video. She confirmed and asked me whether I would like to make any changes in my request. A few days before the lecture, I decided to check again. The employee, polite but visibly disturbed, replied: "Professor, you just have to ask once for something to be done".

Some of the activities performed in Brazil by the staff in Berkeley are directly carried out by faculty. To use a fax, each professor turns the machine on and leaves a note on his/her name, stating whether the fax was personal or professional. The same holds for photocopies. There is a room with a xerox machine to which every professor has access by means of a code. If the copy is used for personal reasons, he/she writes it down in a sheet and is charged for it later. The department also pays for the mailing of all professional correspondence of its faculty.

Gender and race are two increasingly significant categories in the United States. It is thus natural that they are also present in academia. It is very common to ask of a social sciences book or course whether it also complies with such dimensions.

Likewise, since sexual harassment is an important issue in the United States, it is also made manifest in universities. A situation which can be easily qualified as sexual harassment is when a man occupies a hierarchical-

ly superior position, such as in the professor / student, boss / employee relationship, etc. Professors are careful in speaking to their students only with the office door open. Even amongst colleagues, a compliment regarding hairstyle or garment may be interpreted as a beginning of sexual harassment. An American college recently published a code of conduct for behavior amongst students. An interesting feature is that it assumes all sexual initiative is male, and establishes as a guideline that a man always asks (at least for now) oral permission before each of his steps. Something like: "I will hold your hand, can I? I will stroke your hair, may I?" Sexual jokes are unthinkable, and always regarded as sexism. For a Brazilian used to telling and listening to a wide array of such jokes, and kissing and being kissed on the cheeks by his female colleagues, this whole thing looks bizarre.

Racial issue is even more complicated. I do not intend to detail what racism means in the U.S., but only to remark that one of the consequences of the civil rights movement was a reification of the race concept. As a result of the struggle for better opportunities for minority groups such as Blacks, race became a concept no longer perceived as being socially constructed. Once established as a "real fact", race becomes a category in which people have to, and sometimes want to, be classified in order to enjoy certain rights. The secretary of the University of California's Department of Anthropology in Berkeley gave me a form in which data for affirmative action should be filled. According to her, I could not be classified as White since this datum referred to "persons having origin in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East" and explicitly excluded people of "Hispanic origin" – a category in which, according to her, I was included. The Hispanic category was followed by a parenthesis which stated "including Black individuals whose origins are Hispanic", and was thus defined: "Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicano - Persons of Mexican Culture or origin, regardless of race. Latin American/Latino - Persons of Latin American (e.g. Central American, South American, Cuban, Puerto Rican) culture or origin, regardless of race. Other Spanish/Spanish-American - Persons of Spanish culture or origin, not included in any of the Hispanic categories listed above". This means that in the United States a Brazilian Black becomes Hispanic, and the same is true for a Brazilian descendant of Germans or Italians. When I explained to the secretary that I had some difficulty in identifying myself through the category Hispanic, since Brazil had not been colonized by Spain, she told

be that there were advantages in being thus classified, since I would become part of a minority.

No wonder then, that given all such concerns with correctly classifying people, the use of appropriate terms demands careful attention. When referring to a generic person, it is always good to say “he or she”, or “his or hers”. An alternative is to feminize everything, so much so that even when referring to God one should use the pronoun “she”. One should never address a young woman as “girl”, since it would mean to infantilize her. The politically correct term is “young woman”. The appropriate term for a Black person is Afro-American, and for a native Indian, Native-American. In a lecture I delivered on Brazil, I referred to Brazilian Blacks as African-Brazilians, but when I spoke of Bahia I said it had a “rich Black culture”. Afterwards, I asked an American friend who had attended the lecture if she thought there was a problem with my mention of “Black culture”. She said there was no problem, since I had used the term “rich” first.

North-American universities for the most part proclaim themselves as an “affirmative action institution”, that is, when recruiting students and professors they provide additional opportunities for minorities such as women, homosexuals, Blacks, Indians, etc. This may mean that, under equal academic conditions, a department will hire a woman instead of a man, a Black instead of a White, and so forth. Such policy, prevailing in many North-American institutions since the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties, often triggers polemics and debates by groups claiming to be victims of reverse discrimination: that is, they come to be discriminated for not belonging to any minority. Some years ago, the University of California’s Sociology Department at Berkeley had a hard time trying to hire a White professor for a position assigned to racial studies hitherto held by a Hispanic woman. There was strong pressure by students and some professors, and the actual hiring took a whole year to be enacted.

Polemics aside, the ratio of women, Blacks and other minorities in North-American universities’ faculty has considerably increased. In Brazilian universities, the number of female professors is burgeoning, due less to a deliberate policy than to the feminization of higher education, following a trend previously found in elementary and secondary schools. As for the racial issue, the presence of Black professors in Brazilian universities is minimal. During the 1988 Centennial Year of slavery abolition in Brazil, several

seminars on this topic were organized without the presence of a single Black person. In the United States, such a thing is unthinkable, and would have prompted multifold protests.

Another aspect to be considered is the relationship professors / students. North American students are not used to knocking on their professors' doors at any moment. Professors are enforced by contract to hold office hours. In Berkeley, they have three weekly hours for seeing students. Professors usually announce their office hours in their courses' syllabus, and every week they leave a sheet on their offices' door in which students sign-in in advance for appointments. Since there is a high student demand to speak with their professors, the latter usually divide up their office hours into fifteen-minute slots. This means students devise their questionings to fit into such short timeframes, and bring objective questions.

In a major university, the distance between undergraduate students and professors is normally greater than in Brazil. Students address faculty through the titles "professor" or "doctor", and do not display much intimacy with them. Since there are courses attended by many students (in Berkeley there are courses with up to 700 students), professors have teaching assistants, who are graduate students paid for correcting papers and exams, as well as discussing the readings during preset times with small groups of students. This way, access to the professor is restricted.

In Brazilian undergraduate courses students attend more classes than in the United States. Conversely, the reading load is lower. Reading load required from a North-American university student is generally very high. It involves reading some books and several papers for each course. Evaluation is made through exams, papers, and reading reports. In graduate programs, the reading load is even higher, but normally there are written essays rather than exams. This means the students enroll only in a few courses, and spend a great portion of their time reading in the library and writing essays.

In Berkeley, all professors are evaluated by their students. At the end of the term, the department gives the professor evaluation forms which he/she then distributes to the students. After all have filled them out, one of the students returns them directly to the department's front office. On these sheets, students score 1 to 5 on items such as course organization, classes, exams, clarity of exposition, encouraging creative and independent thinking, professor's accessibility, and so forth. The student is asked whether he/she would

recommend the course offered by this professor to a friend. There is also space for writing a paragraph on recommendations, comments, etc. Data are tabulated by the department and, after grades are attributed to all students, the professor receives the evaluation's result.

The beginning of a term in a North-American university is marked by the students' "shopping around". Just as a consumer compares prices and brands before purchasing a merchandise, students are previously informed about the professor and frequently speak to him/her, then attend early classes in different courses before confirming their enrollment in a course. There is a deadline for cancelling enrollment.

Since the United States are a very individualistic and competitive society, students are greatly concerned with building up a curriculum vitae. Making good undergraduate grades is vital for further acceptance in a professionalizing or graduate course, or to get a good job. In Brazil, grades attributed to students are posted right beside their names, being thus possible to know the performance of all. In a North-American university, on the other hand, grades are posted beside the student's I.D. number; only the student can thus have access to his/her own grade. In general, concern with high grades in Brazil is not as great as in the United States. A mediocre university transcript can be compensated for by a good performance in competitive examinations or through networking.

It is common for North-American universities to allow students to take an exam's questions home so they can hand the answers back a few days later. The reasoning is that the student is to be evaluated by what he/she really knows, and not by his/her capacity to deal with the stress of carrying out a task during a limited period of time within the classroom. When I suggested to some of my Brazilian colleagues that we should try out this type of exam, their remarks were that it would not work because the students would meet and discuss how to answer the questions, one helping the other.

Recommendation letters have huge importance in the United States, and take a fair amount of time of a university professor. He/she is constantly asked to write letters for students applying for graduate courses, fellowships, jobs, etc. Generally, professors are very honest in their letters, frankly reporting the students' qualities and limitations. Since North-American legislation ensures all citizens access to information about themselves, it is common to surrender such right in written form when requesting a recommendation let-

ter. University of California provides an evaluation letter service. An undergraduate student wishing to apply for a graduate course will usually submit applications to several universities. Instead of asking a professor to write several recommendation letters, the student requests him/her to write a single letter in a standard form which should be sent to the evaluation letter service, where it is kept on file. Each time a student needs a letter, he/she asks the service to send it directly to the university to which he/she is applying.

In Brazil, recommendation letters do not mean much. The graduate program to which I am attached decided to abolish their requirement for the Master's, after having rejected applicants presenting letters by members of the House of Representatives, senators, and even by the university president. We came to the conclusion that at this level, a recommendation letter is frequently understood as a patronizing personal-sponsorship letter. We retained this requirement only for Ph.D. applicants, asking for letters from the former advisor and former professors to be sent directly to our office.

While in Brazil dissertation defenses are as a rule open to the public, in the United States, where defenses exist, they are usually closed. In a Brazilian university, the defense of a thesis or dissertation is a ritual marking the passage from a student status to that of Master or Doctor. A long time ago, when such titles were rare, these rituals were often characterized by a high degree of humiliation, whereby the committee members affirmed their superiority *vis-a-vis* the candidate. This is the logic of rituals aimed at elevating the ritual's object. One who is about to ascend to a superior status is ritually mistreated. With the growing number of dissertations, the ritual aspect is being softened, for instance through the abandonment of gowns and other costumes. Public defense is also related to the idea of accountability. Although a good defense examination may be an opportunity for learning through the criticism and comments made to the work, a candidate hardly ever fails it.

In Anglo-Saxon universities, the defense is carried out in a room with the presence only of the candidate and examiners. At the University of California, Berkeley there is no dissertation defense. When students begin their research, a committee made up of five professors is assembled. These are the ones who will be present at the candidate's qualification exam. In such exam, his/her written material and research proposal are discussed. When the dissertation is ready, it is read and then accepted by each of the members, being thus considered as approved. I had the opportunity of being a member

of a qualification exam of a PhD student at the Department of Anthropology. The candidate wrote three field statements (that is, essays related to the dissertation subject) and submitted them previously to the committee, which then questioned him. It is interesting that once the exam was concluded, the student asked his sister (who stood waiting in the hall) to take a picture of him with the committee. In the absence of a ritual, at least the picture...

One of the favorite moments to deliver a lecture in a North-American university is during lunch time. Since there are no classes taking place during this period, everybody is free to attend the lecture. For the same reason, people bring their own brown-bag lunch. A few years ago, I was invited to participate in a brown-bag lecture series at the University of Texas. Before the event, the department's secretary went over the lecture details with me and asked what sandwich would I prefer. Since in Brazil lunch is more ritualized than in the United States, it is awkward to see people eating while someone is giving a lecture.

A Brazilian popular saying states that "he who does not cheat does not leave school". Cheating is a strategy like any other learning skill. It means learning to be a *malandro* (rogue), to find a way around (*dar um jeitinho*) getting bad grades when one has not studied. Although it is possible to flunk if caught cheating, there is relative tolerance towards whomever glances at a neighbor's exam. Few people in Brazil are ashamed to acknowledge they cheated in grade or high school or in college. The very notion of plagiarizing is hard to understand by many university students. Used to a high school where to "do research" is to copy passages from books and encyclopedias, these students not rarely copy whole paragraphs when in college, without going through the trouble of quoting the source. In some cases, paragraphs are juxtaposed by authors with radically opposed styles and stances, in a sort of post-modern pastiche.

In the United States, where the law is more highly regarded than in Brazil, the situation is quite different. In a North-American university, there is usually a "code of honor" prescribing that cheating or plagiarizing leads to expulsion. Senator Ted Kennedy was expelled from Harvard University for having sent a classmate to take an exam on his behalf. Roberto DaMatta, who teaches at the University of Notre Dame, tells of a situation in which, as president of the Anthropology Department's Honour Committee, he had to take part in the trial of a student who had cheated from a classmate's essay. He

underscored two of the trial's features: "The first is the coolness of Americans in the face of such an inquiry, certainly the reflection of a confidence in their own legal system. The second relates to the relentless way by which my colleagues thrashed the case. While I was striving to conclude the inquiry as soon as possible, they behaved like attorneys, requiring compromising details from the students. When the meeting was over and we decided for an obvious punishment to the accused, I found out that my colleagues were not entirely happy with it. They wanted a full acknowledgement of guilt, in a typical Calvinist style. To me, a Brazilian and a Catholic, the confession I had just heard was enough..." (DaMatta 1996: 225).

In an interesting essay on his experience as a Brazilian anthropology doctoral student in Harvard, Roberto Kant de Lima discussed how academic training to which North-American students are submitted in school and university ends up domesticating the thought of North-American intellectuals. Referring to the composition courses he attended at Harvard, Lima remarked:

I have learned, for instance, that 'in English' the first or last sentence in a paragraph is the most important, since it is supposed to synthesize the main idea expressed by such paragraph. The mid 'filling' is a mere qualificative of this main sentence, which is named *topic sentence*. Likewise, in every paragraph one idea, and only one, should be developed. If there is more than one idea, there should be a paragraph for each. Each page should have from two to three paragraphs, and in each chapter or part of the work the first and the last paragraphs should synthesize its entire content ... One should always write consciously using logic's operations of classifying, contrasting, comparing, establishing correlations, relations of cause and effect, and specially always making reference to concrete examples and evidences, without which the text becomes 'abstract' and 'too generic' and loses its meaning. As one of the handbooks used in the course taught, the aforementioned logical relationships are not worth knowing deeply, otherwise students could be caught up in an esoteric debate on Logic. Still according to this handbook, the writing student should learn how to operate with this logic, but should not be stimulated to discuss its premises, or the 'course's objectivity' may be lost. I should highlight that such handbooks are not specific to foreigners, but are textbooks used in high school and university courses. (Lima 1985: 31-32).

In Brazilian universities, there is more resistance to writing papers, be it for the lack of writing practice, or for the fact that the written word has such a strong aura that many students are unable to get through it. There are numerous cases of bright students who never succeeded in concluding their thesis or dissertations. In Brazilian schools, the emphasis is usually on creativity-rich writing (*redação*), which may be the source of the Brazilian writing style. A piece written by a Brazilian intellectual does not necessarily follow the model described above. Brazilian intellectuals frequently unfold their arguments as they write, and many times they do not make explicit their intentions or conclusions in such an affirmative way as their North-American colleagues do.

Class participation by North-American students is also guided by a concern with getting to the point, that is, to be objective and make their arguments explicit. Conversely, participation in class by Brazilian students is frequently marked by the use of a text which should have been (but has not always been) read previously as a springboard for discussing other ideas.

Whenever a comparison is made, the question remains: "After all, which one is the best?" The purpose of this article was not to answer such question, but to glance at two very different countries and compare life in their universities, highlighting the differences between them. Currently in Brazil there are in motion several processes which should affect its university life. On the one hand, there is an impressive growth of non-State universities. These universities – which may be private, communitarian, or confessional – often regard themselves as "public", a word which should be distinguished from State-owned or State-run institutions. They struggle for private and State funds and resources, and raise the issue of public funds received by federal and state universities, generally the ones enjoying more tradition in terms of graduate research and teaching. On the other hand, there is an ongoing process of reshaping federal universities' autonomy, mirroring what occurs in São Paulo state universities (which means, among other things, granting them a certain amount of resources to be directly managed by each university). Until now, federal universities send the list of their faculty and staff to Brasília (Brazil's capital), where the payrolls are prepared and where the wages' monetary outflows start. When the university autonomy is finally established, there will be a certain amount of funds (one speaks of 75% of the federal education budget) which every university should manage autono-

mously. It may be that in this fund-granting process, factors such as academic productivity (measured through publications, number of graduations, etc) are taken into account. Nowadays, more efficiency and accountability are demanded in handling anything public. This is why federal universities are concerned with self-evaluation and with disclosing what they are doing with the money they get from taxpayers.

Such processes do not mean, however, that differences between Brazilian and North-American universities will vanish. It will be interesting to follow up how ongoing changes will be mediated by Brazil's cultural specificities.

*Translated from Portuguese by Leticia Cesarino*

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