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Dr. Ayres, Assistant Director of Honors and Fulbright Scholar

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Dr. Ayres, Assistant Director of Honors and Fulbright Scholar

They called us Lucy and Ethel.¹ Embarrassing enough, but at least I was Ethel, the sort-of-wise and stable one. Norma looked like Lucy with her natural curly hair that was brown with red tints. She was always laughing at herself and at me. I was the more serious one who was forever trying to figure out how to get from Point A to B with a map written in Portuguese. Lucy/Norma was the one who simply didn't care where we were. She lived in the moment.

We were both professors. Before coming to Liberty, I was a tenured full professor in the Division of Humanities as well as Coordinator of English at Middle Georgia College, and Norma was a full professor who taught Psychology at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa. Her favorite course to teach was "Death and Dying." So with those dossiers, why did our fellow Fulbright scholars call us Lucy and Ethel?

It was Day 2 in São Paulo. All I wanted was some hot water for tea. How was I supposed to know that the glass cover over the stove top was *not* meant to conduct heat? I turned on a burner, placed a tea kettle over it, and the next thing I knew the entire glass top shattered.

Did I mention that I was also a Fulbright scholar?

As for Norma—although she was used to teaching six to seven courses in psychology in a community college—she was forever losing her glasses, her maps, her bag, herself. She was never worried that we would miss our bus. Nothing bothered her. After I broke the stove in our hotel, I approached everything in Brazil with caution, and she giggled about everything.

Even though by June 2002, I was a seasoned world traveler, Brazil was like a different planet compared to America. I had been to Russia, Europe, the U.K. dozens of times, several Latin-American countries, but no place was more foreign to me. No country that I had visited, including Russia, was so "un-U.S.-ified" as Brazil. There wasn't even a single English speaker on television. The Brazilians were quite apathetic about the United States and unimpressed by our visit. There was very little evidence of any influence of the U.S.A. Furthermore, I was forced to quit thinking of myself as an American when that's what the Brazilians called themselves. On top of that, although my Spanish was pretty good back then, with its proximity to Portuguese, I simply managed to be confused most of the time.



Against a Banyan tree is Ethel, aka Dr. Ayres, in the blue. Sidekick Lucy/Norma is to her right.

1. The characters from the *I Love Lucy* sitcom that ran from 1951-1957. Lucy Ricardo was played by Lucille Ball, often called "that crazy redhead." Her sidekick was a former vaudeville performer, Ethel Mertz, played by Vivian Vance.

What I did learn was to say nearly every day when we visited a grocery store, “*Água sin gás, por favor?*” That means “Water without gas, please.” Who wants to drink bubbles in their water? And buying water instead of drinking tap was absolutely necessary.

I also became very proficient with thanking people with “*Obrigado*,” but having to figure out first if I was thanking a man (*Obrigado*) or a woman (*Obrigada*) was a little too much for this Christian feminist to handle. That, or my oral skills have never been the best, for sometimes it was “*Oblongata*,” that came out of my mouth because I always loved the name for that part of the brain (medulla oblongata) that controlled sneezing.

This was my badge. I was one of fifteen teachers/professors who studied in Brazil from June 5 to July 4, 2002 on a Fulbright.

***Brenda Ayres
Fulbright Scholar
Middle Georgia College
Columbus State University Group***

Columbus State University’s Raj (Rajgopal) Sashti, who served as the director of the Nine University and College International Studies Consortium of Georgia, organized our trip. We received a \$59,000 Fulbright-Hays grant from the United States Department of Education to study and travel throughout Brazil in a seminar called Tradition and Transformation. The trip was not free, but most of it was covered by the grant. It was not a vacation; it was an incredible, unforgettable form of education, and it was life changing.



The group from Georgia in front of Iguazú Falls

The mission of the seminar was “to overcome stereotypical images and promote greater understanding between the United States and Brazil through educational and cultural exchange,” said Raj,² our intrepid leader who, if there was any ice cream to be had in any city, could find it. If we lost him, all we needed to do was to ask people, “*Sorvete?*” which means “ice cream.”

Frankly, I knew as much about Brazil as most Brazilians know about America. However, I had heard a lot about Manaus and that the Amazonia rain forest was full of mammoth trees, bugs, spiders, and snakes; and the most iridescent and polychromatic birds and butterflies, and for those last two things alone, I was dying to go to the jungle. Otherwise, I assumed that Brazilians loved soccer and were really good at it, and Pelé simply defied gravity. Also, Brazil had something to do with Barry Manilow and with a nightclub called the Copacabana. It was in Rio de Janeiro, that city full of beaches, and overseeing all of it was a beautiful statue of Jesus with outstretched arms. And then there was Carmen Miranda who made me curious if there were other Brazilian women who wore fruit in their hair, nothing over their midriff, and come-hither in their eyes. That was the sum total of my Brazilian literacy.

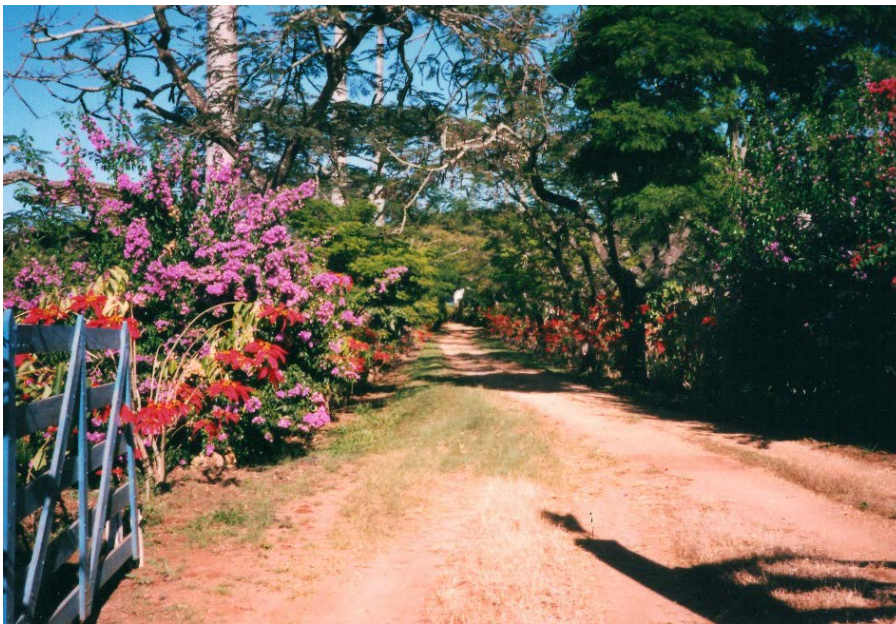
Our first classroom was São Paulo, home to over nineteen million people. This was the view from the 27th floor of our hotel where we sat in workshops learning about the economy, politics, history, and gender dynamics of the country.



One of the lecturers said that unlike the United States, Brazil had a very small middle class, but it was growing and consisted of young professionals primarily in São Paulo. Once we started touring, I discovered that there was a glaring divide between a very small upper class that was extremely wealthy, and most of the rest of the country that lived in abject poverty.

2. Rajgopal Sashti; see <https://news.columbusstate.edu/local-teachers-wanted-for-study-and-travel-in-brazil/> (accessed October 25, 2015).

We barely saw the homes of the wealthy because they were surrounded by tall walls topped with barbed wire to keep out burglars. In the countryside, gates of plantation owners were flung open and colorful flowers beckoned. There were no walls and pretty flowers around the *favelas* or slums, which were everywhere. Still, I was struck that regardless how decrepit a living shelter, nearly every rooftop had a satellite dish.



Entrance to a coffee plantation

Note the dish next to this house that was on a sugar plantation.



The contrast between the haves and the have nots was shocking. I saw “poor” and knew it as poor and recognized it at a level beyond anything that exists in the United States. “Poor” in Brazil are those people, those families who earn less than one-fourth of the minimum wage per capita and comprise 13.4 percent of the total population in Brazil.³

3. Jorge Jatobá, *The Brazilian Family in the Labor Force, 1978-1988: A Study of Labor Supply* (New Haven, CT: Yale University 1993), 4.

Their situations are even more dire. These people are “those who labor the hardest.” Almost 25 percent of the work force in Brazil earns low wages. They cannot afford even the barest essentials for physical survival.⁴ If that isn’t bad enough, there is very little opportunity to escape the cycle of poverty. If you are born poor in Brazil, you usually die poor in Brazil.⁵



Still, despite how poor people were, they seemed so happy. They seemed a whole lot happier than we Americans

who, by comparison, are extremely wealthy, free, and blessed.

The artist Mariza Campos da Paz painted this well-known picture of Rio. She titled it *I Love You, I Love You Such Happy People*.



4. Ibid., 26.

5. Cecilia Loreto Mariz, *Coping with Poverty: Pentecostals and Christian Base Communities* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1994), 33.

Why the people seemed so happy I cannot say. In a country of 156 million, there were 40,000 murders in Brazil in 1997 alone. Although our lecturers were always fond of boasting about Brazil and disparaging the United States, they did not mention that its homicide rate was 25 per 100,000 inhabitants which compared to the United States, which is known for its violence, but at a rate of 12 per 100,000.⁶ Alagoas, on the northeastern coast, in 2013 had 64.7 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.⁷

Machismo continues to thrive in Brazil, although here of late, it has been rebranded euphemistically as *cavalheirismo*. It translates as “knightliness” or “gentleman,” and is a perception of manliness given to honor and chivalry,⁸ all of which explains why, in São Paulo, there is an average of over 130,000 cases of violence against women reported in the police stations every year.⁹ (I hope you know that I am being facetious.) The number does not include all of the cases *not* reported. Every day 10-15 women are murdered in Brazil, most of them through domestic violence.¹⁰ The problem is not just a matter of men with their taking out their frustrations about poverty on women. The problem is also with the law. Rape is not considered a violation of any legal law. It is defined as “a crime against custom rather than a crime against an individual person.”¹¹ If a man accuses his wife of being unfaithful, the law accepts that he has the right to kill her and be absolved “on the grounds of honor.”¹² Other acts of violence to women are often dismissed because of “provocation by the victim.”¹³ A police chief in Rio de Janeiro said that to her knowledge in 1990, of the 2,000 battery and sexual assault cases registered at her police station, not one man was punished. In São Luis, out of 4000 similar cases, only two men were sentenced.¹⁴

6. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, “Political Transition and the (Un)rule of Law in the Republic,” in *Brazil: A Century of Change*, ed. Ignacy Sachs, Jorge Wilhelm, and Paulo S Sérgio Pinheiro, trans. Robert N. Anderson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 204.

7. Mariana Desidério, “Os Estados com Mais Homicídios no Brasil,” *Exame.com* (Nov. 11, 2014), accessed October 27, 2015, <http://exame.abril.com.br/brasil/noticias/uma-pessoa-e-assassinada-a-cada-dez-minutos-no-brasil>.

8. Bernadette Melnyk and Diane Morrison-Beedy, *Intervention Research: Designing, Conducting, Analyzing, and Funding* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2012), 68.

9. As reported by the United Nation’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1997 (p. 6). See Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobson, and Jennifer Marchbank, *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence, and Resistance* (London: Zed, 2000), 150.

10. Helena de Moura, “Study: In Brazil, 10 Women Killed Daily in Domestic Violence,” *CNN*, July 12, 2010. Also “Brazil Femicide Law Signed by President Rousseff,” *BBC News*, March 10, 2015.

11. *Criminal Injustice: Violence Against Women in Brazil*, An Americas Watch Report (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 5.

12. *Ibid.*, 4.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, 5.



Brasilia's military center.

We visited the center for the State Council of Feminine Condition of São Paulo and were told by its director that every minute some woman was being raped in São Pablo. She looked at us as if we should do something about it, and we looked helplessly at each other and wished we could.

And then there is the homophobia. We were amazed to watch thousands of gays, transvestites, and lesbians in a gay pride/rainbow parade on Copacabana Beach and assumed that Brazil was more tolerant than America. The reality is that there were 2,511 homosexuals who were murdered between 1980-2005.¹⁵ According to research by Gay Group, a hate crime is recorded every three days, two per week, eight per month, one hundred per year. Since 2000, the average increased to 125 crimes per year, and in 2004 it reached a record of 158 murders of homosexuals.¹⁶ This, by the way, compares to 25 per year in the U.S.A., and it places Brazil as first in the world for homophobic crimes.¹⁷

Torture and killings by the police and military continue to go unchecked in Brazil. In his *The Killing Consensus*, Graham Denyer Willis argues that “police kill citizens routinely and in predictable ways.” The reason for having been killed by the police is often identified as “resistências” or “resisting arrest followed by death,”¹⁸ which might be considered mercy killing in its having spared the accused of being tortured into a confession of some crime. Willis claims that “there is a presumption of guilt for the person shot, and a presumption of innocence for the

15. Dra. Patricia A. Taus, *The Ecumenical Violence from a Gender Perspective* (Desert Hot Springs, CA: Windmills International Editions, 2014), 210.

16. Quoted in Taus, 210 from the Argentine newspaper *La Fogata*. See “Victims of Hate” (2006), accessed October 15, 2015, http://lafogata.org/06latino/latino6/br_15-7.htm.

17. Taus, 210.

18. Graham Denyer Willis, *The Killing Consensus: Police, Organized Crime, and the Regulation of Life and Death in Urban Brazil* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 29.

officer who shot them.”¹⁹ In 1992 (which is not current today but was closer to the time of information we received in 2002), São Paulo police killed 4,410 civilians, 61 times the number of killings in New York City by police in the same year.²⁰

The entire topic of violence is much more complicated than I have represented here and is far beyond the scope of this article to cover. Let’s just say that to this American, except for the birds and butterflies, it is hard to understand why so many Brazilians seemed so happy.

There were several lecturers who told us the history of Brazil and attempted to argue that unlike America, it was a true melting pot where the majority of the population was “of color,” with no distinction between Amerindian (indigenous), Bahians (descendants from Africans), mulattola (mixed race of African and European), caboclo (mixed race of Indian and European), and Pardo (brown). “Every Brazilian,” Gilberto de Mello Freyre wrote, “even the light skinned fair-haired one,”

carries about him on his soul, when not on soul and body alike ... the shadow, or at least the birthmark, of the aborigine or the Negro. ... In our affections, our excessive mimicry, our Catholicism, which so delights the senses, our music, our gait, our speech, our cradle songs—in everything that is a sincere expression of our lives, we almost all of us bear the mark of that influence.²¹



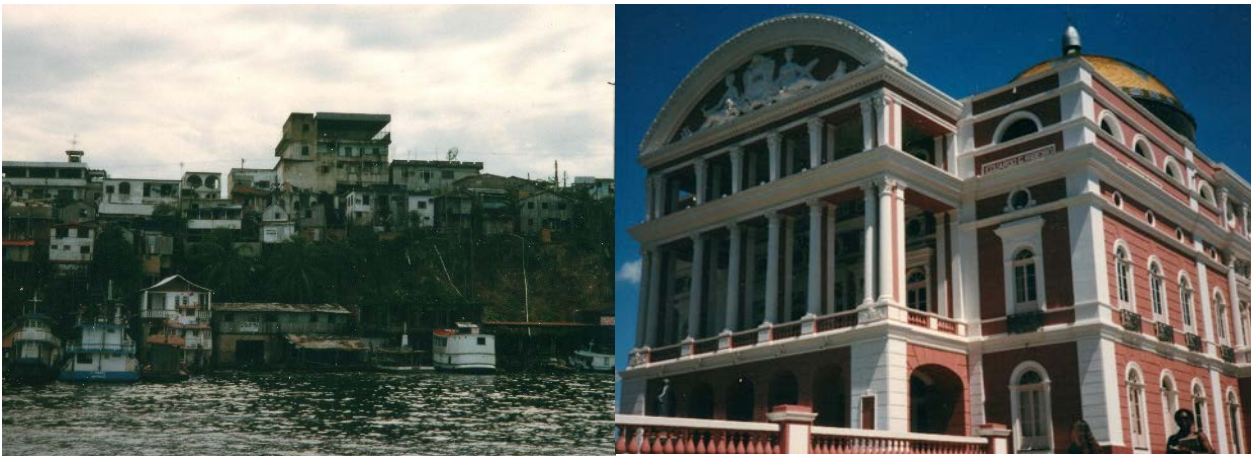
Home of Freyre, Brazilian sociologist and writer

19. Ibid.

20. James Cavallaro, Anne Manuel. *Police Brutality in Urban Brazil* (New York: Human Right Watch/Americas, 1997), 13.

21. Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-grande e Senzala* or *The Masters and Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, 1933, trans. Samuel Putnam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 278. We toured his home in Recife.

What I learned later was that most of the lecturers told us a lot of lies, most likely to put them in good stead with their government. The truth is that there is a definite class structure that is more striated than rich and poor. “Different factors contribute” not only to poverty but also to the deprivation of legal rights, such as “un- or under-employment, lack of professional training, insufficient education, gender, regional origin, age, and above all else, color. Blacks—men and women, adults and children—find themselves situated on the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy.” The darker the skin, the lower the salary and education.²²



Manaus: A City of Contrasts

We did spend some time in Americana, which made me ashamed to be an American—or the other American. Americana was founded by several Confederates from the American Civil War who were unhappy about the war’s outcome. Since slavery had become illegal in the States and was still legal in Brazil, they immigrated to this part of São Paulo where they tried to recreate the antebellum South including “happy slaves.” Throughout the Americana cemetery are Confederate flags.



My sight often met with much pleasanter things. I was entertained by the antics of curious monkeys who were not restrained in any way. There was a fellow birder in our group, and he and I were visiting every zoo and every bird world we could.



22. Sérgio Adorno, “Racial Discrimination Criminal Justice in São Paulo,” in *Race in Contemporary Brazil: From Indifference to Inequality*, ed. Rebecca L. Reichmann (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 124.



What was thrilling however, was to see and hear toucans, macaws, myna birds, and parrots in the wild.



Butterflies were everywhere. I had often dreamt of spending years in the Amazon as an entomologist seeking to identify new species. I took many pictures like the one below. Although I could tell you the scientific name of the Lepidopterans I saw, I am not skilled as a photographer, and I had a very simple camera back then. The picture below does remind me though of how delightful it was to see such God-made beauty amid much man-made ugliness.



I have a picture of a bush that appeared to have hundreds of different colors of leaves, except the leaves were butterflies. Unfortunately, the picture did not turn out well, but I will never forget the picture it made in my mind and heart.

The Brazilians are fond of saying that their Iguazú Falls make Niagara Falls look like a runny faucet. As I stood staring in utter disbelief at the falls, I thought I could hear the haunting soundtrack of *The Mission* by Ennio Morricone titled “On Earth As It Is in Heaven.” Iguazú Falls has got to be one of the most beautiful of God’s creations on this planet. Who could look at such magnificence and not want to worship our Creator?





There were so many memorable times; there was so much that we learned. One excursion I particularly loved was to the University of the Amazon. Can you imagine having classes in a building like the one on the left?

However, the most moving time was when Professor Vincente Nogueira and I exchanged necklaces and rings as a vow that we—as representatives of our respective countries—would do what we could to protect the Amazon. I wept. So

did my colleagues. We had reason to do so. One mahogany tree has the retail value of U.S. \$250,000.²³ When the taking of trees is so lucrative and men are so irresponsibly greedy, I dreaded then and dread even more what is happening to the rain forest. Between 1990 and 2000 Brazil's deforestation was *twice* the size of Portugal.²⁴

I love animals. You cannot imagine how enthralled I was at the natural beauty around us, especially the butterflies and birds. However, my joy took a dip when I read a flyer at Iguazú Falls about what to do if we suddenly saw a jaguar or puma. I will share the advice in case you happen to bump into one, and “the animal doesn't run away”:



- Keep calm, do not run.
- Make noise.
- Speak loudly.
- Clap
- Try to appear bigger

In case of a snake or spider bite, “see doctor quickly in the First Aid area.”

23. Mark London and Brian Kelly, *The Last Forest: The Amazon in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Random House, 2007), 138.

24. Clare Ribando Seelke and Peter J. Meyer, *Brazil-U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service, (Darby, PA: Diane Pub, 2010), 20.

In Manaus I wasn't too crazy about this little girl who wanted me to stroke her pet anaconda, but I was enamored by the sloth that another little girl was holding.

We took canoes to see the "meeting of the waters," where the black waters of the salty Negro flow side by side, without mixing, with the brown waters of the Solimões River. Each river has its own species of fish that cannot survive in the other. Some of the world's largest barracudas live in the Negro River. Mostly, I kept watch for caimans, which are a smaller form of alligator and with belligerent dispositions. The tops of our boats were not far from the river's surface, and I tried to sit in the middle of the seat away the sides.

In many ways, Brazil is very progressive. We learned this as our bus drove by a new sugar factory in Piracicaba that was making ethanol, which is the leading source for car fuel in Brazil. On the other hand, there is the pollution that belches from such factories.

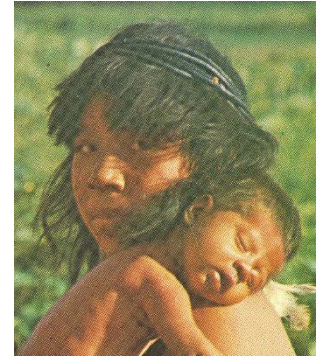


Aside from scientific, technological, and business efforts to modernize, there is still jungle aplenty with Indians living in primitive conditions. In the 1960s, the number of tribes that live without contact of the modern world was listed at 250.²⁵ Today the estimate is 60.²⁶

Note this picture from a postcard of an Indian mother with her son. The description reads:

“*Mãe índia com filho: Foto tirada na Tribo Cintas Largas (Rios Aripuanã e Roosevelt, divisa entre Rondônia e Mato Mato Grosso).*”²⁷

You might have noted the word “Roosevelt,” which contrasts with the river Aripuanã, at least in name. Our very own Teddy Roosevelt led an expedition down the 1000-mile “River of Doubt,” later renamed Rio Roosevelt, deep into the remotest areas of the Amazon basin in 1913-1914. The famous explorer Cândido Rondon, Father Zahm, the American naturalist George Cherrie, and the President’s son Kermit made the treacherous journey. Although they did collect and identify numerous animals and insects, Roosevelt became so afflicted with malaria, dysentery, parasites, and an infected knee injury that he would never recover from his visit to Brazil.



Like the two rivers that run concurrently and don’t mix, Brazil is a country of extreme contrasts, as this next picture will show. In it you see a floating Catholic church and a floating night club, as if both were essential for survival.



25. London and Kelly, p. 35.

26. Nigel South and Avi Brisman, *Routledge International Handbook of Green Criminology* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 203.

27. Litoarte, Caxias do Sul.

Religion is something that cannot be separated from the culture, politics, or identity of Brazil. However, I will write about it in the next issue of *Honorable Mention* in order to do justice to such an important topic. I will end with one more picture. It is of Lucy/Norma and Ethel/yours truly inside a 200-year-old ficus tree. We did like to stand inside trees out of respect for their old and humongous size. I am happy to report that we did not destroy anything else in Brazil since the second day that I broke the stove. In fact, we hope that with our smiles, prayers, and money, we left it for the better for having let us visit. And we left for the better for having visited it.



Eva Niesing has recently theorized that “the world is becoming an interdependent marketplace,” and that the trend is not just company competing with company, it is a “global competition between nations” with countries competing with each other to grab their “share of the worldwide tourists, foreign direct investors, consumer preference for their export products, talented workforce and students.”²⁸ The result has become an impulsive inclination to stereotype and image nations, or “nation branding,” and therefore, “Brazil is associated with beaches, carnival and happy people.”²⁹ Such branding with “positive national images result in a significant competitive advantage,” but this is an uninformed, unbalanced view.³⁰

As I write this article, I yearn to return to such a beautiful country. In truth, I am mostly drawn by Brazil’s natural beauty. As a Christian, though, I remember the faces of so many precious people that I saw in Brazil. On them is what God sees: a sweetness of suffering as well as a desperate spiritual hunger for liberty, justice, and truth; and I hope someday to return and let God use me to do some good. If that doesn’t happen, then I hope that God speaks to you through this article to either consider a mission trip to Brazil or apply for a Fulbright that will take you there or to some other country in the “four corners of the world.” Television, books, and the internet can educate us about other countries, and there is no substitute for actually experiencing them. Furthermore, we cannot “touch” people and be “touched” by them if we don’t do it in person. They may be hidden to those of us who live in the land of the plenty, but they are not hidden to God whose heart aches for those who need His love and freedom.

28. Eva Niesing, *Latin America’s Potential in Nation Branding: A Closer Look at Brazil’s, Chile’s and Columbia’s Practices* (Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2013), 1.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*