

The history and historiography of the book in Brazil: present conditions and future directions

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In July 1940, on the occasion of the Argentinian Book Exhibition held at the Rio National Library, Levi Carneiro – a lawyer, politician, and member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters – gave a lecture on the law book in Argentina. He praised the “great merit of the intellectual production” of that neighboring country, emphasized the vitality of its publishing market, and spoke about its most distinguished jurists. He then went on to talk about “esteem for the book.” In his view, a number of features of intellectual life in Argentina testified to the value accorded there to the printed word, including “the good taste and fine production values of very many of its published works,” “the wealth and great number of its libraries,” “its prestigious newspaper, that is to say *La Prensa* [*The Press*],” and the *Boletín de la Biblioteca del Congreso de la Nación* [*Bulletin of the Library of the National Congress*], “an extremely valuable archive of information” on legal matters, which Carneiro applauded as the best publication of its kind anywhere in the world.

Carneiro's eulogy implied that the central place accorded to the promotion of reading in Argentina's development as a country made the former Spanish colony an example for Brazil. He went on to assert that the very existence of the exhibition of foreign books had strengthened his “confidence in the establishment of international links via intelligence and culture.” In his opinion, law books were among the most useful for promoting “rapprochement,” “mutual understanding,” and “solidarity” between Brazil and Argentina, because they would help to develop “comparisons between the internal political institutions and legal conceptions particular to each nation.”¹

We can use Carneiro's speech as a guiding light as we review some of the key threads of existing research on the history of the book and of publishing in Brazil, as well as some questions that still remain to be explored. His overt affirmation of the power of the book as an instrument of culture, intellectual exchange, and national progress encourages us to take up not only theoretical but also political concerns that the currently flourishing practice of historiography needs to address.

Before going further, I should make two points clear: I understand “the history of the book” here in a broad sense, including the history of the periodical press and the history of

1 Levi Carneiro, “O livro jurídico argentino,” *Revista Forense* 84. 449 (1940): 502–505.

cultural and intellectual projects involving the production and circulation of printed matter. I have also chosen to focus my discussion on collective activities, in particular conferences and research groups. I first review some of the traditions that have contributed to the development of this area of historiography, and then go on to discuss some of the most debated topics in each of the major periods of Brazil's history. My conclusion returns to recent trends and possible future directions.

Intersecting traditions in historiography

In an article on historiography published in 2013,² Eliana de Freitas Dutra argues that the origins of the history of the book as a specific field of study in Brazil are largely to be found in two earlier intellectual traditions. The first of these is a tradition of bibliographical research, which has sought to catalogue publications produced in, or on the subject of, Brazil, and to collect data about their production and distribution. One of the most remarkable outcomes of this tradition was the catalogue of the exhibition on the history of Brazil edited in 1881 by Ramiz Galvão, then the director of the Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's national library. The catalogue contained not only lists of works of various types, including books, manuscripts, newspapers, magazines, almanacs, and gazettes, but also brief essays on book distribution, the activity of foreign booksellers, and typography.³

Bibliophiles helped this tradition to play a crucial role in the development of library collections. The Brasiliana Library, housed at the University of São Paulo (USP), originated from the collection of José and Guita Mindlin. Comprising some 32,000 titles and about 60,000 volumes, this collection includes books and manuscripts in the fields of history and literature, travel narratives, periodical publications, maps, scientific and academic books, iconographic material, and artists' books. With its own site, shared since 2013 with the USP's Institute of Brazilian Studies, the Brasiliana Library is generating research in four areas: 1) Brazilian studies; 2) the history of the book and of reading; 3) knowledge technologies and the digital humanities; 4) the conservation and restoration of books and paper.⁴

2 Eliana de Freitas Dutra, "Une pratique au carrefour: l'historiographie brésilienne et ses défis contemporains," *Revue Tiers-Monde* 16 (2013): 47–49. In the following discussion I have also made use of "L'Histoire du livre au Brésil: Tendances contemporaines d'une production," a presentation by the same author at the international colloquium on the book, publishing, and reading in the modern world (Sydney, 2005), of which she has kindly sent me a copy.

3 Eliana de Freitas Dutra, "A tela imortal. O catálogo da Exposição de História do Brasil de 1881," *Anais do Museu Histórico Nacional* 37 (2005): 159–79. See also Ana Paula Sampaio Caldeira, "Ramiz Galvão e o projeto de uma biblioteca nacional," in *Intelectuais mediadores*, eds. Angela de Castro Gomes and Patricia Santos Hansen. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2016, 177–215.

4 A Biblioteca Mindlin na USP. Accessible at <https://www.bbm.usp.br/node/1>.

The second, antiquarian and learned, tradition was more visible between the years 1920 and 1950, addressing topics such as the origin and transformation of the periodical press, the history of the government printing office (set up in 1808 during the establishment of the Portuguese court in Rio), and the reading habits of men of letters in the nineteenth century. A notable example of this is Eduardo Frieiro's book *O diabo na livraria do cônego* [*The devil in the bishop's library*], which seeks to trace the dissemination of books of Enlightenment ideals, based on an study of the library of one of the men active in a 1789 rebellion in the mining regions of Portuguese South America.⁵

While the bibliographical tradition provided future historians of the book with valuable tools, the antiquarian tradition raised questions that academic researchers were to take up and develop with more refined theoretical tools. At the turning point of more specialized studies of the book are major overviews such as Nelson Werneck Sodré's 1966 history of the periodical press⁶ and *Books in Brazil*, published by Laurence Hallewell in Britain in 1982 and translated into Portuguese for the first time in 1985.⁷

The academic study of the history of the book began to be established around 1960. The pioneering work in this field was closely allied to social history, with a predominantly Marxist orientation. The subject of the book was thus explored within the context of social and political relations and economic constraints. One noteworthy trend was the use of post-mortem estate inventories to investigate the social and symbolic value assigned to books, reading habits, and the book trade. Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva was a pioneer in this area, with her studies of the book and society in Rio at the very end of the colonial period, published from the 1970s on.⁸

In the 1980s, the book began to be studied in the context of the "new history," with its contributions to subjects such as mentalities, daily life, the private sphere, and women's history. Laura de Mello e Souza's study of witchcraft and popular religious practice during the colonial period is an example of this new trend.⁹ Finally, in the 1990s the history of the book made its entrance as an established discipline, encouraged by the "cultural turn" in historiography. For this to happen, dialogue with foreign historians such as Roger Chartier, Jean-Yves Mollier, Robert Darnton, Jean Hébrard, and Martyn Lyons was crucial. The first

5 Eduardo Frieiro, *O diabo na livraria do cônego: como era Gonzaga e outros temas mineiros*. Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1957.

6 Nelson Werneck Sodré, *História da imprensa no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1966.

7 Laurence Hallewell, *O livro no Brasil: sua história*. São Paulo: Edusp, 1985.

8 Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva, "História da leitura luso-brasileira: balanços e perspectivas," in *Leitura, história e história da leitura*, ed. Márcia Abreu. Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 2000, 147–64.

9 Laura de Mello e Souza, *O diabo e a terra de Santa Cruz*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1986.

conference wholly devoted to the history of the book was held at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP) in 1998.¹⁰

More recently, an increasingly fruitful dialogue with the revived field of political history has begun to take place. Interest in the political role of the book, and in active participation in the public sphere that has chosen printed materials as its preferred medium, has also fostered extremely productive relationships between the history of the book and intellectual history. At least three collective projects bear witness to this threefold interaction: “Politics, nation, and publishing,” a conference organized by Eliana de Freitas Dutra and Jean-Yves Mollier at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), whose proceedings were published in Brazil in 2006 and quite recently translated into French¹¹; a book, *Edição e revolução: leituras comunistas no Brasil e na França* [*Publishing and Revolution: Communist readings in Brazil and France*], edited by Marisa Midori Deaecto and Jean-Yves Mollier in 2013¹²; and a collection of articles about intellectuals as mediators, edited by Angela de Castro Comes and Patricia Santos Hansen and published in 2016.¹³ Although the latter publication sounds as if it belongs rather to the world of the intellectual than to that of the book (but can there be intellectuals without books?), almost all of its articles discuss subjects such as publications, bookstores, journals, libraries, reading promotion programs, and the like.

Periods and topics

This section seeks to identify some central topics discussed in Brazilian historiography relative to books, publishing, and reading in each of the major periods of the country’s history.¹⁴ Historians of the book in the colonial era have been particularly interested in censorship, “illicit” and “seditious” reading, the dissemination of Enlightenment ideals, the libraries of literary men, and the role of the periodical press and of pamphlets in the struggle

10 The conference proceedings were published as *Leitura, história e história da leitura*, ed. Márcia Abreu. Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 2000.

11 Eliana de Freitas Dutra and Jean-Yves Mollier, eds., *Política, nação e edição: o lugar dos impressos na construção da vida política: Brasil, Europa e Américas nos séculos XVIII-XX*. São Paulo: Annablume, 2006; translated as *L’imprimé dans la construction de la vie politique: Brésil, Europe, Amériques, XVIII-XXe siècle*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016.

12 Marisa Midori Deaecto and Jean-Yves Mollier, eds., *Edição e revolução: leituras comunistas no Brasil e na França*. Cotia: Ateliê Editorial; Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2013.

13 Angela de Castro Gomes and Patricia Santos Hansen, eds., *Intelectuais mediadores*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2016.

14 In this section I draw substantially on an unpublished presentation by Gabriela Pellegrino Soares at Mexico’s Instituto Mora in March 2015, kindly sent to me by the author.

that led to independence in 1822. These topics have been the focus of work by Luiz Carlos Villalta, Lucia Maria Bastos Pereira das Neves, and Isabel Lustosa, among others.¹⁵

In the case of the Empire, interest has centered on the development of the commercial press and also the increasing institutionalization of libraries, reading rooms, bookstores, and publishers. With respect to the world of literature, newspapers have been studied attentively due to the emergence of the *feuilleton* in the Brazilian press in the 1830s.¹⁶ In the world of bookselling and publishing, mention should be made of the Garnier brothers, who opened a subsidiary branch of their French bookselling and publishing business in Rio de Janeiro in 1844. Andrea Borges Leão, for example, has studied the book series for young people published by Garnier in Rio.¹⁷ Nelson Schapochnik wrote his thesis on libraries and other literary spaces at the court in Rio and the kinds of reading that took place there.¹⁸ Institutional spaces for the dissemination of books and reading in Rio de Janeiro have attracted the attention of Tânia Bessone.¹⁹ Courses in law turn out to have been important (although sometimes overlooked) nodes for the dissemination of books in the Empire, because law was the first university-level subject taught in Brazil, beginning in 1827, and because law schools were identified as centers of education for future leaders of the young nation. The library of one of the first law faculties, in São Paulo, is central to Marisa Midori Deaecto's study of the practices and institutions of reading in the city.²⁰

The historians who focus on the Republic, established in 1889, have explored a publishing market characterized by increasing organization and capitalization, along with projects for the development of reading and a widespread belief in the role of print publications as drivers of progress in Brazil. It is no accident that publishing houses and publishers have become one of the chief centers of interest for historiographers such as Gustavo Sorá on José Olympio, Maria Rita de Almeida Toledo on the Companhia Editora

15 Luiz Carlos Villalta, *Usos do livro no mundo luso-brasileiro sob as luzes: reformas, censura e contestações*. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2015; Lúcia Maria Bastos Pereira das Neves, *Livros e Impressos: Retratos do Setecentos e do Oitocentos*. Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ, 2009; Isabel Lustosa, *Insultos impressos: a guerra dos jornalistas na Independência (1821-1823)*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000. See also the recent anthology of independence pamphlets: José Murilo de Carvalho, Lúcia Bastos, and Marcello Basile, eds., *Guerra literária: Panfletos da Independência (1820-1823)*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2014, 4 vols.

16 Marlyse Meyer, *Folhetim: uma história*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996.

17 Andrea Borges Leão, "Universos da devoção, sabedoria e moral: as Bibliotecas Juvenis Garnier (1858 e 1920)," *Educação em Revista*, 43 (2006): 189–208.

18 Nelson Schapochnik, *Os jardins das delícias: gabinetes literários, bibliotecas e figurações da leitura na Corte Imperial*, Tese de Doutorado em História Social. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, 1999.

19 Tânia Maria Tavares Bessone da Cruz Ferreira, *Palácios de Destinos: Bibliotecas, Homens e Livros no Rio de Janeiro, 1870-1920*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 2014.

20 Marisa Midori Deaecto, *O Império dos Livros: instituições e práticas de leitura na São Paulo oitocentista*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 2011.

Nacional, Aníbal Bragança on Francisco Alves, Elizabeth Wendhausen Rochadel Torresini on Editora Globo, and Alice M. Koshiyama and Marisa Lajolo on Monteiro Lobato.²¹

Gabriela Pellegrino Soares has published a comparative study of efforts to encourage reading and develop a reading public in Brazil and Argentina.²² Various cultural and political projects focusing on publications and the role of publishing in political life, especially in the authoritarian regimes of the 1930s to 1940s and 1960s to 1980s, have generated fruitful discussion. Examples of this are the project “The Brasiliana collection: Reading and writing the nation” directed by Eliana Dutra at the UFMG, the 2011 conference “Brazil in two times: history, social thought and present time”,²³ Fabio Franzini’s thesis on the Documentos Brasileiros collection,²⁴ and Flamarion Maués’ MA thesis on oppositional publishing during the transition to democracy at the end of the military dictatorship.²⁵ Journals are in a field of their own, which is being enriched by the research of Tânia de Luca, Ana Luiza Martins, and Jorge Schwartz,²⁶ among others.²⁷

Recent transformations and perspectives on the future

In recent years, Brazilian historiography in the field of books and publishing has been strongly impacted by the “transnational turn.” Several collective initiatives have been established with the aim of encouraging two types of border crossing – the study of circulation and hybridization of all sorts in the dissemination of books, and the development

21 Gustavo Sorá, *Brasilianas: José Olympio e a gênese do mercado editorial brasileiro*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 2013; Maria Rita de Almeida Toledo, “A Companhia Editora Nacional e a política de editar coleções (1925–1980): entre a formação do leitor e o mercado de livros,” in *O Impresso no Brasil. Dois séculos de livros brasileiros*, eds. Márcia Abreu and Aníbal Bragança. São Paulo: Unesp, 2010, 136–157; Aníbal Bragança, “A política editorial de Francisco Alves e a profissionalização do escritor no Brasil,” in *Leitura, história e história da leitura*, ed. Márcia Abreu. Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 2000, 451–476; Elizabeth Wendhausen Rochadel Torresini, *Editora Globo: uma aventura editorial nos anos 30 e 40*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 1999; Alice M. Koshiyama, *Monteiro Lobato: intelectual, empresário, editor*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 2006; Marisa Lajolo, *Monteiro Lobato: um brasileiro sob medida*. São Paulo: Moderna, 2000.

22 Gabriela Pellegrino Soares, *Semear horizontes: Uma história da formação de leitores na Argentina e no Brasil, 1915-1954*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2007.

23 The proceedings were published as Eliana de Freitas Dutra, ed., *O Brasil em dois tempos: história, pensamento social e tempo presente*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2013.

24 Fábio Franzini, *À sombra das palmeiras: a coleção Documentos Brasileiros e as transformações da historiografia nacional (1936-1959)*. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa, 2010.

25 Flamarion Maués, *Livros contra a ditadura: editoras de oposição no Brasil, 1974-1984*. São Paulo: Publisher Brasil, 2013.

26 Tânia Regina de Luca, *Leituras, projetos e (re)vista(s) do Brasil (1916-1944)*. São Paulo: Unesp, 2011; Ana Luiza Martins, *Revistas em revista: imprensa e práticas culturais em tempos de República. São Paulo (1890-1922)*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 2001. Schwartz, a specialist in Latin American avant-garde movements, has published several studies of literary journals; see for example Jorge Schwartz, “De lo estético a lo ideológico: Klaxon y Revista de Antropofagia,” in *La cultura de un siglo. América Latina en sus revistas*, ed. Saúl Sosnowski. Buenos Aires: Alianza Editorial, 1999, 51–64.

27 See in particular the edited collection on nineteenth-century illustrated magazines by Paulo Knauss, Marize Malta, Cláudia Oliveira, and Mônica Pimenta Velloso, eds., *Revistas ilustradas: modos de ler e ver no Segundo Reinado*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 2011.

of collaborative efforts with foreign colleagues focused on shared interests. In November 2013, SHARP's first regional conference in Latin America was held at Fluminense Federal University (UFF) in Rio de Janeiro state.²⁸ A second Latin American meeting took place in March 2015 at the Technological Institute of Monterrey (Mexico), with significant participation by Brazilian researchers.

The international scholarly project "The transatlantic circulation of printed matter: the globalization of culture in the nineteenth century" brings together researchers interested in the circulation of printed matter and ideas between Brazil, France, Portugal, and Britain.²⁹ Its major achievements include a book on the transatlantic book trade,³⁰ published in 2012 after a conference held in 2010 at the University of Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ), France; a School of Advanced Studies course for doctoral students held in Campinas and São Paulo in 2012, bringing together a hundred young researchers, fifty from Brazil and fifty from elsewhere, and some thirty established specialists in the history of the book³¹; and a conference on "Reciprocal readings: Brazil-Europe in the nineteenth century," also held at the UVSQ in 2013.³²

The project "Transfopress: Transnational network for the study of the foreign-language periodical press (eighteenth to twentieth century)," whose overall coordinator is Diana Cooper-Richet, includes a Brazilian team led by Valéria Guimarães and Tânia de Luca.³³ Guimarães also organized a conference on "Cultural transfers: the example of the periodical press in France and Brazil," whose proceedings were published in France in 2011 and in Brazil in 2012.³⁴ "Transatlantic Cultures: A digital platform for transatlantic cultural history, 1700 to the present," a digital dictionary coordinated by Olivier Compagnon, Anaïs Fléchet, and Gabriela Pellegrino Soares, includes a Brazilian team: Tânia de Luca and Nelson Schapochnik direct the book and publishing section.³⁵

28 See the proceedings of this conference: Nelson Schapochnik and Giselle Martins Venancio, eds., *Escrita, leitura e edição na América Latina*. Niterói: PPGHistória-UFF, 2016.

29 See the project's website, <http://www.circulacaodosimpressos.iel.unicamp.br/>.

30 Diana Cooper-Richet and Jean-Yves Mollier, eds., *Le commerce transatlantique de librairie, un des fondements de la mondialisation culturelle (France-Portugal-Brésil, XVIIIe-Xxe siècle / O comércio transatlântico de livrarias, um dos fundlmentos da mundialização cultural (França-Portugal-Brasil, séculos XVIII-XX)*. Campinas: Publicações IEL, 2012.

31 See <http://www.espea.iel.unicamp.br/>.

32 Program available at <http://www.uvsq.fr/colloque-international-lectures-croisees-bresil-europe-xixe-siecle-289557.kjsp>.

33 For general information on the project, see <http://transfopresschcsc.wixsite.com/transfopress>. On the Brazilian group, see <http://transfopressbrasil.franca.unesp.br/>.

34 Valéria Guimarães, ed., *Les transferts culturels: l'exemple de la presse en France et au Brésil*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011, translated as *Transferências culturais: o exemplo da imprensa na França e no Brasil*. Campinas: Mercado de Letras; São Paulo: EDUSP, 2012.

35 The project is still in its initial stages, but some information about it is available at <https://tracs.hypotheses.org/>.

We should also mention the journal *Livro* [Book], published annually since 2011 by the Center for Book and Publishing Studies at USP.³⁶ This periodical, focused entirely on the history of the book, is an indication of the vitality of this field and demonstrates the importance of a transnational perspective through the regular presence of foreign contributors, especially from France, and of articles specifically on transnational topics. In 2012, for example, it published translations of Michel Espagne's "Cultural transfers and the history of the book" and Diana Cooper-Richet's "Towards a transnational study of the foreign-language periodical press".

If the contributions on Brazil at the 2016 SHARP conference can be read as a partial snapshot of the current state of research on the book, reading, and publishing in Brazil, some general trends can be identified: a pronounced focus on relations with Europe, a preference for studying the nineteenth century over other periods, and a emphasis on interdisciplinary research, especially when the field of literature is involved.³⁷ An initial comment on the future of the historiography of the book in Brazil: it would be productive to expand these cross-disciplinary dialogues further, drawing on a wealth of knowledge hitherto largely neglected in sociology, law, natural science, engineering, the fine arts, and other disciplines.

Another step might be to take a closer look at the relations between Brazil and the former Spanish colonies. As Gustavo Sorá has rightly pointed out in his book on the translation of Brazilian authors in Argentina, the two countries tend to stress their cultural distance from one another, preferring to focus on their links with hegemonic countries.³⁸ Nevertheless, the Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking regions of America have shared moments of lively cultural exchange in which the printed word has played a major role: these have recently drawn attention from researchers, especially those studying the periodical press, including Regina Crespo, Angela Meirelles Oliveira, and Livia Neves.³⁹ It must be said that parallel cultural relations with the United States, which became increasingly important over

36 Information about this center and the journal *Livro* is available at <http://www.usp.br/nele/>.

37 This assessment is based on my consultation of the list of presentations and their abstracts, available at <http://www.sharpweb.org/conferences/2016/>.

38 Gustavo Sorá, *Traducir el Brasil: Una antropología de la circulación internacional de ideas*. Buenos Aires: Libros del Zorzal, 2003, 23–24.

39 Regina Crespo, "A revista *Folha Acadêmica*: esforços para a integração do Brasil na América Latina (1928-1931)," in *Revistas en América Latina: proyectos literarios, políticos y culturales*, ed. Regina Crespo. Mexico City: UNAM, 2010, 215–38; Ângela Meirelles Oliveira, *Palavras como balas. Imprensa e intelectuais antifascistas no Cone Sul*, Tese de Doutorado em História Social. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, 2013; Livia Lopes Neves, *Pensamento da América: intelectualidade e Estado Novo em um projeto comungado (1941-1945)*, Dissertação de Mestrado em História. Florianópolis: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2013.

the course of the twentieth century due to the rise of the US as a hegemonic power, remain generally unexplored.⁴⁰

Overall, research on the history of the book conducted during the last few decades has gradually led to the elimination of claims that in Brazil people read little, and little of significance. The prominence given to the alternative paths taken by the book, such as reading aloud, handwritten texts, and informal book borrowing, has been fundamental for this development. The boundaries between oral and written texts become blurred, multiple types of acquisition appear, and hitherto unexpected groups of readers such as women and slaves have come into view.⁴¹

It is nonetheless true that Brazil had fairly high levels of illiteracy until at least the middle of the twentieth century, a fact with major implications with respect to citizenship: at the end of the nineteenth century, an electoral reform measure denying the vote to illiterate people led to the exclusion of more voters than the previous criterion, which had been based on a minimum level of income. The right to vote was granted to those unable to read only in the most recent constitution, introduced in 1988. The absence of printing firms in Brazil throughout the colonial period is another element to bear in mind, since it constitutes a sharp difference from Spanish-American countries.

Another factor to be borne in mind is that access to archival sources, especially collections of documents relative to publishing houses, is often difficult or restricted, albeit with are some important exceptions, including the archive of José Olympio in the National Library, Companhia Editora Nacional documents donated to the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), resources for the history of left-wing publishing from the State University of São Paulo (UNESP) and the Edgard Leuenroth Archives in UNICAMP, many writers' personal archives, held at the USP Institute of Brazilian Studies, the Rui Barbosa House Foundation in Rio de Janeiro, and the UFMG Central Library in Belo Horizonte.

Despite the various obstacles, whose existence ought to strengthen rather than undermine the legitimacy of this field of research, the history of the book is now a dynamic subject in the universities of Brazil – and a subject not without political implications. To return to the speech by Levi Carneiro with which I chose to begin this inevitably incomplete and provisional progress report: we can of course no longer accept his conception of the book as a panacea for national ills or as the preferable route for international exchanges, and

40 Among the few works to address this question by drawing on printed texts are Mary Anne Junqueira, *Ao Sul do Rio Grande. Imaginando a América Latina em Seleções. Oeste, Wilderness e Fronteira (1942-1970)*. Bragança Paulista: Editora da Universidade São Francisco, 2000.

41 Eliana de Freitas Dutra, "Une pratique au carrefour: l'historiographie brésilienne et ses défis contemporains." *Revue Tiers-Monde*, 16 (2013): 50–53.

Carneiro's elitist view of culture has been challenged especially by advances in research on the history of the book, publishing, and reading. But books do contribute decisively to the dynamics of the dissemination of ideas, and the spread of reading can function as a tool of social inclusion. At a time when the defense of public education has again become a slogan for political debate in Brazil, and when high school and university students are fighting bravely against the threat of enormous and permanent budget cuts, book historians cannot sidestep these issues.

Translated by Linda Gardiner