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Vargas Morto:

The Death and Life of a Brazilian Statesman

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In the early morning hours of Tuesday, August 24, 1954, Brazilian president, Getúlio Dornelles Vargas, lumbered to the third floor of the Palácio do Catete, the ornate Rio de Janeiro mansion that had served as the official presidential residence since 1897. Vargas was seeking relief from a maelstrom that threatened to topple his presidency and, in all likelihood, end a storied political career that began three decades earlier, when as an ambitious party hack from Rio Grande do Sul, Vargas arrived in Rio to assume the post of minister of finance. Weighing heavily on Vargas' mind was a deep economic crisis that cut into the gains of the democratic, populist state that he had tried to fashion after 1950. Equally worrisome was the collapse of support from well-placed civilian and military interests that had historically tolerated the president's well-known political and ideological shiftiness. Most troubling was the knowledge that members of Vargas' inner

circle had conspired to murder a political foe, only to see the assassination attempt result in the accidental death of an air force officer. Over the three weeks preceding August 24th, Vargas had defiantly declared his intention to complete his elected term, then stated that he might resign quietly, and then contradicted himself by asserting that he was prepared to leave the presidential palace as a "cadaver." By the time Vargas reached his bedroom around 4:45am on the 24th, the weary president took note that his security staff was busily arranging sandbags in the palace gardens in preparation for a possible attack. A small group of protesters chanted "Down with Vargas! Death to Vargas!" outside the palace gates.¹

Vargas changed into his pajamas, though it remains doubtful that he actually managed to rest. Twice, he was interrupted with discouraging news about his hopes to quell yet another political crisis. When word arrived that a plan for a temporary suspension of presidential powers would not appease rebellious officers, Vargas walked into the hallway and informed his butler that he intended to lie down. The butler later reported seeing an unidentified heavy object in the pocket of the president's robe. Sometime between 8:30 and 8:45, alone in his bedroom, the beleaguered president removed what turned out to be a 32-calibre Colt revolver, placed the barrel at close range to his upper left chest, and pulled the trigger. Rushing to the bedroom at the sound of the gunshot, Joint Chief of Staff General Aguinaldo Caiado de Castro found Vargas lying immobile on the bed. Alzira Vargas do Amaral Peixoto, the president's daughter and close advisor, entered the room to find her father's striped pajamas, bed sheets, and mattress covered in blood. Death came quickly, without any recorded last words.

Stunned by the bloody scene, Vargas' family and advisors informed the household staff of the president's suicide and searched the room for reasons why Vargas might have taken his own life and thus abruptly ending a career characterized by a will for political survival. On the dresser, the president's son-in-law found a note declaring the intention to shed blood in the defense of the Brazilian *povo* [people]. As they tried to make sense of the real and symbolic meanings of this pact signed in blood, the family set upon the difficult task of preparing the bloodied body for a speedy removal. Once news of Vargas' death hit the radiowaves, the hostile crowds outside Catete were overwhelmed by bereaved mourners, made up of men and women who tearfully gazed past the now-useless sandbags and imagined what Vargas might look like in death.

As the various articles in this collection attest, the Latin America bodies that end up being the bones of political contention, so to speak, are most often the bodies of figures who were exemplary in life as well as in death; they are the bodies of heroes as well as martyrs. Che Guevara, Emiliano Zapata, and Eva Perón were claimed and acclaimed by a wide variety of groups well before their storied deaths. For many, the charismatic (or despised) qualities of these figures' lives became even more explicit and unambiguous after death. Che becomes the pure revolutionary, Zapata the stoic peasant rebel, Evita a *santa*.

Brazil's Getúlio Vargas presents an alternative narrative of death and life, one that deals with a self-confessed master of ambiguity. In life, Vargas once described an encounter with a would-be biographer whose attempts to gain an interview had been firmly rebuffed. "I prefer to be interpreted than to explain myself," Vargas confided to his journal.² In death, Vargas offered an equally enigmatic story. His death-by-suicide

simultaneously traded upon the image of a valiant warrior, selflessly fighting for the protection of national interests, alongside the image of a crafty and calculating statesman, whose political machinations reeked of demagoguery and self-interest. If death itself was a finality for Vargas on the morning of August 24, 1954, the interpretation of his death and life remains uncertain and unstable to this very day.

Prelude to a Tale of Two Corpses

Vargas, who headed the Brazilian state variously as chief of the provisional government, dictator, and popularly-elected president for all but five years between 1930 and 1954, did not cut an especially commanding figure.³ Relatively trim in his youth, the lawyer-turned-politician already showed signs of stoutness when he burst onto the national political scene in the so-called Revolution of 1930. Political cartoonists of Vargas's first tenure in office (1930-1945) often poked fun at the wily president-dictator, depicting him as a short, portly man, dressed in a double-breasted suit, smoking a cigar, and smiling about some inside joke. Fans and opponents knew that Vargas' speaking voice and rhetorical style could be lackluster and that his political positions could be blatantly opportunistic. By the time Vargas stormed across the country in the 1950 presidential campaign, the public received Vargas with mixed emotions, seeing the short and compact politician as both friend and trickster.

This does not mean to say that Vargas was not successful at cultivating a genuine popular following during his lifetime. Among the earliest Latin America populists, Vargas successfully styled himself the *pai do povo*, or the father of the people/the poor,

even before he took "the populist gamble" in 1944-45, openly seeking working class political support during the final months of the Second World War.⁴ And, even after Vargas staked his future on a *trabalhista* [laborite] vision of national politics, this scion of a wealthy landowning family from Rio Grande do Sul still managed to maintain the support of the *classes conservadoras* [literally, "the conservative classes," but closer at elites]. Although an understudied feature of the Vargas mystique, it is clear that Vargas was also able to count upon the support of the growing middle class, who benefited from the expansion of the central state, the pleasures of urban industrial life, and a strengthened sense of *brasilidade*, or Brazilianness.⁵

Even at the height of the Estado Novo dictatorship (1937-1945), when Vargas often ruled by intimidation and decree, he found it prudent to negotiate among seemingly antagonistic interests, cultivating artists and intellectuals of both fascist and communist convictions, and maintaining support within organized labor, even as he suppressed independent trade unions. Vargas was the sort of politician who could imprison the general secretary of the Brazilian Communist Party, ship his Jewish Communist wife off to a terrible fate in Nazi Germany, and later form an alliance with that very same Communist leader.⁶ Thus, not only was the ex-dictator able to ascend to the presidency in 1950 through popular election, but he did so with the support of both working-class organizations and industrialist associations, with the latter explicitly valuing Vargas as a leader who "always sought to establish cooperation among the different social classes and never sought to incite class conflict."⁷ Somehow, Vargas was capable of embodying a range of political aspirations and ideological positions, synthesizing them into an apparently singular Brazilian national calling.

The high-wire act became more difficult in the final years of Vargas' second period in power (1951-1954), when labor relations—especially wages levels for urban workers—set the tone for a broad range of conflicts over state priorities. The centrist Democratic Social Party (Partido Social Democrático, or PSD) and center-left Brazilian Labor Party (Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro, or PTB) continued to throw their legislative support behind Vargas' purified vision of *trabalhismo*, but growing segments of the elite and middle-class who once tolerated the populist rhetoric as a means of assuring class collaboration began to see Vargas as out of touch and corrupt. Some even complained that he was a closet socialist. As Vargas intensified his appeals to organized labor, important factions of the military, influenced by a creeping Cold War anti-leftism, withdrew their support from their former ally. Civilian opponents, particularly those affiliated with the center-right National Democratic Union (União Democrática Nacional, or UDN), denounced Vargas as a rank opportunist and cheap demagogue. Even groups that had consistently positioned themselves on the left, such as the Communist Party, expressed serious reservations about Vargas' heightened populism.⁸

Broad segments of the Brazilian population still managed to find the familiar Vargas preferable to the UDN's "liberal democrats." Other potential rivals, including the oligarchic clans who dominated the interior, urban populists like São Paulo mayor Adhemar de Barros, and charismatic military leaders, lacked Vargas' national projection. Vargas tried to change with the times, recasting himself as a friend of democratic institutions despite a long history of dispensing with constitutional protections when they proved inconvenient. Vargas, however, was never wholly successful in making himself out to be a true man of the people. His most devout followers regarded him with

affection, noting his avuncular bearing and affable public persona. They tended to overlook his past use of censorship and repression against political enemies. (Vargas certainly did not remind them of his past authoritarian streak.) His political allies offered a calculated respect for his ability to mobilize “the masses” in the delicate negotiations among labor leaders, domestic and international capital, and regional interests over the means and ends of national development. To his supporters, Vargas was ultimately an imperfect but beloved populist.⁹

Those who opposed Vargas saw much more than a lack of perfection. As the opposition party, the UDN was especially vocal and well-organized in working to contain or undermine the kind of nationalistic labor policies pursued after 1951. Enjoying easy access to the mainstream press, *udenistas* mounted a spirited campaign to reveal favoritism and corruption in the administration. Most vocal among the *udenista* critics was Carlos Lacerda, a young and ambitious journalist-politician from Rio de Janeiro who bombarded Vargas day and night with vitriolic accusations and criticisms. Cultivating his own political aspirations as the moralizing, middle-class antidote to Vargas' corrupt *trabalhismo*, Lacerda used the printed word and radio to crusade against a president portrayed as the root of all that was wrong in post-war Brazil.¹⁰ By mid-1954, Lacerda's newspaper, Rio's *Tribuna da Imprensa*, was agitating for impeachment proceedings on the charge that Vargas had maintained improper dealings with Argentine populist Juan Perón (a figure about to suffer his own fall from grace).¹¹ Although the impeachment attempt failed in congress, it set the tone for Lacerda's verbal guerilla war on Vargas and *varguismo*.

Fearful that Lacerda might succeed in his campaign to bring down Vargas, close associates of the president contemplated ways of silencing the opposition. Chief among Vargas' protectors was Gregório Fortunato (1900-1962), an Afro-Brazilian who began life as humble ranch hand on the Vargas family estate and would later accompany the up-and-coming Getúlio to Catete Palace, winning the plum position as chief of the president's 48-man security detail.¹² Fingering Lacerda as the most serious threat, Fortunato enlisted a small group of men to shadow the journalist during his numerous public appearances. Lacerda quickly realized that he was under surveillance and petitioned the police to carry a firearm. Motivated equally by well-founded paranoia and rising anti-Vargas hysteria, the journalist began to travel with armed military escorts. The increased security around Lacerda, who reveled in the political theatre, did not deter Fortunato from finalizing a secret plot to have the president's foe murdered. The unfolding of the plan, which felled Lacerda's military escort rather than Lacerda, set off a duel of dead bodies that climaxed with Vargas' own death on August 24, 1954.

Three Weeks and Two Corpses

Just after midnight on August 5, 1954, Lacerda, his teenage son Sérgio, and the military officer assigned to protect the bombastic journalist pulled up to 180 Toneleros Street, a fashionable address in the upscale neighborhood of Copacabana. The street was relatively quiet as Lacerda bid goodbye to his escort, thirty-two-year-old Air Force major Rubens Florentino Vaz, and walked towards the building. As Lacerda neared the garage entrance, a man rushed across the street, firing a pistol. Struck by a bullet, Lacerda drew

his sidearm and returned fire. Major Vaz, in the meantime, stepped in to intervene. The gunman shot the major at close range and then shot and wounded a municipal police officer before speeding away in a car driven by an accomplice. Newspaper reporters were on the scene within minutes, finding a distraught Lacerda, who had suffered a minor injury to his left foot, bent over Vaz's dying body.¹³

In the months leading up to the botched assassination attempt, Lacerda had carped about the rising disorder of public life. His very public decisions to carry a firearm and travel with armed escort were part of the campaign to demonstrate how insecure Brazilian streets had become. Within hours of the attack, Lacerda made a direct connection between the disorder and the president, asserting "I accuse one man as responsible for the crime. He is the protector of thieves whose freedom from punishment gives them the audacity to commit such crimes. That man is named Getúlio Vargas."¹⁴ The UDN seized upon Lacerda's accusation, making Vargas out to be in cahoots with cold-blooded murderers. The attack on Lacerda and the unintended death of Vaz, according to one of Vargas' prominent political supporters, "gave the opposition exactly what they needed: the cadaver of an innocent man who just happened to be an esteemed and well-placed military officer."¹⁵ The wounded Lacerda lambasted the Vargas administration, demanding a formal inquiry. Air Force officials quickly responded, forming a commission to investigate Vaz's murder.

Taking their cue from Lacerda, the president's opponents intensified their denunciations. Support for Vargas rapidly eroded in the empirically nebulous, but politically important realm of "public opinion." Indeed, Vaz's dead body probably served the purposes of the opposition even more effectively than Lacerda's might have had the

assassin's bullet found its intended target. Lacerda's vitriolic and often hysterical attacks on the president had made him many enemies, and even alienated some who were hardly defenders of the president. Vaz's lifeless body— imbued with the military's aura of being above politics— was a more transparent affront to public decency and social order. If Vargas played any role in the major's death, he had committed a crime against the same public decency and social order that the military symbolically upheld.

Vaz's funeral proved to be a veritable field day for the opinion-makers in the press. The major dailies published a multitude of photographs of the funeral procession that wended its way from the Aeronautical Club, past the Senate, to São João Batista cemetery. The images were marked by poignancy, as representatives of all branches of the military joined the Vaz family in burying the slain airman in a municipal cemetery that also served as the final resting place for other fallen military heroes, including the government soldiers killed during an unsuccessful left-wing mutiny that broke out in military garrisons in November 1935. On August 12, the Archbishop of Rio led a Seventh Day Mass (a requiem mass that is central to Brazilian Catholic funerary rituals) in Rio's imposing Candelaria Church. The major's bereaved widow and four children figured prominently in the countless press reports issued in the week leading up to the mass for Vaz's departed soul.¹⁶ The spectacle of Vaz's respectable, white middle-class family grieving for its departed paterfamilias provided a perfect foil for representations of corruption and unsavory dealings in the Vargas government. The press sympathetically chronicled the expression of public and legislative outrage among Vargas' well-known opponents as well as a newly politicized officer corps.

Not surprisingly, the same dailies that made a bourgeois martyr of Vaz filled their columns with incriminations and revelations about those suspected of orchestrating the assassination attempt. Gregório Fortunato, chief of the president's security detail, was luridly profiled as the prime suspect. Against the propriety of a prematurely dead, middle-class military officer who selflessly gave up his life in defending the life of Carlos Lacerda, the press could not resist describing Fortunato—a freed slave's son who rose from rural poverty to circulate throughout the presidential palace—as a "sinister" figure whose dark visage sullied the nation's highest office.¹⁷ To Fortunato's detractors, any sign of middle-class male respectability—his finely tailored suits, his honorable wife and children, and his important position—were to be attributed not to individual merit, intelligence, nor ambition but rather to overly dependent relations with the corrupt Vargas and his nefarious brother, Benjamin.¹⁸ Carlos Lacerda went as far as to make the outrageous accusation that Fortunato, a childhood playmate to a young Getúlio, was the president's lover.¹⁹

[INSERT IMAGE A]

As the "crisis of 1954" unfolded, anti-Vargas factions painted a racially coded portrait of a criminal Fortunato, whose physical characteristics, in combination with his suspiciously intimate relations with the president, categorically denied him any claim to the laurels of respectability and personal honor. Dubbed the "Black Angel" in the press, Fortunato's life as the president's bodyguard was rendered irrecoverably suspect and dirty. During the murder trial that followed Vargas' suicide, Fortunato responded to the

charge that he was a "*negro sujo*" (dirty black) by detailing a record of service to Vargas and the nation, summing up the defense of his personal honor by declaring "*Sou negro de bem*" (I am a good black).²⁰ Long after Vargas was dead and buried, such images would endure, with Vargas' son-in-law, Ernani do Amaral Peixoto, describing Fortunato as a "coarse man, bordering on savage" and a dimwitted gangster.²¹

Even as Vargas felt compelled to disband his security detail out of the fear that it could only bring more dishonor to the presidency, other, more ostensibly "respectable" figures among Vargas' associates were implicated in the moral miasma that enveloped the president. Euvaldo Lodi, a prominent industrialist and longtime president of the Confederação Nacional da Indústria, had to answer to the charge of complicity in Vaz's death.²² Accusations of collusion in the plot even extended to members of Vargas' immediate family; protesters defaced posters from his son Lutero's congressional campaign, and first lady Darcy found herself obliged to give testimony to the police. As for Vargas himself, the press was circumspect in making the accusation of direct presidential involvement, but implied that he was indirectly responsible for the incident as the guiding figure in a government that had spawned the corruption and dirty-dealing that made such ignominious acts possible.²³

Pro-Vargas forces had a difficult time responding to the respectful coverage of Vaz's funeral and the sordid charges of corruption, demagoguery, and murderous conspiracies. During the earlier campaigns to compel Vargas to resign, the president's defenders responded by impugning their opponents' commitment to democracy and to the welfare of the people/nation. *Getulistas* had argued that what motivated Lacerda, the *udenistas*, and their allies in the military was a thirst for political power, which had been

repeatedly frustrated by their inability to rally the voters to their side in recent democratic contests. As Tancredo Neves, one of Vargas' most prominent and ardent supporters, recalled, "Not once did Getúlio face a democratic opposition. From the outset, what Getúlio faced was a subversive opposition. The men of the UDN, and especially UDN elements in the military, could never accept the defeat that they had suffered [in the 1950 presidential campaign]."²⁴

The brazen way in which Vaz had been killed, and the very public way in which the body had been lain to rest, undermined this well-rehearsed defense. With their freshly murdered martyr in tow, Vargas' opponents seized upon the moral, rather than merely "political," rationale for outrage. Demonstrations against Vargas could take the form of funeral processions or solemn ceremonies, rather than public disturbances. Vaz's martyrdom allowed Vargas' adversaries to sacralize their opposition to his presidency, and by serendipity, it created a "legitimate" basis for a degree of turbulence that, together with the assassination attempt, provided grounds for the military to claim that the Vargas presidency threatened the very stability and security of the nation. Perhaps the low-point in Vargas' fortunes was the moment when Lacerda publicly demanded that the Avenida Presidente Vargas, the centerpiece of urban reforms in Rio during the first Vargas regime and staging ground for some of the largest civic ceremonies of the Estado Novo dictatorship, be re-named for Major Vaz.²⁵

The political environment continued to deteriorate for Vargas after Vaz's requiem mass. The investigative commission organized at the Galeão air base aggressively looked towards the presidential palace for evidence related to the "Attempt on Toneleros Street." On August 13, Alcino João de Nascimento, the hapless triggerman, was brought in for

questioning; Fortunato fell into the snare two days later. The latter's arrest included the seizure of a large cache of documents linking the president's security forces to the assassination attempt on Lacerda, influence-peddling, and the *jogo do bicho*, a numbers running game popular in Rio.²⁶ By August 19, several major dailies in Rio and São Paulo, including Lacerda's *Tribuna da Imprensa* and the staunchly anti-Vargas *O Estado de São Paulo*, contemplated Vargas' forcible removal from office.²⁷ Revelations that Fortunato, who was undergoing an intensive regime of interrogation that likely included torture, had coordinated the attack on Lacerda fueled the ardor with which the paper editors and opposition politicians railed against Vargas. Even more moderate papers, such as Rio's *O Globo* and São Paulo's *O Correio da Manhã*, called upon Vargas to resolve the crisis "honorably" by resigning his office. An editorial in the São Paulo daily appealed, "There is only one solution: Mr. Getúlio Vargas' resignation from the office of the president of the Republic. This would put him in high standing and assure the survival of his administration."²⁸ Striking the tone of the *gente decente* (the respectable class), who afforded themselves the duty to rise above the missteps of wayward elites and impressionable popular sectors, these editorials offered the president the opportunity to take the high ground (*coloca em nível alto*) without further scandal and social unrest.

Vargas himself was undoubtedly aware that his honor was at stake. Gustavo Capanema, PSD leader in the Congress, reported that on the day before his suicide, Vargas confided to him that the question of political survival was secondary to the question of maintaining the honor of the presidency and especially personal honor. "My most important task is to defend my honor," Vargas told his longtime ally. "I cannot leave [the presidential palace] tarnished. I cannot leave with the suspicion of impropriety

or murder. I cannot leave here in dishonor [*Não posso sair daqui em desonra.*] I must remain for however long it takes to be able to defend my name.” In a eulogy delivered on the floor of the Congress, Capanema argued that Vargas had remained true to this pact with honor.²⁹

Capanema’s quote may have been apocryphal. It does, however, alert us to the dilemma of honor faced by Vargas: could a resignation under duress trump the morally unassailable martyrdom of the fallen airforce major? How could Vargas compete with the claim to restoring national honor that had been seized by the wounded Lacerda? Where was Vargas to go, honorably, if he were ousted by a military coup? If the democratizing spirit of the immediate post-war period protected Vargas from the loss of political rights following the first military coup to remove him from office in 1945, the prospects for another wave of political forgiveness seemed remote. Indeed, Vargas’ voluntary resignation was unlikely to bring him personal or political honor. Twenty days after Lacerda first contrasted an honorable Vaz to a dishonored Vargas, the president responded to a situation that he memorably described as a "sea of mud" by taking his own life. This was, of course, a high-risk move for Vargas for he thus deprived himself of his one indisputable virtue — his political wits — in his ultimate attempt to reestablish the honor and integrity of his office and person.

Within the limited circle of relatives and advisors who had immediate access to Vargas’ body, the death-by-suicide provoked what must have been a knee-jerk reaction to make the fallen leader into the most respectable of statesmen. Almost immediately after finding Vargas dying in his bedroom, these associates set about preparing the wounded body for a public presentation befitting a president, even if he was a dead president felled

by his own hand amidst a crisis of his own making. The scramble for respectability was instantly obvious to the two detectives from Rio's Fourth Police District who arrived at Catete for a forensic investigation within an hour of the president's death. The scene they encountered was quite different from the one found by Caiado de Castro and Alzira Vargas an hour earlier: Upon entering the room, the detectives found Vargas lying in bed, on his back, head facing the ceiling and eyes closed. The hands were calmly clasped together at the stomach. He wore a dark wool suit, dark cashmere vest, black socks and shoes. A bouquet of white roses lay at the foot of the bed. The tableau was exceedingly orderly, almost as if it had been painted.

As the forensic inspection progressed, the police discovered that the scene was a macabre stagecraft of sorts. The president's body, which had not yet reached rigor mortis, had been carefully prepped for the police and the subsequent appearance in public: the head was held high by a long white cloth placed under the chin. The pallid hands were carefully bound together by a white handkerchief. The suit had been slipped over the pajamas that Vargas had been wearing when he bid goodnight to his butler.

Upon removing the suit, vest, and blood-stained pajama top, the detectives discovered that the gunshot wound had been cleaned and bandaged. Except for a small entry wound near the left nipple, Vargas' chest was free of signs of trauma.³⁰ The forensic field tests quickly proved that Vargas had taken his own life, committing the ultimate act of self-destruction. Yet the scene staged for the police (and the one which was printed in the few forensic photos released to the press) suggested that Vargas had died peacefully, perhaps due to a sudden hemorrhage.

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Outside the presidential palace, things were far less nuanced. News of the suicide spread quickly throughout Rio and the nation, provoking shock and dismay even among Vargas' opponents. Bereaved political allies rushed to the presidential palace, where they confronted a multitude of weeping mourners drawn from all walks of Carioca society. José Américo de Almeida, minister of transportation, recalled the scene after leaving his Copacabana apartment: "I ran to Catete. In every direction, I saw a stupefied populace, greatly concerned, lamenting their idol, a simple man who liked simple things and had the proverbial secret of making friends. Reaching the palace, I broke through the wave, seeing convulsed faces and hearing cries of desperation."³¹ Elsewhere in the capital, and in other cities, angry mobs set upon the offices of newspapers and political interests who had denounced Vargas in the scandal-ridden weeks leading up to the suicide.³² The offices of several multinational corporations as well as the United States Embassy were vandalized. Carlos Lacerda sought refuge, out of fear that he be caught by the pro-Vargas bands who shouted "Death to Lacerda" in the streets of downtown Rio.

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The insults, sacking, and arson visited upon Vargas' foes—real and imagined—were fueled by the suicide letter found at Vargas' bedside. The text of the *Carta Testamento* was read and reread *ad nauseum* over the airwaves, in the special editions rushed to press, and on the lips of Brazilians from all walks of life. The famous

letter narrated Vargas' political career, from the Revolution of 1930 to the populist second administration, stressing the gains of nationalist consolidation, while eliding the authoritarianism, corporatism, and scandal that shaped all of Vargas' career.³³

Events moved rapidly in the twenty-four hours that followed the release of the *Carta Testamento*. Vice-president João Café Filho, Vargas' constitutional successor, worked to assemble a cabinet, while trying to test the political waters among the ex-president's allies. The waters turned out to be exceedingly cold around Vargas' family, who informed the incoming president that the new government should discard any hopes of organizing an official burial. Well aware of the popular ire directed at interests perceived to have been disloyal to Vargas, Café Filho responded as best he could, maintaining a low public profile and declaring a period of national mourning.³⁴ In the meantime, the president's embalmed cadaver was prepared for an impromptu public viewing, arranged downstairs in the presidential palace. The viewing began in the late afternoon and lasted through the early morning of August 25. The somber mood surrounding the president's coffin was punctured by countless outbursts of grief, as political leaders and ordinary people of various physical and social types fell weak and wept (and were photographed falling weak and weeping, especially with handkerchief pressed to forehead) at the glass-topped coffin containing the former president's body, which had been re-dressed in a dark suit and adorned with a large rosary. The newsweekly *Manchete*, which joined its competitors in publishing richly-illustrated special editions on the events of August 24-25, reported that there had been an estimated 2000 cases of fainting during the public viewing.³⁵

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After leaving Catete, Vargas' body was led through the streets of Rio to Santos Dumont airport. From there a civil aeronautics plane (Vargas' family having refused the airforce's offer of an official military escort) took the fallen president to Porto Alegre and then on to São Borja, Vargas' hometown, where the body was to be displayed in the town hall. As the plane departed the national capital, the earlier scenes of somber faces and white handkerchiefs raised in the air were replaced by episodes of civil unrest that lasted through the night. The burial, held under a light rain the morning of August 26, was a relatively private affair for such a public figure. Close associates of Vargas in his final days, including former labor minister João Goulart, were present, but long-time associates like Gustavo Capanema remained in Rio to reclaim the moral highground lost in the previous month's scandals.³⁶ Members of the incoming Café Filho administration were conspicuously absent. The highlight of the afternoon was an impassioned eulogy delivered by long-time friend and occasional rival Oswaldo Aranha, who drew upon Vargas' blood imagery, proclaiming "when they want to write the History of Brazil, whether they like it or not, they will have to wet their pens in the blood of Rio Grande [do Sul], and from this day forward, he who writes and tells the future of Brazil will have to wet his pen in the blood of your heart."³⁷ Once the flag-draped coffin was laid to rest in the modest family vault, the crowd of locals, friends, and reporters departed for home. Brazilians were now left with the strange task of making sense of a Brazil without Vargas.

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By nightfall on August 26—three weeks after the assassination attempt on Carlos Lacerda—several hundred thousand Brazilians had participated in the funeral corteges, memorial services, and street protests that followed the deaths of Major Vaz and President Vargas. Millions more mourned, prayed, and cried in their homes, schools, and churches. These numbers indicate the truly massive nature of funerary culture in August 1954, eclipsing the intense ardor of funerary rites that surrounded public figures of the Old Republic.³⁸ In the three-week duel of dead bodies, Vargas had certainly emerged the winner, as his suicide would play a major role in determining the course of Brazilian politics over the next decade, but even Vargas, the consummate politician, could not control his political afterlife or the ritualized politics of memory that surrounded his largely absent corpse.³⁹

[INSERT IMAGE H]

The Chronicle of a Death-by-Suicide

Vargas' dead body—real and staged—turned out to be a complicated site upon which to enact the politics of remembrance for the man and his fabled career. Once the immediate outbursts of grief and indignation had subsided, those who would mourn and memorialize Vargas quickly faced two complications. One was the remoteness of the chosen gravesite, which removed Vargas' physical remains from the realm of popular

observance. The other complication was the ritual and metaphorical ramifications of a death-by-suicide. Vargas had never been a particularly religious man, so the denial of a Catholic funeral was not especially insulting. Nevertheless, custom would have deemed it appropriate for a Seventh Day Mass to be celebrated on August 31. Rio's Metropolitan Curia initially announced that, due to the exceptional circumstances, it might allow a mass to be performed for Vargas' soul in the Candelaria Church, even though his suicide clearly violated church doctrine. Thus, Vargas' soul would have been celebrated in the same space from which Major Vaz's soul had departed for Heaven. But at the last minute, the curate reversed course and denied use of Rio's most prominent temple. Ignoring ecclesiastical prohibitions, mourners by the tens of thousands descended on La Candelaria, which ironically was located at the terminus of Avenida Presidente Vargas, to hold a popular religious ceremony in the spacious plaza that fronted the church. Men and women sank to their knees on the hard, rough ground of the plaza, burned candles by the thousands, and publicly displayed their devotion. Conducted without the benefit of priests or church approval, the prayers for Vargas' soul were led by lay preachers and simultaneously broadcast over the radio. As had so often happened in the history of religious ritual in Brazil, the official position of the church had been subverted by the popular will.

In many ways, this renegade mass in a very public space was the climax of popular mourning for the departed president. The worshipful throngs that had succeeded in defying the Church's prohibition on the celebration of a Seventh Day Mass had not necessarily won the right to control Vargas' embodied memory. To be sure, Vargas had seemingly "willed" his body to the masses in the text of the *Carta Testamento*, promising

that, in death, he would belong to the people/nation with whom he had forged an irrevocable compact of mutual need. Whatever his intentions, the choices made by the members of his inner circle in the solitude of the presidential bedroom left nagging questions about whether that promise could be fulfilled. Was Vargas really the Father of the Poor when the humble had to scrape for a brief, if emotional, farewell that did not even win church sanction? What was to become of the populist pact forged by Vargas without Vargas himself? For all its bravado, the suicide note painted a somber and surprisingly accurate portrait of the structural tensions between the drive for industrial development and the yearning for social justice. Given the opposition's control of the mainstream press and much of the incoming government, and the ensuing machinations among anti-*getulista* factions within the military, we could ask whether popular claims to Vargas' legacy were a means of political empowerment or, at best, artifacts of sentiment.

Furthermore, both Vargas' intimates and his grieving public had to conjure with the implications of a death-by-suicide. The rather bizarre scene staged by Vargas' aides and family members in the minutes following his death indicates the confusion displayed by even his closest associates over whether this was an honorable or dishonorable way to die.⁴⁰ Was Vargas' death that of a martyr whose suffering should be made as palpable as possible? Or was it the result of a desperate, unbalanced, even cowardly gesture whose physical manifestations had to be concealed at all costs? Historian Brian Hall has argued that "for a national hero, suicide is a bad career move."⁴¹ Leaving aside the question of whether Vargas could be considered a hero, his decision to take his own life does not seem, at first, to have been such a bad move. Given the ambiguities of his particular political career—his reputation for opportunism and for sudden reversals in

direction—ending his life in such a sincere fashion could be seen as a pointed rejoinder to his relentless critics. And his suicide certainly allowed Vargas to “turn the tables” on his foes, and to momentarily release the popular sympathy that had been dammed up by the “sea of mud.”⁴² Yet both the reaction of Vargas’ intimates and the eventual attenuation of popular efforts to memorialize him, indicate a degree of uneasiness with his decision to take his own life.

Indeed, the hours immediately following the suicide were marked by competing demands for political decorum, public access, personal revenge, and instant memorialization of a traumatized corpse. Vargas’ family acted with remarkable dispatch to present the dead body in the most dignified light. (One can only imagine the dark comedy of manipulating Vargas’ lifeless body in order to pull a wool suit over bloodied pajamas before the police arrived.) Although Darcy Vargas had never been entirely comfortable with the more populist aspects of her husband’s political career,⁴³ she nonetheless understood that it was incumbent upon the family to allow the (sanitized) body to be viewed publicly. The impromptu public wake and cortege of August 24-25 fit the bill well. In the same act of allowing a public mourning, the Vargas family rejected the propriety and honors of a state funeral—an especially controversial move since Vargas, after all, had died in office. Vargas’ intimates thus deprived the interim president, João Café Filho (who had publicly broken with Vargas just two days earlier by proposing their joint resignation), of the opportunity to assume the mantle of the fallen president. And by denying military officials and other “disloyal” government figures the right to mourn publicly, Vargas’ widow and the *getulista* stalwarts weakened the opposition’s attempt to disassociate itself from the implication that Vargas’ blood was on

their hands. In response to the claims by Lacerda and others that Vargas' death was actually the result of his betrayal by his closest associates, Getúlio's inner circle left no doubt about whom they regarded as bearing the guilt for Vargas' desperate final act.

Victorious in the initial skirmish over assigning meaning to Vargas' cadaver, Vargas' family recognized the narrow limits of the populist ploy. Although the body underwent a highly atypical embalming during the forensic analysis, Darcy Vargas was eager to have her husband's body removed from Rio, where it might incite uncontrollable popular outpourings of grief. Clearly unwelcome within the inner circle of familial mourners, the mainstream press channeled some of the first lady's apprehensions, chronicling with alarm the various "excesses" that disturbed public and private life in the last week of August 1954. The press warned of communist agitators who sought to take advantage of the people's grief, urging all Brazilians, no matter what their political affiliations, to resist the temptation to use the brief public appearance of Vargas' body as an opportunity to betray their essentially "peaceful and orderly" nature.⁴⁴ In this vein, a photo published in *O Mundo Ilustrado* portrayed an "agitator" trying to "incite *os populares* to assume attitudes incompatible with the nature of the Brazilian people."⁴⁵

[INSERT IMAGE I]

If Vargas' body remained somewhat unstable territory upon which to build a lasting image of his long career, the suicide letter found on his dresser provided an unparalleled opportunity to fix the meaning of his life in politics. The *Carta Testamento* is a masterpiece of populist rhetoric.⁴⁶ In a classic discursive operation of inclusion and

exclusion, Vargas describes his suicide as a sacrifice for the people/nation and portrays the forces that have driven him to this act as alien to the interests of the people/nation. He depicts his (soon-to-be) dead body as an offering to the nation, to the weak and the humble. In contrast, his adversaries are represented as the rich and powerful, willing to betray the nation and collaborate with foreign agents. To be sure, even in this final (conscious) discursive act Vargas is still ambiguous (and ambivalent?) about his ideological inclinations, but he leaves no doubt that he wants the suicide to be seen as an act of sacrifice for the Brazilian "people," who he represents as coterminous with the Brazilian nation. In his last moments, Vargas appears to be conclusively casting his lot with the poor and unprotected.

But as always, matters were more complicated than that. Despite the compelling circumstances of its authorship, Vargas could not manage the reception of his final appeal to the nation. Now that literary theorists have declared all authors dead (metaphorically speaking), we know that a writer—even one about to take his own life—has little control over the meanings that readers give to his or her text. Hence, the *Carta Testamento*—prepared several days in advance of the suicide and probably doctored by Vargas' inner circle—could easily be read as pure artifice. The "unconquerable revolution" described in the first paragraph in fact began as a run-of-the-mill *golpe de estado*. The extra-constitutional machinations that made the first Vargas regime revolutionary (after a fashion) were not even mentioned. The alleged "subterranean campaign of international groups joined with national interests, revolting against the regime of worker's guarantees" obscured a serious lack of fiscal discipline among Vargas' economic planners during the second regime. The entire notion that Vargas was a tireless

defender of workers' rights elided his deep commitment to a corpus of labor laws and a labor judicial system that heavily favored state-sanctioned union leaders, while muffling rank-and-file concerns.⁴⁷

The body described in the letter bleeds for the Brazilian people, without mention of the blood spilled by the Brazilian political prisoners tortured in secret cells on the Ilha das Cobras and in the abysmal penal colonies of Ilha Grande and Fernando de Noronha.⁴⁸ The Christ-like forgiveness that envelops Vargas in the letter's final paragraph hardly corresponded to his actual persona. Vargas was rarely outright capricious, but he was even more rarely beatific. The suicide letter, much like the body left by suicide, could never condense the multiple meanings of Vargas' remarkable political career into a single heroic image. Instead, Brazilians were left with a disquieting, if heartfelt, sense of loss for a vital organ abruptly removed from the national body politic.

Getúlio as a Museum Piece

In the months that followed the president's death, the Brazilian polity experienced mixed success in charting a path without Vargas. On August 25, the PTB adopted a resolution declaring the *Carta Testamento* as the party's guiding ideological statement, seeking to take advantage of the continuing popular sympathy generated by the suicide, but the party soon found it increasingly difficult to manage *getulismo* without Getúlio.⁴⁹ Unionized labor and industrialists won some added maneuverability, but the structural crises of 1954-1955 limited their ability to broker a new political pact of development.⁵⁰ The fallen president's close advisors, as was the custom among politicians from elite or middle-class families, made their peace with the new Café Filho administration, sought

legislative office, or temporarily retired to private life, waiting for an opportunity to return to the national stage. Vargas' popular minister of labor, João Goulart, was particularly eager to re-enter the fray.

Intimates of Vargas who hailed from more humble backgrounds faced more uncertain and precarious futures. Gregório Fortunato, Vargas' all-too-loyal bodyguard, was tried and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. (The term would subsequently be reduced by presidents Juscelino Kubitschek and Goulart, but to no avail, as Fortunato was killed by a prison inmate in 1962.) Vargas' *povo*, meanwhile, got their first, bitter taste of runaway inflation.

The opposition did not necessarily fare any better. Major Vaz continued to climb through the ranks after death, being posthumously promoted to lieutenant colonel and then again to colonel in 1965 by a military regime looking to invent a heroic past. As for Carlos Lacerda, after briefly seeking refuge on the Galeão military base, returned to the national political scene first to beat out Lutero Vargas for a congressional seat, and then to become the leader of the UDN in congress and governor of the state of Guanabara. Fixated on dishonoring Vargas even in death, Lacerda's 1954 successful congressional campaign was rhetorically organized around the defeat of the "*gregórios*."⁵¹ As a party, however, the UDN did not fare as well as Lacerda. In spite of its hopes of finally seizing the presidential palace emptied of Vargas and his cronies, the UDN suffered losses in the congressional elections of 1954 and the presidential elections of 1955. In 1960, the party opted to support the independent Jânio Quadros, fearing that a straight UDN candidacy would again lead to defeat. Quadros won the presidency, only to resign in an act of political suicide that, ironically, tried to echo Vargas' exit from office. To the intense

frustration of its leadership, the UDN remained the minority party for the entire democratic interregnum that lasted from the end of the Second World War until the coup d'etat of April 1, 1964.

As the PTB, unions, industrialists, and the UDN thrashed about, trying to make or break *getulismo* without Getúlio, another pillar of Vargas' political edifice—the state apparatus—slowly moved to find its place in a world without Vargas. No federal organ had a clear claim to guiding Vargas into the History that the ex-president charted for himself in his suicide note. Moreover, the rapid timeline that took Vargas from his deathbed to the family grave in São Borja in just over forty-eight hours made it almost impossible for state planners to craft a public space that might effectively embody Vargas in death and life. Monumental public venues closely associated with Vargas' first administration—the modernist Ministry of Education headquarters, Vasco da Gama stadium, the Avenida President Vargas—had lost much of their allure well before the crises of August 1954. Other recognizable sites closely attached to Vargas' vision of national cultural renewal, such as the historic town of Ouro Preto, had become increasingly delinked from the office and body of the president. Plans to use the death mask molded from Vargas' cadaver on the day of the suicide as a model for a public monument went nowhere.⁵² In theory, the cultural "landmarks" most successfully consecrated by the second Vargas regime, including the "national sport" capoeira, commercialized Carnival music, and the ideology of racial democracy, might have proved useful to memory-makers, but these figures would confront the fact that these monuments were less extensions of Vargas' political corpus and more artifacts of a

complex interplay of popular, commercial, and international actors vying to articulate a modern Brazilian culture that did not necessary turn about Vargas and the state.

Thus, the official memory-makers loyal to Vargas in the late 1950s—a time when Juscelino Kubitschek's "Fifty Years of Progress in Five" used the recent past mainly as a foil against an ever-brighter future—were faced with a dilemma. The president's dead body was safely buried in a family grave located in a remote border city. The actual instruments of Vargas' death (His Passion, if you will) were in the possession of the Rio police or family members. The death scene was off-limits to public visitation. The difficulties in locating a space to sacralize Vargas' body was somewhat ironic in that Vargas himself had learned that there was much political capital to be gained from attending public rituals enacted at the official tombs of national heroes such as the Duke of Caxias, Dom Pedro II, and the participants of the *Inconfidência Mineira*.⁵³

The institution best prepared to venerate Vargas in death—with or without the support of Vargas' family and political allies and even without direct access to his mortal remains—was the Museu Histórico Nacional (MHN). As early as 1930, the museum had been a beneficiary of Vargas' material and symbolic support to the point that the museum's permanent exhibition included a special gallery honoring Vargas.⁵⁴ So, within eight months of Vargas' suicide, the museum director Gustavo Barroso gladly relieved the Café Filho administration of the indelicate burden of what to do with the objects associated with Vargas' death, taking possession of most of the furniture found in Vargas' bedroom.⁵⁵ Taking advantage of a reorganization of gallery space already underway in 1954-1955, the museum made room in its permanent exhibition for a new gallery, named the Sala 24 de Agosto. The room recreated the *mise-en-scène* of Vargas' final hours.

Barroso later informed the president's daughter Alzira that the museum would guarantee that "everything that evoked Vargas's historic personage as a man of state and a man of sentiment [*sua figura histórica do homem de estado e de homem de coração*] would be religiously preserved."⁵⁶ Thus was born the precursor to one of the few sacred spaces in the otherwise secular national museum network.

Unfortunately, there is no photographic record of the MHN's Sala 24 de Agosto. There is, however, evidence that the new gallery and the older Sala Getúlio Vargas became sites where a bereaved public paid homage to their slain hero, even if the central state was unable to create a formal mausoleum. In mid-December 1954, *Última Hora*, the Rio daily that remained ardently loyal to Vargas and *trabalhismo* throughout the second regime, reported:

The Sala Getúlio Vargas is one of the most visited at the Museum, for the beauty and rarity of the objects on display, and, most importantly, because the gallery is a true reliquary of memories for the great popular leader who sacrificed himself to the wrath of his enemies. The people will never forget him. He is in the streets and the humble homes, suffering at their side. He is also in the silence of that gallery, which does so well to protect his everlasting presence.⁵⁷

The report then described an unnamed woman bowed before one of the gallery's display cases, crying at the sight of a golden plaque containing a particularly melodramatic statement of Vargas' selfless commitment to Brazil's *humildes* [humble].

The episode reported by *Última Hora* may not be entirely accurate—the MHN's records indicate that the museum was closed to public visitation from June 1954 through

March 1955⁵⁸—but this does not discount the fact that interests sympathetic to Vargas worked, in the absence of an official place of mourning, to make monuments out of sites already invested with Vargas' physical and spiritual presence. Even as a fiction, the *Última Hora* article tells us that the Vargas galleries at the National Historical Museum had become sites where the faithful might continue to pitch themselves forward in emotional outbursts, reinscribing a ritual of grief (one that the mainstream press consistently gendered as female) that marked the national body politic in August 1954.

Women and men faithful to Vargas' memory earned a more authentic place to see a re-embodied Vargas as a result of Kubitschek's drive to craft a plan of national development that would satisfy the interests that Vargas failed to reconcile in 1954. On March 3, 1960, Kubitschek, wagering heavily on a go-for-broke scheme to complete Brasília before the end of his term, authorized the transformation of the Palácio do Catete into a new federal museum to serve as the official repository for objects related to the history of the republic. In short order, the scene of Vargas' suicide would be a permanent, public part of the new Museu da República (MR).

Months before the museum actually opened, MHN director Josué Montello stated to the press that the transfer of the Sala 24 de Agosto to the MR would be of special interest to the visitor, who now could see the objects in their historical setting. And, once the museum was open to the public, Montello's observations about popular interest in the Vargas bedroom suite proved correct, as the bedroom and its blood-stained mattress proved to be crowd-pleasers. Public visitation to the museum for the last six weeks of 1960 topped 15,000, climbing to a very impressive 156,751 visits during the first full year of operation.⁵⁹

The archival records say relatively little about the ways in which visitors actually experienced the Vargas suite during their visits. The bedroom was certainly a site of curiosity, and for some it may have been a site of ritual pilgrimage. The scene described in *Última Hora* would suggest that the forces most loyal to *getulismo* looked to museums as sacred spaces to remember Vargas. It seems plausible, then, to think that some visitors to the Museum of the Republic would have been overcome with emotion once they saw the bed where Vargas fell dead, still in his pajamas. (Never mind the fact that few would know that the dead body had been staged for its first public viewing just as the museumified bedroom suite was a stage for remembrance.)

Their need to grieve, however, could not compete with the political polarization that plagued the presidency of João Goulart. The coup of 1964, which ousted Goulart and suspended the political rights of politicians and activists associated with the left, made it all the more awkward for a state institution such as the MR to give aid to a cult of veneration for a populist such as Vargas. The possibilities for a legitimate public memorial to Vargas' death grew slimmer as the military regime matured into a full-fledged bureaucratic-authoritarian regime.⁶⁰

At the Museu da República, the signs of a narrowing politics of memory were subtle, but the astute observer could see that the progressive deterioration of the palace gardens formed a poignant reminder that Catete's role as the seat of the nation's republican memory was unraveling. Throughout the 1960s, museum director Jenny Dreyfus was frustrated in her attempts to secure the funds necessary to recuperate the once-lush museum grounds, which had degenerated into a mass of rat-infested foliage and stagnant, mosquito-filled pools. These unpleasant conditions surely contributed to the

steady decline in annual visitation figures, which dropped by half between 1961 and 1967.

More troubling for Dreyfus were rumors that briefly circulated in the press in the first half of 1967 that the Serviço Nacional de Informações (SNI), the military government's internal intelligence unit, and the political police were secretly using the garages behind the Palácio do Catete as interrogation cells. Dreyfus' superiors denied knowledge of any such interrogations, while conceding that the annex to the former presidential palace was under the control of the Ministry of Justice and other state agencies.⁶¹

The rumors of clandestine interrogations vanished almost as quickly as they surfaced, no doubt influenced by the appointment of a naval officer, Leo Fonseca e Silva, to oversee the Museum of the Republic staff. With the support of Fonseca e Silva, the MR cultivated closer relationships with the military state, inaugurating a gallery to honor General Humberto Castelo Branco, author of the April 1964 coup. More ominously, the rising tide of press censorship, intimidation, and direct repression of dissent that culminated in the imposition of Institutional Act 5 (December 1968) made it highly unlikely that the mainstream press would report on possible human rights violations on the museum premises. The psychic and cultural damage was, nonetheless, done. By 1969, the public would find it difficult to count on the Museu da República as a site for patriotic pilgrimage or diversion, even if they were able to see the curious bloodstains on Vargas' mattress (which, magically, resisted all purported attempts at cleaning). The combination of new admission fees to the museum, a small arson attempt resulting in the temporary closure of the Sala Getúlio Vargas, and labor disputes that

closed the entire museum for a time pushed Vargas' death scene near the edge of oblivion.

In short, the museum galleries dedicated to Getúlio Vargas at the Museu Histórico Nacional and the Museu da República gained multiple, contradictory meanings. Run out of the presidential palace in 1954, Getúlio remained a resident of the *Casa do Brasil*, as the Museu Histórico fancied itself, into the late 1950s. The conversion of the Palácio do Catete into a public museum stoked, for a time, public interest in another of Getúlio's reconstituted state homes. The interest in the Vargas suite at the MR was just as much driven by respect and duty to the fallen leader as by puerile voyeurism. But, in time, the visit to Catete grew bittersweet, as the visitor saw a decaying edifice that symbolized the shifts in Brazil's political and cultural capital. Even with the attraction of Vargas' deathbed, the museum offered diminished opportunities for emotional connection. To this melancholic mood we must add the psychological discomfort caused by the nagging rumors—never factually substantiated, yet eminently plausible—that Catete had become a node in a growing network of state offices used for the systematic violation of political and human rights. On dates such as April 19 (Vargas' birthday), May 1, and August 24 (Vargas' death date), Getúlio's life and death could continue to frame a certain politics of public commemoration, albeit quietly. The surrogate tomb erected in the Museu da República, however, grew increasingly uninviting, and for some, symbolic of the nation's descent into a kind of politics of terror that was widely regarded as originating, ironically, in the first Vargas regime.

Bodies of Evidence

The declining popularity of the Vargas exhibit in the Museu da República mirrored both the sorry state of republican ideals under the military and the disavowal of *getulismo* by both the right and the left. In the eyes of the military and its supporters Vargas' politics exemplified the demagoguery and corruption that the National Security State had been designed and imposed to combat, especially with the hardening of the dictatorship after 1968. The Vargas who inhabited this rightwing imaginary was the elected populist president of the early 1950s whose nationalist appeals to the *povo* and whose alliances with the labor left had supposedly set Brazil on a course the right regarded as leading ineluctably to a disastrous revolutionary conflagration (had the armed forces not intervened). Ironically, the rebuff by the right did nothing to endear Vargas to the left. On the contrary, by the late 1960s scholars and intellectuals on the left in Brazil identified Vargas as responsible for the authoritarian/corporatist policies that had led (also ineluctably) to the military regime; more specifically, prominent intellectuals such as Francisco Weffort claimed that Vargas' authoritarian-populist politics had produced a labor movement whose leadership was beholden to the state and thus limited workers' capacity for militant action.⁶² In this left-wing imaginary, Vargas was forever the dictator of the Estado Novo, the authoritarian figure with vaguely fascist leanings who manipulated the labor movement to his own political advantage. Furthermore, this view of Vargas did not remain confined to academic circles; among the founding principles of the Workers' Party was a rejection of the formal ties between labor and the state that had originated under the first Vargas regime.⁶³

Thus, Vargas remained a figure of multiple meanings but none of them had significant political appeal during the era of the military dictatorship. Indeed, Vargas'

family may have been the only group actively interested in amplifying the memory of the clan's political patriarch. In this regard, Vargas' devoted daughter, Alzira Vargas do Amaral Peixoto, played a prominent role in making an honorable political figure out of Vargas. Daughter to a man who styled himself to be the "father" of the Brazilian people and to a matrician first lady, the possibilities for Alzira to assert political agency would appear to have been limited to acts associated with conventional feminine gender roles. Alzira herself tells us that her father's vision of appropriate womanly knowledge could be reduced to mastery of typing, driving, and speaking English—semaphores for a modern, but domesticated femininity.⁶⁴ The manly roguery of the political sphere was, apparently, beyond the pale for a female member of a respectable political clan. Unlike many of her male relatives, Alzira neither joined a party nor sought elected office, and when she was publicly associated with established political parties, her name was attached to feminized labels like "nanny of the PTB" and "mother of the PSD."⁶⁵ Thus, her "public" political performance during the dramatic events of August 24—supervising the cleansing of Vargas' wounds and stoically standing by her father's coffin—could be read as honorable and indispensable feminized forays into the otherwise dangerous world of male body politics.

Truth be told, Alzira was a hard-nosed political actor who served as a close confidant to her father throughout his two presidencies.⁶⁶ Although she was quite capable of playing the "appropriate" role as loyal daughter and faithful and demure wife to politician-diplomat Ernani Amaral Peixoto, Alzira was intimate with the innermost workings of the Vargas state. Her physical presence within the state body began in the early days of the Revolution of 1930 and lasted until the fateful ministerial meeting, held

at 3:00am on August 24, 1954, during which Alzira advised her father on how to respond to the collapse of military support. Alzira was, then, well positioned to negotiate the proper insertion of the late president into the Brazilian public's fickle appetites for a memory of Vargas.

In the preface to her memoirs of the first Vargas regime, *Getúlio Vargas, Meu Pai* [*Getúlio Vargas, my father*], "Alzirinha" positioned herself as the family gatekeeper to Vargas's memory.⁶⁷ By the 1970s, Alzira had decided to take her memorial work to a more public forum, organizing her father's voluminous papers and preparing them for transfer to a public archive. The fortunate recipient was the Centro de Pesquisa de Documentação da História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC), a semi-private research center established in 1973 within Rio's Fundação Getúlio Vargas. The Getúlio Vargas archive organized at CPDOC opened up entirely new ways of knowing Vargas—knowledge based upon the ever-growing body of archival materials once handled, in some way, by Vargas and his intimates. Alzira, the Vargas family's "guardian of memory," remained generous to CPDOC and other public institutions dedicated to preserving and promoting Vargas studies until her death in 1992. A reinvigorated Museu da República even won the bloodied pajamas worn by Vargas on the night of his suicide. Alzira's daughter, Celina Vargas do Amaral Peixoto, continued the family tradition of re-memorializing Vargas through a series of donations made to CPDOC, the Museu da República, and the city of Volta Redonda in the 1990s.⁶⁸

The philanthropic interest exhibited by Vargas' family in institutions dedicated to memory proved to be the perfect counterbalance to the physical atrophy of the Vargas state (and, of course, his long-dead body). As a political body, Vargas was reborn in the

CPDOC archives, gaining vitality in direct relationship to the temporal distance from the fateful events of August 1954. Following the example set by Alzira (and brokered by Celina, who served as director of CPDOC and the National Archives), the families of many of Vargas' most important interlocutors—Gustavo Capanema, Oswaldo Aranha, and Alexandre Marcondes Filho, just to name a few—made large donations of documents, photographs, and print publications, many of them official papers that made their way into the "personal" archives. The archival collections assembled after the initial donation of Vargas' archive have turned CPDOC into the single-most important research center for post-1930 Brazilian historical studies. The scholarship produced by the CPDOC research staff pioneered new standards in Brazilian political and intellectual (and later social, cultural, and business) history as well as archive management. Given the dearth of solid documentation in official archival repositories, many topics in the history of the Vargas era can *only* be researched at CPDOC.

The Vargas family, who denied Café Filho the privilege of staging a state funeral, proved to be quite generous to researchers, both academic and amateur, as well as to educators and documentary filmmakers who sought out Vargas in death. CPDOC became, in a sense, a kind of surrogate memory site for Vargas. The fact that the site has precious few images of Vargas on permanent display; that the mechanisms to enforce a "standard" interpretation of Vargas are very weak; and, that the majority of the visitors are historians and social scientists toting pen-and-paper or laptop computers rather than white handkerchiefs readied for the unexpected emotional outburst, cannot discount the fact that the floors occupied by CPDOC in Oscar Niemeyer's edifice on Rio's Praia de

Botafogo are a site for seeing, touching, and scrutinizing the *restos mortais* of Vargas and his era.

The re-embodied access to Vargas' enigmatic mind and contradictory legacy proves to be all the more significant at a time when, according to former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, "the Vargas era is over."⁶⁹ The Brazilian and international scholarly community continue to reinvest their interests in Vargas as a symbol if not a person. An enduring, if sardonic, popular interest in Vargas also suggests that Vargas will remain with Brazilians. The popularity of Rubem Fonseca's novel *Agosto* (1990) and the TV Globo miniseries of the same name brought the events of August 1954 into the libraries and living rooms of millions of Brazilians.⁷⁰ The theatrical reenactment of the final weeks of Vargas' life, staged within the Museu da República in the last quarter of 1992 (amidst the popular and legislative battle to have president Fernando Collor de Mello removed from office for corruption), brought the public into the very spaces through which Vargas passed during the victories of his first administration and the crises of his last days.

Finally, the 1997 reinstallation of the permanent exhibition of the Museu da República, named *A Ventura Republicana* [The Republican (Ad)Venture], brought Vargas' bedroom back into the museum-goers' gaze. Spartanly decorated with the same furniture used by the president-populist-dictator during his second administration, the bedroom is the closest that the iconoclastic reinstallation comes to an emotional climax.⁷¹ Together, *A Ventura Republicana* and *Eu Getúlio*, a museographic valentine organized in 1999 by the Museu da República in response to a large donation from Celina Vargas do Amaral Peixoto, de- and re-constructed Vargas for generations of Brazilians who were

not alive when he dominated the national political scene. For these Brazilians, Vargas' inimitable contradictions and ambiguities are not necessarily so hard to reconcile.⁷² They are, after all, part of the Brazilian body politic to which these museum visits belong.

Conclusion

Sometimes presented as Shakespearean in drama, Vargas' final moments play out more like a Greek tragedy: A well-known, yet aging, patriarch, mired in a moral quagmire brought on by arrogance, willful ignorance, and deceitful associates returns to the stage one last time to make an impassioned appeal to declare his convictions before the audience. Covered in blood drawn from a self-inflicted wound, the protagonist recounts the trials and tribulations of duty and sacrifice, honor and nation.⁷³ He declares his intention to leave life and enter History. The audience recognizes the leader for his demagogic sleights of hand, yet is compelled to look on in horror as the final death scene plays itself out. The death is, indeed, tragic, full of chest-beating, accusations, and self-recrimination. For a select few, the loss of status, material possessions, and even life are at stake. Eulogies are hastily thrown together and cathartic rituals enacted. But the perverse twist to this Brazilian tragedy is that Vargas' death did not end in a burial service on sacred ground in which the collective was able to re-gather to mourn the dead and bid him fortune in the afterlife. No *deus ex machina* restored order on or after August 24. Instead, political and moral instability dogged those who tried to assume, or reject, the personal and institutional mantles of the fallen president.

In the epilogue to our tragedy an unscripted plot of mourning and memorial, in which closure and catharsis would remain incomplete, rules the day. This unconventional

script of post-death was not unlike Vargas' unconventional political career—full of contradictions, oscillating between affection and cruelty, unbounded hope and cynical calculation, and fused together by a deep emotional commitment to an organic Brazilian body politic that Vargas himself knew to be more dream than reality.

In closing, we return, one last time, to the *mise-en-scène* of Vargas' death suite, now found in the permanent exhibition of the Museu da República. Vargas' bedroom furniture, the blood-stained pajamas, and the infamous 32-calibre bullet can be seen as we would want them to be — isolated and untouchable, but tantalizingly close. One can almost imagine seeing Vargas lying on the bed, dressed in the same suit and vest that he "wore" for the police detectives who arrived around 9:30 on the morning of August 24, 1954. As we take one last glimpse into the room, viewed through flowing curtains added during the 1996 reinstallation, we come to a small room next to Vargas' bedroom; it is the last gallery of the exhibition. An old man, cinematographically projected onto a single bed, restlessly dreams of a national history seen in the hundreds of photographs and film clips projected onto a large white sheet behind the bed. The images are constantly being consumed by flames, only to regenerate for the next audience. *Vargas morto*, Vargas in death, is part of this national history, constantly consumed by destructive flames, yet immune to actual destruction. As the museum visitors descend the stairs and exit into the now-vibrant museum gardens, they are left to ponder how and why this history endures as a museum exhibit and as a point of reference in the hurly-burly of everyday Brazilian political life.

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NOTES

¹ Getúlio's final hours have been discussed in minute detail. Journalist Araken Távora offers a minute-by-minute account of August 24-25 in his *O dia em que Vargas morreu*, (Rio de Janeiro: Repórter, 1966). For other chronicles of the "Crisis of 1954," see Hélio Silva, *1954: Um Tiro no Coração* (Rio de Janeiro, 1978), Carlos Heitor Cony, *Quem Matou Vargas* (Rio de Janeiro, 1974), and Claudio Lacerda, *Uma crise de agosto: o atentado da rua Toneleros*. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1994).

² Getúlio Vargas, *Diário* (Rio de Janeiro: Siciliano/Editora da FGV, 1995), 209.

³ A still valuable narrative of Vargas' political career in the context of changing Brazilian political structures can be found in Thomas E. Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil: An Experiment in Democracy, 1930-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). A more recent synthesis of Vargas' political life and legacy is found in Robert Levine, *Father of the Poor? Vargas and His Era*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴ John D. French, "The Populist Gamble of Getúlio Vargas in 1945: Political and Ideological Transitions in Brazil," in *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Postwar Transitions*. David Rock, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 141-165.

⁵ The development of the Brazilian middle class is treated in Brian Owensby, *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-Class Lives in Brazil*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁶ On the different intellectuals and artists who participated in the first Vargas regime, see Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* (Durham:

Duke University Press, 2001); on the incident involving Olga Benario Prestes, the wife of Communist leader Luíz Carlos Prestes, see Fernando Morais, *Olga* (São Paulo: Alfa-Omega, 1985).

⁷ Barbara Weinstein. *For Social Peace In Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920-1964*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 280.

⁸ On the crises of the era see Maria Celina Soares d'Araújo, *O Segundo Governo Vargas* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1982) and Maria Victória de Mesquita Benevides, *O PTB e o Trabalhismo* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1989). On the Brazilian Communist Party and the second Vargas government, see Flávia Millena Biroli, "A nação diante do suicídio de Vargas: uma análise do discurso do PCB," M.A. Thesis, Unicamp, 1999.

⁹ For a comparison between Juan Perón, a full-fledged populist, and Vargas' more limited populist appeal, see Ernesto Laclau, "Toward a Theory of Populism," in Laclau, *Politics and Ideology of Marxist Theory* (London: Verso, 1977), 143-198, and Maria Helena R. Capelato, *Multidões em Cena: Propaganda Política no Varguismo e no Peronismo* (Campinas: Papyrus, 1998).

¹⁰ On Lacerda as a middle-class crusader-cum-populist, see, Bryan McCann, "Carlos Lacerda: The Rise and Fall of a Middle-Class Populist in 1950s Brazil," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83:4 (November 2003): 661-696.

¹¹ For a brief but fascinating discussion of the press' attempt to conflate its campaign with "public opinion," see Flávia M. Biroli, "Verdade, opinião e política: um ensaio sobre imprensa e democracia no Brasil dos anos 50," (unpublished ms.)

¹² For a highly sympathetic biography of Fortunato, see: José Louzeiro, *O anjo de fidelidade (a história sincera de Gregório Fortunato na Era Vargas)*. (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 2000).

¹³ John W. F. Dulles, *Carlos Lacerda, Brazilian Crusader*. vol. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 157-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 159.

¹⁵ *Getúlio, Uma História Oral*. Valentina da Rocha Lima, ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 1986), 190. Similarly, Amaral Peixoto recalled “It [the UDN] now had a cadaver at its disposal, and we know perfectly well how this shocks public opinion (p. 191).

¹⁶ See, for example, *O Mundo Ilustrado* (Rio de Janeiro), 18 August 1954, 81. Though the photographs mainly portrayed peaceful demonstrators and mourners, or family photos of Vaz in happier days, the magazine did include one shot of protesters setting fire to a PTB car near La Candelaria.

¹⁷ The blackness of Fortunato and other principals of the botched assassination attempt is an unmistakable leitmotif in contemporaneous and retrospective accounts of August 1954. This close association between blackness, criminality, and corruption strongly suggests how highly racist language could enter national political discourse even in the heyday of the ideology of racial democracy.

¹⁸ José Loureiro strongly suggests that it was Benjamin Vargas who masterminded most of the corrupt dealings in the presidential palace.

¹⁹ McCann, "Carlos Lacerda," p. 690.

²⁰ Louzeiro, *O anjo de fidelidade*, pp. 420-21; The *negro sujo* episode might be more accurately translated as a Fortunato's claim to being a "Good Negro" against the insult of being called a "Dirty Nigger."

²¹ Aspásia Camargo, Lucia Hippolito, et. al. *Artes da Política: Diálogo com Amaral Peixoto*. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1986), 368-72.

²² On Lodi's role as a mediator between the Vargas regime and industrialist interests, see Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil*, 99-100.

²³ See, for example, "Indignação, Lágrimas e Revolta durante o Sepultamento do Major Assassinado no Covarde Atentado contra Carlos Lacerda," *Folha da Noite* (São Paulo), 6 August 1954, 7.

²⁴ *Getúlio, Uma História Oral*, 178. Tancredo Neves was himself a future distinguished dead body: indirectly elected to be the first civilian president following the 21-year military dictatorship (1964-1985), he died of stomach cancer before he was able to take office. His death set off an eruption of national grief and mourning.

²⁵ *Folha da Tarde* (Porto Alegre), (24 August 1954), 10.

²⁶ Gustavo Borges, one of the principals of the República do Galeão, chronicled the tribunal's inner workings in *Getúlio e o mar de lama: a verdade sobre 1954*. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Lacerda, 2001).

²⁷ Alzira Alves de Abreu and Fernando Lattman-Weltman, "Fechando o cerco: a imprensa e a crise de agosto de 1954," in *Vargas e a crise dos anos 50*. Angela Maria de Castro Gomes, org. (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1994) 31-35.

²⁸ Cited in Biroli, "Verdade, opinião, política," 6.

²⁹ Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação da História Contemporânea do Brasil/Fundação Getúlio Vargas (Rio), Arquivo Gustavo Capanema [hereafter CPDOC-GC] k 1954.04.05 Doc. III-41. Hand-corrected manuscript version of Capanema's eulogy, delivered on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies, 25 August 1954.

³⁰ Museu da República-Arquivo Histórico, Arquivo Getúlio Vargas, Documentos Complementares GV 954.08.24 "Guia para o Necrotério" Departamento Federal de Segurança Pública do Instituto Médico Legal 24 August 1954.

³¹ José Americo de Almeida, *Ocasos de sangue* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1954), 36.

³² Jorge Luis Ferreira, "O carnaval da tristeza: os motins urbanos do 24 de agosto," in *Vargas e a crise dos anos 50*, 61-96.

³³ The original text of the *Carta-Testamento*, first read on Radio Nacional before 10:00am on 24 August 1954, has been reproduced on the online version of the *Dicionário Histórico-Biográfico Brasileiro*, available at: <<http://www.cpdoc.fgv.br/>>. English translations appear in a number of sources, including *The Brazil Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Robert M. Levine and John J. Crocitti, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

³⁴ Café Filho later described the tricky situation: "No other man in Brazil, besides me, had assumed the presidency of the Republic under such painful and aggressive circumstances. Within Catete, the president was dead by his own hand. Outside, the choral wail of thousands of people...The manifestation of the hostility of the Vargas family, who refused all government role in Getúlio's funeral...the fires and tumults...all left me feeling without guarantees." See: *Do Sindicato ao Catete: memórias políticas e confissões humanas*. Vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1966), 354-356.

³⁵ Arlindo Silva text in *Manchete*, 25(?) August 1954.

³⁶ CPDOC-GCk 1954.04.05 Doc. III-41.

³⁷ Aranha's speech, spoken with the tenderness of a long-time friend and the rhetorical flourish of a would-be populist, is reprinted in Távora, *O dia em que Vargas morreu*, 113-119.

³⁸ On funerals of “national heroes” as a centerpiece of Brazilian civic culture during the First Republic (1889-1930), see Geraldo Mártires Coelho, *O Brilho da Supernova: A Morte Bela de Carlos Gomes* (Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 1995), and João Felipe Gonçalves, “Enterrando Rui Barbosa: Um Estudo de Caso da Construção Fúnebre de Heróis Nacionais na Primeira República,” *Estudos Históricos* 25 (2000/1): 135-161.

³⁹ On the (successful) use of Vargas’ memory by subsequent presidential candidates, see *Getúlio, Uma História Oral*, 262. According to Tancredo Neves, “Getúlio’s suicide really made the career of Juscelino [Kubitschek]. Jango’s [Goulart] as well. Even Jânio’s [Quadros]. Jânio exploited Getúlio more than anybody.”

⁴⁰ For retrospective comments by political allies and family members on Vargas’ decision to commit suicide, see *Getúlio, Uma História Oral*, 261-8. His daughter Alzira disputes the claim that her father was a “born suicide” (*um suicida nato*), and insists that he regarded suicide under most circumstances to be “*uma verdadeira covardia*”—a true act of cowardice (p. 263).

⁴¹ Brian Hall, “Undaunted Crazy,” *New York Times*, 21 January 2003, 27.

⁴² Several of the commentators cited above used the specific phrase “*virou a mesa.*” See, for example, Antonio Balbino’s testimony, *Getúlio, Uma História Oral*, 263.

⁴³ For a discussion of Darcy as a sort of “anti-Evita,” see Barbara Weinstein, “Getúlio Vargas, *Diário*, 1937/1942,” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 34, 2 (Winter 1997), 137-141.

⁴⁴ Ferreira, “O carnaval da tristeza,” 62.

⁴⁵ *O Mundo Ilustrado* (1 September 1954) 9.

⁴⁶ The authenticity of Vargas' suicide note is one of the great whodunits in Brazilian history. Oral histories, corroborated by archival evidence, indicate that Vargas crafted several goodbye messages, of various levels of drama and blood, in his last weeks in office. Vargas' speechwriter, José Soares Macedo Filho, likely played a role in crafting the final, hyper-dramatic, suicide note. Vargas' family and close associates have consistently maintained that the *Carta-Testamento* was indeed authored by Vargas. Vargas detractors have claimed that the letter was seriously altered, or outright fabricated, for political gain. If the letter was indeed altered or invented on August 24, the work was done exceedingly quickly and well, as the text was widely circulating on the radio shortly after Vargas was found dead. For the transcription of two of Vargas' *carta-testamentos*, see *As Instituições Brasileiras da Era Vargas*. Maria Celina D'Araújo. ed. (Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ/Editora da FGV, 1999), 161.

⁴⁷ This is *not* to endorse the widely discredited view that the labor legislation embodied in the *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (CLT) was little more than an instrument of social control. For an excellent discussion of this question, see John D. French, “Drowning in Laws but Starving (for Justice?): Brazilian Labor Law and the Workers’ Quest to Realize the Imaginary,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 12 (1998): 181-218.

⁴⁸ For the darker side of the Vargas regime, see novelist Graciliano Ramos' posthumously published memoir of his incarceration on Ilha Grande, *Memórias do Cárcere* (Rio de

Janeiro: José Olympio, 1953); See also Elizabeth Cancelli, *O Mundo da Violência: A Polícia da Era Vargas* (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1993).

⁴⁹ Ângela Maria de Castro Gomes, "Trabalhismo e democracia: o PTB sem Vargas," in *Vargas e a crise dos anos 50*, 133-160.

⁵⁰ Maria Antonieta P. Leopoldi, "O difícil caminho do meio: Estado, burguesia, e industrialização no segundo governo Vargas (1951-1954); see also Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil*, 294-7.

⁵¹ Dulles, *Carlos Lacerda*, 171.

⁵² A full page photo of the death mask, molded by Museu Nacional de Belas Artes sculptor Flori Gama, appeared in the inside cover of *O Mundo Ilustrado* (1 September 1954), 2.

⁵³ Vargas was a regular at the annual Dia do Soldado ceremonies, held at the equestrian statue to the Duke of Caxias (Rio's Largo do Machado, before being moved to the front of the Ministry of War building on Avenida President Vargas). During the Estado Novo, Vargas was also a regular attendee at the grave-side ceremonies to honor the loyalist troops killed in the 1935 uprising known as the Intentona Comunista. The tomb for Emperor Pedro II and wife Christina, inaugurated at the Cathedral Imperial in Petrópolis in 1939, and the ultra-modernist Panteão dos Inconfidentes, installed in the Museu da Inconfidência in 1942, were also funerary monuments well known to Vargas.

⁵⁴ On the long, intimate ties between the Museu Histórico Nacional and Vargas, see, Daryle Williams, "Sobre patronos, heróis, e visitantes: O Museu Histórico Nacional, 1930-1960," *Anais do Museu Histórico Nacional*, 29 (1997): 141-186.

⁵⁵ Museu Histórico Nacional, Rio de Janeiro-Setor do Controle do Patrimônio [hereafter MHN-SCP] 3/55 Dec. 1 Letter from Cincinato Galvão Ferreira to Gustavo Barroso that accompanied transfer of Vargas' bedroom suite, 15 June 1955.

⁵⁶ MHN-Setor do Controle do Patrimônio [hereafter MHN-SCP] 5/59 Doc. 2 Letter from Gustavo Barroso to Alzira Vargas, 21 July 1959.

⁵⁷ Museu Histórico Nacional, Rio de Janeiro-Arquivo Histórico, Arquivo Gustavo Barroso GB avl 15 Série V *Última Hora*, 13 December 1954.

⁵⁸ Museu Histórico Nacional, Rio de Janeiro-Arquivo Permanente [hereafter MHN-AP] *Relatório do Museu Histórico Nacional*, 1955.

⁵⁹ *Anuário Estatístico do Brasil*, 1936-1995.

⁶⁰ To quote Tancredo Neves one more time, he claimed that “Vargas has still not been adequately studied because the Revolution of '64 had an anti-Varguista, anti-Getúlio spirit. Perhaps here the explanation is Freudian, a sort of repression, a resentment, a frustration over Vargas. [The revolution sought] a total rupture with Varguismo . . . As if the history of nations didn't occur through sedimentation, as if it didn't occur through a process of continuity.” *Getúlio, Uma História Oral*, 263.

⁶¹ MHN-AP/Recortes *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio), 5 May 1967.

⁶² Francisco Weffort, “Participação e Conflito Industrial: Contagem e Osasco, 1968,” *Caderno do CEBRAP* 3 (1972).

⁶³ On the *Partido dos Trabalhadores'* break with the corporatist politics of Vargas and the PTB, see Margaret Keck, *The Workers' Party and Democratization in Brazil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). For a study that emphasizes continuities between

getulismo and the PT, see Isabel Ribeiro de Oliveira, *Trabalho e Política: As Origens do Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1988).

⁶⁴ Ângela de Castro Gomes, "A guardiã da memória," *Acervo: Revista do Arquivo Nacional*, 9:1-2 (1996): 22.

⁶⁵ Castro Gomes, "A guardiã da memória," 26-27.

⁶⁶ On Alzira's role in the first Vargas regime, see Weinstein, "Getúlio Vargas, *Diário*," 137-141.

⁶⁷ Alzira Vargas do Amaral Peixoto, *Getúlio Vargas, Meu Pai*. (Rio de Janeiro: Globo, 1960).

⁶⁸ On Celina Vargas do Amaral Peixoto's relationship to the memory of Vargas see her introduction to Vargas', *Diário*, Vol. 1, vii-xiii. On the Memorial in Volta Redonda (the steel town that was the apotheosis of Vargas' developmental nationalism), inaugurated in 1992 and later augmented by Celina's donations, visit: <<http://www.portalvr.com/portal/cultura/memorial/index.php>>.

⁶⁹ The repeated statements by then-president Cardoso that the Vargas era had ended provoked a significant popular and academic response. The public discussion included a great deal of vocalized wondering about the possible meanings of Cardoso's statement, given the omnipresence of the Vargas state within the interstices of national and everyday life in Brazil, as well as the widespread indifference to Vargas as a palpable national legacy. For a discussion of the persistence of the Vargas state, see Helena Bomeny, "Três Decretos e um Ministério: A Propósito da Educação no Estado Novo," in *Repensando o Estado Novo*, org. Dulce Pandolfi (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da FGV, 1999): 137-166.

⁷⁰ On comparisons between the novel, the Globo miniseries, and the actual events of August 1954, see Mônica Almeida Kornis, "Agosto e agostos: a história na mídia," in *Vargas e a crise dos anos 50*, 97-112.

⁷¹ Curated by the well-known designer Gisela Magalhães, *A Ventura Republicana* is a misguided gesture towards a re/de-sacralization of the national historical memory. The installation is, nonetheless, well worth the visit. Visit: <http://www.museudarepublica.org.br/Indice/ndxexposicoes.html>.

⁷² *Eu, Getúlio* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu da República, 1999).

⁷³ The idea that he was the only individual capable of keeping the Brazilian nation together, and the burden this imposed on him, was a longstanding theme in Vargas' private writings. See Weinstein, "Getúlio Vargas, *Diário*," 137-141.