

MARIA YEDDA LEITE LINHARES (1921-2011)

Maria Yedda Leite Linhares was above all an educator of people. Her joy, her great happiness was to have around her young people with whom she could talk – always in an equal manner, seeking in each of them a talent, a vocation. Through her classrooms and her research offices generations passed. The first of these included names such as Arthur and Hugo Weiss, Valentina Rocha Lima, Francisco Falcon and Helena Lewin. A second group was added to these, formed by the young Ciro Cardoso, Barbara Levy, José Luis Werneck da Silva, Norma Fraga and Berenice Brandão. And so came the irresistible vocation to participate, to ‘live in the world,’ and make changes: the political and social struggles took shape, and so it would be throughout her life: fighting against the oligarchies, against the ‘waiverers,’ against the bureaucracies and the old worn out academic leaders. Her participation in the struggles of her time would lead her in 1964 to live every day in the heart of the crisis of modern Brazil.

Against all advice, including the good sense and wisdom of Dr. José Linhares, or as she simply insisted ‘José.’ Nothing could be done, it was her nature. She was born this way. There in Ceará on 3 November 1921. She was born – to use the expression of the poet she loved so much – to be ‘*gauche* in life.’ As a young girl, against the will of her parents, she placed an enormous red ribbon in her hair to see the passing of the revolutionary troops who entered Calçamento de Messejana to capture Fortaleza in 1930. There she consolidated her vocation: rebel, stubborn, willful, humane and generous.

With her family, following the tracks of the world crisis that had caused the price of cotton to collapse, she moved to Porto Alegre. She spent little time there. She suffered an ear infection, which would later martyrize her life and her vanity. She moved to Rio. Here in the federal capital the space and the social networks opened which allowed Maria Yedda be the woman who marked her epoch. Self-taught with unreadable handwriting, she adapted badly to the school run by nuns, São Paulo in Ipanema. She studied even more, especially Portuguese – which became an obsession and almost robbed her from us for journalism – and history, naturally. In the 1938 Education Marathon she achieved first place, with the prize being the only book she never lent to any of us: *História Geral*, by Varnhagen.

The creation of the Universidade do Distrito Federal (UDF) facilitated her ascension to the course of ‘philosophy’ – understood much more as a humanist course for the formation of teachers. There she met the friends who would mark her life. Such as Dr. Anísio Teixeira, a powerful presence, she learned and

believed throughout her life that only lay and public education for all would change the country. There she also found her friend for life, Darcy Ribeiro – which does not mean in any form that they did not fight like cats and dogs. As a young student she met in the classroom or in meetings and debates, men such as Hermes Lima, Brochado da Rocha, San Thiago Dantas – all young professors and opponents of the Vargas dictatorship. Yedda would listen, learn and prepare to participate.

Finally she witnessed the overthrow of UDF, the coup of the *Estado Novo* and the imprisonment of Pedro Ernesto and his young professors.

Her excellence in Portuguese, known to everyone at that moment, led her to become close to a severe American responsible for the education of the staff of Dasp. It was the arrival in Brazil of the good neighborly policy. Maria Yedda went to the United States young, courageous and alone. A phenomenon in her time, she studied in Barnard College, in the University of Columbia.

Nothing would be the same after this. I believe that even the love and gratitude she would come to have for France would never equal her admiration for the United States. Alone and needing to live, she became, once again, a teacher of Portuguese to Americans and afterwards, in English, a commentator on university radio.

She forged ties of friendship with a generation of exiles from the Spanish Civil War, hated Franco and heard the reports of the atrocities of a rising fascism. She came to know American and Spanish poetry and the glamorous art of an insurgent Mexico. She loved Lorca, went to Radio City Hall and fell in love with the young Frank Sinatra. Her English became fluent, and she loved to recite poetry in it. She never loved Shakespeare, but she would always be fascinated by the sonority of Walt Whitman.

Then came the war and the decision to return to Brazil. Three days by plane, from airport to airport, in the Caribbean with the pilot chasing a German submarine. Rio had changed, Brazil was tied of the native dictatorship. He returned to university, to FnFi in what was now called the Universidade do Brasil, the glorious university in which she would be the youngest female chair.

She built a friendship with Delgado de Carvalho, the Dean of Modern and Contemporary History. More than this, she met José, a young law student, who would bring her even more into the heart of the crisis, marrying and living with the actors of power. Also date from this time is her friendship with and respect for Alzira Vargas – it did not matter that it was opposition, it was just and only Alzirinha. She would never forget the disobedience of Commandant Amaral Peixoto, the father of our 'Free France,' Niterói!

She became a founder of UNE and the first director of its Cultural Department: she loved the theater, including young black theater, the cultural journals and debates. Perhaps it was this that Yedda most liked. Debate. Heated. Alive. Multiple. She was at the front of the demonstrations calling on Brazil to enter the world war, against all forms of fascism. There she is – in a memorable photo –, in the first line, her arms linked with Marighella! The Reuters’ office in Cinelândia would become her own office, where she read at first hand the telegrams which reported the war – I believe that there, international policy and contemporary history bloomed as a vocation. She would become for always and from the bottom of her heart a supporter of Botafogo. The so-called Botafogo boys, with João Saldanha at the front, would be her partners on walks along the then narrow pavements of Copacabana.

Marriage must have been balanced with her revolutionary vocation; however, I believe it was Dr. José who became used to living with the turnabouts. Calm, a sagacious observer, he advised, asked and always, always, was by her side. During every crisis we would repeat the same thing: “Girl, do not say anything, wait to hear...”. Useless, Yedda was not a woman for waiting. She acted. Often in the right direction, guided by her instinct against all injustice. Often she precipitated, however she was never unjust. Most often she only harmed herself.

From her marriage she had Maria Teresa, (Teca), and José, (Zequinha). She was proud of her children, she saw herself in them, felt for them. One of her greatest revolts was to see them involved in the insidious and false campaign of the coup supporting press in March 1964. I believe that both paid some price – the price of being the children of Yedda, the price of the stolen hours, the price of sharing her with all of us, with me, with Ciro Cardoso, and principally with Francisco Falcon. We have to ask pardon for this, pardon for her having had so much time with us! To all of this was added the presence of Yonne Leite, another motive of pride for Yedda, who saw her, with everything that this involved, much more as a daughter than a sister.

In her house the old Virginia looked after everyone, including the task of feeding her staring assistants, including the insistent Falcon.

Along came the public competition, exams, ceremonies, gowns and hoods. She replaced Delgado de Carvalho as chair: this was the day she cried most in her life. She did not want the chair, much less ‘that chair’ – she would fight for the rest of her life to change the university. Falcon was her principal companion in work, in loyalty and intellectual debates. Whole books were read and reviewed by telephone every night.

The times were of lead, the air was gritty and the ground fugitive. Yedda flirted with the PCBR, respected and listen to Apolônio de Carvalho, had Renée as a friend. She supported the Minister of Education and became director of Rádio MEC. Desperate, without any time, negotiating and putting together a work teach, she asked Eduardo Portella to write her inauguration speech, telling her what she wanted to say over the telephone. At her side as her loyal squire was our Sandra Ribeiro da Costa, strong, without subtlety, and capable of protecting her, including from herself.

She used the space of Rádio MEC for culture, moving away from the unhealthy FnFi atmosphere of those days. She loved opera and erudite music, of which she became an aficionado, often having Ciro Cardoso as an interlocutor. She only hated Ravel's *Bolero*. She gave Roberto Carlos his first job in Rio on the actual radio. New faces surrounded her, especially Alberto Coelho, a friend who would be a consolation and permanent source of updating and news.

Then came the worst: the 'alarmed forces,' as José would say, took power. The 'ongoing Brazilian Revolution,' as her friends from Iseb would say, was made of paper. Yedda put the radio in a 'campaign for legality.' The consequences would be terrible. Imprisonments, impeachments, compulsory retirements. Maria Yedda would be indicted in 11 IPMs; she would be accused in the media, she would be trampled on by many. It mattered little, she knew what to do.

She wanted to protect friends – warned Falcon, due to the new history project. She would spend some time abroad and would be at the front of the resistance. In her apartment on *Cinco de Julho* the Passeata dos Cem Mil was organized – Vladimir, Gabeira and Jean Marc were there. The air became unbreathable. The imprisonments followed... Taken from hospital, she was brought to 1 RCC. It was the time to leave. Fernand Braudel and Jean-Paul Sartre wrote to the President-General demanding her release.

The exile would be in France. First Paris, where she would meet Ciro Cardoso and all those who were there, and afterwards Toulouse-Le Mirail, where Jacques Godechot and Bartolomé Bennassar accepted her with affection and respect. She met and won respect from everyone: from early on Albert Soboul and his friend Frédéric Mauro.

Finally, the marriage of Maria Teresa and the birth of Patrícia, her first grandchild, were the limit: she wanted to return. She forced her way back, before the 1976 amnesty. The pressure was tremendous, forcing her into an

internal exile in Vassouras, preventing all research and teaching in public entities.

With her return the networks of sociability, friends and projects were reorganized. First CPDA, in Horto Florestal, where she opened the field of studies in agrarian history, then UFF – alongside Eulália Lobo and Aidyl Preis – and finally the return home, to UFRJ. She built around her a new generation, of whom João Fragoso and Hebe Mattos are the most loved.

Finally, re-democratization: Yedda still accepted challenges. First, Municipal Secretary of Education, afterwards twice State Secretary of Education. Finally, alongside Darcy Ribeiro, she built the legacy of Dr. Anísio Teixeira. The *Cieps, Brizolões* – the most generous and egalitarian proposal of education the country has produced – they are actually the modern version of Escola-Parque.

Other friends would come: Laurinda, Lia Faria, Edilberto, Maria Lucia Kamache, Silas – all with the same dream: “Education for all, public, lay and of a high quality.” At her side as a support, critic and friends, she had the permanent presence of Paulo Sérgio Duarte, another beloved son. ‘Schools, schools for all’ was the key to the construction of a better Brazil.

This is a little of Maria Yedda, only a little because so few people have managed to live so much in a single life. Today I am not sad, I do not want to be sad. For Yedda I have only one remembrance, a title of a Pablo Neruda poem: I confess that I have lived!

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