

discurso académico con lo que teníamos al frente, pero creo que ése no era el objetivo de nuestro autor.

No obstante, toda la vitalidad de Efraín, toda su locuacidad y rapidez mental, no fueron suficientes para evitar que los negros nubarrones que se ciernen sobre los espíritus libres lo oprimieran por dentro, al punto de poner en peligro su integridad. Eran los años oscuros de la guerra interna en el Perú, cuando las condiciones de vida de todos eran precarias y todos los augurios nefastos parecían cumplirse, en medio del desangramiento de un pueblo y el colapso de la economía. Le costó salir del hoyo pero lo hizo. Salió dañado sin embargo. Decidió fugar hacia delante, encajar su pasión por el fútbol y su labia enjundiosa con su saber de historiador. Diseñó un personaje público que llegó a ser “famoso”. A la hora de su muerte los diarios debieron precisar que el conocido comentarista deportivo también era historiador.

Un encargo de la Municipalidad de Lima para escribir una pequeña biografía del primer alcalde de la ciudad devolvió su prosa a las prensas. Tuve la suerte de prologar su librito, que salió hace menos de un año, como en 1983 cuando reseñé su libro sobre Lucas el encomendero, una de las pocas veces que he publicado reseñas en mi carrera y atiné a escribir algo sobre ese estupendo trabajo. Por eso me cuesta saber que ya no está.

Es bueno que en un espacio académico como éste se conmemore la vida de una persona que supo hacer de nuestro oficio parte indelible de su vida. Alguien que puso el sello personal en la obra, que hizo del estilo el método. Que supo comprometerse con las gentes cuya historia estudiaba, seguir los pulsos vitales de los personajes. Que vino a dejarse la piel en los renglones que escribió. Ésa también es una buena lección para los estudiantes que se forman para ser historiadores.

Gracias por lo que nos diste y nos dejaste, descansa en paz querido amigo Efraín.

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Emília Viotti da Costa (1928–2017)

When Emília Viotti da Costa passed away on November 2, 2017, at the age of 89, the world lost a scientific poet of the past whose research, writing, and mentorship epitomized the best of the historical profession. She spent 13 years, from 1956 to 1969, at the University of São Paulo (USP), rising to tenured

professor, followed by 25 years at Yale University (1973–98). In dozens of essays and three major books, Emília produced landmark research in the comparative history of New World slavery—as well as revolutionizing established understandings of the history of Brazil, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

History writing at its best, Emília believed, joined the strengths of literature—in its capacity to move the reader—with the social scientific search for causal explanation. Like her mother Zilda, Emília had been an early and avid reader of fiction; she forsook her first love, physics, to take history and geography at USP in 1948. At this new university, founded with French assistance in 1936, Emília was trained in the *Annales* tradition by visiting French professors, followed by a year of doctoral research in Paris in 1953–54. Married at 18 and eventually a mother of three, Emília in her 30s was already a cosmopolitan figure, having traveled much of Europe, South America, and the Brazilian port cities from Santos to the Amazon.

Irreverent in spirit, Emília is described by younger Brazilian colleagues as a “historiadora pioneira, estudante contestadora, docente engajada.” A “pesquisadora contumaz,” she was also, they emphasize, a “mulher combativa” with a “carreira de mulher dona do seu nariz, quando isso era desusado.” Recalling her 21 years of association with the USP history department, they hailed her “fervor rebelde e radicalmente crítico,” a teacher who was “instigante, polêmica e profundamente generosa.” Above all, she contributed—directly and by example—to the establishment of a sounder epistemological foundation for Brazilian historiography.¹ The writing of history in Brazil till then had been characterized by the absence of archival research, an erudite and ornate amateurism, and a narrow focus on “political appearances” and the “spectacle of events” (*histoire événementielle*, in Fernand Braudel’s terms). The 1950s and 1960s saw a wave of “methodological renovation” among historians, enriched in a dialogue with the social sciences. Summing up this revolution, Brazilian historian Francisco Iglesias cited Emília as exemplifying this “renovating tendency,” which sought to grasp the totality of the historical process and the dynamics of institutions while encompassing hitherto-ignored actors such as slaves and subsistence agriculturalists.²

After returning from Paris, the promising young historian abandoned her original dissertation topic on the *ancién* regime nobility after the French

1. Zilda Márcia Gricoli Iokoi, “Apresentação,” in *Cerimônia de outorga do título de Professor Emerito: Profa. Dra. Emília Viotti da Costa* (São Paulo: SDI/FFLCH/USP, 2002), 7; Angela Alonso, “A senhora da história,” *Pesquisa FAPESP*, no. 244 (2016): 95.

2. Francisco Iglesias, “A historiografia da América Latina,” *Revista de Historia de América*, no. 75–76 (1973): 57–73.

Revolution. Staying with the nineteenth century, she plunged into big questions—never before asked—about the Brazilian empire’s slaveholding monarchy. For her 1964 dissertation and field-defining 1966 monograph *Da senzala à colônia*, she focused on the surprisingly rapid disaggregation, without civil war, of a slavery system that had lasted 350 years without challenge. Completed under the light oversight of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, her bold book reflected the broader international debates regarding the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe and the dizzying contemporary impact of classic Western colonialism’s liquidation, which heightened nationalist stirrings in Latin America. As with many of the best USP history dissertations between 1951 and 1973, Emília’s work engaged with questions raised by Brazil’s pioneering Marxist historian Caio Prado Júnior and partook of a larger international dialogue with North Atlantic intellectuals ranging from Lucien Febvre, Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Jean-Paul Sartre, Stanley Stein, and E. P. Thompson.³

The very year that *Da senzala à colônia* appeared, the young US Brazilianist Richard Graham published an article on landowners and Brazilian emancipation without, as he would later remark, realizing that Emília had already made the same point in her book. In a major 1970 review essay, Graham offered a thorough introduction to the remarkable historical investigations into slavery at USP and cited Emília’s impressive use of primary sources and nuanced judgments. He hailed *Da senzala à colônia* as “one of the most important works to emerge” from USP. It was in the experience of slavery that Emília, along with sociologists including Fernando Henrique Cardoso, sought to find the “meaning of the Brazilian past and the explanation of its present condition.”⁴

The scholarly judgment remains consistently positive for a monograph that has been dubbed seminal, classic, iconic, and indispensable. “Viotti’s reading of the sources remains, even today, exemplary,” French slavery historian Jean Hébrard noted in 2013, adding that “implicit in her work are most of the themes that would be explored and brought to light by the generation that followed.”⁵ The book continues to be praised for showing “slaves to be

3. Maria Helena Rolim Capelato, Raquel Glezer, and Vera Lúcia Amaral Ferlini, “Escola uspiana de história,” *Estudos Avançados* 8, no. 22 (1994): 352–53; Maria Alice Rosa Ribeiro, “Uma homenagem a Emília Viotti da Costa (1928–2017),” *História Econômica e História de Empresas* 20, no. 2 (2017): 511–22.

4. Richard Graham, “Brazilian Slavery Re-examined: A Review Article,” *Journal of Social History* 3, no. 4 (1970): 434, 438.

5. Jean M. Hébrard, “Slavery in Brazil: Brazilian Scholars in the Key Interpretive Debates,” *Translating the Americas* 1 (2013): 56.

historical subjects” with “nuance and complexity” and for its author’s vigorous denunciations of racism and careful deconstruction of the myth of racial democracy, an ideal dear to white Brazilian elite fantasies.⁶

In the fecund decade of the 1960s, Emília’s technical expertise and startling originality combined seamlessly with the fearlessness of a generational vision that sought to remake Brazil on new, more just, and autonomous foundations. Emerging from the reformism of the late Populist Republic, intellectuals felt even greater social responsibility after the 1964 military coup and dictatorship, which lasted far longer than anyone expected. The exercise of Emília’s “moral integrity,” as a public participant in 1968 debates over a proposed university reform, would lead to her firing the next year along with other USP faculty, including Brazil’s future president Cardoso.⁷ This was followed by her brief detention in 1970 and subsequent indictment and trial, along with some of her undergraduate students, on charges of subversion. Although absolved by a military court in 1971, Emília was left unemployed, persecuted, and barred from the teaching that she loved so much. Soon to be legally separated and with three children, two of them underage, Emília was forced to uproot herself, taking short-term positions at Tulane University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Smith College, where in 1972–73 she met her devoted lifelong partner, US historian R. Jackson Wilson.

With her life upended, Emília spent her early 40s contending stoically with trauma and loss in a country whose government had supported the dictatorship that persecuted her. She also had to master US myths and protocols while learning to think and write in a language of which she did not have mastery. It was a brutal transition, but she overcame the obstacles because of her “tenacidade vital, existencial,” as Fernando Novais put it.⁸

Even before being granted tenure at Yale, Emília had taken over responsibility—aided over the years by junior colleagues including Peter Winn and Daniel James—for mentoring “outstanding historians who now teach and train historians in major graduate programmes in the United States (such as Yale, Wisconsin, Duke, New York University),” as the historian Marshall Eakin

6. João José Reis and Herbert S. Klein, “Slavery in Brazil,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American History*, ed. Jose C. Moya (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 182. For more on Emília’s take on Brazilian racial democracy, see Emília Viotti da Costa, “The Myth of Racial Democracy: A Legacy of the Empire,” in *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 234–46.

7. Fernando Antonio Novais, “Discurso de saudação,” in *Cerimônia de outorga*, 10.

8. Novais, 10.

has noted.⁹ While engaging in the controversies involving Eugene Genovese, Robert William Fogel, and Stanley Engerman over American slavery, Emília continued to produce innovative essays such as “Slave Images and Realities” (1977). Yet her focus on slavery had never been exclusive or driven by programmatic adherence to history from the bottom up, which she viewed as an essential but incomplete project. She was driven by a holistic concern over rulers and those whom they ruled so as to better understand how, despite asymmetries of power, each influenced the other as socioeconomic systems, institutions, and political ideologies evolved.

As the field of comparative slavery waned, Emília’s intellectual impact was widening, with influential studies of independence and nineteenth-century liberalism. Her chapters in the now classic *From Colony to Nation* (1975), edited by A. J. R. Russell-Wood, earned praise from senior scholars such as C. R. Boxer, Ron Seckinger, and Rollie Popino. The essays that would comprise her field-defining *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (1985) originated during her USP heyday and appeared first in a Portuguese edition in 1977. The English-language collection of these tightly integrated essays—some explicitly comparative—had been rewritten, in English, by Emília specifically for a US and North Atlantic audience. Reviewers praised the “refreshing quality” and “originality” of these wide-ranging essays, while more than one cited “the enduring value and soundness of Costa’s scholarship.”¹⁰ Having established the “standard interpretive themes in the field,” the book was republished in 2000 with a new essay on women—“a fitting tribute,” one leading Brazilianist rightly deemed, “to a historian who has helped transform the history of the Brazilian Empire and the history of Latin America over the past four decades.”¹¹

In her 40s and 50s, Emília devoted herself to an entirely new intrainperial project on the transatlantic world of slavery and evangelical Protestantism in England and the Caribbean. In its own way, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood* (1994) thoughtfully reflected on the contemporary ideological and material processes glossed as globalization while engaging questions of alterity and cultural

9. Marshall C. Eakin, “Brazilian Historical Writing,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 5, *Historical Writing since 1945*, ed. Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 446.

10. Stanley Stein, review of *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories*, by Emília Viotti da Costa, *American Historical Review* 92, no. 5 (1987): 1311–12; Neill Macaulay, review of *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories*, by Emília Viotti da Costa, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 67, no. 2 (1987): 360.

11. Marshall C. Eakin, “Expanding the Boundaries of Imperial Brazil,” *Latin American Research Review* 37, no. 3 (2002): 267.

difference. It examined the 1823 revolt in Demerara (today Guyana). A rebellion of 7,000–10,000 slaves, it was the least understood of the three late rebellions in the English-speaking Caribbean. Her account was quickly recognized as the definitive study by US, English, Caribbean, and Caribbeanist historians. They hailed its sophisticated handling of an “immensely rich body of primary sources” and the subtlety and nuance of its analysis, which made it an “impressively significant contribution to the historiography.”¹² Having himself consulted the “chaotic and daunting” primary source material, the senior slavery comparativist David Brion Davis judged this “brilliant” masterpiece of “exhaustive detail” “the best single study we have of a slave revolt.”¹³

“Emília’s understanding of the relationship of history and politics,” Daniel James wrote in the afterword to her 2001 Festschrift, was expressed “nowhere more powerfully than in her extraordinary book on the Demerara slave rebellion of 1823.” Comparing *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood* to E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), James linked Emília’s achievement to her “profound belief in history and its potential intelligibility,” which entailed, as he explained sympathetically, “a commitment to what I think she would not be averse to calling ‘grand narrative,’” a commitment that reflected her “fundamental belief in narrative form and its political potential.”¹⁴ It is this commitment that demonstrates Emília’s understanding of the poetry of history and its ability, at its best, to move the reader. As a narrator, Emília crafted fully realized characters on all sides, which not only enhanced readers’ understanding but allowed them to identify with the characters.

Reviewers of *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood* agreed that her masterpiece was “vividly and beautifully written,” a “remarkable story . . . told in stunning prose.”¹⁵ Among the “outstanding achievements” of this “extraordinarily moving” book, Franklin Knight suggested, was that it was “eminently readable” and accessible to the general public. “Above all it illustrates how language, meaning, and intention became tragically confusing obstacles in a situation in

12. Edward L. Cox, review of *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*, by Emília Viotti da Costa, *African American Review* 31, no. 1 (1997): 140; Franklin W. Knight, review of *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*, by Emília Viotti da Costa, *American Historical Review* 100, no. 5 (1995): 1733.

13. David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 383n33.

14. Daniel James, “Afterword: A Final Reflection on the Political,” in *Reclaiming the Political in Latin American History: Essays from the North*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 358.

15. Alida C. Metcalf, review of *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*, by Emília Viotti da Costa, *Ethnohistory* 43, no. 2 (1996): 369–70.

which everyone was a stranger in a strange land.”¹⁶ English historian Catherine Hall especially appreciated how vividly “the people who lived there [are] dramatically evoked,” on all sides, and especially Emília’s careful attention “to the different narratives of her historical actors, the specific meaning words had when spoken from different positions, [and] the ways in which these stories ‘are commentaries on their present experiences, memories of a past willed to them by their ancestors, and anticipations of a future they wish to create.’”¹⁷ As James shows beautifully, it is her command of the literary craft of narration that gives exceptional power to the work’s most powerful and emotionally wrenching scene: the killing of Quamina.

Some historians write above all for the past, whether to document, clarify, or explain, while others write for the present, driven by the pressing urgency of weighing in, clarifying, and affecting their world. Eschewing the Scylla of antiquarianism and the Charybdis of presentism, Emília Viotti da Costa’s steadfast vision of the historical enterprise derived from her awareness, following T. S. Eliot, “not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.” Eliot spoke of tradition not as an inheritance but as something only achieved “by great labour” because the writer is “not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.”¹⁸ Echoing her favorite historian Eric Hobsbawm, Emília liked to say that tradition not only was invented but had to be reinvented over and over again as part of the evolving dialectic between social mythology and the writing of history. Dr. Emília Viotti da Costa was indeed one of the tallest trees in the forest of historians.

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16. Knight, review of *Crowns of Glory*, 1733–34.

17. Catherine Hall, “Race-ing Imperial Histories,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 41 (1996): 278.

18. T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 43–44, 53.