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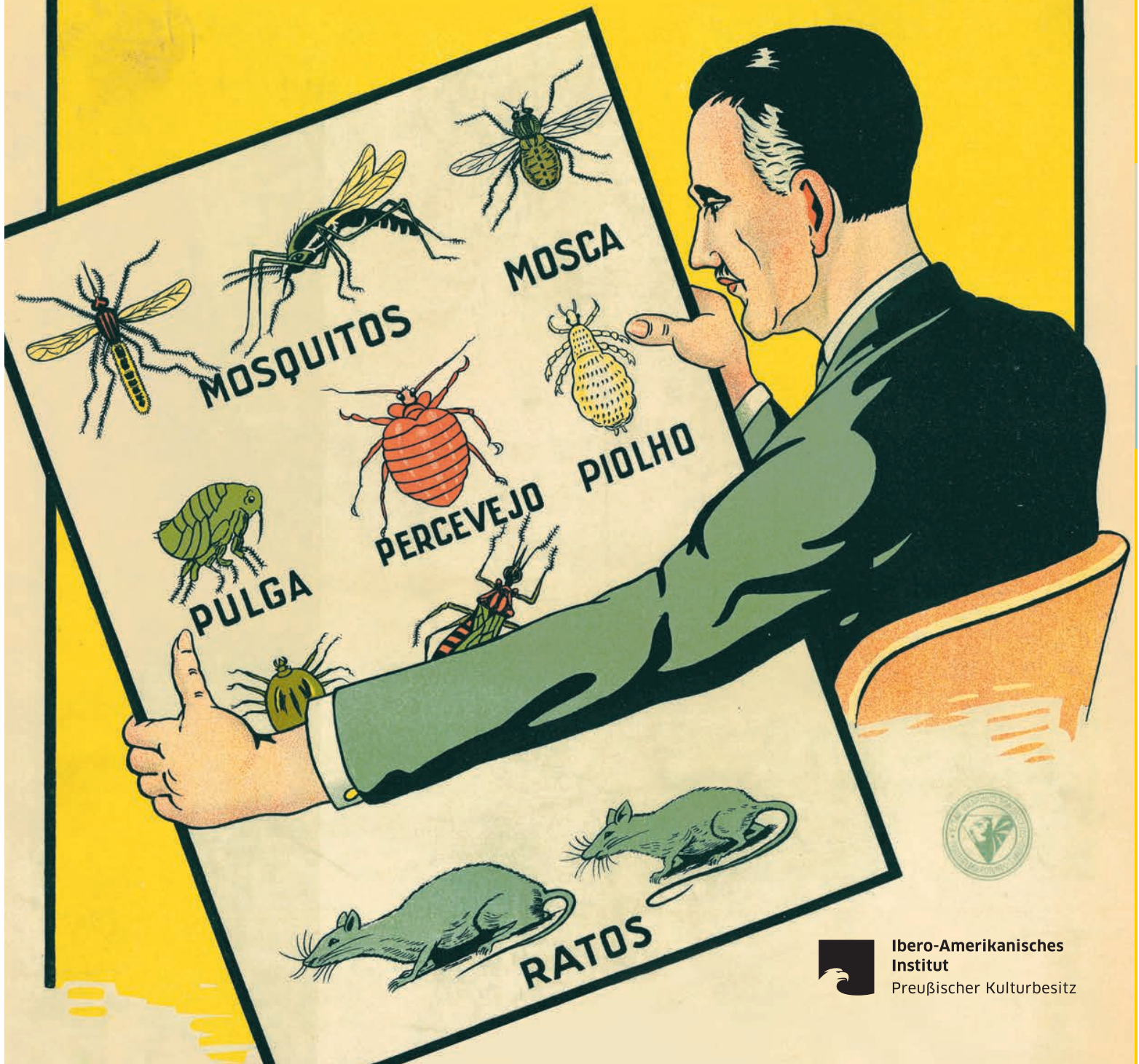
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# POPULARIZAÇÃO DA POLÍTICA DE SAÚDE NA ERA VARGAS

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Ibero-Amerikanisches  
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**Ibero-Amerikanisches  
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# REPRESENTING PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION THROUGH IMAGES IN 1930S BRAZIL

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The corpus of academic literature that is dedicated to the “first” Getulio Vargas era administration (1930-1945) is extensive, and the series of reforms that his government undertook to usher in the period of Estado Varguista has been well-documented. Some studies have focused on educational reforms, industrialization, political fractures, while others have highlighted the creation of sustainable public health infrastructure. The Vargas administration relied on the media like many other populist governments in Latin America to communicate with its audiences. However, this study aims to explore how Brazilian authorities implemented specific policy objectives in public health education using the print media's vivid and catchy imagery.<sup>1</sup>

First, the Vargas administration used different modes to convey critical public health messages geared towards the diverse masses in various parts of the nation and to different audiences such as healthcare workers, educators, and the general multi-ethnic population. The sheer geographic distances, cultural hybridities, and disparate economic development in various regions presented the Brazilian State with a formidable task of creating and organizing comprehensive and cohesive public health and sanitary education policies. These policies went hand in hand, as both education and public health were interlinked domains for controlling epidemics. Second, the messages that were to be conveyed needed to be like today's tweets (twits), with limited yet effective short phrases and catchy imagery.

In this short essay, I plan to address several issues, such as what are some of these resources that can allow us to examine the postulate of visual imagery as a tool

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1 Hochman, Gilberto. “Cambio político y reformas de la salud pública en Brasil. El primer gobierno Vargas (1930-1945)” [Political changes and public health reforms in Brazil. The first Vargas government (1930-1945)]. *Dynamis (Granada, Spain)* vol. 25 (2005): 199-226, table of contents.

for communication? What were some of the changes that were ushered in Brazil during the Vargas era that could have mandated using such posters and other print items? Third, what were places these posters could have been utilized to reinforce further the messages that the State had intended?

The epidemics that the Vargas administration was trying to control have been part and parcel of Brazilian topos even before the arrival of the first Europeans on the continent. Also, the Jesuits had to deal with these tropical diseases, as noted by S.J. Serafim Leite in *Cartas dos primeiros jesuitas do brasil* (Leite 1954:453 vol. III).<sup>2</sup> The different epidemics in Brazil of XVI, XVII, XVIII, and XIX centuries provided first the colonial administrators, then the imperial and republican governments opportunities to devise strategies piecemeal to confront these diseases. John Luccock, in his 1820 book, “Notes on Rio de Janeiro and the Southern Parts of Brazil,” mentions Yellow Fever.<sup>3</sup> which became a persistent epidemic from 1850 to the 1950s that continued to represent a consistent challenge.<sup>4</sup> However, one cannot relate 20th-century pandemics in Brazil to the earlier epidemic events. Industrialization and increased urbanization, coupled with uneven socio-economic development, created suitable conditions for epidemics like chickenpox (Varicella/Varicella), tuberculosis, and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases like Syphilis. The availability of vaccines was nothing new in early 20th century Brazil. However,

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2 Leite, Serafim. 1956. *Cartas dos primeiros jesuitas do Brasil*. São Paulo: Comissão do IV Centenario da Cidade de São Paulo.

3 Luccock, John. 1820. *Notes on Rio de Janeiro, and the southern parts of Brazil*. P.133

4 Benchimol, Jaime. „Yellow Fever Vaccine in Brazil: Fighting a Tropical Scourge, Modernising the Nation.“ In *The Politics of Vaccination: A Global History*, edited by Holmberg Christine, Blume Stuart, and Greenough Paul, 174-208. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. Accessed May 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wn0s1m.13>.

the skepticism about the effectiveness of immunization manifested in 1904 as a well-documented revolt. The revolt was primarily against the mandatory vaccination against Variola (Revolta de Vacina). A caricature from the journal *O Malho* by Leonidas Freire, depicted in image 1 below, presents an artistic impression of the revolt.<sup>5</sup> Oswaldo Gonçalves Cruz, the head of the Public Health Department, recommended the Alves administration the mandatory immunization against Variola. The bill was contested, and the opposition to it generated discontent and a popular revolt in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>6</sup>



Image 1: “Espetaculo para breve nas ruas desta cidade: Oswaldo Cruz, o Napoleão da seringa e lanceta, à frente de suas forças obrigatorias, será recebido e manifestado com denodo pela população. O interessante dos combates deixará a perder de vista o das batalhas de flores e da guerra russo-japoneza. E veremos no fim da festa quem será o vaccinador, á força!”. Leonidas Freire (1882-1943) - *O Malho*, nº 111, 29/10/1904

In the case of Brazil, efforts to convey public health messages through print media were tried even before the Vargas government’s re-envisioning of public health propaganda through images.<sup>7</sup> For example, searching for keywords like “Variola” in the newspaper’s digital archive, “O Estado de São Paulo,” yields several hundred results. The distribution of the term “Variola” in image 1 shows that before the ascension of Vargas (1910-1920), “Variola” was mentioned more frequently than during all other

5 Leonidas Freire (1882 - 1943) - *O Malho*, nº 111, 29/10/1904  
 6 Sevckenko, Nicolau. 1984. *A revolta da vacina: mentes insanas em corpos rebeldes*. São Paulo, Brasil: Brasiliense  
 7 De Castro-Santos, Luiz A. 1990. *Power, ideology and public health in Brazil, 1889-1930*. Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI.

years. Although the search, as shown in image 2, may appear as a simple keyword search for “Variola”, the frequency of its appearance tells us an interesting story: The increased frequency of the word Variola in the search can be correlated to the increased focus of the Vargas administration on Variola and the vaccination against it.

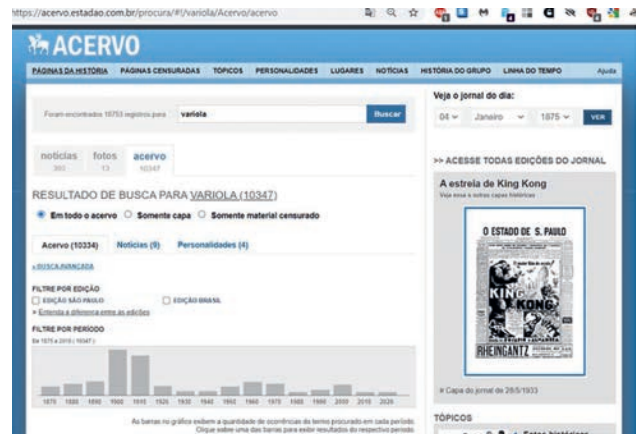


Image 2: The landing page O Estado de S Paulo shows the keyword “Variola” from 1870-2020.

Another example is image 3: a headline that reads, “A Variola em São Paulo,” as shown below in the August 14, 1926 issue of “Folha da Manhã.” The news piece reports that the “Serviço Sanitário” (Health Services) states that the vaccination is a patriotic duty and a legal obligation: By appealing to patriotism, the public health authorities created a moral obligation to emphasize the importance of a vaccination in order to minimize the chances of a Variola epidemic.

Variola is quoted here as one example of an epidemic that the Brazilian public health authorities tried to deal with even before Getulio Vargas’ presidency; then what was so different about the public health reforms that his administration implemented? A comprehensive overview



Image 3: A landing page of Folha da Manhã from August 14, 1926

of these reforms has been provided by Gilberto Hochman in his 2005 work, “Cambio político y reformas de la salud pública en Brasil. El primer gobierno Vargas (1930-1945).”<sup>8</sup> First, the global financial crisis also affected the Brazilian “agricultural” countryside, increasing migration from the countryside to larger urban centers. The migrants came looking for a better life and work opportunities. The increased urbanization in light of ongoing industrialization led to the emergence of large concentrated areas of dwellings, favelas of lower socio-economic classes. The lack of essential sanitary services and relevant infrastructure meant higher probabilities of spreading common infectious diseases. A case in point is the research by M. Eakin regarding the industrialization and urbanization of Belo Horizonte, illustrating the nuanced trajectories of social changes in the Minas Gerais region.<sup>9</sup> The author argues that Brazil is an example of late but gradually successful industrialization in the global south where sectors like mining, textile manufacturing began to emerge and co-exist with the agricultural sectors like coffee production.<sup>10</sup> Pereira traces the beginning of industrialization in the 1930s, understanding the Revolution of the 1930s a period of intense transformation.<sup>11</sup> The Brazilian government had to contend and contest the traditional interests of the middle class and thus turned to the urban proletariat.<sup>12</sup> To secure the support of the emerging industrial workers, the Vargas government came up with the “new health policies.” The details of the new health policies are described in several works, including that of André Luiz Vieira.<sup>13</sup> These health policies consisted of the vigorous use of various posters related to different diseases.

The visual cues provided by the public health posters offer insights into the mindset of their creators. The use of specific keywords or terms with suggestive graphics is usually subservient to the goals and objectives of their creators and intended use. These posters were created by

8 Hochman Gilberto. 2005. “Cambio Político Y Reformas De La Salud Pública En Brasil. El Primer Gobierno Vargas (1930-1945).” *Dynamis* (Granada Spain) 199–226

9 Eakin, M. 2016. *Tropical Capitalism: the Industrialization of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 1897-1997*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

10 Eakin, M. 2016. *Tropical Capitalism: the Industrialization of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 1897-1997*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan p.14

11 Pereira, L., 2020. *Development and crisis in Brazil, 1930-1983*. [Place of publication not identified]: Routledge.

12 Pereira, L., 2020. *Development and crisis in Brazil, 1930-1983*. [Place of publication not identified]: Routledge.

13 Campos, André Luiz Vieira de. 2006. *Políticas internacionais de saúde na Era Vargas: o Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública, 1942-1960*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Editora Fiocruz.

the Serviço Nacional de Educação Sanitária of Bahia. The majority of the analyzed posters come from the collections of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut.

For example, in a 1930 poster titled, “Transmissão das doenças pelas vias respiratorias,” shown in image 4 below, we see pictures of two men. Various utterances of the names of infectious diseases emanate from their mouths, illustrating the respiratory transmissions of multiple conditions. It would have been an incentive if the poster had also promoted the use of masks. Nevertheless, it is important to note that we are examining posters that were created over ninety years ago, and we are looking back at them dislocated from their original purpose of use.



Image 4: Transmissão das doenças pelas vias respiratorias<sup>14</sup>

14 “Transmissão Das Doenças Pelas Vias Respiratorias.” 1930. São Paulo: Estab. Graphico “Bomsuccesso”. 1930. [https://digital.iai.spk-berlin.de/viewer/resolver?identifier=IAI0000554100000000&field=MD\\_IAIPURL](https://digital.iai.spk-berlin.de/viewer/resolver?identifier=IAI0000554100000000&field=MD_IAIPURL)

The title of the next poster is “Proteja contra varíola, tuberculose, coqueluche, difteria, tifo e tétano vacinando.” As shown in image 5, it emphasizes the importance of vaccination against several diseases such as Diphtheria, smallpox, tuberculosis, whooping cough, tetanus, and typhoid. The arrangement of fonts and use of specific colors such as red for “Proteja” and bold black font for the word “Vacinado” are employed to underscore the relative importance of these terms in the message string that the creators wanted to convey. Another noteworthy aspect is that the poster features two individuals with Asian characteristics.



Image 5: Proteja contra varíola, tuberculose, coqueluche, difteria, tifo e tétano vacinando.<sup>15</sup>

15 “Proteja Contra Variola, Tuberculose, Coqueluche, Difteria, Tifo e Tétano Vacinando.” 1930. Salvador: Fundação Gonçalo Moniz. 1930. <http://resolver.iai.spk-berlin.de/IAI0000551E00000000>

The vaccination against the Variola remained a cornerstone of public health policy in 1930’s Brazil. In image 6 entitled, “A vaccina evita a variola,” we see an individual getting vaccinated.<sup>16</sup>



Image 6: A vaccina evita a variola

The other way to combat the spread of other infectious diseases was to target the transmitters of vector-borne illnesses. By the 1930s, we see a clear understanding of how insects are the vectors of certain conditions. If the population of these insects is left uncontrolled, it can contribute to the rise of epidemics and poor individual and social hygiene. The whole premise of controlling disease outbreaks seems to be set on preventing the spread of the diseases. The following two posters can help to answer where these posters could have

16 “A Vaccina Evita a Variola.” 1930. São Paulo: Estab. Graphico “Bomsucesso”. 1930. <http://resolver.iai.spk-berlin.de/IAI0000553D00000000>





Image 7: Animaes transmissores de doenças.

been used. In image 7, titled “Animaes transmissores de doenças”,<sup>17</sup> various arthropods, including flies, mosquitoes, and others, are depicted. Besides the insects that transmit diseases, we see images of rats. These animals are depicted on a map-like paper that one individual is holding and observing.

The names of insects on the poster vary from specific names like *pulga* (a flea) to generic names like *percevejo* or a bug.

Flies, as seen in image 7, are highlighted as vectors, and the public health education service focused on combating the spread of infection through the control of flies. In image 8, “*Combatei as moscas*,” we observe a child with a fearful gaze looking at several flies, including a “supersized fly” from whose limbs we see medallions hanging

17 “Animaes.” 1930. São Paulo: Estab. Graphico “Bomsucesso”. 1930. <http://resolver.iai.spk-berlin.de/IAI0000553F00000000>



Image 8: Combatei as moscas!

with the names of several infectious diseases.<sup>18</sup> The fly appears to be looking at the child, and in the fly’s forelimbs, we observe a medallion with the title Variola. Once again, Variola seems to occupy a special place in the artist’s eyes who created this poster.

The medallions are shown to be falling on the ground, thus indicating a sort of airborne transmission of certain diseases. The diseases emphasized in the poster are Cholera, Conjunctivitis (Ophthalmia), Dysentery, Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever, Tuberculosis, and the dreaded Small Pox (Variola). The main text on this poster says *Combatei as moscas!* The term ‘combat’ implies a deliberate effort to defeat the moscas.

As the posters above show a policy initiative to use visual cues to battle infectious diseases through images

18 “Combatei as Moscas.” 1930. São Paulo: Estab. Graphico “Bomsucesso”. 1930. <http://resolver.iai.spk-berlin.de/IAI0000552E00000000>

and short texts, it is possible that some of the venues where these could have been deployed must have been places where Brazilians gathered. These places were kindergartens, schools, local health clinics, hospitals, or other areas of large public gatherings.

Today, these posters serve as evidence of a concerted public health campaign during the Vargas administration to combat various infectious diseases through vaccinations and vector control. While looking back on the public health policies of 1930s Brazil, one can see that the State made a concerted effort to assure stability in a public health domain as it was mandated in light of increased industrialization and urbanization. These posters remain a testimony and constitute a historical archive of a bygone era. The public health messages conveyed by these posters were brief but based on the understanding that prevention is better, and that the costs of large-scale treatment during an epidemic can be mitigated through prevention. The preventive measures against epidemics, such as Variola included a drive to vaccinate the population. The vivid imagery on these posters could have been an effective means to overcome public skepticism about vaccination. After all, as the English adage goes, pictures are worth a thousand words.