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ETHNOLOGY BRAZILIAN STYLE

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Introduction

To write about the work of our colleagues and our own is never an easy task, not only because of the close involvement with the subject-matter, but also because in characterizing someone else's writings, there is always the risk of misunderstandings, distortions, omissions and other injustices. What follows is the personal view of someone who has been conducting indigenous studies since the 1960s, and has, therefore, her own understanding of the field. My reading of ethnological production in Brazil will probably differ from that of my Brazilian colleagues, and will certainly be different from that of foreign ethnologists. But, being totally immersed in the ethnological community of the country, I could never pretend to pose as an impartial observer.

The reason I propose this exercise is twofold; one is to present to a non-Brazilian audience some of the features of ethnographic work done in Brazil; the other is to address the question of the social responsibility of ethnographers in their actions and writings regarding the peoples they study.

It is not my intention to do a survey of the literature on Brazilian Indians; this has been competently done by several people, among them, Baldus (1954, 1968), his successor Hartmann (1984), and Melatti (1982, 1984). Nor is it to exhaust the field of personal styles and biographies of specific anthropologists, even if I have to focus on one or two major figures in the field. What I want to do is emphasize some aspects of Brazilian ethnography that give it specificity and identity. Perhaps much of what is said here is sheer

wishful thinking or, at times, also an expression of frustration and dissatisfaction. Be that as it may, ethnology should be practiced with a dose of passion and that, I feel, is not lacking in Brazil.

Perhaps our northern readers will have to make a certain mental effort to catch the implied rather than explicit tone of our discourse. Being outspoken is not one of the most salient features of Brazilianness. But it can be, I hope, an interesting ethnographic experience of its own, a sort of "fusion of horizons" without falling into the trap of confusion of premises. Some of the local color will necessarily be lost in the translation into the English mode of thinking, but the effort to communicate with a foreign audience will perhaps force me to make more explicit certain thoughts that might otherwise never come out of the narrow space between the lines.

Ethos, style, and involvement

Ethnographic studies of indigenous societies in Brazil have followed different trends, depending basically on whether the etnographer is a Brazilian or a foreigner. As Melatti (1982) has already pointed out, foreign anthropologists have mostly focused on aspects of culture and social organization, whereas Brazilian anthropologists have tended to concentrate on the subject of contact and its implications to the indigenous peoples. This, of course, being the main trend, has its counter examples (see Graeve 1976 as an example of a foreigner dealing with contact, and Viertler 1976; Melatti 1977, 1978, 1979; Da Matta 1976, 1979; Viveiros de Castro 1986 as some examples of Brazilians handling "traditional" culture).

Most ethnographies written by non-Brazilians limit the information on the contact situation of the Indian groups in question to a brief historical description which accompanies brackground data provided to contextualize the analyses that

constitute the main body of the work. It does not mean that these ethnographers, as if unaware of the politics of contact, are in search of the "cultural purity" of Brazilian Indians. It is rather, or so it seems to me, the theoretical interests they develop in their own academic milieu at home which orient them to first select topics and then indigenous groups to match. These topics may range from submerged symbolic lineages, to the social role of music, to concepts of privacy, to the carrying capacity affecting an indigenous economy. All of these things can be treated -- and often are -- without reference to the inequality of interethnic relations which nowadays weighs on all Indian groups on the continent, not just in Brazil. There is something uncomfortably false in disregarding this pervasive fact, for no matter how "neutral" the research topic may be, it is impossible to ignore the imposing fact that there is no longer an "isolated tribe" anywhere. An indigenous society can be, and should be, studied from a variety of angles, but to pretend that the consequences of contact can be conveniently bracketed out is to create an anthropological illusion.

The privileged focus of Brazilian ethnology on interethnic relations is, like most things, linked to a specific social interest and historical context. It is associated with an attitude of political commitment to the defense of the rights of the peoples studied. Natural as this interest may seem to us, it has, nevertheless, produced a certain puzzlement, if not discomfort, on the part of foreign colleagues, either because they prefer not to be sucked into the professionally dangerous meanders of political hassles, or because they feel that one cannot do both well at the same time. For instance, in a paper presented at the Work Group on Indigenous Policy during the Fifth Annual Meeting of ANPOCS (Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais), Anthony Seeger (1981) expressed his perplexity at the apparently impossible task of combining academic research with political involvement, and his

doubts as to whether both could be done equally well.

Such impossibility is more apparent than real. On the one hand, research topics such as mythology or ritual might be examined as if the whites did not exist, as if the Indians were in a pure state of social isolation. But even here it would require a great effort of abstraction to pretend that contact has not affected the symbolic realms of indigenous life. The result would amount to something verging on ethnographic mystification. Even when Brazilian anthropologists dedicate months or years of their lives collecting and analysing data on kinship, myths, spiritual worlds, or other supposedly "cold" issues, the treatment done to these topics is underlined with the more or less visible influence of interethnic contact. On the other hand, these same anthropologists are repeatedly called upon to participate, in a variety of ways, in the defense of indigenous rights (1). They are not allowed (even though sometimes they have so wished) to be left in the peace and quiet of their academic offices. Some of the working time that might be spent in theoretical thinking or in sharpening methodological tools is put into political action. This loss, however, can be compensated for by an increase in sensitivity, maturity, and commitment to profoundly serious human issues.

Some themes are more directly related to a political stance than others, Indian-white contact being one of them. In such cases, part and parcel of the ethnographic investigation is the position the researcher takes and the Indians have come to expect and increasingly demand. The Black Panther adage of the sixties in the United States can now be applied to many a case in indigenous Brazil: you're either part of the solution, or you're part of the problem. Scientific neutrality, either in the name of rigor in research or of impotence in politics, is being less and less tolerated by both the ethnographer's peers and his Indian hosts (2).

Moreover, intensive fieldwork among an indigenous society or, for that matter, any other human group, is never devoid of involvemwnt. Gift-giving, working with preferred informants, answering questions about our own society and other bits of constant interaction put the ethnographer in the middle of an unavoidable political scene, subtle as it may seem, and whether he wants it or not. To take this fact into consideration for purposes of the research is the crucial point here; it depends on theoretical interests, professional style, personal sensitivity, a greater or smaller degree of political naiveté (3). Even the superb ethnography of Evans-Pritchard suffers from the insufficient attention the author paid to the nature of his involvement with the Nuer as an Englishman, and to the political strain under which those people were living at the time of his fieldwork. Some puzzling aspects of The Nuer, such as the role of prophets, are the result of his silence on this matter.

There is no purely academic research; what there is is the rhetorical possibility and personal inclination to exclude from one's written works the interactive, political, moral or ethical aspects of fieldwork. By the same token, engagement in political issues regarding Indian policy, time-consuming as it can be at times (writing up documents, accompanying Indians to Congress, to governmental offices or elsewhere, excruciatingly long and convoluted discussions well into the night), is not exactly a digression from a scientifically oriented program of work. No science exists in a social vacuum, much less so in the case of ethnology. Furthermore, if we take this kind of engagement as being itself a subject of anthropological thinking, then the apparent "schizophrenia" point out by Seeger becomes a perfectly valid course of professional action, in that observers and observed are both seen as actors and agents in the same scenario. After all, in writing an ethnography, it is the ethnographer himself who constructs it, who chooses the tone, and

shapes it to his own image, whether he admits it or not. He is an integral part of it.

Seeger raised an interesting point, but it should be examined more closely, as there are some specific aspects of ethnographic research in Brazil which come into the picture and may not have counterparts in other anthropology producing countries. This would make an interesting research topic of its own. But before that is done, it may be a bit premature to judge whether or not it is possible to succeed in both academic and activist endeavors. One thing is certain. Practically every ethnologist in Brazil, in one way or another, has some sort of involvement with the destiny of the country's indigenous peoples (4), which reflects on the character of his research, his choice of topics, of theoretical approaches, fieldwork strategies, and ethnographic writings.

There are, of course, many foreign anthropologists deeply involved with the defense of indigenous rights. Their concern is no less strong or effective than that of their Brazilian colleagues. The point I am trying to make, in response to Seeger's challenge, is that, unlike Brazilian ethnologists, North American and British anthropologists have a tendency to make the option: they either stay in academia and practice human rights in the interstices of their professional time, if at all, or they give up academic careers to dedicate themselves full-time to advocacy work. In Brazil, putting together academic duties and the practice of social responsibility is not only frequent, but highly desirable and expected by the anthropological community as a whole. It is possible that the nature of academic work in Brazil is such that it permits greater freedom of action than in the anthropological environments of the Anglo-Saxon world. This, however, would not be enough to make the difference (5).

How has this Brazilian ethnological ethos come about ? What are the historical and social ingredients that combined to produce this style of anthropology or, more specifically, of indigenous ethnology ?

In her characterization of the brand of anthropology that is practiced in Brazil, Mariza Peirano (1981) traces the birth of the discipline to the roots of the modernist movement of the 1920s and the effort to build a Brazilian nation. The responsibility of the intellectuals was to construct a national identity based on what was "native". Artists, writers, sociologists, and other thinkers did not simply produce work for their own individual satisfaction or for the advancement of science as such. Their production was motivated and oriented around a civil responsibility vis-a-vis the consolidation of a well defined nationality. Each one worked as a citizen, contributing something to the new nation. Anthropology appeared and blossomed in this context. But, while participating in the broader nation-building effort, early anthropologists also took pains to differentiate themselves from their fellow-humanists by creating a discipline of their own based on that privileged source of nativeness, the Indians. For nearly seventy years, the anthropologist as citizen (Peirano 1985) has been a national figure(6).

At the root of the humanistic flavoring of Brazilian anthropology is the inspiration of its founding fathers in early twentieth century. Whereas in Britain and elsewhere the first anthropologists were mostly physicists, medical doctors, experimental psychologists and other representatives of the hard sciences, bringing with them a baggage of scientistic assumptions and expectations, in Brazil, cultural anthropology sprang from a tradition common to philosophers, writers, and other humanists, as Peirano points out. It is true that other professionals, such as medical doctors, adopted anthropology, both physical and cultural. But. I think it is fair to say, contemporary Brazilian anthropology retains very few signs of their influence, apart from sparse contributions to the ethnography of a limited number of Indian or rural peoples. The principal mode of anthropological thinking in the country has no affinity with the exact sciences. We might trace a parallel with the development of

ethnology in France in the 1920s which was deeply influenced by the surrealist movement (Clifford 1981). Perhaps Pascal's famous distinction -- esprit de geometrie versus esprit de finesse -- might well be an apt impressionistic image to portray the respective anthropological worlds in Anglo-American and in Latin traditions.

This humanistic slant of anthropology in Brazil, and the recurrent social involvement of its professionals, may be due to yet another factor, that is, the fact that Brazil has been a colonized country for four centuries both before and after political independence from Portugal. Such colonization is not simply a matter of economic dependence. It also -- and perhaps most importantly -- involves the hegemony of Euro-American ideas, attitudes, and fashions which, directly or indirectly, invade the minds of the population of countries such as Brazil which, in this respect, is no different from other Latin American nations.

Along with such imposition, comes the reaction to it in the form of a posture critical of things hegemonic. It is not surprising that this condition of colonized has shaped a style of social thinking proper to Brazilian intelligentsia. Much of the intellectual effort of social scientists has been devoted to dissect and understand the historical character, the political twists and turns, and the social implications of such predicament. This critical posture, often but not always of marxist inspiration, has had the effect of departing from the positivist style of North American or British social sciences. Brazilian anthropology, having grown up in very close contact with the other social sciences that have a strong tradition of being highly politicized, has been influenced by the same spirit. That does not mean that positivism is foreign to Brazilian social sciences, but when it is there, it is heavily shaded with other colors and other influences (Velho 1982).

The engagement of Brazilian anthropologists in things political does not jeopardize their concern for rigorous academic work. The quality of this work, as anywhere else in the world, varies with

individuals and with institutions, but the overall picture is that anthropology in Brazil meets international standards of quality while maintaining its own flavor. We court various influences and inspirations, but are faithful to none. We speak the lingua franca of anthropological theory, but retain our own thick and recognizable accent.

In contemporary Brazilian anthropology, it is the Indian issue which is the main focus of political attention, even though ethnologists dedicated to indigenous studies are but a minority in the profession. Why should this be ?

Of all the concrete objects of Brazilian anthropological research, indigenous societies are the best representatives of "Otherness". In studying an Indian group, the ethnologist does not have to create a methodologically desired distance, as is the case with work among peasants, urban dwellers or other segments of the national society. This distance, guaranteed by different historical processes and traditions, facilitates the ethnologist's work by reducing the interference that too much familiarity with the object may produce. Thus, political involvement in the Indian cause is not so completely woven into one's own personal life (as is, for instance, the case of a feminist studying feminism or a homosexual studying the gay movement) as to impair the critical sense that is necessary for analysis.

Yet, Brazilian Indians are our Others, they are part of our country, they constitute an important ingredient in the process of building our nation, they represent one of our ideological mirrors reflecting our frustrations, vanities, ambitions, and power fantasies. We do not regard them as so completely exotic, remote or arcane, as to make them into literal "objects". Their humanity is never lost on us, their predicament is our historical guilt, their destiny is as much theirs as it is ours.

I am not saying that ethnologists who study Indians are the only professionals engaged in human rights activities in Brazil, nor that Indians are the only sector of the country's population to deserve that sort of attention. What I am arguing is that the Indian question is a particularly privileged field for the exercise of the twofold project of academic work and political action. For indigenous peoples are the most dramatic example of being oppressed for being different and, as we never miss a chance to emphasize, cultural differences and social diversity are the soul stuff or vital principle of anthropology.

In the field of Indian studies, anthropologists find a political cause which is all the more worthy of fighting for, the deeper one goes into the understanding of the indigenous worlds. Of course, the understanding one gains is proportional to one's dedication to systematic ethnographic investigation, an investigation that should cover as much cultural ground as it is possible to cover, including the not so explicity political spheres of their lives. The experience of several of us has shown that there is a correlation between solid ethnographic work and effectual political action, not only because of accumulated knowledge, but also due to the authority that such knowledge confers.

I shall now try to identify some features of ethnographic research in Brazil and show the role they play in the shaping of indigenous studies. I must again insist that this is not an exhaustive survey of the field, but rather my own view of it, focusing on some contributions Brazilian anthropologists have made to both anthropological theory and to a better understanding of Indian problems.

In Brazil as anywhere else where anthropology has been established as an ongoing academic interest, fieldwork is a fundamental part of the discipline. The specificities of an academic career in Brazil have created a pattern of fieldwork which has had

consequences to the style of ethnology to which I have been referring. On the one hand, the critical posture described above is part of our university trajectory and predisposes us to pay attention to politically relevant issues in the field. On the other hand, the careful preservation of academic quality has resulted in some important and original ways of approaching certain problems of wide interest to the profession at large. In order to better contextualize this point, I think it is worth discussing the conditions under which fieldwork is usually done in Brazil and some of the most relevant advances in indigenous studies.

The field in our backyard

Rarely has a Brazilian ethnographer spent a whole continuous year in the field. The reasons for this are various, but we can mention three: limited funds, restrictions regarding absence from jobs, and the field-in-our-backyard syndrome.

Funding agencies tend to provide amounts of money far too small for long stays in the field. Although this fund restriction was much more acute in the fifties and sixties, it is by no means a thing of the past. The great majority of research funds comes from government agencies, be they federal or state supported, and as such their budgets oscillate with the changes in public spending policies.

Another factor limiting the time spent in the field is the difficulty of getting prolonged leaves of absence. University jobs, especially, tie the researcher to a work schedule which gives him a maximum of forty five days vacation and, in some of them, a one semester sabbatical. Being away in any other capacity involves a rather long bureaucratic process of request to leave, with or without pay, starting at the department level and going all the way to the central administration of the university. A trip abroad takes the process even farther, to the Minister of Education, requiring his

signature and that of the President of the Republic. Shortage of faculty in many anthropology departments also discourages absences of over six months. We might say that doctoral candidates are nowadays the only ones with the time, disposition, and possibility (even the obligation) to spend about a year doing fieldwork. But this is of recent date, since the creation of doctoral programs in anthropology, especially at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, and at the University of Brasilia.

Full-fledged ethnographers take short trips to Indian areas mainly during the summer months (December through March). This pattern, of course, is closely linked to the notion that the Indians are relatively near, at easy reach, illusive as this impression may be in some cases. For example, a trip to the Upper Rio Negro area, to Amapá, Acre or Roraima is almost as costly, if not more, in time, money and effort for a Brazilian as it is for a foreign researcher coming from abroad. Added to these difficulties are the ups and downs of the official Indian policy with its erratic decisions on whether or not to allow "strangers" into Indian areas(7).

Partly as a consequence of these short term visits, Brazilian ethnographers rarely have a good command of the language of the indigenous group they study. They either rely on interpreters or on the knowledge the Indians have of Portuguese. Giving priority to the theme of interethnic relations, important as it is, may very well work as an alibi to dispense with the need to learn the Indian language, as it presumes a long standing experience of the Indians with nationals and a fairly good command of Portuguese on their part.

How does all this affect the quality of ethnological studies in Brazil ?

Naturally, a style of fieldwork done, as it were, in spurts, most often conducted in the language of the investigator, will produce results which are very different from the traditional brand of ethnography à la Malinowski, involving one long, continuous stay in

the field, followed by a permanent absence or a short return much later. In contrast, Brazilian ethnographers maintain an ongoing interaction with the people they study, amassing ethnographic material through the years and never, really, cutting off their ties with them.

We can draw some important lessons from this contrast of fieldwork styles. In the first place, the Brazilian way of doing research calls into question the mystique of prolonged fieldwork as the necessary rite de passage bound to guarantee a successful entry into the temple of academic excelence. For, in their piecemeal research, Brazilian anthropologists preserve the quality of their writings by a cumulative, long term involvement with the people studied, a tight theoretical focus, a clear delimitation of the problems under investigation, and an acute sensitivity for sociologically critical issues. Secondly, it raises the question of the advantages and disadvantages of a concentrated but synchronic field research versus field trips that are intermittent but recurrent and lasting for decades. In one case, we have a plethora of fine detail and depth analysis which produce a dense picture of a society or part of it. In the other case, we have a gradual construction of a people's profile which is transformed as the researcher acquires fresh data and new outlooks at each visit to the field. The first style would be like a sharp, detailed and heavily textured still photograph; the second could be compared to a motion picture, as it is less focused on permanence and more on movement. As the product o two different traditions and vocations, these styles demonstrate, once again, that in anthropology a one-way road is out of place and out of time.

Brazilian anthropological studies are said to have a fairly high dose of creativity and innovative verve (8). Self-indulgence aside, it should be recognized that some of the most influential analytical viewpoints in South American ethnology have come from the

works of Brazilian ethnographers, sometimes in collaboration with foreign colleagues. I shall now discuss two of these perspectives.

Persons are good to think

Since the days of monographic works, such as Wagley and Galvão's on the Tenetehara (1961), Baldus' on the Tapirapé (1970), or even Nimuendaju's on the Sherente (1942), Timbira (1946), and Tikuna (1952), Brazilian ethnography has changed its style of writing about indigenous societies. Selection of theoretical problems became the main thrust in choosing a specific society for fieldwork. With the Harvard-Central Brazil Project of the sixties, directed by David Maybury-Lewis of Harvard University and Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira of the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, a series of studies of Ge-speaking peoples were carried out under the inspiration of the then emergent structuralist approach. Two Brazilian anthropologists were directly involved in the project: Roberto Da Matta with his study of Apinayé social structure, and Julio Cezar Melatti who worked with the Krahó Indians.

Out of Melatti's work (1971) came the idea that was to be the basis for further elaboration among "Ge-ologists" and other ethnologists, that is, the notion of a dual kind of transmission of human attributes: physical substance by kin -- the genitors -- social ingredients by affines -- the name givers. Da Matta expanded on this theme among the Apinayé (1976) to characterize their whole relationship system and its ideological underpinnings. In a joint article, Seeger, Da Matta, and Viveiros de Castro (1979) took this idea still further, sketching a theory of corporeality which would be the South American counterpart to the descent theory out of Africa, or the alliance theory out of Australia.

The interest in the notion of personhood among Brazilian Indians developed from this seminal idea of substance versus persona, and as a consequence "person" has come of age in the country's etnographic

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thinking. A whole book was written on the Krahó concepts of personhood (Carneiro da Cunha 1978); the topic has crossed the boundary of indigenous studies and entered the realm of, among other things, kinship in national society (Abreu Filho 1982). I am not, of course, implying that Brazilian anthropologists "invented" personhood as a research topic, a ludicrous idea given the long list of scholars, beginning at least with Marcel Mauss, who have written about it. My comments are strictly limited to South American ethnology and should not be read as a claim to anything more grandiose than just that.

The emphasis on corporeality, person, substance, and related concepts has worked as a theoretical catalyst for the recurrent statements by ethnologists about the alleged diffuse character of indigenous social organization in the continent. The often repeated claims of structural fluidity (Rivière 1984; Kaplan 1977) are no more than the expression of anthropologists who, in spite of their dissatisfaction with the models generated by ethnographies from other parts of the world, have not found an appropriate alternative approach to South American materials. A social structure is more or less fluid in reference to what ? If the framework on which the structure is spun takes on the appearance, not of an elaborate genealogy with clearly defined sets of rules, but of a network of ideas about attributes and components of human beings in life and in death, of relationships with the cosmos, with the natural as well as the supernatural world, then one should not suppose that such relationships are less basic and constitutive than socio-jural arrangements. Structures of that kind are no more nor less fluid than any others. They are simply diffferent (9).

The repercussions of this way of looking at Brazilian Indian societies are great and being felt in the production of new ethnographic materials (Viveiros de Castro 1986; Albert 1985; Montagner Melatti 1985. See also Kaplan 1986). Even if the model drawn by Seeger, Da Matta and Viveiros de Castro fits Ge societies

better than some others, since these were the empirical inspiration for it, the opening up of new ways of perceiving structure is an important step for the advancement of theoretical issues in Brazilian ethnography. Closely related to the idea of person, and the articulation of natural and supernatural realms, other aspects of indigenous life have been explored which add to this general interest: art (Vidal 1981), naming (Ramos 1974), cannibalism (Viveiros de Castro and Carneiro da Cunha 1986). We can perceive one clear direction in which these efforts are pointing, intentionally or not: to let the Indian mode of being, in all its fascinating diversity, unveil itself to the ethnographer who is open to the unexpected. In fact, the more unfamiliar and intellectually unsettling an ethnographic discovery, the more appreciated by the ethnographer and his audience.

Associated with the concept of personhood and its refinements is that of identity. What makes an individual feel different from everybody else and yet, Louis Dumont notwithstanding, be part of a collectivity ? This issue, touched upon in various of the works mentioned above, has received relatively little attention (see Viveiros de Castro 1975) outside the context of interethnic relations.

The constant factor in considering identity has been the level of contrast and its contextual variations. The identity of a Bororo person belonging to the Macaw clan is quite different from the identity of that same person in contrast to a regional Brazilian. And yet, it is the same person in both contexts; what changes is the relationship of contrast. We might say that identity is to difference as the same is to the other. But these concepts of identity and sameness are yet to be properly explored in anthropology.

Darcy Ribeiro, it became politicized; from an essentially academic exercise in permutations of possible outcomes when two or more cultures meet, acculturation studies in Brazil, while still holding the focus of culture traits, gained a critical dimension in the attempt to explain why Indian cultures were being depleted by contact with whites.

The intellectual milieu of São Paulo in the forties and fifties, considered to have been the most politically active and academically sophisticated center in the country (Peirano 1981), produced two of the main figures of Brazilian ethnology whose influence in the studies of interethnic relations cannot be overlooked. What follows is a brief discussion of the contributions of these scholars -- Darcy Ribeiro and Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira -- to the understanding of Indian-white contact. Each in his own way, they have imprinted a style of engagement which transcends their individual trajectories and careers. They are part of a generation of social scientists who matured in a markedly nationalist phase of Brazilian history, and whose sense of social justice and humanistic concerns were a source of much anxiety, stress, and frustration in the following decades, after the military coup in 1964.

Darcy Ribeiro, one of several ethnologists who were employed by the national Indian Protection Service (SPI) in the fifties, combined a neo-evolutionist approach with a marxian inclination. The result was an outstanding series of essays (1970) analysing the several faces of contact in various regions of the country, with different degrees of impact on indigenous populations, but all leading to the death and misery of thousands upon thousands of Indians. The sharp, poignant tone of Ribeiro's style has been highly praised both in Brazil and in other Latin American countries, especially where he lived during his political exile. His denunciations of ethnocide and criminal disruption of Indian lives are greatly enhanced by his ability to move audiences both in speech

and in writing. Led by the overwhelming evidence of the destruction of Indian peoples, he predicted their disappearance within fifty years, after the devastation caused by infectious diseases, loss of land and of ethnic dignity had reduced them to "generic Indians" with no tribal identity left.

History has proved Ribeiro's prophecy wrong (10). In organizing themselves around common grievances, Brazilian Indians have, at the same time, strengthened their sense of ethnic identity. The "generic Indian" has never materialized in Ribeiro's sense; in fact, the term "Indian" has become a political resource appropriated by the Indians themselves who converted it into an active figure in the context of interethnic antagonism. To be an Indian in Brazil is now to be an important agent in the national political scenario (Ramos 1988b).

That does not, however, diminish the value of Ribeiro's work. One of the most touching pieces in the ethnography of contact is his report on a Tupian man, Uirá, in search of the deity Maíra and the promised land, after most of his family had been killed by repeated epidemics. Frustrated in his search, having suffered all sorts of humiliating experiences on the way to the sea, he is sent back home by agents of the SPI. Utterly demoralized, he commits suicide by throwing himself into a piranha infested river (Ribeiro 1957). The promised land was no longer in this world as it used to be before the whites invaded (Clastres 1978).

Ribeiro's other studies of the Kadiwéu (1948, 1950), and Urubu-Kaapor (1955, and with Berta Ribeiro 1957) have a fragmentary character and lack the force of "Uirá sai ao encontro de Maíra" (see also 1974), and his 1970 book, Os Índios e a Civilização.

In that book, he discusses the many fronts of national expansion: agricultural colonization, cattle ranching, rubber tapping, Brazil nut gathering, missionizing. He assigns different degrees of virulence to each of them, the least harmful being the

gathering of raw materials. In the fifties, that might have been the case. In the seventies and eighties, it was no longer so. Following the construction of roads in Amazonia, came the interest in lumbering and mining. The scale of mining operations has no resemblance to Ribeiro's descriptions of small bands of nut collectors or of scattered rubber tappers. Mining is now either done by hundreds of thousands of placer miners (garimpeiros), many times the local indigenous populations, or by the heavy machinery of large-scale industrial companies (Ramos 1984; CEDI-CONAGE 1988).

But, in the present as in the past, the spread of contagious diseases is one of the greatest killers of indigenous peoples, especially those with little time of contact. Of an estimated five million in 1500, the Indian population of Brazil reached its lowest point in the late 1950s, with less than one hundred thousand, recovering a little in the last decades, to the present estimate of about two hundred thousand, less than 0.2 percent of the country's total population. This process of contamination and decimation is masterfully presented by Ribeiro.

His model of ethnic transfiguration, innovative as it was, still showed a strong influence of the acculturation approach; it was not sufficiently sharp-focused to take into account the many-faceted, multi-dimensional consequences of contact. His theoretical and methodological achievements are important, but somewhat obfuscated by his extraordinary ability to transmit to the reader the sense of dispair, injustice, helplessness, and the irreversibility of everything contact brings along to the Indians. His 1970 book is a tribute to that suffering part of humanity by an extremely sensitive ethnographer who had in this sensitivity and critical outlook his best anthropological asset.

In the sixties, the acculturation model began to crumble and be replaced by an approach that became known as "interethnic friction" Its proponent, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, a former student of philosophy, worked at the SPI with Ribeiro. His fieldwork among the Terena and the Tikuna Indians was motivated by his strong interest

in the sociology of contact. Both groups had a long experience with whites, yet different kinds of experience: the Terena surrounded by farming and cattle raising whites, the Tikuna by rubber tapping hands and lords. Among the works that came out of those field trips are, especially, O Processo de Assimilação dos Terena (1960), and O Índio e o Mundo dos Brancos (1964); see also 1968, 1983).

Cardoso de Oliveira shifted the emphasis from the cultural focus of acculturation studies to the field of social relations. Inspired by the work of Georges Balandier on Black Africa, particularly regarding the concept of colonial situation and its postulate of a "syncretic totality", Cardoso de Oliveira took as his main object of research the interethnic situation in which Indians and whites coexist and develop ways of interaction that are specific to the context of contact. This interrelatedness is seen by him as asymmetrical, generating diametrically opposed interests. Moreover, in a much quoted passage (1962:85-6), he claims that the two parties of the contact situation are interdependent, "paradoxical as it may seem". The problem with this statement is that it may give the impression that it puts the Indians on a rather more favorable footing than they really are. The whole process of attraction and pacification of isolated Indian groups is geared to produce a one way dependence, that of the Indians on the whites. In fact, the asymmetry of the relationship is virtually total, for it actually involves a unilateral dependence. Interdependence and diametrical opposition may be true for Africa where whites, although the power holders, are the demographic minority, therefore, depending on the blacks for labor, etc., but it does not hold for Brazilian Indians.

Cardoso de Oliveira's model has reached farther afield than Ribeiro's, although, in a sense, it gives continuity to the latter. Several of Cardoso's students were engaged in projects focusing on interethnic friction in various parts of the country (Melatti 1967; Laraia and Da Matta 1967; Santos 1970, 1973), and, to this day,

anyone who works on the subject-matter of interethnic contact, invariably makes use of his analysis.

In contradistinction to Ribeiro, Cardoso de Oliveira stands out for his interest in theoretical and methodological experiments, and for the constant search for new ways of looking into the problematic of contact. Ribeiro's model of analysis is much more dependent on his personal talent than on the working out of a careful, replicable conceptual framework. It is precisely on this latter attribute that Cardoso's strength lies. From interethnic friction he turned his attention to the issue of identity (1976, 1983). From identity he passed on to ethnicity (1976).

A spare fieldworker, he opted to do what he called a "sociology of indigenous Brazil" (1972). His sociology is critical, inspired in the works of authors as different as Poulantzas, Mauss, and Lévi-Strauss, with a dose of phenomenology. His insistence that the study of ideology in the context of ethnic identity should not be dissociated from social relations can be at times minimized when the former weighs slightly more than the latter.

Cardoso de Oliveira's influence on Brazilian anthropology cannot be overemphasized. In his writings as well as in his teachings, he has forged many a career in anthropology. His project of interethnic friction, with its emphasis on the contact situation involving Indians and whites, led to the need to know more about regional populations in contact with Indian groups. Two major projects -- in Central Brazil and in the Northeast -- were put into action to study the expansion of living frontiers. Among the most important results of this project were Lygia Sigaud's studies of rural Northeast (1979, 1980), and Otavio Velho's book on rural Amazonia (1972). In turn, both Sigaud and Velho have stimulated other researchers on this topic.

Interethnic contact was definitely established as a trademark of Brazilian ethnology. For the best part of three decades, many

students of indigenous societies have been stimulated by Cardoso de Oliveira and have taken to the field one or another version of his model of interethnic friction. In spite of the high quality of some of these works, most of them are still in the form of unpublished theses both at the National Museum and at the University of Brasília, two institutions where Cardoso de Oliveira taught for a total of nearly thirty years.

But, those heroic and charismatic times, to use an expression by Cardoso de Oliveira himself (1988), are over. In the seventies, the trend has shifted from the orbit of father figures around which theoretical trends or political postures coalesced, to a dispersed arrangement of ethnographers occupying positions in a variety of institutions, mostly state and federal universities. We now form an acephalous body in a sort of "ordered anarchy", Nuer style. We have our differences, bickerings, sympathies or antipathies toward each other's brand of anthropology (be it structuralist, marxist, interactionist, interpretive), but, like the Nuer, we readily join forces against a common enemy whenever crucial issues arise involving the human rights of indigenous peoples. We are not exactly an example of a cosy, happy family, but any of us can count on virtually all the others for support and cooperation when the situation so requires. At the present conjuncture, we are, as it were, a mild case of ethnological segmentary opposition.

Part of the interest in interethnic contact has led some of us to make incursions into other topics closely related to it. One of them is Melatti's work on Krahó messianism (1972); another is Oliveira Filho's detailed study of Tikuna factionalism in the context of interethnic antagonism (1977, 1989); yet another is my own work on intertribal relationships, providing a structural contrast to the Indian-white contact situation (Ramos 1980).

From academic to political and back again

The thrust of these studies in interethnic relations is to expose the process of domination under which the Indians are forced to live after the so called "pacification". They are reduced to the poorest of the rural poor. They lose their lands and the freedom to live according to their own cultural canons. They suffer a double jeopardy: for being economically deprived and for being ethnically different.

Officially, "Indian" is a temporary condition. Throughout the history of official protectionism, beginning with the creation of the SPI in 1910, and continuing with its successor, the present day FUNAI (National Indian Foundation), all policies regarding Indian affairs have been geared toward integration. The involvement of the government in this policy has been increasing to the point of becoming, in the last decade, a concern of national security. Such integration would mean transforming the Indians into whites. But, while the official policy emphasizes the need to dissolve the Indians into the supposedly undifferentiated mass of Brazilians, the regional population who interact directly or indirectly with the Indians refuse to accept them as equals. This double bind makes the Indians a permanent target for prejudice, discrimination, and sheer persecution (Ramos 1985).

On the one hand, integration in those terms means anihilation of ways of life which are different from what is supposed to be Brazilian. Considering that the national population is itself highly diversified, to demand uniformity of the Indians is doubly discriminatory: first, it is the denial of legitimacy to their life styles; second, it is the imposition of an accommodation that is not required of anyone else in the country.

On the other hand, keeping the Indians under a constant bombardment of discriminatory measures, as is often the case at the

local level, amounts to a kind of psychological anihilation. No matter how we look at it, integration or segregation represent different forms of achieving the same thing -- the negation of legitimate otherness. And being Indian is being other when it comes to interethnic contact. Outside the contrast with Whites (here understood as "civilizados" without reference to skin color) there are no Indians.

The most decisive push to break away from this double bind was to come from the Indians themselves. The Brazilian Indian movement has covered some ground in that direction, incipient as the results may still be, and in spite of retaliatory action which has led to the murder of Indian leaders, massacre of entire families, illegal arrests, and other forms of repression on the part of landowners, miners, lumber interests, etc.

Brazilian anthropology has yet to catch up with the events of the last decade which has witnessed a profound transformation in the political role of the Indians at the local and national levels. None of the well known theoretical approaches -- acculturation studies, interethnic friction, or ethnicity, for instance -- seems quite appropriate to unravel the intricacies of the indigenous movements in Brazil today. More sensitive and agile instruments are needed in order to cope with the bewildering contradictions that continuously spring out in these movements, the caleidoscopic assemblage of Indian personalities, the extremely fast pace at which tactics, strategies and outlooks change, and, last but not least, the loss of the anthropologist's role as spokesman for the Indians. More than ever the inadequacy of the subject-object chasm, on which mainstream anthropology has rested, appears in its glaring awkwardness. The experience is perhaps too novel to have been assessed with the theoretical tools so far at our disposal, and too recent to give enough time for the development of new ones.

One step in that direction is the effort to demystify the notion that "totemic" societies are anistorical or "cold" and establish once and for all that history is not only present among Indians, but that it is tailored by them in their own terms, perhaps unrecognizable to us at first sight, but part and parcel of their ongoing traditions (Ramos 1988b).

Indeed, interest in ethnohistory is reappearing in Brazil after a hiatus in which structuralism predominated (Silva 1984; Laraia 1984/85; Farage 1985; Carneiro da Cunha 1987; Wright 1981). This new interest in history is no doubt motivated by the urge we have to understand the process of politicization, that is, the insertion of the Indian population into the political arena of the whites.

It is the feedback effect between his commitment to the anthropological enterprise and to the destiny of indigenous peoples that will provide the ethnologist with the elements to carry on lucid and meaningful analyses of the complex process of Indian-white contact in which he is inescapably an actor.

Perhaps novel in the history of ethnology is the experience of anthropologists and Indians working together, participating in the organization of assemblies, in the writing of documents, and in negotiations with the authorities. This active role of ethnologists should not be lost to the theoretical developments yet to come. The anthropologist as citizen has responsibility not only toward the people he studies, but also to the discipline he practices.

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NOTES

1. In some cases, the Indians themselves recruit their ethnographers to assist them; other times it is the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) which calls on the expertise of its members to provide reports for court cases involving land rights (ABA has signed a standing agreement with the Procuradoria Geral da República, "Attorney-General", for that purpose); congressmen, the press and other key agents in the national political scene often approach anthropologists for information and advice.

2. To the point are the very revealing statements by several North American anthropologists downplaying the influence that ethnographic writings can have in the political decisions that affect indigenous peoples (Booth 1989).

3. Experiences such as those reported by Crapanzano (1980), and Kondo (1986), for instance, can be extremely revealing of the stuff from which ethnography is constructed.

4. It should be pointed out that during his résidence in Brazil, in the 70s, Anthony Seeger was actively engaged in human rights, having actually been chosen as president of one of the many advocacy groups in Brazil at the time, the Pro-Indian Committee in Rio de Janeiro. His question can thus be taken as a challenge and a call for reflection, rather than as the curiosity of an innocent observer. If so, it has had the desired effect, for it has triggered off much thinking on the subject, as least on my part (Ramos 1988a, 1988b).

5. It has been very gratifying to me to read the reports by Fred Myers (1986, 1988) on the engagement of North American anthropologists in the problems of contact faced by the Australian Aborigines. On the other hand, the active concern that anthropologists in the United States have had with human rights issues has not so far contributed in any significant way to shape the specific brand of North American anthropology as -- it is my point -- has been the case in Brazil.

6. Klaas Woortmann, my colleague at the University of Brasília, has suggested to me that while in Brazil anthropologists have worked toward nation-building, in Britain and the United States, they have contributed to empire-building. Certainly, incidents such as the scandalous Project Camelot involving North American anthropologists in cover-up operations in the sixties tend to corroborate Woortmann's insight. This may also have to do with why most Anglo-American anthropologists shy away from political involvement.

7. At present, a large number of researchers, Brazilian and foreign, are not allowed into Indian areas, especially in the north Amazon region, where the military have created the Calha Norte Project, a grandiose plan for the defence of the borders, control of development, monitoring of land occupation (see Albert 1989).

8. In a provocative little book comparing North American and Brazilian academic ethos and habits, Roberto Kant de Lima (1985) shows how creativity and imagination are encouraged in the training of social scientists in Brazil.

9. This concern was repeatedly stated during a Seminar on Comparative Social Structure of South American Indian Societies held at the National Museum in Rio in September 1985, attended by several Brazilian ethnologists and some foreign colleagues. More recently, Kaplan (1986) has reviewed the field pointing out precisely this displacement of focus from social to cosmological relationships.

10. In a seminar on Frontier Expansion in Amazonia held in Gainesville, Florida, in February, 1982, both Ribeiro and Wagley were happy to admit their error in predicting the total extinction of Brazilian Indians. In light of the Pan-Indian movement in the country in the seventies and eighties, both ethnologists recognized the extraordinary resilience of indigenous peoples and their capacity to survive against all odds (see Ramos 1988b).

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