

A Companion
to Latin
American
Anthropology

Edited by
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CHAPTER 3

Brazil: Otherness in Context

Mariza Peirano

For a long time anthropology was defined by the exoticism of its object of study and by the distance, conceived as cultural and geographical, that separated the researcher from his or her group. This situation has changed. Even (and perhaps mostly) in the socially legitimate centers of anthropological production, the ideal of an encounter with some sort of radical alterity is no longer considered an essential dimension of the anthropological perspective. Anthropology is not about an object, it is about difference.

Of course, this viewpoint has been present in the international scene since the 1960s, but it would not surface easily in the minds of anthropologists. Despite the fact that anthropology's interest had shifted from far away (the Trobrianders, the Azande, Kwakiutl, Bororo) to less exotic places (the Mediterranean countries, for example), and then to settings and groups close by, when it really did reach "home" in the 1980s, in some quarters it turned itself to an array of *studies* – cultural studies, science studies, feminist studies and so on (cf. Peirano 1998).

In Brazilian anthropology, as in Latin American more generally, difference came to refer to a plurality of notions which can be either historical or simultaneous. In Brazil, though exoticism has never been an issue in itself, some dimension of alterity has been and continues to be a basic trait of anthropology. Briefly, a notion of otherness involving indigenous peoples and their contact with the regional population dominated the scene up until the 1960s; in the following decades, these studies coexisted with "softer" alterities in which anthropologists turned their attention to the peasantry and then to urban contexts, until, more recently, during the 1980s, their concerns began to include social scientists' intellectual careers and production. Otherness has thus shifted from a concept of distant to minimal alterities, many anthropologists having developed interests in several kinds over the course of their academic career. The result has been a steady incorporation of new topics and an enlargement of the discipline's research universe. Today, all these modes of conceiving alterity (indigenous peoples, urban population, peasantry, social scientists themselves) live together in a pluralistic way.

The Brazilian example reveals that, though exoticism is the sociogenetic foundation of anthropology, *for anthropologists themselves* difference can assume many meanings. While in canonical terms it was radical to the point of (ideally) being foreign, when acculturated in other latitudes alterity has often translated into relative rather than exotic difference. Whether near or far, these differences can be cultural, social, economic, political, religious, territorial. In other words, the process that in the metropolitan centers took a century to develop – that is, bringing the discipline home from abroad – in Brazil took no more than three decades. Even though there are of course intellectual and/or empirical priorities as well as trends (theoretical or regarding objects/subjects), there are no real restrictions in relation to this multiplicity of alterities.

This relative freedom is related to many factors, and I shall raise a few of them. First, Brazil (or South America, for that matter) has never experienced any historical resentment for having been the object of anthropological curiosity by the metropolitan centers (as was the case in the first half of the century with Melanesia, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa). Second, sociologists have been the main interlocutors for anthropologists – and not archaeologists, physical anthropologists or linguists. If neighboring disciplines (as models or rivals) must always be considered in order to focus a specific field of knowledge, then permanent dialogue with sociology and political science has prevailed. In Brazil, anthropology is one of the social sciences. Third, indigenous peoples – the presumed prototype of a radical alterity – were researched within the boundaries of the national territory. This situation reveals less a problem of financial resources – although this needs to be considered – than the choice of an object of study which includes, or is mixed with, a concern over differences. A last point to mention is the dominant influence of a French/Durkheimian perspective (over a German one, for instance), in which different ways of conceiving society stand side by side, thus playing down any strict interests in peculiarities or singularities. (The exhilaration which Lévi-Strauss produced in Brazil in the 1960s may be explained by this situation.)

Given this general context, this chapter centers on (but is not restricted to) the last three to four decades, when anthropology gained legitimacy and became a prestigious field of social inquiry in Brazil. Because it emerged as a kind of rib to sociology – a feminine agency, for that matter – it also inherited sociology's basic tension, that of combining theoretical excellence with social commitment. All this has to do with the institutionalization of the social sciences back in the 1930s, an Enlightenment project to help forge a political elite to govern the country and create a "national" ideal. Since then, this external dialogue with sociology has been internalized in the discipline as a dichotomy between indigenous ethnology "made in Brazil" and anthropological research *about Brazil*. Today we may say that an anthropology made in/about Brazil is a general goal.

EXOTICISM AND IDEAL TYPES: THE CASE OF BRAZIL

From the perspective of the classic concern about taboos, exoticism is a distant and remote alterity which also includes a sort of fascination. In other words, rather than delineating a forbidden territory, it calls for scrutiny. But alterity as *difference* or as

exoticism diverge: while exoticism always implies some sort of difference, not every difference is exotic. This is basic Durkheim. In the first case, political dimensions are intrinsic to its very existence. In the latter, politics are beyond, far away or in any case separate. One more aspect is that the emphasis on difference is inherently comparative, whereas the emphasis on exoticism does not require contrasts.

Since exoticism was the sociogenetic trait of anthropology, I will take it as the relevant element in relation to which examples can be measured. The aim is to focus on how it was acculturated in Brazil by means of a shift in emphasis toward difference. I identify four ideal types, in the Weberian sense: (1) radical alterity, (2) contact with alterity, (3) nearby alterity, and (4) minimum alterity. These types are not mutually exclusive and, as mentioned, throughout their academic careers anthropologists move back and forth among and within them. In chronological terms, a certain sequence can be noted: the research project of radical alterity preceded the study of contact of regional with indigenous populations. In turn, this interest was followed by research carried out at home, especially in urban contexts. Today sociological production itself has become an anthropological problem. In the past decade, the trend to transpose national boundaries (but in a different mode from orthodox anthropologists) has been not only accepted but praised. I will look closer at these cases but, for editorial reasons, I will transform long and productive academic careers into a single reference, and sometimes not even that. I apologize to my colleagues in advance. (For a more inclusive listing, see Peirano 1999.)

Radical alterity

The search for a rigorous sort of alterity can be illustrated in Brazil by two forms of geographical and ideological distancing. First, in the classic study of indigenous populations; second, in the more recent project of going beyond the country's own territorial limits. In neither case, however, compared to a central or "international anthropology" (as per Gerholm and Hannerz 1982), is alterity extreme (though it may be argued that indigenous peoples represented the "available exoticism," and that studying abroad is what anthropologists should do).

Let me begin by looking at the study of indigenous peoples. Today apprentices in the field can detect some dichotomies: Tupi or Jê; social organization or cosmology; Amazonia and Central Brazil or Xingu; history or ethnography; political economy or descriptive cosmology (Viveiros de Castro 1995). As with any dichotomy, the empirical options are far greater. But in this context, research on the Tupi, having practically disappeared from ethnology in Brazil during the 1960s (see Larala 1964, 1986), has made a return in the past two decades (Viveiros de Castro 1992, 1998; Fausto 2001; among others). At the same time, research on indigenous peoples has provoked a systematic interest in kinship systems: though a classic area of anthropology, in Brazil's local scene it was considered a novelty (Viveiros de Castro 1995; Villaça 1992; Gonçalves 1993; Teixeira Pinto 1997).

Before the 1980s, the Jê was the most studied group in Brazil. Following the classic works of Nimuendaju (for example, 1946), the Jê caught the attention of Lévi-Strauss (for instance, 1952) and, shortly thereafter, of the Harvard-Central Brazil Project (Maybury-Lewis 1967, 1979). In a short time, the results of this ambitious research

project became the main support for structuralist Ph.D. dissertations. This field experience was central for a whole generation of Brazilian anthropologists (for example, DaMatta 1976; Melatti 1970). In the following decades, research on the Jê continued, although the question of hegemony over the Tupi research was no longer an issue: see, for example, Vidal (1977), Carneiro de Cunha (1978), Seeger (1981), Lopes da Silva (1986), among others. (For the ethnology of Xingu musicology see Seeger 1987, followed by Menezes Bastos 1999.)

This brief overview indicates that research has been consistently carried out in Brazilian territory. The specialists, however, do not consider they are studying "Brazilian Indians"; for them the relevant fact is that these indigenous groups are *situated* in Brazil as a matter of chance. There are, however, political and ideological implications deriving from this location – anthropologists are often called to participate in the demarcation of Indian lands, for instance. But even if the main motivation for research is not exoticism but rather the (social, cultural, cosmological) difference between social groups, this line of research best corresponds to the traditional concerns of anthropology. It follows that it is within this area of study that debates with the "international" community are most frequent (see the debate between Brazilian and French ethnologists in Viveiros de Castro 1993 and Copet-Rougier and Héritier-Augé 1993; see Viveiros de Castro 2003). The question thus remains: is *our* difference *others'* exoticism?

One more word in retrospect. Since it is considered the classic field of anthropology, specialists have access to a large body of literature on South American ethnology. It traces back to the German expeditions of the 19th century seeking answers in Brazil to European questions about the nature of primitive groups, and continues onward to recent generations, such as the works of Nimuendaju about the social organization of the Jê, or research in the 1930s about the Tupi (for example, the monographs by Herbert Baldus, Charles Wagley and Eduardo Galvão, as well as the works by Darcy and Berta Ribeiro about the Urubu-Kaapor, by Florestan Fernandes concerning Tupinambá social organization and Tupinambá war, and Egon Schaden on the Guarani (see references in Melatti 1984; Peirano 1999).

Then there is a second case of radical alterity. In this situation, otherness is basically geographical but not historically distant. In fact, though Brazilian anthropologists are increasingly breaking with the common practice of conducting fieldwork within the country's borders, an ideological bond to Brazil remains the rule. This happens in two ways: first, following Brazilians abroad, and second, looking at populations who were once colonial subjects of Portugal.

Let us see both. The first tendency leads us straight to the United States, which has acquired a social value of paradigmatic alterity for comparative purposes (see G. Velho 1995 for references of studies published from the 1950s to the 1990s; see also Wade, this volume). This practice builds upon the classic study about racial prejudice by Oracy Nogueira (1986), but also includes analyses of hierarchy and individualism by DaMatta (1973, 1980). Later developments are, for example, L. Cardoso de Oliveira (2002) and Kant de Lima (1995a, 1995b). A second direction leads us to Portugal's former colonies and to the ethnographic interest they inspire. Fry (e.g. 1991, 1999, 2005) compares colonial experiences in the matter of color and race in Brazil, the United States, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Trajano Filho (1993, 1998) examines the national projects for a Creole society, with reference to Guiné-Bissau, and in a

similar mode, but this time in the Cape Verde Islands, are Dias (2004) and Rego (2001). Thomaz (2002) examines the Portuguese "third empire," thus confirming the deep-rooted link to Portugal. Dialogues between Portuguese and Brazilian scholars can be found in Bastos, Almeida and Bianco (2002), G. Velho (1999), and *Etnográfica* (2000). Of course, there are exceptions to the rule concerning direct links to Brazil, and some authors have developed studies on other settings such as Argentina (G. Ribeiro 1991; Neiburg 1997), France (Fonseca 1986; Eckert 2003), and Syria (Pinto 2002).

A new trend may be detected in recent concerns about international and supranational affairs. Among these studies, Góes Filho (2003) looks at meetings of the General Assembly in the United Nations as rituals; Silva (2004) examines the role of the United Nations in East Timor state-building processes; Leite Lopes (2004) focuses on the proliferation of nuclear plants in small towns in Brazil and the issue of environmentalism.

Contact with alterity

If radical alterity consisted of studies *about* indigenous groups, studies looking at relations *with* indigenous groups are of a different kind, which I call contact with alterity. Today, a considerable body of literature is beholden to indigenist concerns, long discussed separately from mainstream ethnological monographs in the 1940s. Contact itself became a legitimate academic topic during the following decades: after D. Ribeiro (1957, 1962) focused in on the issue of Indian integration, R. Cardoso de Oliveira (1978) adopted a perspective *from within* and crafted the notion of "interethnic friction."

Interethnic friction is considered a theoretical innovation by many. It appeared as part of a bricolage of indigenist concerns and sociological theory, revealing "a situation in which two groups are dialectically put together through their opposing interests" (R. Cardoso de Oliveira 1963:43). Interethnic friction was proposed in a context where the theories of contact, both British (Malinowski) and American (Redfield, Linton and Herskovitz), had proven inadequate. The combination of an anthropological subject and a sociological inspiration (Fernandes and the French sociologist Georges Balandier) resulted in a proposal which became fundamental in the consolidation of several M.A. and Ph.D. programs.

In the 1960s, when the notion of interethnic friction was proposed, a structuralist oriented project was also being developed in the same institutional space (Museu Nacional), curiously involving many of the same researchers (Laraia and DaMatta 1967; DaMatta 1976; Melatti 1967). The literature produced from these two projects focused, respectively, on interethnic contact from a sociological orientation, and on indigenous social systems in a structuralist mode.

In the late 1970s research about "contact" received a new impulse. Oliveira Filho (see 1998, 1999) expanded interethnic concerns by reshaping them to include historical dimensions. A group of researchers followed suit and unfolded this thematic approach by discussing relations between indigenists and government policies, the demarcation of Indian lands, the role of the military and frontiers, the notion of *territorialization* and the two-way process that derives from it, the examination of "mixed Indians" in the Brazilian northeast and Indian rights. Souza Lima (1995) refocuses

some of these concerns by looking at research programs on "indigenism," described as a set of ideas related to the insertion of indigenous peoples into nation-state societies, and Souza Lima and Barroso-Hoffman (2002) look at several dimensions inherent in the association between anthropology and the state regarding indigenous policies. They discuss the regulation of Indian rights in Brazil, confronting the paradox that social policies often create and maintain social inequalities despite their discourse to the contrary. One sensitive nerve touched by the probing of these issues is the national myth about an integrated society derived from the "mixture of three races" and the role of the state as mediator.

Parallel to this front, Baines (1991) looks at relations between indigenous groups and the National Indian Foundation. For further studies of indigenous legislation and the conditions of South American Indians, see Carneiro da Cunha (1993) and Santos (1989). After a canonical trajectory in ethnology, Alcida Ramos developed an increasing concern with indigenism, evaluating Yanomami ethnography in a context of crisis and examining the idea that indigenism is for Brazil what orientalism is for the "West" (Ramos 1995, 1998).

Here, I pause just to mention, without further elaboration, the anthropological study of peasants – a highly relevant field which deserves a study of its own (see Seligmann, this volume). I only indicate that during the 1970s the concern with contact incorporated the theme of expanding frontiers. This in turn made topics such as internal colonialism, peasants and the development of capitalism legitimate anthropological concerns (O. Velho 1972, 1976). At the same time, studies about peasants gained an independent thematic status, involving both anthropologists and sociologists (for the former see Palmeira 1977, Sigaud 1980, Moura 1988, Seyferth 1999, and the works of Klaas Woortmann (1990) and Ellen Woortmann (1995), among others). To the degree that alterity shifted its locus from Indian groups to contact with Indians, and then to peasants, the path was somehow completed with the inclusion of the peripheries of big cities (for instance, Leite Lopes 1976).

Nearby alterity

Since the 1970s, anthropologists in Brazil have carried on research in large cities. Given that the teaching of anthropology is part of the social sciences curriculum, it is common for anthropology to become a counterpoint to sociology. Under the political authoritarianism of the 1960s, anthropology was seen by many as an alternative to (Marxist) challenges coming from sociology, in a more or less silent dialogue that has persisted ever since. The attraction to anthropology rested both on its qualitative approach and on the promise of answers to understand both the country's diversity and its unity.

In the case of nearby otherness, the object of study has generally been chosen in close association with specific theoretical options. In Brazil, theory is not just an approach, but a political statement. Thus, G. Velho pulled together, by way of a bricolage, the symbolic interactionism from the Chicago school of sociology, and 1960s British social anthropology (Clyde Mitchell, Raymond Firth, E. Bott) to open up the possibility for research on sensitive urban topics. Those included middle class lifestyles, cultural behaviors of what is called in Brazil "psychism" (psychoanalysis etc.), drug consumption, violence, and politics. See for example G. Velho (1981, 1994). In this

context, Velho's pioneering fieldwork in urban anthropology in the early 1970s focused on a specific overpopulated building in the Rio de Janeiro neighborhood of Copacabana (G. Velho 1973).

Later, this line of research expanded into other areas, including poverty, the elderly, gender issues, prostitution, kinship and family, music and politics. A central goal of this comprehensive project as a whole has been to reveal some urban values of Brazilian society. In this sense, this research project not only situated phenomena in the city, but also sought to analyze, in the path opened by Simmel, conditions of sociability in metropolitan areas. The production of this thematic line is voluminous and broad-ranging. (See Peirano 1999 for references.) For violence in the city, the extensive work by Zaluar is essential (see Zaluar 1999 for a review article on violence and crime).

DaMatta (1973, 1980) found in structuralism a legitimate theoretical approach with which to begin his research about Carnival. The horizontality this perspective conferred to different societies allowed him to leap from his 1960s study on indigenous peoples to national society as a whole. Later on, he added Gilberto Freyre (a former student of Franz Boas) as a predecessor for the examination of a possible national ethos. DaMatta (1973) may be considered the transition point, with a canonical structuralist analysis placing side by side an Apinajé myth, a short story by Edgar Allan Poe and Carnival as *communitas*. This line of research was later expanded in order to examine "what makes Brazil, Brazil" (DaMatta 1984).

In this expansion toward urban topics, the relevance of researching at home was never seriously questioned. There was a brief discussion about the nature of fieldwork in general in the 1970s, but the whole issue was solved by the 1980s.

In the period that begins in the 1960s, other topics have emerged, some related to the social integration of oppressed sectors of the society and, later on, to minorities' rights. Despite occasional rivalries between anthropology and sociology regarding the study in urban settings, both disciplines have had a long association, which can be attested in a large bibliography related to immigration, race relations, feminism and gender studies, messianism, Afro-Brazilian cults, crime, citizenship. To mention only a few examples, the review article on religion and Afro-Brazilian cults by Montero (1999) offers a basic bibliography (but see also Maggie 1975, 1992; Carvalho 1992; O. Velho 1995). Popular festivities are the subject of Magnani (1984), Chaves (2003), and Cavalcanti (1994), among others. The investigation of Brazil as a nation-state is exemplified in DaMatta (1980) and Oliven (1992). The subject of gender is exemplified in Grossi (2003) and Fonseca (2000); crime and citizenship in Caldeira (2000). For studies focused directly on politics from a native's perspective, see the more than 30 volumes of the *Coleção Antropologia da Política* (published by Relume Dumará, Rio de Janeiro), which puts together studies on several topics including, for instance, the National March of Landless Workers (Chaves 2000), honor among Congressmen (Teixeira 1998), the presence of the state in the everyday life of a shantytown (Borges 2004), political networks, favors and personal dependency in governmental spheres (Bezerra 1999), kinship, family and rural labor unions (Comerford 2003), and elections and political representation (Palmeira and Goldman 1996). Palmeira and Barreira (2005) puts together contributions by the project's principal researchers.

Minimum alterity

As if to confirm that the social sciences in Brazil have a debt to Durkheim – for whom other forms of civilization should be looked at in order to explain what is near to us – since the 1980s anthropologists have launched a series of studies about themselves and their craft. For the most part, these studies aim at understanding science as a manifestation of modernity. Topics vary from the study of historical contexts for science and biographies of social scientists (mostly in Brazil) to inquiries about classical sociological authors. Some examples are studies examining the development of anthropology in museums and universities (Castro Faria 1993); the historiography of the discipline in the country (Corrêa 2003); intellectual biographies (such as one of Lévy-Bruhl, see Goldman 1994) and memories (Peixoto, Pontes and Schwarcz 2004); comparative projects concerning the social sciences in Brazil (Miceli 1999); the social sciences in São Paulo (Pontes 1998); comparisons between intellectual careers (such as Gilberto Freyre and Roger Bastide in Peixoto 2000; Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in Castro Santos 2003; Mario de Andrade in Brazil and Béla Bartok in Hungary in Travassos 1997); investigations on scientists and the race question in Brazil (Schwarcz 1996, 1999; Maio 1996); a bibliographical guide to the study of Brazilianists (Peixoto and Schwarcz 2002). The interest that Brazilian scholars generally manifest in educational issues is discussed in Bomeny (2001), and a comprehensive bibliography of anthropology in Brazil until the 1980s appears in Melatti (1984).

A broad-based research project dealing with different national styles of anthropology was inaugurated in R. Cardoso de Oliveira and Ruben (1995). Conceived as an inquiry into “peripheral” anthropologies, it is inspired by the work of philosopher G. Gaston Granger. Before that, in the late 1970s, I started a research project with the intention of analyzing the discipline from an anthropological perspective. Challenged by Dumont’s proposal, in which he submits that anthropology is defined by a hierarchy of values in which universalism encompasses holism, I examined anthropology in Brazil, with France and Germany as control cases (Peirano 1981). This study was followed by a comparison between Brazil, India, and the United States, resulting in the proposal for an “anthropology in the plural” (Peirano 1992). The analysis of the relationship between social science and the national ideology was refined by Vilhena (1997), who examines the role of regional intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s, and the struggle by folklorists to survive in an environment in which sociology was becoming hegemonic. A new project on the relationship between anthropological perspectives and state-building processes is presented in L’Estoile, Neiburg and Sigaud (2002). Psychoanalysis has also proved to be a fertile field of study for anthropology in Brazil. A dialogue within this field has developed into a solid research program; see Duarte (1986, 1996, 2000).

In sum: the studies in which alterity is found among social scientists generally focus on the Brazilian case, often with a comparative perspective in mind, but also on topics related to broad Western intellectual traditions. Since most of the publications are in Portuguese, the audience is limited. This scenario is enlarging with publications in English, but overall these are still a tiny minority. An important question thus arises concerning the audience for these studies. To what extent does it make sense to

undertake comprehensive and exhaustive investigations if they have no immediate overseas audience? Or, put in another way, why enter into a dialogue with the sources of scholarship if the desired debates do not occur due to the very language of enunciation? It seems that the link with the wider intellectual world – by means of inquiries about the works of recognized scholars – is sought for its illocutionary effect at home, as it is considered essentially “theoretical.” Accustomed to the exotic gaze of investigators from abroad, the idea of “minimum alterity” thus hides a proposal of “maximum (theoretical) alterity” that remains incomplete at heart, since no feedback is generally available.

MULTIPLE INTERLOCUTORS

If the Brazilian example reinforces the idea that categories of alterity are contextual for anthropologists themselves, it is necessary to turn, by way of comparison, to the consecrated traditions in order to remember that they never were totally radical: Africa was relatively *home* for the British when they transferred the notion of totality to the Tallensi, the Azande and the Ndembu, thus renouncing sociology in favor of a flourishing anthropology. Up until the mid-1950s the discipline was limited to the metropolis, but social recognition of structuralism during the 1960s produced an unexpected by-product. If it is true that human practices are horizontal, it was possible to imagine both the emergence of “indigenous anthropologies” along with the endorsement that today, in the words of Clifford Geertz, “we are all natives.”

The center’s acceptance seems to have legitimated the many conferences held since then by, and/or for, “non-Western” specialists, but the matter remained controversial. One example is Kuper (1994), who criticizes “nativist” manifestations of anthropology using the case of Greece. Denying that only natives can have a proper understanding of their own society, and that natives are the best judges (even censors) of ethnography, this sensible viewpoint is followed by a not so thoughtful proposal for a “cosmopolitan anthropology” which would exclude not only curious foreigners, arm-chair voyeurs, but also the native community of specialists (social scientists, planners, intellectuals in general). Anthropology is a social science allied to sociology and history, and should not be linked to political programs – that is the conclusion.

In Brazil, the alliance between anthropology, sociology and history has been common practice, but the same does not hold for the exclusion of political viewpoints. Actually, in different guises, political agendas have always been part of scientific projects – in Brazil as elsewhere. In Brazil, efforts to achieve theoretical excellence rest on classical sociological authors, on critical dialogues with contemporary specialists (foreigners and local), and on the impact of new empirical evidence. In other words, in Brazil theoretical bricolage is the foundation for new intellectual lineages, with social responsibility being pervasive.

One specific feature, however, is relevant here: foreign interlocutors *from the metropolis* have been social scientists’ fashionable preference. They have been chosen from several blends of Marxism since the 1960s, then Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism, interpretativism in Clifford Geertz’s style, and more recently, Foucault and Derrida’s postmodernism. For those who take it for granted that the center is where theory is (and vice versa), parochialism is simply avoided by means of the immediacy of the empirical data. This may partially explain why there is not much ongoing exchange with peers from other Latin America countries (Mexico and Argentina are exceptions).

Since the basic triangular dialogues in Brazil are with local social scientists in general, with native subjects (generally conceived as socially oppressed), and with Western traditions of scholarship in the discipline (where legitimate theory is supposed to develop best), it would be necessary to make a new effort to include other Latin American traditions into this configuration.

MULTIPLE ALTERITIES

The institutionalization of the social sciences as part of nation-building processes is a well-known phenomenon (see Peirano 1981), as is the paradox of the existence of a critical social science surviving the interests of the elite that created it. In these moments, the new social science is not specialized because the project of nation-building and state formation encompasses several academic disciplines. Alterity is rarely neutral and the interested aspects, in a Weberian sense, are in many cases explicit. Anthropology and sociology only break apart in a process which is at once political, institutional and conceptual. Specializations are often needed when the process of nation-state building demands separated areas of investigation, for instance on the conditions for development (sociology) and cultural diversity (anthropology).

During the 1930s in Brazil, the social sciences were adopted in order to provide a scientific approach to the project of a new nation. It was believed that social sciences would substitute for the socioliterary essay which (more than philosophy or human sciences) had performed the task of reflecting on social issues. Thus, from the 1930s to the 1950s, sociology was understood as encompassing all social sciences. But an emerging "*made-in-Brazil* sociology," which combined theoretical demands with political concerns, was to become hegemonic during the following decades (Fernandes 1958, 1963). Meanwhile, ethnological studies of indigenous groups represented the canonical model for anthropology, even though soon afterwards it adopted topics considered to be related to sociology. There was a fundamental disparity between sociology and anthropology, though: while problem-solving projects dominated sociology, the examination of social and/or cultural *difference* was the concern of anthropology. Difference, however, was to be found inside Brazil's own borders. Nowadays, even when anthropologists do venture out of the country, the quest for some sort of "Brazilianness" is unavoidable (as attested by the studies of former Portuguese colonies or Brazilian immigrants).

Social sciences from Brazil were never part of the circuits dominated by the centers of intellectual production. Curiously, though, we still consider ourselves as legitimate interlocutors of recognized authors of the Western tradition. It seems that the isolation of the Portuguese language has an affinity with the (local) political role reserved for the social scientist. This affinity, first of all, justifies alterity's ideal types and strategies, while on the other hand it spotlights a paradox: when we look for difference, we often find a supposed singularity (which is "Brazilian"). Apart from this puzzling aspect, however, the complex process of intellectual and political debates has over time contributed positively to the consolidation of an effective academic community. On that note, I conclude this essay by pointing to three aspects:

In terms of exoticism For Brazilian anthropologists it has been difference, whether social or cultural, and not exoticism, that has provided the focus of attention when they look for alterity. This characteristic perhaps explains why, as opposed to the places

where exoticism is threatening to destroy the discipline, or at least displace it, Brazilian anthropologists tend to share an optimistic perspective.

In political terms Though the political dimension has always been present wherever social sciences develop, in Brazil it has been directed toward a specific type of ideal nation-state, in which differences should be respected and a (national) singularity sought out and revealed.

In theoretical terms Conceived as part of the Western world but not speaking an international language, Brazil finds itself in a *sui generis* position, in which theoretical dimensions assume a critical role as the noble path to modernity. In Brazil, the political implications of social theory lead to a bricolage of specific objects of study and theoretical options. In recent years, the more successful attempts in the social sciences have come from the above-mentioned summation of previous and still valuable theoretical approaches and the empirical situations at hand. In this context, there is room for a variety of approaches. Room first of all for pure mimetism, produced from a belief that we are all part of a homogeneous world that does not exist. This situation leads to the acritical absorption of current foreign authors as a shortcut to the modern world. Second (as a variation on the first approach), there is room for a trivial practice whereby the data are ours but the theory is imported – the interlocution between empirical data and theory is abandoned, and data become the mere illustration of theory. There is a third, perhaps more rewarding option. It rests on the idea that anthropology (and the social sciences in general) develops better when expanding, redirecting and broadening previous questions, thus posing renewed problems and questions. In this case, anthropology defines itself as eternally surpassing itself – and in this sense partaking of the Weberian eternal youth ideal of the social sciences. This project does not deny political differences among intellectual communities, but rests on a sociological understanding of them. If it is correct to think that “a world culture of the times” develops by constant exchanges – out of the “centers” to the ideological peripheries *and vice versa* – then the implicit promise is for theoretical and empirical dialogues surpassing boundaries toward “plural universalisms” to take root. In this context, where one lives – in Brazil or elsewhere – is an important but not the only factor at play. Anthropology is one and many: while anthropology is practiced in Brazil, there is not of necessity a “Brazilian anthropology.”

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