

Joyeuses Tropiques: Five Encounters with Alterities in Brazil*

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Abstract. The paper describes the predicament of Brazilian anthropology through a personal experience of teaching and living in Brasilia. Just like Brasilia, Brazil is many ways considered as “a work in progress” – and Brazilian anthropology as a lively and thriving area, although frequently overlooked by non-Brazilian scholars. The situation in which Brazilian anthropologists find themselves is put in the context of their own history, as well as the particular social conditions of the country – with special reference to Brazil as invention, taking as an example celebration of “500 years of Brazil.”

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Introduction: Coming there

I came to Brazil almost as a result of an accident.¹ I was looking for a job, and they were looking for someone with “extra-continental” interests, preferably, to develop and teach courses on Europe (or at least from a “Europeanist” perspective), and there I was. To make matters more dynamic, I was leaving Belgrade (then Yugoslavia) and South-eastern Europe on the eve of the escalation of the Kosovo crisis – the day after I arrived in Slovenia [on 24 March 1999], the NATO bombing campaign began. Since my parents and some of my friends were among the ones being bombed (and exposed to shortages of water, electricity, etc.), there was a kind of tension. I was supposed to get immediately into the teaching and courses’ preparations (as I did), although my thoughts and my feelings were elsewhere.

I had some very vague ideas about Brazilian anthropology – I knew about the seminal works of Nimuendajú² and I had a general concept of the Brazilian tradition as one of the great non-Western ones (along with the Indian one). I read some papers sent to me before taking off (including Peirano 1998), which I found very interesting. Finally, I also read the famous (especially in Brazil) Rabinow’s article, which increased

my curiosity. I also had a general idea that the department where I was going is very good.

I was already warned (when I mentioned the idea of coming to Brazil to a Brazilian anthropologist at the 1998 ICEAS in Williamsburg) that “Brazil is not for beginners.” I also heard when I came that Brazil was not a country for people who get upset too easily – an obvious experience when dealing with various levels of different bureaucracies (as I was to learn later).

Encounters (1): Work in progress

All I knew about Brasília was that it was built as a monument to modernism in architecture, primarily by LeCorbusier’s students and followers. The city was conceived in the 19th century but built during the 1950s and officially inaugurated in 1960. It is on the UNESCO’s list of the world heritage sites.

The first reaction was mixed. Most of the Brazilians I spoke to before taking off seemed horrified that someone would go to their country and immediately go to the capital. “You shouldn’t go there, it’s horrible... You should go to Rio or São Paulo!” was a sentence that I heard so many times. Later I also heard that when Brasília was inaugurated as the country’s capital (21 April 1960), it provoked a deep resentment, primarily from the people from Rio de Janeiro, the former capital, as many people who worked in the government administration lost their jobs. But, more importantly, its inauguration almost coincided with the military *coup-de-état* in 1964, and in many minds the image of the capital is still strongly associated with the military dictatorship (1964–1985), as well as the corruption and bureaucracy that is usually associated with the government. To make matters even more interesting, a whole new generation of public prosecutors has entered the public life recently and started inquests into dealings of some prominent political figures. This increased the number of scandals that the press (reasonably well – if not directly – controlled)³ can write about, involving people very close to the government and to the president himself.

The city looks very strange to someone who lived in the former communist (or, as Czeslaw Milosz called it nicely, *Other*) Europe. We have seen and experienced communist experiments in modernist architecture – long, uniform, dull multi-apartment blocks of buildings supposed to house many people⁴ and to enable them to quickly get to work via the

elaborate system of streets. Except that in the case of Brasília the streets are more like highways (two of them literally cut the city in halves) – and it seems that back in 1950s no one thought that there would be any pedestrians in the 1980s or 1990s. Brasília was designed for people to get quickly from point A to point B – in a car. The city was planned for 50,000 people and the number of inhabitants was supposed to grow to up to 500,000 by late 2000. Of course, like all plannings, this one was a bit over-optimistic: by the end of 2000, Brasília (officially) had over 2 million inhabitants and at least 500,000 cars. There is almost no life on the streets and there are no squares – no open-space public areas where people could converse and meet. As noted by Miguel Vale de Almeida,⁵ this is a strange paradox at the time when people elsewhere want to reclaim the streets and do everything in their power to create their own public spaces. In Brasília, public spaces are mostly reserved for cars. And everything is carefully planned (the aircraft-like city plan) and numerical – streets have no names (invoking for me the U2 song), but *quadras* (apartment blocs) have numbers. While the numbers have their own logic (after 100s come the 300s – not the 200s! –, then 500s, 700s and 900s; 200s are followed by 400s, 600s and 800s), and once one gets used to it, there is actually some coherence there.

Of course, the city did not turn out according to the plans nor according to the drawings and designs of great architects Oscar Niemeyer and Lúcio Costa – just like in many other Third World countries, the government simply ran out of money and many areas that were suppose to “humanize” the environment (squares, public spaces, areas for cultural events) were never actually built. The impressive almost half-mile long central building of the University of Brasília (*Minhocão*, “The Big Worm”) was left without a dome that was supposed to be over it – just like in many other aspects, Brasília seems, like Brazil as a whole, to be “a work in progress,” something that is left unfinished, something that is continuously happening, but without any idea of the clear end and without any certainty that there will be money (or political will) to finish what was planned.

For example, the trees are planted in a haphazard fashion – the South Wing of the city (*Asa Sul*) has most of them. However, as in many other situations, the people doing the planning of the city were not from this area (Brasília looks quite different when seen from Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo!), so even when there are trees, they do not provide shade. Most of the trees shed their leaves during the “winter” season (June–September, actually the hottest time of the year in Brasília), when it is dry and the unforgiving tropical sun just burns everything.

On the other hand, vast open spaces convey an image of grandeur and openness. From almost any point in the city, one can see the line of the horizon – and at dawns or sunsets this image can be quite a spectacular one. Overall, the city does have its charm. There are concerts (when police do not rush in to ban them – it sometimes seems that concerts and private parties are the main concern of Brazilian police), exhibitions, and cultural events. While some of the apartment buildings have started to disintegrate (modernism in architecture was meant to be looked at, not really lived in – and many of these buildings were apparently built without taking into account the tropical climate and the rainy season), some of the more recent ones look and feel much nicer. Some of the *quadras* have developed a sort of a life of their own, with lively cafés, bars and restaurants. The New Age spiritualism thrives with the image of its mythical founder Dom Bosco and all kinds of religious cults and orientations. The result is that most people are quite open when it comes to religion or belief – a Palestinian friend of mine was quite happy that he came to the place where no one was bothered by his (Muslim) religion.

Encounters (2): Rabinow, modernism and Brazilian anthropology

Ever since Lévi-Strauss, Brazil has been *the* anthropological theorists' favorite laboratory, as there were plenty of "others" ready to be studied and examined. The impact of structuralism is unquestionable – until very recently it was *the* dominant paradigm in Brazilian anthropology. Perhaps it is a matter of mere coincidence, but Geertz's article "Cerebral Savage" (with his strong criticism of Lévi-Strauss) is among the six chapters inexplicably missing from the Brazilian edition of *The Interpretation of Cultures*. As a matter of fact, after Darcy Ribeiro, one of the founding fathers of contemporary Brazilian anthropology,⁶ was allowed to return to the country by its military rulers in 1979, he noted that most of his fellow anthropologists were *cavalos de santo* for Lévi-Strauss' structuralism.⁷ This provoked a heated polemic (which is actually something quite unusual in Brazilian social sciences – if one does not like something, she/he just keeps silent and pretends that the thing does not exist and as a matter of fact has never existed!) and an angry response from another local great – Roberto DaMatta.

Structuralism is still present, of course. Paul Rabinow described the first meeting with "a leading anthropologist" at the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro⁸ and referring to "a well-rehearsed analysis" of a

photograph of Lévi-Strauss and several anthropologists at the Museu, dating from the 1930s. “M.’s structuralism is a talisman turned back on Lévi-Strauss and other foreigners, simultaneously claiming and denying seriousness, welcoming and warning at the same time.”⁹ The concept of authority is present as well, so describing one of the leading figures in Brazilian anthropology as “simultaneously insecure and self-congratulatory” and “a pompous provincial” obviously did not get Rabinow much points in the eyes of his Brazilian colleagues. What surprised me, however, was the fact that no one ever bothered to reply in any direct form to Rabinow’s piece. True, it is fairly consistent with Rabinow’s own (post-Foucauldian) style, so I was not very surprised by it. The surprising part was that no one felt the need to respond to it (publicly) in any form. Occasionally, one could find a reference such as the one by Peirano on “what Rabinow thought about his Brazilian colleagues.”¹⁰ (I was to learn later that there exists a code by which Brazilians in general and academics in particular communicate in a – for me strangely – indirect and formal way, leaving things unsaid when in fact implying them.)

The article is full of value judgments, as some of the author’s own friends remarked after reading an earlier version of it.¹¹ For example, it is true that racism exists in Brazil (Brazilian anthropologists are the first ones to acknowledge this!) – but it is a bit strange hearing criticism from someone coming from as race-segregated society as the US.¹² It is not true that Brazilian social scientists (including anthropologists) are silent about this – beginning from as far back as 1906,¹³ and certainly some younger ones more recently.¹⁴ It is also not true that almost half of the Brazilian anthropologists do research on Indians¹⁵ – a great majority of them study (and did so as well in 1987 – when Rabinow stayed in Brazil!) acculturation, peasants, rural communities, and more recently movements like the *Sem Terra* (MST), social organization and various urban groups.

A colleague of mine described Rabinow’s talk in Brasília as “shallow,” and, worse than that, he felt that the distinguished guest meant it to be shallow. Of course, one can always hear distinguished guests delivering superficial talks (I had a chance to hear at least one US anthropologist deliver his superficial stint during my very first semester in Brasília), but Rabinow was not just any anthropologist – he came as a sort of a superstar (or the closest that one can get to it in the academia), and the disappointment was proportional. “What is worse,” my colleague complained, “he [Rabinow] did not even listen to ‘the Natives!’”¹⁶ Of course, taking into account Rabinow’s style, he did not

have to. Everything was there, ready and pre-set: dynamics of social interactions, power, and, most of all, otherness.

Brazil has served well as the metaphor for otherness: the wild Indians, the uncharted wilderness of the Amazon, exotic plants and rare animals, incredible mixture of races and ethnic groups – all of that served to create an image of a distant, exotic other, which was yet so “understandable” (most academics speak English or French, some German) and near by. In this image of otherness, the other is postulated as the source of ultimate wisdom (in this case, an anthropological one) – but only people discovering the other (distinguished guests) can articulate that wisdom properly and put it in the context of the whole discipline. Just like in the American B-style kick-boxing movies,¹⁷ where the Oriental guy is the one that knows all the techniques that the white (American) guy needs to learn in order to compete and win, but, curiously enough, the Oriental never competes (even though, having all the knowledge, he could probably win easily) – it is left to the white guy to enter the combat, defeat all the opponents and claim a well-deserved victory. Brazil provides the knowledge (or bits of it), but Brazilians are not supposed to win. They are not even supposed to compete – some distinguished guest will do that for them.

Encounters (3): The myth of the state

With the year 2000 coming up, Brazilians have geared themselves up for the celebration and commemoration of the 500 years of the *discovery* of Brazil. While there was not much public excitement, the media were constantly bombarding the population with the magic number of 500. The debates reverberating throughout the Americas in 1992 have largely gone unnoticed here – unlike the Spanish talk of the *conquista* (*conquest*, with all its negative connotations), the Brazilians spoke of *descobrimiento* (*discovery*, with all the “pure” implications), ending up with the apparently innocent “500 years of Brazil.”¹⁸ Part of it is strictly cultural in the narrow sense – many Brazilians never felt like part of (the Spanish-speaking) Latin America. They tend to see their own great country as a completely separate thing – and a good deal of it has to do simply with the *size* of the country and enormous distances involved. Part of it is different cultural heritage (and language – although Portuguese became the official language of the colony only since 1746!), part of it are colonial policies of the Portuguese in the 17th and 18th centuries, but part of it is simply geography – since Brazil is separated

from most of its neighbors by either the Amazon forest or the Andes, the ties with Europe or even Africa were much easier to establish.

I will return later to this image of Brazil as an island, but now back to the *discovery*. The genocide that took place throughout the Americas following 1492 (and 1500) is relatively well documented. It would be difficult to find Brazilian anthropologists (or sociologists) who would agree with this celebratory spirit of *500 years of Brazil* – but still, no public debate was taking place. At the 22nd meeting of the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) in Brasília (15–18 July 2000), no one mentioned this, there were no public declarations or statements. It seemed that the social scientists have sided up with the people in thinking that this event (and everything that went on before and after it) is insignificant. The popular attitude could be summed up by a proposal of the popular musician Caetano Veloso¹⁹ that just like any person's birthday, the 500th anniversary of Brazil should be celebrated – no questions asked.

However, the actual celebration of the 500-year anniversary was a messy affair, where the government displayed a sort of brutality that is so often associated (in the popular imagery) with Latin American countries. Police was sent to deal with the (very few) dissenting voices and disillusioned Indian representatives – apparently, without any attempt on the side of the government to try to appear understanding. Protesters from the movement of the landless people were labelled by the (then) president Fernando Henrique Cardoso as “fascists.”

No attempt was made to problematize the whole affair of the *conquest* – unlike in other American countries in 1992 – the government, basically, stuck to the basic nation-building myth that it has nothing to do with any injustice that might have occurred in the past. There were clashes of Indians with the police, there were injured and arrested people, all of this made its way into the media and was very well publicized, and the president of the FUNAI, Carlos Marés, resigned in protest over the government-inspired and government-led violence. (Of course, to make matters more specifically *de jeito brasileiro*, his resignation was not accepted by the [then] Justice Minister, José Gregori, and Marés was officially *fired*.) So much about the 500 years of Brazil...

Encounters (4): Indians and others

Part of the problem lies in the conflicting imagery of the Brazilian Indians. On the one hand, many inhabitants are led to believe that they

are just an obstacle on the way to modernization and Progress (the words on the country's flag: *ordem e progresso* – Order and Progress). While Indians occupy a miniscule portion of land compared to what they used to, the authoritarian structures of the government found it relatively easy to pit them (because they supposedly occupy a disproportionate amount of land compared to their number) against the poor (almost half of Brazilians live below the poverty line as defined by the UN). It was also relatively easy to pit Indians (who “do not produce, do not work”) against the movements of landless peasants like the MST. On the other hand, the image of a noble, brave and pure Indian serves well to reiterate the myth of the ethnically and racially mixed society. Indians symbolize great mythical past, they provide the link with tradition which sometimes Brazilians seem to be desperately looking for.²⁰

Moreover, different kinds of images have their own practical political values – Kayapo and Shavante leaders, for example, have become quite adept in exploiting this kind of imagery for their own benefits. Various lobbies and interest groups – politicians on national and local levels, big land owners (*fazendeiros*, whose influence on Brazilian domestic policies is often overlooked by foreign scholars), environmentalists, journalists, human rights advocates – use different representations to promote their own causes. On the other hand, different Indian groups also fight among themselves for greater influence, thus practically preventing the ascendance of any Indian leaders at the national level. Things get even more complicated when one takes into account the role of the ever so powerful Brazilian military. Contrary to the popular belief (especially outside Brazil), and contrary to some of their own particular projects, most of the military leaders have not been ill-disposed towards the Indians. As a matter of fact, from the mid-19th century onwards, there was an idea of transforming Indians in “the Wall of the Interior” (*a muralha do sertão*), incorporating them into the “mainstream” society and making them the real “guardians” of the national frontiers and the integrity of the country as a whole. They were also supposed to be integrated as the new work force of the society (after the abolition of slavery, there was a need for new labor) – since they were born in Brazil and lived “in nature,” they could perfectly fit the image of the new agricultural producer – they *knew* the *nature*, so they could skilfully exploit her. In this grand picture, the integration of Indians would benefit both them and the rest of the nation. Of course, things did not work out that smoothly, and this view of some military leaders was overshadowed by the interests of the big capital. Many areas inhabited by Indians are too rich in mineral resources, and that spelled doom for the native inhabitants of

the country. In more elaborate attempts to deprive Indians of what they had (or what they thought they had), the conflicts were put in terms of competing traditions. The Indian “tradition” on the one side, the national, ethnic or regional on the other – they all compete against each other while on the other hand frequently complementing each other.

This “tradition” is, of course, only a construction. Any grand narrative or metanarrative (in the sense defined by Lyotard or Rorty)²¹ of “tradition” presupposes the existence of “pure” or “clean” tradition in the past, from which all our subsequent tradition(s) are derived. The construction is contradictory because it on one hand reiterates our need “to return to the tradition” or to preserve “traditional values,” while on the other taking pride in alterations or modifications of the glorious past. Furthermore, no one ever constructs “tradition” for the sake of the past – it is always made up for some very contemporary (usually political) purposes, or very tangible goals for the immediate future.

While there are various constructions of “tradition” in Brazil (depending on who is talking), all of them take into account the immense pride in the fact of “being Brazilian” – a kind of romantic nationalism that looked awkward and a bit out of date to someone coming from Southeastern Europe (who has seen what nationalism does).

One of the aspects of tradition as it is constructed in Brazil takes into account the role of black people as part of the society (with some reluctance, though – Brazil was *the last* Latin American country to abolish slavery, only in 1888!), but Indians are much more difficult to include or “naturalize.” Part of the answer might be in that while blacks (or “Afro-Brazilians”²²) are visible, Indians are not. Not only because of their numbers (the most recent estimates by the Instituto Socioambiental NGO are that there are more than 350,000 living today in Brazil – despite a phenomenal growth since 1991, still a percentage of population smaller than in any other Latin American country except Uruguay), but even more because of their remoteness, their life in what the popular imagination holds to be the unexplored wilderness of the interior. Until very recently, Brazilian law made careful distinctions in terms of the “nationality” of its subjects. Indians are Brazilian citizens and yet not quite the same thing as white or black, or mulatto Brazilians. There is still a distinction between Brazilian-born Brazilians and foreigners who acquire Brazilian nationality – the latter ones are called “naturalized Brazilians.” The Indians are in an even more exotic situation, since they are recognized as the *real others*, primarily members of their own communities, while at the same time being *Brazilian citizens*.

Although given full civil rights by the 1988 Constitution, the Civil Code of 1916 regards them as “relatively incapacitated” – hence, not completely responsible for their actions. Therefore, someone has to take care of them. Hence, various government agencies, beginning with the Service for the Protection of the Indians – SPI (founded in 1910), and now the FUNAI.²³

It always helps to be on good terms with these agencies if one wants to conduct a field research in the Indian territories. Also, one is not suppose to criticize large-scale development projects (which result in either total destruction of Indian-held lands, or in their expulsion) which are supported by FUNAI, government and important foreign agencies such as the World Bank.²⁴ Punishments for disobediences can be severe – mostly cutting off anthropologists’ access to their area of research. Of course, it should be noted that the anthropological scene in Brazil is still relatively small, so it is important for people to establish not just their authority (as anthropologists), but also their claim to *possess* (defend, interpret, speak for) certain groups or segments of the society. In practical terms, that means that one has to have an *authorization* of the “owner” in order to study a particular ethnic group or segment of the society. (For example, after exposing all the dealings of the powerful industrial lobbies at the Waimiri–Atroari area, Baines *was never given permission to return to that area again.*)

Encounters (5): An anthropology of anthropology

The affectionate term that people use for the indigenous groups they study is “my Indians.” The areas are well defined and well delimited, since getting into someone else’s area of study (like his or her “Indians”) can be considered as an insult, which is bad enough. In the worst case scenario, it could be considered as a blatant disrespect for the strict set of rules that govern dominant segments of Brazilian anthropology. Like everywhere else, there are hierarchies. However, unlike everywhere else, the hierarchies seem to be petrified and considered as ever-lasting and ever-valid.²⁵ One example is the annual meeting of Brazilian social scientists, under the auspices of ANPOCS (National Association of Post-graduate Programs and Research in Social Sciences), well illustrated in the article of Saint Martin. The working groups (*Grupos de Trabalho*) of the ANPOCS are in theory open, but, in practice, it is *the same people always participate and present their papers*. Moreover, while, again in theory, new working groups could be established, they

would have to include members from five different Brazilian states – in practice, a very difficult task.²⁶ No new groups have been established in the last decade, keeping the field sealed off and the players well known to each other. This enables a good environment for discussion, but also limits the scope of the debates, since, basically, it is just another meeting of friends, paid for by the National Council for Science (CNPq). On the other hand, while there is no question over the quality of the works presented, this closeness could also contribute to a certain provincialization and corporativism.

This closing in favors patronage: one always has her/his mentor. If one *behaves* (unlike me – see Endnote 25) and listens to his/her elders or superiors, everything will be fine. When advertising for academic positions (the famous *concursos públicos*), it is usually internally known which candidate must get the job, and which candidate must not – under any circumstances.²⁷ Of course, mistakes do occur, as it happened with a colleague of mine at the University of Brasília, who was not supposed to get the job, but still succeeded. Another friend of mine got the job because the person who was supposed to get it simply did not pass the examination. Because of the (still limited) size of the academic arena in Brazil, in cases of conflicts, it is relatively easy to “spread the word” about someone’s (mis)behavior. I think that this debilitates the teaching and research – I had a colleague who never prepared for classes, and received a really embarrassing criticism from his post-graduate class.²⁸ However, because of the power of his protectors, he really does not have to care about this (once one gets a permanent position it is *for life* – whatever she/he does and regardless of the quality of teaching and research) – the only important thing is not to disturb the structure of power. Having said that, one could return to Rabinow and wonder whether his “value judgments” and even “arrogance” were in fact responses to what he perceived among his Brazilian colleagues.

Brazilian anthropologists whose research interests lie outside their proper country are very rare (two notable exceptions were in Brasília while I was there). There were only three students in the post-graduate program in anthropology at the University of Brasília who did research outside their own country. (One of them did research in Brazil, but he was Chilean.)²⁹ One of my friends and colleagues assured me that there were *none* in other programs in the country – like the one at Museu Nacional in Rio, or the other at the University of São Paulo. This kind of closing in and inward-looking could produce certain problems in the future.³⁰ While other generations of well trained field workers who will be experts in their areas of study will undoubtedly appear, one has to

wonder about the prospects of their entering the world academic markets, and presenting their works (with all the theoretical and practical implications) to the wider community. Or maybe there is no wish to present anything to a wider audience? After all, it is safe “at home,” with all the rules known and all the faces knowing who is who is who is what (and with a sense of professional courtesy and solidarity – people will rarely criticize their colleagues’ works, and almost never in public).³¹ On the other hand, this can also be understood in the light of the national (and nationalist) ideology that postulates Brazil as great, marvelous and, above all, self-sufficient. It is enough to study one’s own country, social groups, their contacts or conflicts – everything else will fall into its place. Anthropology does make its way back home,³² but in a somewhat strange way.

Concluding remarks: Alterities in context

As remarked many times and on many occasions, stereotypes simply do not work in Brazil.³³ For example, despite the fact that the military regime was hardly the nicest thing that ever happened to the country (people were tortured and killed, democratic institutions strangled, censorship imposed), it still enabled free elections for the National Congress, encouraged technological and scientific development, and gave rise to almost all the Brazilian political parties (except the PCdoB and the PT). Brazilian political system (at least when it comes to political parties) as it is today is a direct heritage of the years of the military regime – whether one likes it or not. The whole Brazilian society is highly bureaucratized – everything has to have the seal of approval from somewhere, there are always complicated bureaucratic institutions one must go to in order to complete even the simplest task. In this sense, it is a Weberian heaven (or nightmare, depending on the perspective).

When constructing images of alterity, there are problems with naïve imagery of Indians as passive subjects of exploitation – many groups have learned the rules of the game and are increasingly capable of being important actors in local political debates, sometimes carefully orchestrating media campaigns and certain NGO representatives and playing exactly with the “orientalizing” imagery that was bestowed on them. Sometimes these political games leave other, less powerful or less numerous, Indian groups on the margins and as real losers, while some skilled leaders have been capable of amassing considerable personal wealth.

Being an anthropologist in Brazil is an interesting predicament. On one hand, it is clearly a “mission impossible” – if one is to side with her/his subjects of study, one is invariably pitted against governments (regional and federal), strong lobbies (especially by big ranchers and *fazendeiros*), industrialists (the whole “development” lobby) and representatives of international and multinational capital. In many cases, being on reasonably good terms with the state agencies (who indirectly or directly do their utmost to destroy one’s “privileged others”) guarantees that one can continue working. I also have to note that Brazilian anthropologists who openly raised their voices during the years of dictatorship are very rare. Most of them just went to the field, studied Indians or whatever they were doing, and commented only within the walls of their own apartments or houses.

This battle between moral principles, obligations to the nation or a community, and doing “what is right” can never be won – which does not prevent people from trying. Sometimes, it looks like a battle against the windmills, but more often, it looks like a brave attempt to make the world a better place, as well as make the voices of the dispossessed and underprivileged heard. On the other hand, the new generations of anthropologists are also keen on questioning some pre-established and highly ritualized structures of power (including patronage), and this might open some new spaces in the future (or create problems for these bright young people).

Part of the problem that one faces when trying to understand this great country lies in outsiders’ constructions of alterities within Brazil and lack of even minimal understanding of various processes that shaped up Brazilian history and still shape up social relations within the country.³⁴ Among the latter, of crucial importance are certain authoritarian traits present in the society and the role of the owners of large latifundias (or *fazendas*). These people virtually control politics (and decisions on economy are also made by politicians). It is from the concept of *fazendeiros* as that another interesting trait of Brazilian politics is derived: the idea of *property*. This idea extends to human beings. Although slavery has been abolished in the late 19th century, the strict social hierarchy demands that anyone’s position be clearly defined within the social ladder (“Do you know who are you talking to?”³⁵). People owe allegiance to other people, and, the lower on the social scale they are, the greater and indiscriminate this level of allegiance gets. For the “completely” poor, the situation is the following: basically, they earn their right to life by voting.³⁶ These people are housed in the designated *areas* (you cannot vote at any place in Brazil – only where

you are *registered to vote!*), *favelas* or slots of public land (for the latter, a good example is provided by the local government of the Federal District in 1999/2000). When the time for elections comes, these people are literally *herded* onto trucks (more often) or buses and driven to the polling stations, where they cast their vote (voting is obligatory in Brazil) – naturally, either for their *fazendeiro*, or for whomever they are told to by the people who give them slots of land. In this sense, the politics works just fine: the underprivileged get to exercise their basic democratic right, and the ultra-privileged ones get their votes.

The question of how Brazilians see themselves versus the rest of the world is also an interesting one. The sheer size of the country is impressive – the variety of problems that it is facing as well. On one hand, many educated Brazilians are well aware of these problems and want to do something to change things for the better. But, on the other, there is a strange sensation of provincialization – at least to an outside observer like myself. Sometimes it seems that the outside world almost does not exist. The international news are usually reduced to 30–60 s total in the 30 min main evening TV news. Sometimes there are blocks of other scientific or popular news – mostly on the Globo network, which has correspondents in the US and the UK – but for an average Brazilian, the outside world almost does not exist. To add a bit of the international relations here: one of the most visible and highest ranking UN officials in recent years has been a Brazilian, Sergio Vieira de Mello.³⁷ However, he was almost completely unknown in his own country!

I believe that this also has to do with construction and deconstruction of alterities. Various identities superimpose themselves in various layers of the society. Sometimes Indians, sometimes peasants, sometimes “Afro-Brazilians,” but in all cases, something that should arise is a sense of “Brazilian-ness,” a sense of the unified whole that defies all the differences. One of the unspoken projects of Brazilian social sciences seems to be creating a unified image of *the Brazilian*, combining all the differences in a wonderful and multi-faceted mosaic which, according to the nationalist ideology, still has to be *one*. In combining *the one* and *the many*, anthropologists (and social scientists) have their task: to add to this wonderful image, to help create and establish this symbol of national unity in a country torn between the opposites that might seem unimaginable to an outsider.

The role of the intellectuals is a precarious one, since on one hand they are supposed to contribute to this glorious nation building myth (“one nation – one leader – one country”?), but on the other, at least

some of them cannot help seeing that things are sometimes going the wrong way. The intellectuals are so deeply embedded into the system that it is difficult for them to see that there is a whole world outside of it, they are wholly immersed in the social hierarchy (no anthropologists from lower classes in Brazil!), and they respect it. Would abolishing of patronage and corporativism help in developing different directions in Brazilian anthropology and perhaps amplify its scope and its influence? Would it be possible for people to come out of their neatly structured world and take a glimpse of what *other* realities look like? I am not sure I know the answer, since coming from the essentially egalitarian background and having fairly anarchic ideas does not conform well with the *order of things* in the Brazilian academic world... In the end, it is probably left for the consciousness of the individuals to pick their allegiances or choose their masters. Anthropologists have one big advantage, though: they do not live in *favelas*.

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Notes

* for my wonderful, inquisitive, and curious students in Brazil; in memoriam Martin Alberto Ibáñez Novion

¹ As put by Ulf Hannerz in his talk at the 2004 ASA conference in Durham, quite a bit (if not all!) of his own anthropology is a result of “chance and serendipity.”

² It is interesting to note that some of the founding fathers of Brazilian anthropology – just like in the US (where it all began with Franz Boas) – are Germans: Curt Unkel (alias Nimuendajú) and Herbert Baldus, along with enormous influence that Egon Schaden had at São Paulo. A very interesting recent comparison of Brazilian and German anthropology (where the former one is regarded as far more interesting!) has been made by Peter Schröder, “Berufsperspektiven für Ethnologen im Kontext der Globalisierung: Anregungen aus der Sicht einer ‘peripheren Anthropologie,’” *Anthropos* 97(2) (2002): 421–434.

³ For the media in Brazil, see Simon Hartog, *Brazil: Beyond Citizen Kane* (TV program broadcasted on the Channel 4 on 10 May 1993) and Geraldo Anhaia Mello, *Muito além do Cidadão Kane* (São Paulo: Scritta, 1994). For an interesting anthropological perspective on press and politics, see Carla Costa Teixeira, “The price of Honor: The Press Versus Congress in the Rhetoric of Brazilian Politics,” *Public Culture* 16(1) (2004): 31–46.

⁴ These blocs were conceived primarily as *sleeping areas* – the “real life,” the active life was supposed to take place elsewhere.

⁵ Miguel Vale de Almeida, “Alvorada”, *Público*, 25 June 1995.

⁶ Along with Eduardo Galvão and Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira. The latter founded several anthropology departments in the country, including Brasília and Campinas. Ribeiro is least appreciated among Brazilian anthropologists today, in part due to his idea of founding an “autochthonous” Brazilian anthropology.

⁷ According to Darcy Ribeiro: “Disso tudo resulta, que grande parte das ciências sociais, e particularmente da antropologia brasileira, é o que eu chamo de *cavalo-de-santo*. Porque são caras, por cuja boca, estão falando Levy-Strauss [sic!], ou qualquer inglês que esteja na moda.” In: “Antropologia ou a Teoria do Bombardeio de Berlim,” in *Encontros com a Civilização Brasileira* 12 (1979): 94. [“All of this results in that a large part of the social sciences, and especially the Brazilian anthropology, is what I call ‘cavalo-de-santo.’ For these are the guys through whom speak Lévi-Strauss or any other Englishman who is popular at the moment.”]

⁸ Which is actually the most prestigious anthropology department in Brazil – and was even more so when Rabinow visited in 1987. Whether it is really “the best” depends to a large extent on who one is talking to – for example, anthropologists from the Museu Nacional are not required to do teaching (or teach very little), which obviously gives them ample time to do research and publish.

⁹ Paul Rabinow, “A Modern Tour in Brazil,” in *Modernity and Identity*, Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (eds.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 255.

¹⁰ Mariza G. S. Peirano, “Where is Anthropology?”, *Série Antropologia* 229 (1997), footnote.

¹¹ Rabinow, 263.

¹² Rabinow, 255–256.

¹³ Nina Rodrigues, *Os Africanos no Brasil* (Brasília: Editora UnB, 1988).

¹⁴ Fernando Rosa-Ribeiro, “Racism, Mimesis and Anthropology in Brazil,” *Critique of Anthropology* 20(3) (2000): 221–241; Livio Sansone, “Os objetos da identidade negra: consumo, mercantilização, globalização e a criação de culturas negras no Brasil,” *Mana* 6(1) (2000): 87–119. For the criticism of some North American perspectives on “Afro-Brazilians,” see Rita Segato, “The Color-Blind Subject of

Myth: Or, Where to Find Africa in the Nation," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 132–134.

¹⁵ As claimed by Rabinow, 253.

¹⁶ Or: local anthropologists.

¹⁷ Like the series of films on "The Great White Dragon."

¹⁸ Paul Little, "Brasil: Los otros 500 años y el movimiento indígena," *Revista Cántaro* 28 (2000); Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira, "500 Years of Brazil: Global and Cultural Perspectives," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 38(2) (2001): 5–9.

¹⁹ In a televised debate on Brazil in the third millennium broadcasted on 2 January 2000.

²⁰ See, for example, Alcida Rita Ramos, *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), and "Cutting through State and Class: Sources and Strategies of Self-Representation in Latin America," *Série Antropologia* 247 (1999).

²¹ To quote from Rorty: "These metanarratives are stories which purport to justify loyalty to, or breaks with, certain contemporary communities, but which are neither historical narratives about what these or other communities have done in the past nor scenarios about what they might do in the future." In: Richard Rorty, "Post-modernist Bourgeois Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), 585. See also Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

²² I do not intend to get into the nuances of the (extremely complex) race identification in Brazil, but the way how one *looks* does not necessarily correspond to the way in which one *declares herself or himself*. Hence, a person can (to an average European) look as "Black," but regard herself or himself as "White," or the other way around. An excellent recent critical discussion of the topic is presented by Rosa-Ribeiro, "Racism, Mimesis and Anthropology in Brazil." On the construction of particular "racial politics," see the excellent discussion of David Cleary in "Race, Nationalism and Social Theory in Brazil: Rethinking Gilberto Freyre," David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (1999).

²³ This is another situation where generalizations do not help. For example, while there are examples of some FUNAI staff doing ethically highly questionable things (apart from Baines' work, one could also find numerous references in Turner's work with the Kayapo), the situation of the whole institution is much more complex, and many people (including a good deal of undergraduate and post-graduate students) devote their time and energy in trying to make things work. The whole affair with the 500 years of Brazil and the resignation or firing of Marés did not make things any easier.

²⁴ See Stephen G. Baines, *É a FUNAI que sabe: A Frente de Atração Waimiri-Atroari* (Belém: Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, 1991), and "Waimiri-Atroari Resistance in the Presence of an Indigenist Policy of 'Resistance'," *Critique of Anthropology* 19(3) (1999): 211–226.

²⁵ My experience at the Department of Anthropology (DAN) of the University of Brasília has been that the questioning of any decisions by the people in power can be self-destructive. It seems that my first error was accepting to supervise a post-graduate student, after the student asked in her proper department and was told that there was no problem with it. However, it seems that my accepting to supervise this

student was against the internal power structure (of the DAN), since I was stepping (at least in theory) on someone else's territory. Namely, I could not supervise post-graduate students if I have not done it at DAN previously, and since I could not do it (I was not at DAN), case closed. Also, full-time staff earn points that add up to their salaries (so-called GED) – in part, based on how many M.A. and Ph.D. students they supervise. While I was ineligible for these extra points, I was still (theoretically – and without being aware of it!) infringing on someone else's right to get these points. Perhaps by mere coincidence, a week after this the Head of the Department informed me that she did not think that my contract should be renewed into the 2002, claiming that she would want to bring new people in as visiting professors. Of course, it seems that she did not understand that after I leave, "my" post goes away, as my contract was with the University and *not* with the department, and the timing of my contract (it ends in the second or third week of classes) actually does not allow her to hire someone in my place. Furthermore, she informed me about this as if it was a *fait accompli*, even though the department as a whole decides on such matters (as it did when they decided to invite me). I had very little doubt that the internal structure of power would not allow for most members of the department to disagree with her (even though some expressed their outrage in conversations with me).

Later on, all the rage descended on me after I bothered to ask what was the rationale of the closing off of the bathroom and coffee area in the department for the students (since post-graduate courses were [and still are] held *in the department*, I thought this was quite silly) – the decision was made and implemented literally overnight. Most of the rage was due not to the argumentation (there was none), but to the fact that I have had the nerve to ask such a question. One of the people in power explained to some students later on that the professors needed to have their "private areas." Apart from the interesting things that this could say about his (and his colleagues') hidden anxieties and fears of students, one has to wonder if he has read Freud...

²⁶ Monique de Saint Martin, "À propos d'une rencontre entre chercheurs: Sciences sociales et politique au Brésil", *Actes du Recherche* 36 (1987): 129–134.

²⁷ Of course, I am not claiming that this kind of hiring practices exists in Brazil only – most of the traditions that I have any knowledge of use them. However, due to a particular nature of the procedure in Brazil (public lectures, marks that are made public, etc.), the Brazilian cases tend to be more visible.

²⁸ One of the prodigal sons of the department, he has been highly authoritarian (likes to shout at students) and some of his actions I found very questionable – like shouting at a student and, when she started crying, locking the door of his office and refusing to let her out until she stops crying. In some countries, this would result in a criminal investigation, at some universities the disciplinary proceedings would take place...

²⁹ This type of criticism could be extended to students from other Latin American countries who come to study in Brazil – they also choose their own countries, cultural contexts where they come from, apparently, without any wish to venture further and put things in a bit more comparative perspective. Of course, I do not wish to imply that this reflects on the *quality* of theses or dissertations produced – I am just wondering how people trained only in *one* tradition (however rich it might be) will face the world of multitude of traditions, options and perspectives.

³⁰ For the context of historical sciences, see the remarks by Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, “A provincianização do Brasil”, *Veja*, 15 August 2001.

³¹ For the strict hierarchical structure of the Brazilian academia (especially when it comes to anthropology and sociology!) and its direct implications to discussions or debates following the presentations of papers or public lectures, see Roberto Kant de Lima, *A antropologia de academia: quando os índios somos nós*, 2nd ed. (Niterói: EDUFF, 1997), 25–26, 50. My experience in Brazil has been similar to his, inasmuch as I found undergraduate students more open for discussions, more inquisitive, and, generally speaking, easier to work with.

³² See Mariza Peirano, “Where is Anthropology,” also “When Anthropology is at Home: The Different Contexts of a Single Discipline,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 105–128.

³³ Roberto DaMatta, *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis: Para uma sociologia do dilema brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1979); Peter Fry, *Para Inglês ver: identidade e política na cultura brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1982); Livia Neves de H. Barbosa, “The Brazilian jeitinho: An Exercise in National Identity,” in *The Brazilian Puzzle: Culture on the Borderland of Western World*, David Hess and Roberto DaMatta (eds.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 35–48. For an interesting view of some aspects of popular culture, see Myriam Sepúlveda dos Santos, “The Brazilian Remake of the Orpheus Legend: Film Theory and the Aesthetic Dimension,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 20(4) (2003): 49–69.

³⁴ For a somewhat revisionist outsider’s look (especially when it comes to the Anglo-American construction of “Latin America”), see Robert Morse, *O Espelho de Próspero: Cultura e idéias nas Américas* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1988).

³⁵ Roberto DaMatta, *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis*, 160 ff.

³⁶ The poverty remains a huge problem in Brazil, although according to the recent statistics, the number of poor people is decreasing by 2.2% every year, especially with the taking over by the new government of the president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003. However, Brazil will meet its international commitments for significantly reducing it only in 2019. See Alan Infante, “Má distribuição atrasa redução da pobreza”, UNDP Brazil, 1 April 2004 <http://pnud.org.br/pobreza_desigualdade/reportagens/index.php>, also the UNDP-sponsored report *Objetivo 1: Pobreza e Fome*, Maria Beatriz Ribeiro de O. Gonçalves and Alfonso Henrique Borges Ferreira (eds.), (Belo Horizonte, 2004), especially 24 ff.

³⁷ He was killed in a terrorist attack on the UN Headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq in 2003.