

Brazilian Anthropologists in Africa

Remarks on Theory, Politics and Fieldwork Overseas

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Introduction

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In the last few years, studies that have African countries as their scenario are becoming a regular element of the anthropology produced by Brazilian scholars or by those that have ties of some nature with Brazilian institutions. Standing out in particular in this field are activities undertaken by graduate centres in São Paulo such as the University of São Paulo (*USP*) and at the State University of Campinas (*UNICAMP*); in the Federal District at the University of Brasília (*UnB*); in Rio de Janeiro at the Federal University at Rio de Janeiro (*UFRJ*) and in Bahia at the Federal University at Bahia (*UFBA*). In the light of practices and knowledge accumulated thus far, the time appeared ripe to us to reflect on the potentialities, challenges and tensions that have permeated such experiences, especially in this thematic edition of *VIBRANT* about *South-South Anthropology*.

The following remarks are the product of discussions that originally took place during a round table discussion entitled “Is There a ‘Brazilian Anthropology’ in and about Portuguese-Speaking African Countries (*Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa [PALOP]*)?” held in June 2008, at the XXVI Brazilian Anthropology Meeting. Before we are accused of some form of *lusotropical* nostalgia, we should explain that the choice of the *PALOP* arose because of our supposition (in the absence of an up to date systematic survey) that studies undertaken in these countries by Brazilian anthropologists are numerically more expressive, compared to other African countries. Furthermore, these studies have been taking place for at least a decade, which facilitates the construction of a critical retrospective examination

in relation to them. It is also important to emphasize that the term *PALOP*, in that context, was chosen because it appears to us to be less ideological than other possible terms, such as the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries [*Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP)*], “Portuguese Africa” etc. This does not mean that we are unaware of the immense diversity of the populations that live within their borders and the different socio-historical processes that have contributed to their configuration.

The debate that took place was inspired by a variety of issues such as: 1) does the form of academic training of anthropologists in Brazil condition our understanding of the phenomena that occur in these empirical scenarios, *vis-à-vis* other “national” variations of the discipline?; 2) does the history of the consolidation of the discipline in Brazil and its position in relation to the “central” anthropologies reverberate in the records of perception we produce?; 3) does the fact that Portuguese is our native tongue have any implications for our research objects?; 4) what is the role of our nationality, in the manner in which it is perceived by our interlocutors, in the construction of knowledge?

These and other questions are examined below by anthropologists with research experience in East, West or offshore Africa. These questions gave rise to multiple replies that it is impossible to resume in a homogenous narrative. In order to preserve the richness and the complexity of the arguments constructed, we opted to present them in the form of remarks, organized by four themes common to the interventions of Juliana Braz Dias, Omar Ribeiro Thomaz and Wilson Trajano Filho: 1) What “Brazilian anthropology” in Africa? 2) The cultural frontiers of Africa and the limits of the Empire, and the limits of the notions of *PALOP* and *CPLP*; 3) The Portuguese language: potentials and pitfalls; 4) Other political issues.

The first session of comments stands out because it is impossible to conceive of a Brazilian style of anthropology in construction in and about the *PALOP*. Following this, we are called to reflect on the cultural diversity of the African populations and the inappropriateness of political categories correlated to the international order of the world intended to account for their similarities and differences. In the discussion about the place occupied by the Portuguese language in their research experiences, the authors indicate the multiple semantic potential of this sign and instrument of communication, which at times helps and at others hinders and confuses the activities of

our *métier* in these spaces. This session of collective comments is brought to a close by problematizing, among other things, the way in which research investments oriented by the South-South agenda are situated within a broader system of power relations. A fundamental part of this system is the Brazilian State's efforts to present itself as a leader among emerging countries.

These reflections are intended to register some of the issues and challenges that currently impose themselves on the field of Anthropology in Brazil. Clearly there is no intention whatsoever to totalize the tensions that arise as a result of these experiences. There are many Africas, as there are many Brazilians who undertake their *métier* overseas. At a time when the internationalization of research agendas appears as a viable and fertile option for many of us, the critical view of some pioneers in relation to it can help us to take better control over the factors that affect the practice of our discipline.

1) What “Brazilian Anthropology” in Africa?

Omar Ribeiro Thomaz

My first reaction to the question raised is to formulate another question: why would there be a “Brazilian anthropology” in or about the so-called Portuguese-speaking African countries? The mere fact that there are Brazilian anthropologists or anthropologists who were trained in Brazil or who have links with Brazilian institutions undertaking research in these contexts is not sufficient to support this question. Beyond this fact, we would need to imagine that Brazilian anthropologists are the subject of a specific, “Brazilian”, anthropology; and we would also have to differentiate Brazilian anthropologists from those who undertake research in former Portuguese colonies in Africa from those who research in other African countries – and they are many: the Ivory Coast, Benin, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda.

With regard to the singularity of Brazilian anthropology in general, I do not believe that I am the most appropriate person to undertake any form of systematization, especially because there is a sub-discipline called the “History of Anthropology in Brazil”, or “Brazilian Anthropology”, which has its own specialists and is a tradition in itself that seeks, among other things, to unveil intellectual lineages, to understand the particularities in the formation of this field and also seeks to defend the existence of a specific style of

anthropological practice among us. To a certain extent, it is the existence of this discussion about “Brazilian Anthropology” that has made possible the issue to be debated now, since, for a considerable time, it has been observed that conducting Anthropology in Brazil is generally confused, at least within some of our lineages, with conducting an Anthropology of Brazil. As such, the question as to whether our “singularity” reproduces itself abroad, does, in principal, make sense to a certain extent: it is the necessary correlate of our autonomy in the face of the “great traditions”, understood by some to be three – the British, the North American and the French traditions – and by others to be four – these three plus the German tradition. Furthermore, we could establish a fourth or a fifth tradition, and others could emerge, such as Mexican, Indian or Chinese anthropology.

This formulation brings problems in its wake, just some of which I will present – I insist that I am not a specialist on the history of anthropology in Brazil, nor of the history of anthropology as a whole. To what extent can we differentiate British anthropology from a South African anthropology, for example? Some anthropologists generally associated with British anthropology not only were South Africans but also involved politically and ethically with their country – anthropologists as distinct as Gluckman, Schapera, Turner, Hilda Kuper, Adam Kuper, Jessica Kuper, Monica Wilson, to name but a few. All of them undertook research in African contexts and many of them were prevented from effectively exercising their profession in South Africa after a certain moment in time, and thus concentrated on British protectorates such as Basutoland and Swaziland or on colonies such as North Rhodesia, now Zambia. Furthermore: their studies were, undoubtedly, decisive for the work of anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown – who lived in South Africa and was expelled from that country because of his opposition to the apartheid system – or Evans-Pritchard.

The insistence by some in differentiating North American anthropology from that which existed in pre-Nazi Germany does not withstand more in-depth analysis. To a certain extent, lineages of North American culturalism are more indebted to their Teutonic origin than they are fruits of a North American intellectual or institutional specificity.

Be that as it may, the insistence on a debate on a “Brazilian anthropology” is the fruit of the perception of the formation of a discipline that is remote from an imperial context or that has a “colonial overseas” element. It is

also probable that we are not very original, because in given moments in our history, our discipline certainly came close to movements that were more or less imperial and which took place within our frontiers. In other words, anthropology in Brazil had its origins in the interiorization of the metropolis, to quote Maria Odila's famous expression, and we must also imagine that, from the perspective of the indigenous populations or those of African descent, the homogenization project that accompanied the formation of our nation may have been just as violent as the expansion of the colonial frontiers in Africa.

In sum, I do not believe that the exoticism that characterized the imperial metropolitan anthropologies at the beginning of our modernity was absent from that which was being born in Brazil. The very idea that we were building a nation and not an empire appears above all to be a position of principle: it is remarkable just how much Euclides da Cunha's classic *Os Sertões* retains a structure similar to the accounts of war such as those of Mouzinho de Albuquerque or Antônio Enes in Mozambique. The characterization of populations in revolt obeyed the same evolutionist principle, the representations of their future were the same, in the same way as Euclides da Cunha or Mouzinho de Albuquerque expressed their admiration in the face of their tenacity... or as did the British military in the face of Shaka Zulu. On the other hand, today we know that the imperial anthropologies, which were also national, were expressing within colonial spaces a perception of culture, diversity and even projects aimed at a homogenization previously tested within their territorial borders.

I believe that these and other examples oblige us to give diverse hues to our supposed originality.

Wilson Trajano Filho

The central issue here is not about the possible singularity of an anthropology of the "Portuguese African" countries. This expression makes the countries appear only as a scenario where research is done. This reminds me of the Geertzian motto that we should not study villages, but rather we should study in villages. It is very true that in some cases the theme of our studies are countries or, to use a more sophisticated language, national states or nations. But even in these cases, what we do in fact is a variety of other things, such as analyzing musical forms, mutual help institutions, social incorporation and reproduction practices and strategies, among others.

Furthermore, it is not possible to completely equate the anthropologist's nationality, the place of his academic formation and the place where he works. Today, in Brazil, we have anthropologists doing research in "Portuguese Africa" who are not Brazilian, although they have had a substantial part of their professional education in Brazil; others who are not Brazilian and did not have their academic training in Brazil; some who are Brazilian but got their degrees abroad, and then there are the Brazilians who had their academic education in Brazil. I have not included in this list some Brazilians whose academic training took place partly or totally abroad and who work abroad, or Brazilians who have connections with Brazilian institutions, whose academic formation occurred here or abroad, and who are doing research in "non-Portuguese Africa". As can be noted, there are many possibilities. And as the universe of specialists is not very large, a little more than a dozen, the different positions of each of them in this disciplinary field can distort the generalizations regarding a Brazilian anthropology of "Portuguese Africa".

(...)

It remains to be seen whether or not the kind of academic training anthropologists have in our country conditions their understanding of African realities. It may well be that this is the case, but we should ponder the implications of this issue. How many anthropologists who got their degrees in Brazil were trained as Africanists? How many took one or more courses on African ethnography? How long was their fieldwork experience in Africa? I do not have the answers to these empirical questions, although they are not difficult to answer, given our small group. I suspect, from my knowledge of Brazilian anthropology, that there is no such thing as typical Africanist training among us, which involves several systematic courses or seminars on African ethnology and history. This would lead us to an intellectual milieu in which the rigidity of this type of formation is absent but which, on the other hand, lacks the density of the specialized training necessary for beginning any research.

What do we use in its place? The theories and analytical tools developed locally to deal, for example, with indigenous Brazilian societies, with the peasant groups of the north-east and central Brazil? I think not and I feel, at times, embarrassed for not dialoguing more intensely with my Brazilian colleagues who are conducting research with Indians and peasants. It appears to

me that what we take to the field is an eclecticism that may well have much creative potential, but little density and a great deal of naivety. I shall consider only the latter.

To be eclectic, in this context, presupposes in practical terms the illusion that we are dialoguing with the world (with our varied sources of theoretical, thematic and methodological inspiration), when, in reality, we are, as a network, imprisoned within a great soliloquy.

The emergence of an established field of study in Brazilian anthropology on “Portuguese Africa”, with or without singularity, requires a great deal of researchers breaking away from this insane soliloquy. It depends on an intense dialogue with our Brazilian colleagues who do research in other places, and on a greater presence, both ours and of our texts, on the edges of the anthropological world that no longer has a centre: in the African countries, in Portugal, but also in Denmark, Germany, Holland and elsewhere. But it will depend, above all, on the development of a perspective of our own – something that will only be achieved when we leave behind the comfort, which is inexplicable to me, of “Portuguese Africa”, that is to say, when we venture, well trained and with solid ethnographic and historical knowledge, into the realities of South Africa, Namibia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Tanzania, the Ivory Coast, Uganda and so forth, given that Africa is very big.

Juliana Braz Dias

It is somewhat precipitated to suppose the existence of a “Brazilian anthropology” in or about the so-called Portuguese-speaking African countries. Some of the problems raised by this form of questioning have been well addressed by Omar Ribeiro Thomaz and Wilson Trajano Filho, suggesting the impossibility of our speaking, at this moment, of a consolidated field characterized by some substantial specificity. I believe, however, that some quantitative data needs to be added to this discussion capable of showing the exact dimension of what we are examining. After all, how many Brazilian anthropologists undertake research activities in Portuguese-speaking African countries? How many dissertations and theses have been defended and how many papers have been published in specialized journals, in the past five years, having any of these countries as the scenario where the phenomena studied take their course? Is it possible to perceive a significant increase in these numbers compared to those of previous years?

I do not have an answer to these questions, but this kind of data is not hard to obtain, and would provide new parameters for our discussion. The volume published in 2004 by the Brazilian Anthropology Association, entitled *O Campo da Antropologia no Brasil* provides us with a variety of relevant information about the Brazilian anthropologists who venture beyond our frontiers. The data presented in that publication indicate, for example, that between 1998 and 2001 five anthropology theses and dissertations with focus on social situations in Portuguese-speaking African countries were defended in Brazil. Leafing through the programmes of the most recent congresses organized by the Brazilian Anthropology Association to find, amongst the titles of the papers presented, references to the *PALOP*, is another way of investigating who and how many these researchers are – and may, at times, become a somewhat frustrating task. Taking a rapid glance at the programme of the 26th Brazilian Anthropology Meeting we find very few papers that refer to Portuguese-speaking African countries. I was only able to find four papers that had this characteristic, with the exception of the round table that we took part in to discuss this issue, as well as a few papers referring to migrants from the *PALOP*, resident in Brazil or in Europe, and research done in other African countries. Although I am aware of the need for a more systematic survey in order to make a more conclusive affirmation, what matters here is simply to give some indication of just how limited, in quantitative terms, is the group of researchers to which we refer in this debate.

However, even though it is a small and not very homogenous group, I believe that there are some points that pervade this ensemble of experiences, which bring them together and which are worthy of attention. I am referring in particular to the conditions involving field research, including issues such as funding, the uses of the Portuguese language and the difficulties concerning the relative novelty of the undertaking – these being issues that are always relevant in a discipline that has been marked right from the beginning by its reflective character.

2) The cultural frontiers of Africa and the limits of the Empire, and the limits of the notions of *PALOP* and *CPLP*.

Wilson Trajano Filho

I begin by examining the ontological status of “Portuguese Africa” in order to

determine if there is any unity in this object that would provide the grounds for a singularity in the way we, Brazilian anthropologists, treat it. The phrase that concerns us refers to five former Portuguese colonies.

Two of them are island societies with less than 500 thousand inhabitants. Cape Verde, formed by ten islands with differentiated topography, climate and soil, was originally populated by people from Portugal and by a large number of Africans who were taken as slaves from the adjacent coast. As time went by, the islands gave birth to a Creole society, which was a product of a complex mixture of people with different ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. This hybrid society found a way to reproduce, playing the role of broker in the inter-societal trade system: its members were agents both in Atlantic commerce and regional coastal trade. The population of the islands was not able to create a production system capable of satisfying its basic needs. The crises of famine caused by the regular droughts that devastated the islands are well known. From the beginning, its reproduction has depended on the dispersion of its inhabitants around the world (firstly to the adjacent coast, then throughout the colonial empire and today throughout the vast globalized world). São Tomé and Príncipe were also populated in a similar manner to Cape Verde. A Creole society also emerged there, although, unlike the archipelago to the north, it did not need to disperse its children throughout the world in order to reproduce itself. After having been a *entrepôt* for slavery, the islands developed an economic system based on the export of tropical products dominated by the local Creole elite. From 1860 onwards, the two islands received a large influx of Cape Verdean migrants who, fleeing from drought and famine, came to work on the coffee and cocoa plantations owned by the local Creole families.

Among the former colonies, Guinea-Bissau is the smallest and poorest. It is part of the cultural and social area known as the Upper Guinea Coast. Currently, 1.4 million people live in the Guinean territory. They belong to more than 20 historically interrelated ethnic groups. A Creole society also developed there, but very different to those of Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. It was this society, which in reality is a group of intermediaries, which led the nationalist movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The Portuguese colonial presence was always very limited, so that the true government of the colony fell to the Cape Verdeans who occupied the intermediate levels of bureaucracy.

Angola and Mozambique are the southern giants. The former has a population of 12 million, whilst some 20 million live in the latter. The rural population belongs to various ethnic groups, which, have a different demographic density than those in Guinea. They are large groups. Culturally the Angolan groups are very similar, being part of the vast linguistic family of the southern Bantu. Differently from Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, the presence of Islam is insignificant. In Angola a relatively large *mestizo* elite was formed, perhaps because it was the only colony to be settled by the Portuguese. However, this elite never transformed into a true Creole society, with its own particular forms and institutions of incorporation and reproduction.

More populous, but with less potential wealth than Angola, Mozambique is inhabited by peoples belonging to the linguistic group of the central Bantu. They are also culturally related peoples, but differently from the Angolan ones, the Mozambican groups were influenced by a strong Islamic presence. However, this is a variety of Islam that is different from that practiced in Guinea-Bissau or in large parts of western Africa, which is very much influenced by the Senegalese brotherhoods. Some of the Mozambican ethnic groups belong to the so-called matrilinear belt of central Africa, which distinguishes these people from those of the other former colonies. In Mozambique there is also a significant number of Indians and other peoples of the Indic Ocean.

This brief information suggests that the traditional populations of these countries have very little in common that would ethnographically justify the expression “Portuguese Africa”. A Balanta or Papel peasant in Guinea-Bissau lives in a social and cultural milieu that is closer to that of the Mende and Temne of Sierra Leone than that of the Makua or Kimbundo in Mozambique and Angola, respectively. The Creole population of Guinea-Bissau’s towns is also culturally more akin to the Krio of Sierra Leone than to the Angolan *mestizo* elite. In reality, the three former continental colonies are located in three different African culture areas: Guinea-Bissau belongs to the Upper Guinea Coast complex, Angola, which belongs to the Congo area, and Mozambique to the cattle area. If this terminology seems too old-fashioned, I can rephrase it, saying that the former Portuguese colonies experienced a differentiated insertion in the dynamics of the inter-societal flows in Africa.

Considering only the indigenous societies of these countries, such as they were idealized in the classic period of Africanist anthropology, “Portuguese Africa” is a construction that is ethnographically meaningless and, therefore, cannot be the basis of any possible singularity of the anthropology done by Brazilians. However, all these societies shared a historical experience during a period that lasted for around a hundred years. It was the process that resulted in the implantation of a colonial regime by a single colonial empire. Although there may be no ethnographic reason that justifies the use of the expression “Portuguese Africa”, there certainly is an historical reason for it. All these societies had to face colonial domination, and the Portuguese empire was guided by the same general principles and by the idea of a civilizing mission *à la* Portuguese. It was an empire marked by a self-image of fragility, weakness and humility, but paradoxically it was the last empire to fall. However, a closer examination reveals that the way the empire operated was very different in each colony. Whilst Angola attracted a mass of Portuguese colonists, there were practically none in Guinea-Bissau. Whereas Angola and Mozambique were rich colonies, Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé were, to a large extent, disdained and abandoned. And Cape Verdeans were always divided about their identity; they were never sure as to whether Cape Verde was part of Africa or part of the Atlantic islands.

It is therefore the colonial Portuguese presence that justifies, as an historical experience, the unity of “Portuguese Africa”. But this, in my opinion, is not enough to build a singularity. The Brazilian obsession (or the obsession of Brazilian social sciences) with the issue of nationality complements this relatively shared historical experience. The so-called PALOP countries currently experience the initial stages of the nation-building process. This is a key issue in all of these countries, in the same way as it is a theme dear to our social sciences. It may well be that our ideology of nationhood, which incorporates all differences into the national body, represents an advantage to understanding the historical experience of these countries in comparison with the perspectives of other national anthropologies: the English and the American ones that ethnize, if not racialize, differences, naturalizing them; Portuguese anthropology, always nostalgic in relation to the lost empire, always divided between the discomfort of its smallness and the obligation of civilizing; French anthropology, very universalist and also tending towards civilizing, but with a heavier hand. A more definitive answer to this question will, however, have to wait until several generations of Brazilian anthropologists have done research in Africa.

Omar Ribeiro Thomaz

At this point I would like to raise a fundamental point with regard to the question of the region. If it is true that there is something in common between Angola and Mozambique, as a consequence of a past marked by the same colonizer, it is also true that this is the only thing these two countries have in common. The more research I do in Mozambique, the more I become distant from Angola or Guinea, and the more I become closer to Malawi, Zimbabwe and certain regions of South Africa or Swaziland. The approximation between the *PALOP* countries, taking as a reference a supposed Portuguese past, does not fail to retain a lusotropical echo. And this is not just because the colonizers that went to Angola and Mozambique, and who no longer exist, were profoundly different, but also because the populations of Angola and Mozambique are also profoundly different, not to mention those of Guinea, Cape Verde or São Tomé and Príncipe.

The notion of a “cultural area”, unfortunately unfashionable among us, makes a lot of sense in these African contexts, and it is this notion that allows us to perform a salutary comparison. Whereas Guinea is located in what is conventionally called “West Africa”, and most of Angola is associated with the “Congo basin”, Mozambique is a southern and eastern context. The revealing comparisons here will be between northern Mozambique and former British East Africa, between central Africa and the former Rhodesias, and between the south and South Africa and Swaziland. With other peoples, other colonizers, the distant Portuguese past is a factor that interacts dynamically with others, and one that certainly distances Mozambique from Angola, from Portugal, and from Brazil... Furthermore, Mozambique is in the Indies, and it was the Indian populations that inherited a kind of colonialism in competition with the Portuguese, and it is the Indians that remained and are part of the Mozambicans’ daily lives.

3) The Portuguese language: potentials and pitfalls

Wilson Trajano Filho

Does the fact that we are Portuguese speakers have any effect on how our research is conducted and on its results? In relation to this, it is important to note that societies develop different ways of perceiving language and language use. Portugal is a focused speech community, where language is a very

strong feature of social identity and thereby the object of attention and regulation by State institutions and society. In Portugal, vernacular variants are constrained by linguistic policy and ideology. Brazil is also a focused speech community, but less so than Portugal. The Portuguese-speaking African countries are diffuse speech communities, where language plays a secondary role in identity building at a national level. There, concrete language policies tend to have a utilitarian nature rather than a primordial one. In such contexts language variations suffer little constraint from ideology and state regulation. All this means two important and related things: 1) the Portuguese language is not perceived in the same way in these countries; and 2) what is identified as Portuguese in Africa does not have a monolithic system or code as its reference. In reality, “Portuguese” is just a name, a label that refers to a huge set of vernacular variants the extremes of which are more far apart than our standard variant is from standard Spanish. For all these reasons, the question as to the role of language in our research needs to be reviewed so that we do not have our linguistic ideology as our starting point, which, as we have seen, places great identitary value on language. It remains to be known whether on a pragmatic level any mutual intelligibility of the vernacular variants that we call “Portuguese” facilitates our interactions in the field. Here, once again, there is immense variability. I would say that for the urban centres in Cape Verde the response is affirmative, but I have strong doubts in relation to the small rural communities on the island of Santiago. In the case of São Tomé, the situation is similar to that of Cape Verde. In Guinea-Bissau, there is hardly any comparative advantage in speaking “Portuguese”. Omar has something to say about the situation in Mozambique. Angola, I believe, still needs to be discovered by Brazilian anthropologists.

Omar Ribeiro Thomaz

The second supposition would refer to a specific link between Brazilian anthropologists, or those who had their academic formation in Brazil, and distinct contexts that we characterize, out of sheer complacency, under the umbrella of the same official language. And this is where the Portuguese language gains differentiated protagonism. If it is clear that no kind of lusotropical bent appears to be part of the spirit of this round table, it is no less true that linguistic unity continues to be a supposition that deserves, at least, to be discussed.

It is a fact that Portuguese is the official language of five African countries – Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Angola and Mozambique. Recently it also became the joint official language of Equatorial Guinea, alongside Spanish, and is on its way to having privileged use in Senegal. The relationship that individuals in these different countries have with the Portuguese language is, however, very distinct, preventing us from creating a link between them, and even more so a link between these countries and Brazil.

From the demographic point of view, Portuguese has a very differentiated impact. In Guinea-Bissau it is language virtually limited to official documents and is practically absent and even unknown to the majority of its inhabitants, who are very well aware of its official usage in the face of the national character of Guinean Creole. In Mozambique, if it is true that it is a language increasingly spoken and known by the Mozambicans, nevertheless, it continues to be the mother tongue of a very small minority, and command of the language composes an element of status and power. It is true that in Angola the use of Portuguese is singular, since this is one of the few countries where the majority of the population effectively knows the language of the State and the elite, the result of a generalized autonomous process of academic training within a reasonable education system.

And even in Angola and Mozambique it would be fitting to ask: do we understand each other in Portuguese? I believe not. It is true that the use of Portuguese effectively brings us closer to the circles of the elite and the intellectuals of these countries, which is not something to be taken lightly. The Angolan and Mozambican elites are profoundly cosmopolitan, they are familiar with Brazilian literature and can be described as tributaries of a specific relationship with Brazil, to the extent that Brazilian intellectual and literary production has been an important reference for autonomous intellectual production in these countries. More recently, mass Brazilian culture, in the form of telenovelas and even other kinds of programmes, have invaded these countries and have become part of a repertory accessible in particular by the urban elite. But we cannot forget that Brazilian productions compete with those of other countries. In Mozambique, for example, Brazilian soap operas compete with others imported from India, which are preferred by the Indian communities in that country.

In terms of historiographic undertakings, knowledge of Portuguese

provides an advantage. And not only for the studios in the current *PALOP* countries: a large part of the documentation available about different regions of Africa between the 16th and 18th centuries is in Portuguese, which places us at an advantage in relation to researchers from other places. Even so, only a few Brazilians have knowledge of the Arab sources, which are also fundamental to understanding the immense African interior in the pre-colonial period, or Indian production, crucial to a closer understanding of the east coast...

But the advantages of having knowledge of Portuguese to be able to relate with the elite and have privileged access to the sources is not enough. The idea of the existence of a common language is, in truth, profoundly authoritarian, since it restricts us to the singularity of the use of Portuguese in these contexts, transforming it, in any case, into an object of sarcastic comments or curiosity. I am one of those who defends that Portuguese in Mozambique is, currently, a native language. This is not just because it is increasingly becoming the preferred language of many in the urban centres or even the mother tongue of a few, but rather, because it has been incorporated into the daily lives of the Mozambicans as something that belongs to them. I believe that the challenge here is the real unfamiliarity with spoken (and written) Portuguese in Mozambique that permits the perception of what people are expressing, in a process in which a common language is built during the relationship between the anthropologist, in this case Brazilian, and his interlocutor, rather than a supposed principle of communication between poles.

A good example of what I am talking about is the generalized use of the term *xará* in southern Mozambique. It is a word that until recently was unknown in Portugal and which, over the last twenty years, has been incorporated by those who speak various languages in southern Mozambique. In the Portuguese translation of Henri Junod's *Moeurs et Coutumes des Bantous*, the term *xará* does not appear, and when Webster worked among the Chopi people of southern Mozambique in the early 1970s, he made no reference to this term, but rather used the Chopi word *nyadine*, which has corresponding terms in Changana, Xitswa and Bitonga. The statement: "you are my *xará*" is recurrent in southern Mozambique, and appears to indicate, in an effusive manner, simply the fact of two individuals having the same name, or names with the same root. However, *xará* means much more than this: it is nothing less than an institution. Having the same name creates a relationship that borders on being kin, as Webster states, and this in turn assumes a set of

duties, obligations and rights. A child can be a *xará* of an elderly man, which implies that the child has a relationship of obligations towards the older man, and that the child is the classificatory father of his children, which assumes another entire set of duties, obligations and rights. An individual can be the *xará* of a deceased person, a forebear, which places him in another universe of relationships and creates a connection between him and the happenings of ancient times... It took me years to perceive the relevance of *xará*, and for many years I took the effusive nature of my *xarás* as nothing more than an affinity that arises between two people with the same name who talk to each other. This is something that, on the other hand, would not make much sense in Portugal, where the system of naming people is, as we know, much more restricted with regard to proper names and which would end up turning an individual into the *xará* of an infinite number of people...

The same can be said of the term *lobolo*, which has been totally incorporated into Mozambican Portuguese, even having the corresponding verb *lobolar*, representing a central institution in the lives of the Mozambicans. *Lobolo* means, among other things, the relationship an individual of the male sex has with his mother-in-law and sisters-in-law (*sograria*). Translating *lobolo* as dowry or the price of the bride does not do justice to the word, even more so because in Mozambique no translation is necessary. The translation of all native language kinship terms into Portuguese, as Christian Geffray reveals, leads to a multiplicity of ambiguous interpretations, beyond those committed by anthropologists, but also among those from other places who translate the term *mamá* as mother, and *papá* as father, in the Makua territory, where there are no such things as fathers or mothers... or among those who associate the term *mamana*, used in southern Mozambique, with the idea of mother, when although *mamanas* can be mothers, they are certainly much more than mothers.

In sum, we do not understand each other in Portuguese, and the initial use of this language by Brazilian and Mozambican anthropologists is capable of creating a false identity that ends up blurring the meaning of words in a specific context, within a process of the Africanization of Portuguese and its concomitant use with an infinity of other languages.

(...)

In Mozambique, to use Portuguese is, however, an indicator of status. However much Brazilians attempt to differentiate themselves from the former colonizers, and are not mistaken for them by the urban Mozambicans,

the recurrent use of Portuguese places them in an undesired social hierarchy. That is to say, the Portuguese language, rather than bringing Brazilians closer to the Mozambicans, creates a distance between them. Those who speak Portuguese, in the opinion of the vast majority of the rural population, whether they be white or black, are associated with the urban universe and a set of attributes belonging to the *mulungo*, or “civilized person”. As such, a Brazilian anthropologist is a *mulungo*, in the same way as the representative of the nation is, that is to say, a bureaucrat from Maputo, who wears clothing similar to that of the West, or displays clear signs of consumerism, such as wristwatches, mobile telephones or cars.

There is not necessarily an immediate empathy between a Mozambican rural inhabitant and a Brazilian anthropologist, and such empathy is generally limited to sectors of the local elite who, on the one hand, have knowledge of us through literary references or telenovelas. Brazilian telenovelas have become a reality in Mozambique at least since the 1980s, and in recent years have become widespread as television has expanded in the country. The images portrayed of Brazil are not necessarily the most agreeable. If among sectors of the Maputo elite there exists a certain affinity and even the positivation of a universe of consumerism present in the telenovelas, in other circles at times there is rejection, because of the way gender relations are represented and above all because of the way intergenerational relations emerge. The eroticization or even hyper-sexualization contained in the telenovelas are perceived with mistrust and generate considerable anxiety, not to mention the fact that we know very little of what is really understood in relation to these telenovelas in Mozambique. Furthermore, there is no reason for us to suppose that Brazilian telenovelas might create a specific identity between the Mozambicans and Brazil, different to that which is created between a Zimbabwean and the United States as a result of the generalization of U.S. television series in that country.

Juliana Braz Dias

It is impossible not to discuss attentively the role of language in the face of the range of questions raised here. The tonic of the discussion remains the same, taking as its object of reflection a set of questions, their foundations and consequences. Is language a factor that brings the various social realities mentioned here closer together? Articulated with other factors, does

language help to form a relatively homogeneous bloc? As a result, is language also acting to delimit an object that we would examine in a specific manner? Given the series of reasons already put forward, our reply is negative: both with regard to the homogenization of this large and diversified group and also with regard to a clear advantage that Brazilian researchers have in accessing data and in their very relationship with the people whose social practices become the object of our research. Giving this debate the attention it deserves, I opt to continue it based on a reflection that is very close to my own research experiences in Cape Verde. The “Portuguese language” and the role it plays in this ethnographical encounter presented themselves to me with a certain degree of novelty, given that they put into perspective my own linguistic ideology and required my investigation strategies to be redesigned.

In 1998, when I planned my first visit to Cape Verde, I was able to perceive just how unknown that archipelago was to the vast majority of people in Brazil with whom I commented on my research project. Gradually I became more patient with these situations and learned to present Cape Verde to my Brazilian interlocutors as an African archipelago that is a little more than three hours by plane from Fortaleza (Brazil); or as the homeland of Cesária Évora; and – this being the chief reference – as a country where Portuguese is also spoken.

Equally remarkable for me was to discover how close and present Brazil is for the Cape Verdeans. In a variety of situations I was able to perceive the important and complex role played by Brazil in Cape Verdean representations. I shall now recount some of these situations which took place during my second visit to Cape Verde, more precisely on the island of São Vicente in 2002.

It was not uncommon for me to take part in conversations in which my Cape Verdean interlocutors demonstrated their admiration for Brazil. Evidently many of these conversations arose because of my presence there and because of their desire to demonstrate towards the Brazilian visitor the famous Cape Verdean hospitality. But the signification of these conversations did not stop there. I became accustomed to hearing that “deep down, deep down, Cape Verdeans and Brazilians are the same race” or, more commonly, that “Cape Verde and Brazil are two sibling countries”. Once, when I was talking with a member of the local elite, I heard that Brazil was not only a “sibling country”, but above all “the sibling that prospered”. I confess

that my first reaction to this label was one of great surprise, it being so far removed from the self-image we generally have of the Brazilian nation. And this situation began to require me to pay attention to the role my country played in local representations, as well as the consequences of this for the research I was seeking to undertake.

The second situation I will refer to focuses more directly on the linguistic issue. Although Cape Verde's official language is Portuguese and it is used by the public administration, schools and the mass media (and more frequently among the members of the local elite), the Creole language is spoken in the majority of everyday situations and is a fundamental element in the constitution of the Cape Verdean national identity. As such, throughout my entire stay in Cape Verde I sought to learn and to improve my understanding and speaking of the Creole language, since it is a way in to the cultural universe of the islands. Even though everybody understood me whenever I spoke in Portuguese, I made an effort to converse in Creole, even if I made some mistakes. One day, when I was shopping in a small store, the salesman, a young man of about twenty, started the usual conversation about Brazil. As happened very frequently, however much I insisted in speaking Creole, my interlocutor, curiously, also made an effort to speak in Portuguese, creating a situation that was both amusing and embarrassing at the same time. So I specifically asked him to talk with me in Creole, to help me to learn the language. He asked me: "What for? Your language is more *sabe*...". The adjective *sabe* comes from Creole and has equivalence in the words "nice", "good", "pleasant" and "pleasurable", having not only a strong positive connotation, but also being a reference for the native inhabitants of São Vicente, who refer to the island as a *land of "sabura"*. This situation repeated itself so frequently that I began to perceive that speaking in "Brazilian" (as they call our language) was, very often, a more efficient way of getting closer to my interlocutors, who seemed to feel more interested and encouraged every time I used my own language. Opting to speak "Brazilian" instead of Creole, in some situations, undoubtedly meant closing some doors that would lead me to the universe of Cape Verdean culture, but it showed itself to be a more efficient way, in practice, of forming ties and making it easier to get closer to some people, thus creating a more favourable environment to undertake my research.

When reflecting on this information, it must be emphasized from the outset that all of it refers to Cape Verde, and to the island of São Vicente in

particular, and it cannot be carelessly extended to the broad and highly heterogeneous group of African countries that have Portuguese as their official language. This emphasis on the proximity between Cape Verde and Brazil is so proper to the population of São Vicente that it is even an important attribute used in the construction of the singularity of that island in relation to other places on the Cape Verdean archipelago. This identification with Brazil says a lot about what the native inhabitants of São Vicente think about themselves, and in no way can it be extended to Cape Verde as a whole. But even being aware of this particularity of the data presented and the context it is part of, I believe that there are points there that allow us to continue with more general reflections.

The way in which my nationality and my mother tongue interfered in the situations experienced in the field, making approximation easier or more difficult, as well as determining to some extent the exchange of information, reinforces the need to reflect on the pre-existing relations between our country and those we seek to understand. And if the focus of our discussion is the possible specificity of the research undertaken by Brazilian anthropologists in the *PALOP*, it is fundamental that we think about our insertion in this linguistic and political Portuguese-speaking context, reflecting on the way in which it can influence our work to some extent, organizing beforehand the scenario in which we operate.

I believe that is not an exaggeration to state that Brazilians, in general, feel quite distant from the African countries that have Portuguese as their official language. Participation in the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries does not play a very important role on the image Brazilians have of themselves – especially when compared to the way in which the Portuguese constantly turn to this linguistic community, I would risk saying, almost as a politically correct reinvention of the former Portuguese colonial empire. And as in Portugal, this linguistic situation appears to me to have many significations (other significations, evidently) in the *PALOP* as well, with some degree of historic importance and direct interference in given events of current times. I emphasize, yet again, the heterogeneous character of this large group we are referring to. Each one of these countries (Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Angola and Mozambique), as well as the sub-groups that comprise these national totalities, certainly experience and interpret in a very particular manner this experience of “sharing” the same

language. But the fact to be highlighted here is that, in any of these contexts, the Brazilian ethnographer - as a Portuguese speaker - does not develop his work in a “neutral territory”. Our research activities do not occur in a vacuum. In any of these countries, despite their specificities, Brazil undeniably plays a very particular role. And, as ethnographers, we have to deal with this reality and bear in mind the relations that already exist, between our society and the one we intend to study, before we reach the field.

Undertaking ethnography is, as Geertz suggests, “to situate ourselves”, participating to some extent in that new cultural context with its structures of signification. I insist that “situating ourselves” means, among other things, understanding the image the group we study has of us. It means becoming aware of the historical and political position that we hold in the view of those we seek to understand. In the same way we construct interpretations of the groups we study, we are also an object of their thought. In the case we are dealing with, we need to know the signification that being Brazilian (and speaking “Brazilian”) has for the group we enter into contact with, and also to learn how to deal with this image and with its interference as we undertake our research activities.

I return to the Cape Verdean case to reinforce my point. Having my country defined by the informants as a sibling country, I perceived straightaway a relation that brought us closer together, highlighting the common points in our history. But that is not all. The theoretical discussions that take place in our discipline, in the classical studies of kinship, frequently point towards the idea that there is more than just equalness between brothers or sisters. The same seems to apply to the metaphor used here. Having history in common as former Portuguese colonies brings us closer, but does not necessarily make us equal. And it was a Cape Verdean that confirmed this by telling me that we are the sibling that prospered. What to do in the face of this uncomfortable affirmation?

We can consider the linguistic issue in a similar manner. The Portuguese language brings us closer, but its regional variations are valued differently. It is, in principle, the same linguistic community, but within an unequal relationship. And this pre-established unequalness between the anthropologist and his informants reveals all its potential to delimit the processes of building proximities and distances that are proper to ethnographic work. It remains, finally, to ask ourselves to what extent we, anthropologists, are

subject to reproducing such hierarchies on various planes: in the way we relate with others in the field, in the dialogues established, in the data obtained and in the conclusions we reach.

4) Other political issues

Wilson Trajano Filho

There is, indeed, an incipient network of people doing research in Africa, sharing themes, approaches and difficulties. Strategically, it could even be interesting from the network's point of view if there were a singularity in our way of dealing with "Portuguese Africa" that were recognized internally and externally. This would make our collective actions aimed at common goals more effective. And this may be happening at this very moment, through this four-voiced prelude, but, if this is the case, the process is still at the embryonic stage. Furthermore, even the prospects of an external recognition of a potential Brazilian peculiarity must be carefully analyzed, if we wish to understand the true potential that this would have for the reproduction of the group and the research field among us.

I deliberately avoid the use of the expressions centre and periphery when referring to anthropology, since it is too rich and differentiated a discipline for us to continue operating with these binary oppositions. A possible external recognition (of the singularity of the group or even of the work of an individual researcher) is no longer subject to circulation in or mediation by the Anglo-Saxon networks. If we are working with "Portuguese Africa", we will undoubtedly have an important source of dialogue and intellectual exchanges with social scientists (and here I insist that the strategic category is that of social scientist and not that of anthropologist) of the African countries and with our Portuguese colleagues. These are perhaps our main partners at this stage. But if we wish broader recognition as a group, the case is quite different, because it involves language mediation. And in that case it will not be sufficient for us to speak and write only in Portuguese, however uncomfortable that may be...

Omar Ribeiro Thomaz

The intensification of political and economic relations in parallel with calls for research projects that favour the work of Brazilian anthropologists

in the *PALOP* should be viewed with care. Brazil's interest in other "southern" countries is not new, and we can undoubtedly recall the "third worldism" of the military period, which brought together a right-wing dictatorship and a socialist revolution such as that in Angola, or which promoted the creation of airline routes (subsidized and incapable of making profit) between Brazil and different African countries – in the 1970s and 1980s, VARIG airlines had flights to Angola, Mozambique, the Ivory Coast and Senegal, in addition to South Africa. Undoubtedly, the idea of Brazil as a country that ought to have a high profile in the Latin American context or among underdeveloped countries, is not a new one, and it encounters parallels with the initiatives of other national elites, such as those of Mexico, South Africa, India and China.

And it is with China that Brazil currently finds itself in African contexts: the increase in trade and political relations between African countries as different as Sudan, Ethiopia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique and China is remarkable, and is not shrouded with any kind of post-colonial or identity rhetoric, but rather is marked by a kind of pragmatism that appears to accompany Chinese international relations at the beginning of this millennium.

No less important is the existence of a rhetoric that could bring Brazil closer to African countries in general and to the *PALOP* in particular, which is not accompanied by business relations of any great impact. Indeed, among the *PALOP*, the only one that has a significant relationship with Brazil is Angola, while among the African countries South Africa and Nigeria, for obvious reasons, could undoubtedly awaken the interest of Brazilian businessmen.

It is in another type of relationship that a certain Brazilian specificity would appear to reside: it is not just recently that Brazilians are present in the *PALOP*. In the 1970s and 1980s, countries such as Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique were lands of exile for groups of professionals who fled from the military dictatorship installed in Brazil, and there they found employment opportunities, as well as the longed for revolution. In recent years, particularly in Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde, Brazilian professionals are involved in international cooperation, particularly in the areas of healthcare (the HIV/AIDS epidemic) and education, competing with northern hemisphere cooperation agencies that insist on the idea of "helping" the poorer countries.

At the same time, it is not of lesser importance that since the 1970s Brazil has become a place where Africans can further their academic formation, as part of an unusual movement that appears to overturn the logic that imposes

studying and academic formation in the former colonial metropolis or in the United States. Indeed, in the larger Brazilian universities, it is not uncommon to find a considerable number of *PALOP* students, whilst the Brazilian State also has a generous student grant policy unparalleled in other southern countries (with the possible exception of China). As a result, we find important politicians and professionals in countries like Mozambique or Cape Verde who studied in Brazil. A systematic analysis of the results of these forty years of cooperation in the area of academic formation has yet to be performed.

The relationships between anthropological research and this intermittent expansion of political, commercial or simply professional interests in the *PALOP* needs to be placed in perspective. If these relationships do in fact exist, they must be compared with Brazil's relationships with other countries to help us effectively assess their dimension. Reflecting on the place of research in the midst of this broader process will only be possible after time and accumulated knowledge.

Juliana Braz Dias

Another issue that appears to me to be very relevant is the Brazilian Government's current policy in relation to the so-called *PALOP*. Precisely when we perceive an increase in the amount of research being undertaken by Brazilian anthropologists in the *PALOP*, we also see the Brazilian Government making efforts to get closer to the African continent and to the *CPLP* through a variety of strategies. This twofold interest in Portuguese-speaking Africa may not be a mere coincidence – and it certainly interferes in the conditions in which we undertake our research activities.

Not very long ago, the press publicised President Lula's harsh criticism of the Brazilian air transport sector. The shortage of airlines linking our country to Africa was seen to be preventing greater exchange between Brazil and the African countries. The President stated that for Brazilians to get to Angola they have to travel via London. He also said that he needed to “do some serious speaking” with the Brazilian air transport sector, and even raised the possibility of a new state airline company that would be capable of meeting this demand.

These statements are interlinked with a series of initiatives taken by the Federal Government with effect from President Lula's first term of office. Since he became President in 2003, Lula has visited nineteen African nations, including the *PALOP*. During these visits, several cooperation agreements and

technical pacts relating to education, healthcare, electronic technology and agriculture have been signed. Donations of resources and loan renegotiations have also taken place. In 2004, President Lula pardoned the US\$ 2.7 million debt that Cape Verde had with our country, putting into practice the generosity that, as he stated, all countries should have with smaller countries. In a speech made in April 2005, on his fourth visit to Africa, the President stated that his wish is that those that govern in Africa perceive that we are a “country of brothers”, that we are interested in effective integration and that we want to share what little we have with them, and for them to share a little of what they have with us.

The approximation of relations with poor and developing countries (especially on the African continent) has been one of the principal current strategies of the Brazilian government’s foreign policy. The ultimate aim of this is to increase trade and give impetus to business with these countries – although these visits and initiatives also have a clear and firm political dimension, with the aim of strategically occupying a position of leadership on the international scenario, especially in relation to the southern hemisphere countries.

Another important fact is the current incentive, offered by Brazilian funding agencies, for research in Portuguese-speaking African countries. Since 2005, six calls for research projects have been made by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (*CNPq*) to select proposals for international cooperation with African countries and/or the *CPLP* (“Programme for Social Sciences Cooperation with the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries” and “Programme for Scientific and Technological Cooperation – PRO-AFRICA”). As researchers, we can only be encouraged by such funding possibilities, which make our projects viable. But we cannot fail to reflect on the way in which this inclination on the part of the federal government may interfere with the conditions of the “ethnographic encounters” we undertake, given the ethical and political implications of this kind of governmental support, albeit incipient.

I insist that all these federal government initiatives are part of a strategy to reduce the distance between Brazilians and Portuguese-speaking Africa. But they are equally a means of gaining a privileged position in this relationship, by means of a hegemony-building project within the *CPLP* and in South-South relations. It is an attempt to redefine these relations and to consolidate a supposed leadership in this scenario.

They are, therefore, new elements that we must consider when appreciating the scenario we enter when we begin our research. What position should we take in the face of this policy that interferes in the relations between our country and those we research, and in the way we see them and the way they see us? How does the production of ethnographic knowledge take place in the face of this scenario in which there is a slight but complex inclination towards Brazil's leadership in relation to Africa? While running the risk of exaggerating, but merely with the aim of encouraging reflection: could it be that our research in some way is being aggregated to the Lula Government's cooperation agreements, in order to demonstrate "our humanity and concern for others", along with our technological and scientific superiority? Although our research can be considered part of the so-called South-South dialogue, I have difficulty assuming that these relations are completely equal.

As is being systematically debated within our discipline, the anthropologist's profession is crossed by sociological and historical forces and by the dynamics of the relations between nation-states. Until a few decades ago, we used to discuss these issues only concerned about the production of anthropological knowledge in colonial and imperial situations. Today, as anthropology is becoming more diversified and is strengthening in the so-called "peripheries" (if we can still use this expression), this discussion needs to become more complex, so as to talk about imperialism not just in the strict sense of the word, but in terms of more subtle international leadership strategies – as I believe is the case of Brazil in relation to Africa and the CPLP.

I insist that we need to be aware of the social and political conditions surrounding the work we do. I am not suggesting that, having got past a long period of exclusive preoccupation with the construction of the nation, Brazilian anthropology has now turned towards the construction of an empire. A dichotomy of this nature would be excessively impoverishing. Brazilian anthropology can indeed become international, without becoming an anthropology of empire building. But this remains a question about which we should be alert, if we foster this reflexivity and the awareness of the immersion of our work in a broader power system.

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