Dialogical and Power Differences in World Anthropologies[1]

Luís R. Cardoso de Oliveira (University of Brasilia)

Anthropology established itself as an academic discipline in the first half of the twentieth century, focusing on the study of tribal societies in colonized or third world countries, giving rise to its three founding traditions: the American, the British and the French. Besides the power relation between researcher and subjects of study, fieldwork conditions were also marked by a strong dialogical stance where the ethnographer was always concerned with understanding the native's point of view, even if the main goal of the study was to convey an adequate description of these societies to readers in the researcher's society. With the development of Anthropology in former colonies and third world countries themselves, changes in power relations and dialogic conditions may have had an impact on ethnography and the discipline's interpretive stance. What would be, if any, the interpretive differences in these latter studies? Has the enlargement of anthropological readership and the advances in global communication had an impact on the stance of the discipline's founding traditions themselves?

If, at first, the traditional stance tended to reproduce itself through the study of tribal societies of these countries by their intellectual elite, once third world anthropologists started studying their own society or other countries with whom it made no sense to relate from the perspective of a world power, the limits of the unilateral interest characterizing the classical ethnographies produced by the founding traditions have come wholeheartedly into the fore. Now, it did not make much sense anymore to approach the

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object without engaging in systematic dialog with groups of intellectuals in the other countries. Although I am going to develop my argument with a focus on Brazilian Anthropology, I suspect one would find many points of convergence with the Anthropologies developed in former colonies and third world countries.

From Without to Within the Nation: anthropology as a two way street

As mentioned above, anthropological perspectives have always been characterized by a strong dialogical stance, particularly after fieldwork became an established practice in the first quarter of the last century, and Malinowski's (1922/1984) groundbreaking ethnography on the Trobrianders is perhaps the greatest symbol of it. Be it the native's point of view, to use Malinowski's formulation, *le regard du dédain*, in the French tradition, or the actor's perspective, to locate it now in a broader sociological orientation, Anthropology has ever since been critical of all kinds of ethnocentrism and, to put it in a nutshell, the discipline has moved away from all approaches that looked at the object exclusively from without.

However, if the connection with the symbolic universe of the natives was readily seen as a condition for successful research, such efforts were very much dominated by the concerns of the researcher (given the usual lack of access to studies by the natives themselves) and, more often than not, with scarcely any interest in the perspective of local groups of intellectuals. A good example of this one-sidedness of research interests is the work of the so-called Brazilianists, who, even when they study Brazilian society at large, engage in dialog with Brazilian intellectuals usually just to exchange data, paying very little attention to the exchange of perspectives or interpretive viewpoints. The lack of impact of Brazilianists in Brazilian Anthropology, as recently suggested by Velho (2006: 267), is not only due to the fact that just a few of them study Brazilian Society at large (instead of "isolated" tribal groups), but mainly, I believe, because of their lack of interest in engaging themselves in discussions focusing on problems and perspectives that concern Brazilian social scientists. While many of these works are carefully produced ethnographies simply not concerned with looking beyond the (unilateral) interests and research questions shared within their own

original academic communities (e.g., Harris 1956 and Gross 1970), others, like Scheper-Hughes's book (1992), show little and non-reflective ethnographic understanding, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Sigaud (1995). Of course there are exceptions to this intellectual attitude as, for instance, the recent books by Vidal (2007) and Holston (2008), who do make an effort to establish a dialog with intellectual interests and concerns shared by Brazilian social scientists. But, these are rare and difficult to achieve, given that they do not find much stimulus to cultivate such efforts at home.

At any rate, I would like to emphasize here that I am not bringing this up as a critique or a complaint against this type of interpretive stance or attitude. My intention is merely descriptive and, although I am concerned about its limitations and do not sympathize with it, I do not think it is normatively wrong or incorrect.

In its beginnings, Brazilian anthropology also focused on tribal societies, within its own borders, and was very much influenced by the three founding traditions. Such influence is still present nowadays, even if it expresses itself through a distinctly local reading, and it is probably true that Brazilian students are more exposed to the founding traditions as a whole than their counterparts in any of the three central countries regarding anthropological theory. Nevertheless, the interest in understanding the tribal peoples of the country has soon become associated with a concern with their living conditions within Brazilian society at large and/or a concern with nation building efforts (Peirano 1981). This has been pointed out by many colleagues, who have characterized it as a Brazilian style (Ramos 1990) or as an interested approach (Peirano 2004) also marked by certain ethical-political commitments regarding the subjects of study (R. Cardoso de Oliveira 1988 & 2004).

Perhaps the line of studies that best expresses this kind of perspective is the one known as interethnic relations, which gave rise to an original conceptualization of the problem through the idea of *interethnic friction* (R. Cardoso de Oliveira 1964). Here, tribal peoples are looked at from the perspective of their connections with the society at large, where interethnic relations are embedded in power and recognition struggles (R. Cardoso de Oliveira 1964/1996 & 2006). The point being twofold: (1) these studies were historically situated and the researcher's position was placed in perspective [to use Dumont's formulation (1980)], as interpretive and post-modern anthropology would demand a decade or so later in the USA; (2) the respective

ethnographies aimed at producing an understanding of both, the modes of living or existential conditions of tribal peoples and Brazilian society at large. To that extent, even if these studies are also predominantly oriented by concerns shared in anthropological theory or in the community of researchers, the latter's effort to improve their understanding of their own society reduces significantly the traditional relatively unilateral viewpoint of classical anthropology, which I have mentioned above. A similar argument could be made taking as reference the concept of *internal colonialism* and ethnological studies in Mexico (Casanova 1963).

Mariza Peirano, who has written extensively on Brazilian anthropology from a comparative perspective, has contrasted such a stance with the predominant perspective in the central anthropological traditions in terms of, respectively, an emphasis on difference versus an emphasis on exoticism (Peirano 2004). While the latter stressed the distance between interpreter and the subjects of research, the former was concerned with alterity, conceiving of several possibilities of achieving it, from radical otherness (tribal peoples in themselves) to nearby alterity (urban studies), but calling attention to a permanent ideological bond to Brazil throughout. In this regard, when Peirano looks at more recent trends in Brazilian anthropology focusing on radical otherness through experiences of fieldwork abroad, she points out the concern with keeping the ideological bond to Brazil by either studying Brazilian immigrants in other countries or by doing research in former Portuguese colonies, or yet, by connecting ethnographic situations abroad with Brazilian concerns, thereby keeping within view an important dimension of proximity.

In spite of agreeing by and large with Peirano's interpretation, I would like to take up this dimension of self-reflection of Brazilian anthropology that Peirano identifies with an ideological bond to highlight the corresponding dialogical and power differences, which characterize this kind of anthropology. From my point of view there are two types of differences that have come up in these studies abroad, with interesting implications, and which could be classified, respectively as: (1) symmetrical comparisons and, (2) dialogical partnerships.

As mentioned before, given that Brazil is neither a world power nor is it likely that it will ever be even if the country comes to achieve a very significant degree of international leadership in the future, there is no point

in taking up a unilateral interpretive stance as indicated above. That is, not to say anything about a resistance to such an approach within the local anthropological tradition itself, and the recent changes in world anthropologies that emphasizes broader ideals of dialogical rapport with the subjects of study and native or local anthropologists. Be it as it may, the two types of research endeavor just indicated are characterized by strong dialogical concerns and an interest in dialog where power relations play a much lesser role.

I have two situations in mind regarding symmetrical comparisons: (a) exchanges leading up to one research endeavor by a single author; and, (b) exchanges involving interactions between research groups and their publications. In the first case I would like to mention my own comparative work comprising experiences of research in Brazil, the USA and Quebec/Canada. After doing research on Small Claims Courts in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from a perspective already marked by my Brazilian background (L. Cardoso de Oliveira 1989), I took up an initial comparison with citizenship rights in Brazil, where I propose that such rights, in order to satisfy citizens' demands, must strike a balance between respecting legal rights and expressing considerateness to the person of the citizen (L. Cardoso de Oliveira 1996). To a certain extend the relation between respect and considerateness would correspond to the one between justice and solidarity in political philosophy.

Like many Brazilian social scientists who have lived in the USA I was very much impressed, during my stay in this country, with the respect paid to individual rights and to the value attributed to the notion of citizenship in American society. However, my analysis of small claims disputes at the Cambridge District Court indicated a significant difficulty of the actors in dealing with rights whose respect (or observance) demanded a manifestation of deference or solidarity from the interlocutor (L. Cardoso de Oliveira, 1989). That is, I am talking about situations in which the lack of attention to the demands or personal perceptions of the interlocutor are experienced as a denial of his/her identity as a citizen and, therefore, as an unacceptable insult. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ground such an insult as an illicit aggression that deserves reparation and litigants rarely get a satisfactory response from the court in such matters. Contrasting the North-American context with issues related to citizenship rights in Brazil, I called attention to an inverse Brazilian difficulty towards respecting individual rights, which is partially compensated by the value attributed to manifestations of considerateness

towards the person of the interlocutor (Idem 1996). The comparison allowed me to point out an imbalance between the principles of justice and solidarity in the two countries, which becomes clear by an emphasis on individual rights in the USA and a concern with considerateness in Brazil. Thus, I argued, this imbalance would have produced deficits of citizenship in both countries, even if the Brazilian deficit seems to be much greater than the USA's, given that, in the former, there is a difficulty in respecting the basic rights of citizens.

This polarity between the Brazilian and the USA cases has motivated a research effort in Quebec where, in principle, these two dimensions of citizenship (or of rights) should articulate in a different manner (L. Cardoso de Oliveira 2002/2005). Being a Canadian province and, therefore, very much influenced by the values of individualism, Quebec is the main political actor in the Canadian constitutional crisis. This is engendered by the dominant perception within the province that the rest-of-Canada does not recognize its cultural singularity, denying the worthiness of the Quebecois identity and the importance of its contribution in the process of making up the country. The demands for recognition, as formulated by Taylor (1994), share many similarities with problems of considerateness. Be it by way of its manifestation as a native category in Brazil (the initial reference of my concerns in this area), or as an analytic concept defining one type of human rights that is associated with the dignity of the citizen (Haroche & Vatin, 1998). In this connection, I interpreted the lack of recognition of Quebec's singularity as an *act of inconsiderateness* characterizing a moral insult, which, despite being identified as an aggression, does not allow for the grounding of demands for recognition as a legal right.

Be it as it may, the point of the symmetrical comparison is that the units of analysis are dealt with on an equal footing and the focus of analysis should be perceived as relevant from the perspective of native interpreters and intellectuals belonging to the units involved. The same goes for the exchanges involving research groups that, in fact, seem to have a greater interpretive potential. I am thinking of situations in which researchers of at least two countries do fieldwork in each other's country and cooperate by exchanging data and perspectives as part of the same research endeavor. In the last decade or so the collaboration between Brazilian and Argentinean anthropologists stimulated by the RAM (Mercosul Anthropology Meetings) have brought together such research groups, and I could cite, for instance, the one

lead by Roberto Kant de Lima in Brazil and Sofia Tiscornia in Argentina on problems of public security.

By the same token, the dialogical partnerships follow the same orientation, the difference being that here the collaboration is not aimed at the comparison of empirical situations, but at the exchange of perspectives over the same issues. One could think, for instance, about research efforts focused on a third empirical situation, where researchers of at least two countries or anthropological communities would systematically exchange their views. Again, the intellectual elite or community of interpreters from the third empirical situation should be taken as significant interlocutors, even if they do not show an interest in systematic collaboration. In all cases though, symmetrical comparisons and dialogical partnerships equally demand greater exchange commitments among researchers.

Now, what difference does it make? How does one compare the results of research done under the orientation of these two modalities of rapport and the traditional stance of the discipline? What kind of an impact can one expect of such research experiences in anthropological theory at large?

It is true that not only the ethnographic production of the centers where anthropology was initially created as a discipline have become more exposed when the societies formerly studied produced their own anthropologists, who could read the classical ethnographies, but some of them were later hired by universities at the centers, specially in the USA. However, these researchers represent a very small portion of the anthropological production in the periphery, most of which is not produced in English or French, nor is it usually translated to provide broader access to it. If, on the one hand, this is a disadvantage of such production, given that it actually addresses a much smaller readership, on the other hand the researchers living away from the centers have greater access to the current diversity of perspectives, given the mandatory command of English and French, besides at least their native language, and may benefit from this fact.

At any rate, it would be interesting if encounters such as this, at the AAA, stimulated efforts of systematic comparison between interpretive perspectives and styles of research cultivated within different anthropological traditions or communities. Thereby, perhaps one would find in the more recent anthropological traditions an original contribution to the field.

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Luis R. Cardoso de Oliveira has a PhD in Anthropology from Harvard (1989) and is a Full Professor of Anthropology at the University of Brasilia. He is also a researcher of CNPq, and has been a visiting scholar at Université de Montréal (1995-1996) and at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris (2006). He has published over 40 articles in academic journals and has published 3 books: *Fairness and communication in small claims courts* (University Microfilms International, 1989); *Direito legal e insulto moral* (Relume Dumará, 2002), which is also available in French (2005); and, *Ensaios Antropológicos sobre moral e ética* (Editora Tempo Brasileiro, 1996), with Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira.

E-mail: lcardoso@unb.br