

LYGIA SIGAUD (February 28, 1945 – April 9, 2009).

By José Sérgio Leite Lopes (UFRJ/PPGAS) with the collaboration of Beatriz Heredia (UFRJ/PPGSA) and Rosilene Leite Lopes (UFPE/PPGA)

The recent death of Lygia Sigaud has left a feeling of emptiness, as we lose a friend, colleague and human being, but also the fullness of that which she had accomplished and the plans of things to come.

Lygia joined the first group of students to study in the Anthropology Programme founded by Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira at the National Museum in 1968 (PPGAS-MN). She soon became a member of faculty where her presence influenced all subsequent generations. Her research project in Brazil's northeast enthused the first groups of the PPGAS-MN.

Throughout her professional career the central concern of her research was to understand the processes of social transformation among peasants and rural workers first in the sugar cane zones of the state of Pernambuco and later in various other regions of Brazil. Her first publications told of the impact of the persistent demand for rights—acquired during the first years of the 1960s—, even in the face of the police repression which scourged the region when Lygia began her fieldwork in 1969. Her analysis of the apparent paradox of the coexistence of a certain idealization of the past when workers lived on the traditional sugar cane properties, and a demand for contemporary social rights, inspired the growing interest of social scientists and historians in the way in which workers conceive of and use the Law over recent years in Brazil. This research project continued with the publication of *Os clandestinos e os direitos* (Clandestines and Rights). Which told of the drama of unregistered workers known as clandestine workers (*os clandestinos*), who were recruited by agents at the “ends of the street” (“pontas de rua”) or *favelas* in local towns, for the arduous work in the sugar cane fields. In the mid 1970s Lygia witnessed the collective mobilization which finally broke out in the area in 1979. Having studied social relations in the *zona da mata* of Pernambuco where the sugar cane grows, since the beginning of the 1970s to the present day, Lygia was able to give us a complete panorama of the successive transformations which have characterised the area. In the 1990s she started to analyse land occupations and a series of workers' camps in the sugar cane properties themselves, which came into being concomitantly with the economic decline of sugar cane plantation properties. She brought

together a bi-national group of researchers recruited from students and faculty of the PPGAS-MN and the École Normale Supérieure in Paris to study diverse aspects of these transformations. In 2002 she coordinated an exhibition, “*Lonas e Bandeiras*” (“Tarpaulins and Flags”) in the National Museum, which was an aesthetic audio visual result of her study of the workers’ camps.

In the late 1980s Lygia studied the repercussions of large scale dams on local peasant populations; the loss of their lands and the disruption of local social life, as well as removals and regroupings, through comparing similar events in the northeast and the south of Brazil. During this research also she supervised master’s and doctoral theses.

Apart from teaching at the PPGAS-MN of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, she also taught in the Department of Sociology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Brasília. Later on she gave courses at the École Normale Supérieure, and the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and in the Anthropology Programme of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). She was Head of the Anthropology Department of the National Museum, Coordinator of the PPGAS, and editor of *Mana*, the journal of the PPGAS. She was also vice president of the teachers’ association of the UFRJ during its first years.

As teacher and researcher, Lygia Sigaud also had a significant impact outside Brazil, most notably in France. Her research experience on the social rights of rural workers and her comparative experience in diverse national fields (Brazil, France, England), also led her to write on the theory and history of anthropology, in particular the way in which anthropologists received and appropriated Marcel Mauss’ *Essai sur le Don*. To prepare the paper on this question which was published in *Mana*, and the presentation which she wrote for the Brazilian translation of Edmund Leach’s *Political Systems of Highland Burma* she undertook archival research in France and England as well as designing a project on the social conditions of originality within Social Anthropology.

When she died, Lygia was preparing three books for publication. The manuscripts which she left behind contain well developed discussions on the repercussions of the Law and social transformations, the comparative history of land occupations and demands for agrarian reform in Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul, as well as the social constraints that explain innovation in anthropological theory.

Beyond her academic rigour, her enormous capacity for fieldwork and her dedication to the academic institutions where she worked, Lygia Sigaud was forever politically active in broadening the democratic process in Brazil, whether through the results of her academic work on rural workers, or through participation in university associations. Her attachment to and enthusiasm for the broadening of citizenship rights, the public good and social solidarity were constant through a life that was so suddenly and prematurely brought to an end.

Rio de Janeiro, 13 April 2009

Translation: Peter Fry

Text first appeared on the home page of the Brazilian Anthropological Association: <http://www.abant.org.br/conteudo/002PRINCIPAL/Nota%20so-bre%20Lygia%20Sigaud.pdf>

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By Emília Pietrafesa de Godoi (Unicamp/IFCH)

2006. Lygia Sigaud was our guest during the first semester of that year. Her generous presence was divided between the class she taught regularly as a visiting professor in the Graduate Social Anthropology Program at Unicamp, attending students, which she did in room 34 B of the “teacher’s building” of the IFCH, and discussing projects and studies underway among sociology and anthropology students at the Center for Rural Studies at the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences (CERES). There is no way to write about her time with us without this becoming glowing testimony. I sat in on a few of her classes and we discussed our student’s projects and research. Her class dealt with *Law and the Social World* and its proposal can be synthesized in two issues: the way that legal innovations trigger effects in the social world and how the law, as a set of norms and institutions, becomes effective. Lygia’s thinking was rigorous and vigorous. It was fascinating to accompany her classes and to see her thinking in action. In the first class, she made a point of explaining the perspective from which the course was conceived, to then steer the students to reflect on the ethnographic work: How to prepare the research questions?

How to build the *corpus* for analysis? What uses can be made of distinct – ethnographic, documentary, historic and statistical procedures in our work? She always demonstrated that it is best to first ask “how” and not “why”, because as she taught, “it is the ‘how’ that allows us to unveil the process, that allows the *description*”. Social processes were always at the core of her studies, since the initial works in the *zona da mata canavieira* of Pernambuco in the late 1960’s, precisely in 1969. She brought her field, or that is her fields, inside the classroom: it was possible to see the landscape of the empiric facts being analyzed (the social actors with names, social positions, events, the appeals to the legal system, the petitions, the social situations). She taught our students that the heuristic virtues of a social universe are not transparent.

In her course, Lygia Sigaud explored an entire conceptual apparatus of anthropology concerning social obligations, relations of exchange and of reciprocal dependence, to relations of power and domination. All of this, allied to her broad ethnographic experience and her fertile intellectual exercise, was also objectified in the inaugural lessons that she gave at the opening of the semester of the Graduate Social Anthropology Program, which she gave the titles *O senso-comum em Antropologia* [Popular Perspective in Anthropology], and which was later published in *Revista Novos Estudos Cebrap* (v.77, 2007:129-152), under the title *Doxa e crença entre os antropólogos*. Her article ‘*Se eu soubesse*’. *Os dons, as dívidas e suas equivalências*, published in *Ruris* (no. 2, v. 1, set. 2007:123-153), presented her reflections on exchange and law. In this article, after presenting the statement of a rural worker about his break in relations with his boss in the recent history of the Pernambucana plantations, Lygia analyzed the transformations that favor the accounting for of land titles, their meanings for those involved and their implications for the studies about exchange and law.

Her collaborations with the line of research *Territorialities and Social Processes* at CERES and with the graduate program were invaluable. I particularly remember her contribution to the studies about the land occupations in Brazil undertaken by doctoral and master’s students not only from the Anthropology Program, but in Sociology as well, which could benefit from her orientations and which continue to do so through her writings about the issue, which brought an original reading. She proposed the existence of the “forma acampamento” and the “forma movimento” as a legitimate way of demanding land from the State.

Lygia had a notable capacity to establish relations between her experiences in different empiric and intellectual fields; in this way, the understanding of one social phenomenon fertilized another: the road blocks, the *piqueteiro* movement in Argentina, the demands for land in Brazil. I remember that the last topic of the course that she gave at Unicamp referred to demands for land, ethnic conflicts, and to NGOs, and the agreements with the State in South Africa. It is here where I arrive at the point that her precocious departure leaves us. In the second half of 2008, we organized a Symposium about Mobility and Identity Constructions: Experiences in Brazil and South Africa, at Unicamp, which took place in the first week of December of that year. The intellectual interest in South Africa and the comparative perspective were already expressed in the book that Lygia Sigaud had organized with Benoît de L'Estoile and Federico Neiburg, *Antropologia, Impérios e Estados Nacionais* (Rio de Janeiro, Relume Dumará, 2002). Her physical presence was no longer possible, but was clearly manifest in the participation of her colleagues and former students, evoked by Omar Ribeiro Thomaz (Unicamp), Antonádia Borges (UnB) and Marcelo Rosa (UnB). We remembered her in name at that symposium. This issue of *Ruris*, which includes a dossier about sugar cane workers, was heading to the printers when we received the news that Lygia Sigaud had departed on the morning of April 9. Lygia was a pioneer in the anthropological studies of these workers' rights. We offer this homage from *Ruris* and the researchers at CERES so that Lygia Sigaud's presence will always be felt among us.

São Paulo, April 2009

Translation: Jeffrey Hoff