

Four Obituaries

Over the last three years four major Brazilian anthropologists have died: Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, Ruth Cardoso, Sílvia Coelho dos Santos, and Lygia Sigaud, In this number of *Vibrant* we publish texts written by their colleagues and friends.

ROBERTO CARDOSO DE OLIVEIRA (July 11, 1928 — July, 2006)

By Roberto Damatta (PUC – Rio)

We, his first students, secretly called him “RCO”. It wasn’t really a secret because he knew and liked it, since the reduction of his name to initials was a form of institutionalization; a precocious admission of the perennality that he, at that young age, desired so much. In classes and seminars, our discussions were with “Roberto”, whose comments were always inspired by philosophy, in which he earned his Bachelor’s degree and with which he had strong ties until his death on Friday, July 21. But the informal treatment and the healthy Brazilian camaraderie did not imply any impingement on his authority as the intellectual mentor, which constituted his way of being. It was something that was a natural part of his life, like wings are part of a bird. Since I was also a “Roberto”, but a student, I soon discovered that the name was exclusive. I was content to be called “Matta”, which became my perfect *nome de guerra* (if an exaggerated one). It was more than perfect (if a bit exaggerated) because it did not leave any doubts about who was *the* “Roberto” in the group. While returning sorrowfully from his funeral in Brasília, I read an obituary that reiterated the melancholy reality of his death at 78. Someone sitting on the other side of the narrow airplane corridor with a rustled newspaper was coincidentally reading the same page and I watched as he glanced at the news. The salt of life: for that man, a simple obituary; but for the history of Brazilian Anthropology, an irreparable loss, and for his family, former students, disciples and friends, a catastrophe. It shakes our emotional landscape, composed of people who are homes, foundations, stairs, fences, wells, beds, tables and landscapes. Some surround us and limit us, others take us in and support us; some are our downfall, many inspire our courage and are our guiding lights. In the landscape of my life, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira was a

foundation and an illuminating lighthouse. Since I met him, when I was 20, I found in him the professor and researcher who I wanted to be. The first time I saw his apartment full of books, in Leme [a Rio de Janeiro neighborhood], seeing him alongside his wife Gilda, and children, I discovered in him the future that I would also have. At the end of the visit, I realize that Roberto had given me more than professional advice and a pair of essays with a dedication – the first that I would receive, for at that meeting, whether I knew it or not, he had established the foundation of my life. I say this in an attempt to reveal Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira’s charisma, which is a sign of the great masters and of the courageous creators of institutions. Because in addition to searching for researchers, stirring in them the incurable yearning to write and study, Roberto was the intrepid creator of Anthropology programs at the National Museum, and in Brasília and Campinas. He was a rare example of a professor capable of teaching and building institutions. As he said: it was necessary to both play and carry the piano...a required exercise in this Brazil, where it is still repeated with turpitude that “those who can do and those who can’t teach”! At heart – this is one of the revelations of death – Roberto taught us to work for lost causes, the only ones for which it is worth fighting: the impartial study of tribal societies, the honest teaching of social theory, the unending fight against obscurantism and ignorance, the love for academic life, despite the paltry conditions of university life in Brazil. I often heard him shockingly say, “I was studying”, with the candor of an apprentice. Every book was a treasure to him. It is not my intention to reveal the contributions of Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, our beloved “RCO”, to the Social Sciences and, within them to Social Anthropology. This is a term that he introduced to Brazil under the watchful eye of older colleagues, who, with reason, saw in it the threat of a transformative innovation. It was one of those pesky things that requires us to learn and to see the world in another way. What I want to do, in these lines, is to try to present a personality marked by an obsession for study, research and writing. I want to honor a man distinguished by an enviable moral integrity, which made me see in him a mythic character about whom my mother had taught me. She would describe a soldier who was thin, small, apparently fragile – just like our professor – but gifted with a moral strength capable of confronting the most savage disorder. It is for this reason that the physical disappearance of Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira is a catastrophe. It is a disturbance that goes beyond a question of forgetting him. Because in Roberto’s case, it is

not enough to forget him; it is necessary to unforget him. There is only one way to do so: to cannibalize him. We must place him within our hearts so that his moral effort and his thirst for knowledge survive and multiply, alongside his love for Social Anthropology and his undying creative energy.

Translated by Jeffrey Hoff

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ROBERTO CARDOSO DE OLIVEIRA (July 11, 1928 — July, 2006)

By Roque de Barros Laraia (UnB)

Sixteen years ago I accepted Mariza Corrêa's invitation to participate in the organization of a volume to homage Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira at the time of his retirement from the State University at Campinas. At the time I had decided to emphasize his role as a teacher, focusing on his concern with the training of new human resources for social anthropology. Now, upon being invited to participate in a posthumous tribute to my dear professor and friend, I have decided to rewrite the same article with a few modifications and additions.

This paper concerns an important aspect of the career of Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira: his capacity to prepare new human resources for social anthropology. In this regard, he was distinguished from other important scholars who did not or could not form a "school". Thus, in addition to being a field worker, an anthropologist concerned with the theoretical development of the discipline, and a militant defender of indigenous peoples, he was an educator committed to the renovation of the academic ranks in order to assure the future of science; he was a professor dedicated to the objective to end an era dominated by autodidacticism.

He was the product of a transitional phase between self-teaching and education *stricto sensu*, which was basically only possible in Brazil in the second half of the 20th century. With a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of São Paulo, his interest was kindled in anthropology by the preparations for the festivities of the IV Centennial of the City of São Paulo. Among the many events programmed, two of them were closely related

to the discipline: the realization of the XXXIV International Congress of Americanists, at the imposing Hotel Esplanada, with the presence of the most important anthropologists of the time, and a large ethnological exposition mounted by Darcy Ribeiro at the then brand new Ibirapuera Park. The two met at a lecture by Darcy at the Municipal Library. Soon afterwards, Darcy invited him to work in the Division of Studies of the Indian Protection Service. This is how the recently graduated philosopher became an ethnologist, repeating the mutation that, 20 years earlier, took place with a French philosophy professor. It was at this time that he began his field studies among the Terena.

In 1956, he was invited by Darcy Ribeiro to participate, as an assistant, in the 2nd Improvement Course in Cultural Anthropology at the recently created Museum of the Indian. Students in this course included Carlos Araújo Moreira Neto, Danton Moreira Neto, Jorge Guimarães de Oliveira, Lígia Estevão de Oliveira and Maria Heloísa Fenelon Costa. In 1957, with Darcy Ribeiro's departure from the Indian Protection Service, the course terminated. Another was created by Darcy within the Brazilian Center for Educational Research, the Social Researchers Improvement Course, more explicitly steered to the field of education. Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira was also a teacher in this course in the two following years.

With the dismissal of José Maria de Gama Malcher from the presidency of the Indian Protection Service, and with the departure of Darcy Ribeiro and Eduardo Galvão from the Division of Studies at the Museum of the Indian, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira accepted, in 1959, Luís de Castro Faria's invitation to join the staff at the Anthropology Department at the National Museum, then an autonomous research institution tied directly to the Ministry of Education.

The National Museum – founded in 1818 and thus the oldest research institution in Brazil – already had tremendous experience in the organization of scientific expeditions for the collection of materials and data in the fields of anthropology, botany, geology and zoology. It had a collection of approximately four hundred thousand ethnographic pieces. The Anthropology Department included important researchers such as Edgar Roquette-Pinto and Heloísa Alberto Torres, but until the end of the 1950s, it still did not stand out in the teaching of anthropology.¹

1 It is true that the practice of teaching was not totally foreign to the institution. Departments at the

Even before the incorporation of the Museum to the University of Brazil – which only took place in 1961, Roberto took the initiative to organize a graduate course in social anthropology (*lato sensu*), having obtained the financial resources from the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Brazil. In February 1960, the first class was selected and six students² admitted, who, with fellowships, had a full-time, 10-month academic program, three of which were dedicated to field work among the Terena Indians.

For students who had recently received their Bachelor's degree, the course constituted a total change of pace. Each morning was occupied by classes and seminars, given exclusively by RCO. The afternoons were dedicated to reading texts related to the morning activities. Most of them were in English, a few in French or Spanish and practically none in Portuguese.³ They also worked at home, to be able to complement the readings, which could reach 900 pages a week. This, thus repeated on a graduate level the didactic experience of selecting a small group of students and submitting them to a complete training regimen under tutorial supervision, an experience that was being realized, since the previous decade, on the undergraduate level by the School of Economic Sciences at the University of Minas Gerais.

The austere environment of the National Museum – with its corridors lined with glass cases with bones and scientific equipment – the naturalists (the official designation for the researchers), with their solemn white lab coats, increased RCA's enthusiasm and positively reflected on the group of young students, providing a climate of solidarity, a willingness to work and a suitable level of competition.

More than 40 years later, reviewing the notes from this course, it is possible to imagine (or that is recall) the “brave new world” that RCO offered to each one of his students. A world that encompassed the classic authors of anthropology and which also opened spaces for sociologists such as Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Marion Levi Jr. and of course Florestan Fernandes. Two texts were discussed at length: *The Structure of Society*, by Marion Levy Jr

Museum regularly received interns who worked under the guidance of the researchers.

2 The six students were Alcida Ramos, Edson Soares Diniz, Hortênsia Caminha, Onídia Bevenuto, Roberto Augusto da Matta and Roque de Barros Laraia.

3 At the time there were very few translations of anthropology texts. *O homem*, by Ralf Linton, and *Um espelho para o homem*, by Clyde Kluckhohn, appear to have been the only two books available in Portuguese.

(Princeton University Press, 1952) and the then recently released *Fundamentos empíricos da explicação sociológica*, by Florestan Fernandes (Companhia Editora Nacional, 1959). The epistemological base of the course was complemented by S.F. Nadel, *Fundamentos da Antropologia Social* (Fundo de Cultura Economica, México, 1955). These readings also stimulated the realization in the following year of an informal seminar, held by three students in the course, the basic text for which was the book *Ideology and Utopia* by Karl Mannheim.

There is no doubt that, at the time, the purposeful break from the orthodox limits of anthropology triggered criticisms and comments from anthropologists more rigidly tied to the canons of the discipline. The very choice of the course title, Social Anthropology, instead of Cultural Anthropology, constituted a challenge. The most frequent accusation was that it was a sociology course. Nothing could be more false. The traditional issues of anthropology occupied most of the students' time. Under the title, "Organization of economic activity", they studied both Firth as well as Herskovitz. And many of the students were presented, for the first time, to rituals such as the "kula" (through Malinowski), the "potlatch" (through Boas) and even the "Tapirapé eating groups" (through Baldus). The concept of property and possession was orthodoxly taken from the prosaic *Notes and Queries, vade mecum* for an entire generation of anthropologists.

The portion aimed at the study of the "organization of associative life" used texts by Morgan, Rivers, Lowie, Tönnies, and by an author then still poorly known in Brazil, Claude Levi-Strauss.⁴ Under the title of "organization of religious conduct" the texts of Durkheim, Mauss, Herz, Firth, Pindigton, Radcliffe-Brown, Weber and René Ribeiro were studied. As to be expected in a course organized by RCO, "acculturation and assimilation"⁵ were given substantial emphasis. This was when the students had the opportunity to become familiar with the work of Malinowski, *The Dynamics of Cultural Change: an inquiry into race relations in Africa* (1949); of Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire* (1955); principally the *Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation*, by Redfield, Linton and Herskovitz, published in 1935; and *Acculturation: an Explanatory formulation*, signed by Siegel, Vogt, Watson and Broom,

4 Emphasis given to the work of Levi-Strauss led to a strong structuralist influence among some of the students at the beginning of their academic careers.

5 It was during the course that RCO finished writing his book *O processo de assimilação dos Terena*.

published in 1954. It was during this portion of the course that for the first time RCO presented the reflections that led him, a short time later, to formulate his theory about “inter-ethnic friction” one of the important marks of his academic life.

Finally, “methods and techniques of social research” constituted an important portion of the course, the goal of which was to train field researchers. The book by Goode and Hatt, *Métodos em pesquisa social* [Methods in Social Research], was a basic text and students never got tired of thanking the Companhia Editora Nacional for having published the translation in 1960. In this part of the course, simulation research was conducted in the Rio de Janeiro favelas of Leme, Jacarezinho and Esqueleto. The students were divided into three pairs and four of them apprehensively saw off the two that had the bad luck of being designated to conduct the work in the city’s most notorious favela, that of Esqueleto.⁶

The second portion of the course was dedicated to research training. RCO, accompanied by three students, went by train to the then distant city of Campo Grande, in Mato Grosso. The trip began with a stop in São Paulo so that RCO could show his students the Philosophy School at USP, on Rua Maria Antônia, where they met Florestan Fernandes and his two assistants Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Otávio Ianni. The three female students, with assistant professor Olmar Paranhos Montenegro, went by plane. After all, at that time the line between chauvinism and chivalry was still blurred.

The project “Domestic Group, Family and Kinship: Ideas for Research in Social Anthropology”, prepared by RCO, served as training for the students in the study of the Terêna. All of them conducted the different research procedures, such as interviews, genealogies, life stories and case studies. They learned the techniques of approximation of the informants and the preparation of the field notebooks and diaries, all of this was combined with teaching about the ethics of field work. At night the group met and each one read a portion of their diary, all subject to critical commentary from the professor. It was a period rich in fascinating experiences, when some confirmed their choice of profession. With the conclusion of the field work that lasted from June to August, the data analysis phase began at the National Museum and

⁶ The favela known as Esqueleto [Skeleton] no longer exists. It became the site of the campus of the State University of Rio de Janeiro.

the writing of the thematic reports, which RCO used to support his book *Urbanização e Tribalismo* (1968).

The last part of the course (which took place in parallel to the writing of the research reports) was more concentrated in the field of ethnology. In addition to the works then available by Brazilian authors (Baldus, Nimuendajú, Galvão, Ribeiro and Schaden), texts of African ethnology were discussed, combined in two now classic volumes: *African Political Systems*, organized by Meyer Fortes and E.E. Evans Pritchard (1942) and *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, organized by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Darryl Forde (1950).

In December, the course terminated with a test. The National Museum, requested the hiring of those with the three best scores.⁷

The class was repeated in 1961 and 1962. In 1961, there were three students: Júlio Cezar Melatti, Marcos Magalhães Rubinger and Maria Andréa Loyola. As in the previous year, the students served as research assistants for field work, conducted respectively by Roberto DaMatta among the Gaviões Indians, in southern Pará; Roque de Barros Laraia among the Suruí Indians in the same region; and Alcida Ramos (then a researcher at the Social Sciences Institute of the University of Brasilia) among the immigrant settlements located at Ponta do Caju, Rio de Janeiro.

In 1962, the course also had three students: Maria Cecilia Vieira Helm, Maria Stela Amorim and Silvio Coelho dos Santos. Two of them accompanied RCO's field work among the Tikuna Indians in the Upper Solimões River. Maria Stela Amorim participated in the study by Marcos Magalhães Rubinger among the Maxakali Indians, in Minas Gerais.

Thus, in three years, the course "Theory and Research in Social Anthropology" prepared 12 professionals, nine of whom continued in an academic career.⁸ This course was the first trial for a larger project: the creation of the Graduate Social Anthropology Program, which began operating in the second half of 1968. In the difficult years between these two courses, RCO did not neglect his role as an educator. In the coordination of two research projects ("Studies of areas of inter-ethnic friction in Brazil" and Comparative Study of the social organization of Indians in Brazil"), he advised various

7 Roberto DaMatta and Roque de Barros Laraia were hired. Alcida Ramos was not because she did not have Brazilian citizenship, although she had the highest grade.

8 Only two did not complete the program. Marcos Magalhães Rubinger suffered an early death, but exercised his professional activities until he was prevented from doing so by the military dictatorship.

young researchers. Some of these interns formed the first group of students in the Graduate Social Anthropology Program.

Strong support from the Ford Foundation was decisive for the implantation of the graduate program, and was obtained thanks to the prestige that RCO enjoyed at that institution. It is not possible, in the scope of this work, to list all of the anthropologists who graduated from this program, but we cannot fail to mention the first group of 13 students – young people who decided to confront a rigorous academic program, while each participated in their own way in the political movement against the dictatorship. Some of them were initially motivated by sociology, but sought anthropology because there was no graduate sociology course at that time in Rio de Janeiro. All of them were converted to anthropology during the Master's course, with a single exception. It was a brilliant group, as demonstrated by the following numbers: 12 completed the Master's course (only one did not, because he died prematurely); one third of the dissertations approved were published; nine received a doctorate; and most importantly, all conducted academic activities, and some are considered important Brazilian anthropologists.⁹

During the time he was coordinator of the graduate program, RCO was advisor to five dissertations. In 1971 he was invited to be a Visiting Scholar at the Laboratory of Social Relations at Harvard University and in 1972, with our invitation, transferred to the Social Sciences Department at the University of Brasilia, with the objective of creating a master's program in social anthropology. The Ford Foundation, which had previously supported the masters in sociology in this department, provided the same support given to the National Museum. RCO remained in Brasilia for 13 years, a period during which he advised 15 master's dissertations and had a primordial role in the creation of the doctoral in anthropology in 1982.

In Brasília, he had a new experience: he taught undergraduate classes. He was responsible for a number of classes and stimulated the rise of various anthropological vocations. In this period, he was head of the Social Sciences

9 The first group was constituted by the following students (the initials in parentheses indicate where they exercised their activities): Alice Rangel (IFCS-UFRJ), Cláudia Menezes (MI-FUNAI); Elizabeth Frolich (PUC-SP), Euripedes Cunha Dias (UnB), Lucia Matoso (falecida), Lygia Sigaud (MN-UFRJ), Madalena Diégues (FINEP), Maria Andréa Loyola (UERJ), Maria Rosilene Alvim (IFCS-UFRJ), Neide Esterci (IFCS-UFRJ), Otávio Velho (MN-UFRJ), Paulo Marcos Amorim (IFCS-UFRJ) and Wagner Rocha Neves (UFF).

Department and director of the Human Sciences Institute, but at no time did he stop giving classes, even those these posts would have allowed this.

In 1972, he created the Anthropology Series, a collection of texts produced by the professors, which has now reached number 409. In 1976, in conjunction with *Tempo Brasileiro*, he founded the *Anuário Antropológico*, a periodical designed to accept the works of researchers in the Department, as well as other Brazilian and foreign colleagues.

In 1985, he unexpectedly transferred to Unicamp, where he played an important role in the creation of the doctoral program in social sciences and advised seven doctoral theses. The period he spent in Campinas had great scientific productivity, expressed in a large number of publications, among which we highlight the following: *Razão e afetividade – O pensamento de Levi Bruhl* (Campinas: Centro de Lógica, Epistemologia e História da Ciência, Unicamp, 1991; 2.ed. Brasília: Editora da UnB/Paralelo 15, 2002); *Sobre o pensamento antropológico* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca Tempo Universitário, Tempo Brasileiro, 1988); *A crise do indigenismo* (Campinas: Unicamp, 1988); and organized the following books: *A pós-modernidade* (Campinas: Unicamp, 1987); *A Antropologia de Rivers*, (Campinas:Unicamp, 1991); and *Estilos de Antropologia* (Campinas: Unicamp, 1995).

In December 1990, he retired from Unicamp, but remained associated to the university as Honorary Senior Professor, which allowed him to continue to teach classes and advise students. In 1997, he was named Professor Emeritus at Unicamp.

In 1995, he returned to the University of Brasilia, this time to the Graduate Center of Latin American and Caribbean Graduate Research Center, where he undertook a line of research entitled “Comparative Study in Latin American border regions under the theme of Identity, Ethnicity and Nationality”, under which he advised eight doctoral theses.

In this period, RCO returned to issues closer to his own Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy, moral and ethics, which are two concepts that appear frequently in his work. It is interesting to remember that in an interview granted to Mariza Peirano, in 1978, referring to the beginning of his career, he affirmed he had only gone to Anthropology as part of a strategy to obtain knowledge of a science capable of providing the content for a truly philosophical reflection. At a certain time, this philosophical bent led him to a close approximation with hermeneutics. We can imagine that the

preparation of his book *Os diários e suas margens: viagem aos territórios Terêna e Tukúna* (2002) had been an attempt to close the cycle of ethnology and revive the plans of his youth, plans which were delayed due to the publication of his last two books: the organization of the book entitled *Nacionalidade e etnicidade em fronteiras* (Brasília: Editora Unb, 2005), with Stephen Baines, and that which was published posthumously, *Caminhos da identidade: ensaios sobre etnicidade e multiculturalismo* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP/Paralelo 15, 2006).

The return to the plans of his youth, the return to philosophy, were put off forever in July 2006. Perhaps this desire was merely rhetorical, because since he accepted the invitation from Darcy Ribeiro, Roberto became a complete anthropologist, who, with great dedication, intelligence and creativity, dominated Brazilian anthropology in the second half of the 20th century. His passing was a loss not only for anthropology, but for all of the social sciences. I am grateful for his teachings, and above all, his friendship.