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**“OTHERNESS IN CONTEXT”:**  
A guide to anthropology in Brazil

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## A guide to anthropology in Brazil \*

For a long time anthropology was defined by the exoticism of its object of study and by the distance, conceived as cultural and geographical, which separated the researcher from his/her group. This situation has changed. Even (and perhaps mostly) in the socially legitimate centers of anthropological production, the ideal of an encounter with some sort of radical alterity is no longer considered an essential dimension of the anthropological perspective. Anthropology is not about an object, it is about difference.

Of course, this viewpoint has been present in the international scene since the 1960s, but it would not surface easily in the minds of anthropologists.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that anthropology's interest had shifted from far away (the Trobrianders, the Azande, Kwakiutl, Bororo) to less exotic places (the Mediterranean countries, for example), and then to close-by settings and groups, when it really did reach "home" in some quarters it turned itself to an array of *studies* (cultural studies, science studies, feminist studies and so on).<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the case of Brazil is presented here to discuss how that difference involves a plurality of notions which can be either chronological or simultaneous. I will present some general features of the discipline in that context, using a Weberian ideal-type formulation. In Brazil, though exoticism has never been an issue in itself, some dimension of alterity has and continues to be a basic trait of anthropology. Briefly, a notion of otherness involving indigenous peoples and their contact with the regional population dominated the scene up until the 1960s; in the following decades, these studies coexisted with "softer" alterities in which anthropologists turned their attention to the peasantry and then to urban contexts until, more recently, during the 1980s, their concerns began to include social scientists' intellectual careers and

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\* This is an expanded and updated version of the arguments presented in Peirano (1998, 2000). (This paper will be published in *Companion to Latin American Anthropology*, a volume being edited by Deborah Poole.)

<sup>1</sup> See Lévi-Strauss (1961), for the disappearance of primitive peoples and the realization that anthropology would survive exactly because it was not interested in a concrete object, but in the *difference* between peoples.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Peirano (1998).

production. Otherness has thus shifted from a concept of distant to minimal alterity, and many anthropologists having developed interests in several alterities over the course of their academic career.<sup>3</sup> The result has been a steady incorporation of new topics and an enlargement of the discipline's research universe. Today, all these modes of conceiving alterity (indigenous peoples, urban population, peasantry, social scientists themselves and so on) live together in a pluralistic way.

The Brazilian example reveals that, though exoticism is the sociogenetic foundation of anthropology, *for anthropologists themselves* difference can assume a plurality of notions. While in canonical terms it was radical to the point of (ideally) being foreign, when acculturated in other latitudes alterity has often translated into relative rather than exotic differences. Whether near or far, these differences can be cultural, social, economic, political, religious, territorial. In other words, the process that in the metropolitan centers took a century to develop — that is, bringing the discipline home from abroad — in Brazil took no more than three decades. Even though there are of course intellectual and/or empirical priorities as well as trends (theoretical or regarding objects/subjects), there are no real restrictions in relation to this multiplicity of alterities.

This relative freedom is related to many factors, and I shall raise a few of them. First, that Brazil (or South America, for that matter) has never experienced any historical resentment for having been the object of anthropological curiosity by the metropolitan centers (as was the case in the first half of the century with Melanesia, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa). Second, sociologists have been the main interlocutors for anthropologists — and not archeologists, physical anthropologists or linguists.<sup>4</sup> If neighboring disciplines (be they models or rivals) must always be considered in order to focus a specific field of knowledge, then permanent dialogue with sociology and political science has been the case. In Brazil, anthropology is one of the social sciences. Third, indigenous peoples — the presumed prototype of a radical alterity — were researched within the boundaries of the national territory. This situation reveals less a problem of financial resources — although this needs to be considered — than the choice of an object of study which includes, or is mixed with, a concern over differences. A last point to mention is the dominant influence of a French/Durkheimian perspective (over a German one, for instance), in which different ways of conceiving society stand side by side, thus playing down any strict interests in peculiarities or singularities. (The exhilaration which Lévi-Strauss produced in Brazil in the 1960s may be explained by this context.)

Given this general context, this article centers on (but is not restricted to) the last three to four decades, when anthropology gained legitimacy and became a

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, DaMatta (1970, 1976, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> A similar phenomenon takes place in India, where professionals seen as anthropologists abroad, at home are seen as sociologists.

prestigious field of social inquiry in Brazil. Because it emerged as a kind of rib to sociology — a feminine agency, for that matter —, it also inherited sociology's basic tension — that of combining theoretical excellence with social commitment. All this has to do with the institutionalization of the social sciences back in the 1930s, an Enlightenment project to help forge a political elite to govern the country and create a “national” ideal. Since then, this external dialogue with sociology has been internalized in the discipline as a dichotomy between indigenous ethnology "made in Brazil" and anthropological research *about Brazil*. Today we may say that an anthropology made in/about Brazil is a general goal.<sup>5</sup>

### **Exoticism and ideal types: The case of Brazil**

From the perspective of the classic concern about taboos, exoticism is a distant and remote alterity which also includes a sort of fascination. In other words, rather than delineating a forbidden territory, it calls for scrutiny. But alterity as *difference* or as *exoticism* diverge: while exoticism always implies some sort of difference, not every difference is exotic. This is basic Durkheim. In the first case, political dimensions are intrinsic to its very existence. In the latter, politics are beyond, far away or in any case separate. One more aspect is that the emphasis on difference is inherently comparative, whereas the emphasis on exoticism does not require contrasts.

Since exoticism was the sociogenetic trait of anthropology, I will take it as the relevant element in relation to which examples can be measured. The aim is to focus on how it was acculturated in Brazil by means of a shift in emphasis towards difference. I identify four ideal types, in the Weberian sense: (i) radical alterity, (ii) contact with alterity, (iii) nearby alterity and (iv) minimum alterity. These types are not mutually exclusive and, as mentioned, throughout their academic careers anthropologists move back and forth among and within them. In chronological terms, a certain sequence can be noted: the research project of radical alterity preceded the study of contact of regional with indigenous populations. In turn, this interest was followed by research carried out at home, especially in urban contexts. Today, sociological production itself has become an anthropological problem. In the past decade, the trend to transpose national boundaries (but in a different mode from orthodox anthropologists) has been not only accepted but praised. I will look closer at these cases although I will not make exhaustive citations, but only mention some authors and works in order to indicate different themes and approaches.

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<sup>5</sup> In conformity with our native conception, in this text I refer to anthropology as a discipline, and not as a gaze, a voice or a perspective.

### *Radical alterity*

The search for a rigorous sort of alterity can be illustrated in Brazil by two forms of geographical and ideological distancing. First, in the classic study of indigenous populations; second, in the more recent project of going beyond the country's own territorial limits. In neither case, however, compared to a central or “international anthropology” (Gerholm & Hannerz 1982), is alterity extreme (though it may be argued that indigenous peoples represented the “available exoticism” and that studying abroad is what anthropologists should do).

Let me begin by looking at the study of indigenous peoples. Today apprentices in the field can detect some dichotomies: Tupi or Jê, social organization or cosmology; Amazonia and Central Brazil or Xingu; history or ethnography; political economy or descriptive cosmology (see Viveiros de Castro 1995b). As with any dichotomy, the empirical options are far greater. But in this context, research on the Tupi, having practically disappeared from ethnology in Brazil during the 1960s (see Laraia 1964, 1986), has made a return in the past two decades (Viveiros de Castro 1986, 1992, Lima 1995, Fausto 1997, 2001; see also Muller 1990, Magalhães 1994). At the same time, research on indigenous peoples has provoked a systematic interest in kinship systems: though a classic area of anthropology, in Brazil's local scene it was considered a novelty (Viveiros de Castro 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2001; Viveiros de Castro & Fausto 1993, Villaça 1992, Gonçalves 1993, Teixeira Pinto 1993, 1997).

Before the 1980s, the Jê was the most studied group in Brazil. Following the classic works of Nimuendaju (for example, 1946), the Jê caught the attention of Lévi-Strauss (1952, 1956, 1960) and, shortly thereafter, of the Harvard-Central Brazil Project (Maybury-Lewis 1967, 1979).<sup>6</sup> In a short time, the results of this ambitious research project became the main support for structuralist Ph.D. dissertations. This field experience was central for a whole generation of anthropologists who spent their careers in Brazil (see, for example, DaMatta 1970, 1976; Melatti 1970a, 1978). In the following decades, research on the Jê continued, although the question of its hegemony was no longer an issue: see, for example, Vidal (1977), Carneiro de Cunha (1978), Seeger (1980, 1981), Lopes da Silva (1986), Lea (1992, 1995), among others. (For the ethnology of Xingu music see Seeger 1987, followed by Menezes Bastos 1993, 1995.)

This brief overview confirms that research has been consistently carried out in

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<sup>6</sup> David Maybury-Lewis recalls: “By 1960 I had defended my D.Phil. Thesis on the Xavante at Oxford and read L-S papers (1952 and 1956). These both fascinated and puzzled me. Fascinated, because of the subtlety of arguments, and puzzled because of the ethnographic and theoretical objections that I felt I could raise to L-S' theses. So I published a critique of them in the *Bijdragen* in 1960, which was sent to L-S who replied in the same issue of the journal in 1960 [Maybury-Lewis 1960, Lévi-Strauss 1960]. So, by the time the Harvard-Central Brazil Project was launched it was based on a desire to follow up and clarify Nimuendaju and an ongoing argument with L-S” (Maybury-Lewis, personal communication).

Brazilian territory.<sup>7</sup> The specialists, however, do not say they are studying “Brazilian Indians”; for them the relevant fact is that these indigenous groups are *situated* in Brazil as a matter of chance. There are even though political and ideological implications deriving from this location — anthropologists are often called to participate in the demarcation of Indian lands, for instance. But even if the main motivation for research is not exoticism but rather the (social, cultural, cosmological) difference between social groups, this line of research best corresponds to the traditional concerns of anthropology. It follows that it is within this area of study that debates with the “international” community are most frequent (see the debate between Brazilian and French ethnologists in Viveiros de Castro 1993, 1994, and Copet-Rougier & Héritier-Augé 1993). (See also Viveiros de Castro 2003). The question thus remains: is *our* difference *others'* exoticism?<sup>8</sup>

Then there is a second case of radical alterity. In this situation, otherness is basically geographical but not historically distant. Though Brazilian anthropologists at times break with the common practice of conducting fieldwork within the country's borders, an ideological bond to Brazil remains the rule. This happens in two ways: first, following Brazilians abroad and, second, looking at populations who were once colonial subjects of Portugal. Let us see both. The first tendency leads us straight to the United States, which has acquired a social value of paradigmatic alterity for comparative purposes.<sup>9</sup> This practice builds upon the classic study about racial prejudice by Oracy Nogueira (1986), but also includes analyses of hierarchy and individualism by DaMatta (1973a, 1980). Later developments are, for example, L. Cardoso de Oliveira (1989, 1996, 2002) and Kant de Lima (1985, 1991, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). In this context, the emerging topic of studying Brazilian and Portuguese immigrants to the US confirms the bond with a sort of “Brazilianess” (see G. Ribeiro 1996; Bianco 1992, 1993, 2001; Guran 1999). A second direction leads us to Portugal's former colonies and to the ethnographic interest they inspire. Fry (1991, 1995a, 1999, 2002, 2004) compares colonial experiences in the matter of color and race in Brazil, the United States, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Trajano Filho (1993a, 1993b, 1998, 2003) examines the national projects for a *Creole* society, with reference to Guiné-Bissau and to São Tomé e Príncipe. In a similar mode, but this

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<sup>7</sup> Although there are several books about Indians of Brazil (Melatti 1970b, Laraia 1993), Melatti is preparing a comprehensive study of the ethnographic areas of the whole sub-continent of South America. See also Carneiro da Cunha (1992), Fausto (2000).

<sup>8</sup> Being considered the classic field of anthropology, specialists have access to a large body of literature on South American ethnology. It traces back to the German expeditions of the 19th century seeking answers in Brazil to European questions about the state of the nature of primitive groups (Baldus 1954, Schaden 1954b) and continues onward to recent generations, such as the works of Nimuendaju about the social organization of the Jê, or research in the 1930s about the Tupi (for example, Baldus 1970, Wagley and Galvão 1949, Wagley 1977), as well as the works of Darcy & Berta Ribeiro about the Urubu-Kaapor (Ribeiro & Ribeiro 1957), of Florestan Fernandes concerning the reconstruction of Tupinambá social organization and the social function of Tupinambá war (Fernandes 1963, 1970). For a reference to Guarani culture, see Schaden (1954a).

<sup>9</sup> See G. Velho (1995) for a survey that includes studies from the 1950s to the 1990s.

time in the Cape Verde Islands, Dias (2000, 2002) focuses on family relations, language and power in the process of nation-building; Lobo (2001) looks at the environment as part of the self-image of the people and of the nation; and Rego (2001) deals with the Cape Verde's "re-invention". See also the recent Ribeiro Thomaz (2002) on the Portuguese "third empire." Anthropology originating in Portugal has also instigated novel interests, as indicated by congresses and conferences in the two countries (see Almeida 1996, Bastos 1996, Cabral 1996), revealing again the historical, linguistic, and ideological links. On dialogues between Portuguese and Brazilian scholars, see Bastos et al. (2002), with several many shared topics as, for instance, J. Montero (2002) and Seyferth (2002). See G. Velho (1999) for a dialogue of Portuguese and Brazilian scholars on the subject of urban anthropology, and *Etnográfica* (2000) for several articles published by Brazilian anthropologists in Portugal. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule concerning direct links to Brazil. See, for instance G. Ribeiro (1991) in Argentina (but also G. Ribeiro & Figueiro 2002 on Argentinians and Brazilians), F.R. Ribeiro (1994) in South Africa, Fonseca (1986) and Eckert (1991) in France, Neiburg (2001) in Argentina and Pinto (2002) in Syria. A third trend may be detected in new concerns about inter and supra-national affairs: Góes Filho (2003) looks at the conferences and general assemblies in the United Nations as rituals in order to elucidate the route by which universal principles become established in that setting. Leite Lopes (2003a, b) focus on the debates around the issue of the proliferation of nuclear plants in small towns and its relationship to universal environment concerns. (At present, a research project run by Kelly Silva on the role of the United Nations in the East Timor state-building process is underway.)

### *Contact with alterity*

If radical alterity consisted of studies *about* indigenous groups, those looking at relations *with* indigenous groups are a second type, which I call contact with alterity. Today, a considerable body of literature is beholden to indigenist concerns which were long discussed separately from mainstream ethnological monographs (for example, Baldus 1939, Schaden 1955).<sup>10</sup> Contact itself became a legitimate academic topic during the 1950s and 1960s: after D. Ribeiro (1957, 1962) focused in on the issue of Indian integration, R. Cardoso de Oliveira (1963, 1978) adopted a perspective *from within* and crafted the notion of "inter-ethnic friction".<sup>11</sup>

Inter-ethnic friction is considered a theoretical innovation by many. It appeared as part of a *bricolage* of indigenist concerns and sociological theory, revealing "a situation in which two groups are dialectically put together through their opposing interests" (Cardoso de Oliveira 1963: 43). Inter-ethnic friction was proposed in a

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<sup>10</sup> See Peirano 1981, chapter 4.

<sup>11</sup> For Darcy Ribeiro, the *indigenous problem* could not be grasped outside the framework of Brazilian society, since it only exists "where and when Indians and non-Indians enter into contact" (D. Ribeiro 1962: 136).

context where the theories of contact, both British (Malinowski) and American (Redfield, Linton and Herskovitz), had proven inadequate. The combination of an anthropological subject and a sociological inspiration (Fernandes and Balandier) resulted in a proposal which became fundamental in the consolidation of several MA and PhD programs.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1960s, when the notion of inter-ethnic friction was proposed, a structuralist-oriented project was also being developed in the same institutional space (Museu Nacional), curiously involving many of the same researchers (Laraia & DaMatta 1967, DaMatta 1976, Melatti 1967). The literature produced from these two projects focused, respectively, on inter-ethnic contact from a sociological orientation, and on indigenous social systems in a structuralist mode. Almost four decades later, it is possible to recognize that influence was exercised in both directions: in the short term Brazilian anthropologists became cognizant of structuralist approaches, and in the long run, in the 1990s, former researchers from the Harvard-Central Brazil project disclosed their concerns with the problems of contact (Maybury-Lewis 1997). (See also Turner 1991.)

In the late 1970s the research project about contact received a new impulse. Oliveira Filho (1977, 1987, 1988, 1999a) expanded inter-ethnic concerns by reshaping them to include historical dimensions. A group of researchers followed suit and unfolded this thematic approach by discussing relations between indigenists and government policies, the demarcation of Indian lands, the role of the military and frontiers, the notion of *territorialization* and the two-way process that derives from it, the examination of “mixed Indians” in the Brazilian northeast and Indian rights (Oliveira Filho 1998, 1999b). Souza Lima (1995, 2002, 2003) refocuses some of these concerns by looking at research programs on “indigenism,” described as a set of ideas related to the insertion of indigenous peoples into nation-state societies. The three volumes by Souza Lima & Barroso-Hoffoman (2002) look at several dimensions inherent to the association between anthropology and the state regarding indigenous policies. They discuss the regulation of Indian rights in Brazil, confronting the paradox that social policies often create and maintain social inequalities despite their discourse to the contrary. Contacts between Indians and the national society and the later development of this initial concern were the groundwork for what today is an important and significant research group, which poses sociological, moral and ethical questions about the relationship between Indian populations and the nation-state that accommodates them. One sensitive nerve touched by the probing of these issues is a national myth about an integrated society derived from the “mixture of three races” and the role of the state as mediator.

Parallel to this front, Baines (1991) looks at relations between indigenous groups and

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<sup>12</sup> This fact is especially evident in the graduate programs of the Museu Nacional/Rio de Janeiro Federal University (UFRJ) and of the University of Brasilia. In both places Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira played a central institutional role. (However, the notion of inter-ethnic friction was never exported beyond Brazil's own borders, as was the case with its kin, “dependency theory.”)

the National Indian Foundation, with special focus on the Waimiri; Barretto (1997) searches for links between Indian lands and conservation units. For studies of indigenous legislation and the conditions of South American Indians, see Carneiro da Cunha (1992, 1993), Santos (1989). After a canonical trajectory in ethnology (Ramos 1972, 1978, 1979), the author developed an increasing concern with indigenism. Ramos (1995) evaluates Yanomami ethnography in a context of crisis, and Ramos (1998) does a study based on the idea that indigenism is for Brazil what orientalism is for "the West."

Here, I pause just to mention, without further elaboration, the anthropological study of peasants — a highly relevant field which deserves a study of its own. I only indicate that during the 1970s the concern with contact incorporated the theme of expanding frontiers. This in turn made topics such as internal colonialism, peasants and the development of capitalism legitimate anthropological concerns (O. Velho 1972, 1976). At the same time, studies about peasants gained an independent thematic status, involving both anthropologists and sociologists (for anthropologists, see Palmeira 1977, Sigaud 1980, Moura 1978, Seyferth 1985, K. Woortmann 1990, E Woortmann 1995, Scott 1992). To the degree that alterity shifted its *locus* from Indian groups to contact with Indians, and then to peasants, the path was somehow completed with the inclusion of the peripheries of big cities (for instance, Leite Lopes 1976).

### *Nearby alterity*

Since the 1970s, anthropologists in Brazil have carried on research in large cities. Given that the teaching of anthropology is part of the social sciences curriculum, it is common for anthropology to become a counterpoint to sociology. Under political authoritarianism of the 1960s, anthropology was seen by many as an alternative to (Marxist) challenges coming from sociology, in a more or less silent dialogue that has persisted ever since. The attraction to anthropology rested both on its qualitative approach and on the promise of answers to understand both the country's diversity and its unity.

In the case of nearby otherness, the object of study has generally been chosen in close association with specific theoretical options. In Brazil, theory is not just an approach, but a political statement. Thus, G. Velho pulled together, by way of a bricolage, the symbolic interactionism from the Chicago school of sociology, and 1960s' British social anthropology (Clyde Mitchell, Raymond Firth, E. Bott) to open up the possibility for research on sensitive urban topics. Those included middle class lifestyles, cultural behaviors of psychism, drug consumption, violence, and politics. See, for example G. Velho (1981, 1986, 1994).<sup>13</sup> In this context, Velho's pioneering

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<sup>13</sup> Before, it had also been the Chicago school that inspired Florestan Fernandes, the father of the social sciences in Brazil, to "confront society" after his ethnographic studies on the Tupinambá Indians (Fernandes 1963, 1970).

fieldwork in urban anthropology in the early 1970s focused on a specific overpopulated building in the Rio de Janeiro neighborhood of Copacabana (G. Velho 1973).

Later, this line of research expanded into other areas, including poverty, the elderly, gender issues, prostitution, kinship and family, music and politics. A central goal of this comprehensive project as a whole has been to reveal some urban values of Brazilian society. In this sense, this research project not only situated phenomena in the city, but it also sought to analyze, in the path opened by Simmel, conditions of sociability in metropolises. The production of this thematic line is voluminous and broad-ranging. See, for instance, Duarte (1986), Gaspar (1985), Lins de Barros (1989, 2000), Vianna (1999), Kuschnir (1998, 2000). For violence in the city, the many articles in G. Velho & Alvito (1996) and the extensive work by Zaluar (1985, 1993, 1994) and Zaluar & Oliveira (2002).

DaMatta (1973a, 1980) found in structuralism a legitimate theoretical approach with which to begin his research about Carnival. The horizontality that this perspective conferred to different societies allowed him to leap from his 1960s study on indigenous peoples to national society as a whole. Later on, he added Gilberto Freyre (a former student of Franz Boas) as a predecessor for the examination of a possible national *ethos*. DaMatta (1973a) may be considered the transition point, as he placed side by side a canonical structuralist analysis of an Apinajé myth, of a short story by Edgar Allan Poe and of Carnival as *communitas*. This line of research was later expanded in DaMatta (1984, 1985, 1991), by means of a dialogue with Louis Dumont, in order to examine “what makes Brazil, Brasil”. See also DaMatta & Hess (1995) and DaMatta & Soárez (1999).<sup>14</sup>

In this expansion towards urban topics, the relevance of researching at home was never seriously questioned. There was a brief discussion about the nature of fieldwork in general, in which DaMatta (1973b) proposed the idea of “anthropological blues” as a central dimension of ethnological research, and an exchange on the topic of familiarity in any situation (G. Velho 1978). The whole issue was solved by the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> For a contemporary discussion of fieldwork in urban contexts, see Velho & Kuschnir (2003).

Despite occasional rivalries between anthropology and sociology, regarding the study in urban settings, both disciplines have had a long association (Candido 1958). To mention only a few examples, for immigrants in Brazil see Azevedo (1994), Cardoso

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<sup>14</sup> Amongst Brazilian anthropologists, DaMatta is one of the most remarkable cases of shifting alterities in terms of the ideal types presented here (from “radical otherness,” to “contact,” followed by “nearby alterity”). But it is revealing that, already a well-known author on urban topics, DaMatta was apologetic for publishing his Apinajé monograph in Portuguese (DaMatta 1976: 7).

<sup>15</sup> This debate was contemporaneous to the discussion of Indian anthropologists on the study “of one's own society”.

(1995), Seyferth (1990); for race relations, Borges Pereira (1967), Fry (1991), Carvalho (1992a), Segato (1986), Seyferth (2000); on gender, Grossi & Pedro (1998), Bruschini & Sorj (1994), Gregori (1993), Perlongher (1994); on religion, messianism and Afro-Brazilian cults, see R. Ribeiro (1978), Maggie (1975, 1992), Maggie & Rezende (2002), P. Montero (1985), Queiroz (1995), O. Velho (1995), Carvalho (1992b), Birman (1995); on popular festivities, see Magnani (1984), Sanchis (1983), Chaves (2003), Cavalcanti (1994), Silva (2001); for emphasis on Brazil as a nation-state, see DaMatta (1980), Oliven (1992, 1999). See, on crime and citizenship in São Paulo, Caldeira (2000), and for family, gossip, and honour (Fonseca 2000). For studies focused directly on politics from a native's perspective, see "Coleção Antropologia da Política" (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará), which put together studies on several topics: see, for instance, Teixeira (1998), on honor among Congressmen; Bezerra (1999) on political social networks (public officials, ministers, governors and Congressmen); Chaves (2002), on the National March of Landless Workers; and Borges (2004) on a Peircean ethnography revealing the modes whereby the State is present in the everyday life of the population of a shantytown near Brasília. These books were the result of a research project preceded by Palmeira (1995), and Palmeira & Goldman (1996).

### *Minimum alterity*

As if to confirm that the social sciences in Brazil have a debt to Durkheim — for whom other forms of civilization should be looked at in order to explain what is near to us — since the 1980s anthropologists have launched a series of studies about themselves and their craft. For the most part, these studies aim at understanding science as a manifestation of modernity. Topics vary from historical contexts for science and biographies of social scientists — mostly in Brazil — to inquiries about classical sociological authors.<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Castro Faria (1993, 2002), for a reflection on anthropology carried out in museums and universities; Corrêa (1982, 2003), for a historiography of the discipline in the country; Miceli (1989, 1995, 1999), for a broad and comparative project concerning the social sciences in the last quarter of last century. Goldman (1994) presents an intellectual biography of Lévy-Bruhl; see Grynspan (1994) for Mosca and Pareto; Neiburg (1997) for anthropology in Argentina. On the social sciences in São Paulo see Peixoto (1998, 2000) for Lévi-Strauss; for a study of the paulista Clima group, see Pontes (1998). For a comparison between Gilberto Freyre and Roger Bastide, see Peixoto (2000); on Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, see Castro Santos (2003). The interest that Brazilian scholars manifest in educational issues is discussed in Bomeny (2001a), and for an examination of the career of anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, see Bomeny (2001b). In Travassos (1997) we find a comparison between the dilemmas of modernization faced by Mario de Andrade in Brazil and Béla Bartok in Hungary, and for an inquiry

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<sup>16</sup> Many of these studies have recent French scholars as their inspiration or privileged interlocutors.

on the relationship between scientists and the race question in Brazil, see Schwarcz (1996, 2001). For a comprehensive bibliography of anthropology in Brazil until the 1980s, see Melatti (1984).

A broad-based research project dealing with different national styles of anthropology was inaugurated in R. Cardoso de Oliveira & Ruben (1995). Conceived as an inquiry into “peripheral” anthropologies, it is inspired by the work of philosopher G. Gaston Granger. Along this same line of research, for the comparative cases on ethnology in Australia, Brazil and Canada, see Baines (2002), on Argentina see Figoli (1995), see Ruben (1995) on Canada and R. Cardoso de Oliveira (1995) on Catalonia .

Before that, in the late 1970s, I started a research project with the intent of analyzing the discipline from an anthropological perspective. Challenged by Dumont's proposal (1978), in which he submits that anthropology is defined by a hierarchy of values in which universalism encompasses holism, I examined the sort of anthropology developed in Brazil from a perspective in which I blended Dumont and Norbert Elias. France and Germany were explicitly control cases (Peirano 1981). This study was followed by a comparison between Brazil and India — supposedly the hierarchical society par excellence —, resulting in the proposal for an “anthropology in the plural” (Peirano 1992). The triangular comparison between Brazil, India and the United States continued in Peirano (1991, 1998). The results of that research project focused on the discussion about the context in which anthropology develops, especially the political dimensions of nation-, state-, empire- and society-building. Most recently, I have refocused my interest on the political dimension of different theoretical strategies (Peirano, 1997, 1999).

The analysis of the relationship between social science and the national ideology was refined by Vilhena (1997), who examines the role of regional intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s, and the struggle by folklorists to survive in an environment in which sociology was becoming hegemonic. A new and promising project on the relationship between anthropological perspectives and state-building processes is presented in L'Estoile, et al. (2002). Psychoanalysis has also proved to be a fertile field of study for anthropology in Brazil. A dialogue within this field has developed into a solid research program; see Duarte (1989, 1990, 1996, 1997). Finally a collection of reflections about teaching anthropology in Brazil can be found in Bomeny et al. (1991), Pessanha & Villas Boas (1995); see also Viveiros de Castro (1995c), Duarte (1995), Montero (1995), Fry (1995b), Peirano (1995), Corrêa (1995), Sanchis (1995), Fonseca (1997), Niemeyer (1997), K. Woortmann (1997).

In sum: when alterity is found amongst social scientists, these studies focus on the Brazilian case, often with a comparative perspective in mind, and also on topics related to broad Western intellectual traditions. Since most of the publications are in Portuguese, the audience is limited. This scenario is enlarging with publications in English, but these are still a tiny minority. An important question thus arises concerning the audience for these studies. To what extent does it make sense to

undertake comprehensive and exhaustive investigations if they have no immediate overseas audience? Or, put in another way, why entering into a dialogue with the sources of scholarship if the desired debates do not occur due to the very language of enunciation? It seems that the link with the wider intellectual world is sought for its illocutionary effect at home. In this context, “minimum alterity” hides a proposal of “maximum alterity” that remains incomplete at heart, as it is theoretical.

### **Multiple interlocutors**

If the Brazilian example reinforces the idea that categories of alterity are contextual for anthropologists themselves, it is necessary to turn, by way of comparison, to the consecrated traditions in order to remember that they never were totally radical: Africa was relatively *home* for the British when they transferred the notion of totality to the Tallensi, the Azande and the Ndembu, thus renouncing sociology in favor of a flourishing anthropology (Anderson 1968). Up until the mid-1950s the discipline was limited to the metropolises, but social recognition of structuralism during the 1960s produced an unexpected byproduct. If it is true that human practices are horizontal, it was possible to imagine both the emergence of “indigenous anthropologies” (Fahim 1982) along with the endorsement that “we are all natives” (Geertz 1983).

The center's acceptance seems to have legitimated the many conferences held since then by, and/or for, “non-western” specialists (for example, Asad 1973), but the subject remained controversial. One example is Kuper (1994), which criticizes “nativist” manifestations of anthropology using the case of Greece. Denying that only natives can have a proper understanding of their own society, and that natives are the best judges (even censors) of ethnography, this sensible viewpoint is followed by a proposal for a “cosmopolitan anthropology” which would exclude not only curious foreigners, armchair voyeurs, but also the native community of specialists (social scientists, planners, intellectuals in general). Anthropology is a social science allied to sociology and history, and should not be linked to political programs — that is the conclusion.

In Brazil, this alliance has always been common practice, but the same does not hold for the exclusion of political viewpoints. Actually, in different guises, political agendas have always been part of scientific projects — in Brazil as elsewhere. In Brazil, efforts to achieve theoretical excellence rest on classical sociological authors, on critical dialogues with contemporary specialists (foreigners and local) and on the impact of new empirical evidence. In other words, in Brazil theoretical bricolage is the foundation for new intellectual lineages, with social responsibility being pervasive.<sup>17</sup>

One specific feature, however, is relevant here: foreign interlocutors *from the center*

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<sup>17</sup> See Peirano (2003) for a discussion of anthropological lineages.

have been social scientists' preference. They have chosen from several blends of Marxism since the 1960s, then structuralism (Lévi-Strauss), interpretativism (Clifford Geertz) and more recently, Foucault and Derrida's postmodernism. For those who take it for granted that the center is where theory is (and vice-versa), parochialism simply is avoided by means of the immediacy of the empirical data. This explains why for the most part there is no ongoing exchange with peers from other Latin America countries (Mexico and Argentina are exceptions). Intellectual dialogues must be plural and – *ipso facto* – cannot be restricted to regional settings.<sup>18</sup>

### **Multiple alterities**

The institutionalization of the social sciences as part of nation-building processes is a well-known phenomenon (Becker 1971, for France and the United States; Peirano 1981, O Velho 1982, for Brazil; Saberwal 1982, for India), as is the paradox of the existence of a critical social science surviving the interests of the elite that created it. In these moments, the new social science is not specialized because the project of nation-building and state formation encompasses several academic disciplines. Alterity is rarely neutral and the interested aspects, in a Weberian sense, are in many cases explicit. Anthropology and sociology only break apart in a process which is at once political, institutional and conceptual. Specializations are often needed when the process of nation-state building advances historically. In this situation, triangular dialogues becomes visible — between anthropologists and sociologists of the same local community, metropolitan traditions of knowledge (past and present), and fieldworkers and their subjects.

During the 1930s in Brazil, the social sciences were adopted in order to provide a scientific approach to the project of a new nation. It was believed that social sciences would substitute the socio-literary essay which (more than philosophy or human sciences) had performed the task of reflecting on social issues. Thus, from the 1930s to the 1950s, sociology was understood as encompassing all social sciences. But an emerging “*made-in-Brazil* sociology”, which combined theoretical demands with political concerns, was to become hegemonic during the following decades (Fernandes 1958). Meanwhile, ethnological studies of indigenous groups represented the canonical model for anthropology, but soon afterwards it adopted topics considered to be related to sociology. There was a fundamental difference between sociology and anthropology though: while problem-solving projects dominated sociology, the examination of social and/or cultural *difference* was the concern of anthropology. These differences, however, were to be found inside Brazil's own

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<sup>18</sup> In India, anthropologists seem to be acutely aware of their place of enunciation. Madan (1982) mentions two triangular connections: first, the relationship between insider research, outsider research and the studied group, secondly, the relationship between researcher, the funding agency and the group studied. Das (1995) points out three kinds of dialogues in which Indian scholars find themselves: with Western traditions of scholarship in the discipline, with Indian social scientists in general, and with the native, whose voice is present both as information obtained in fieldwork and in the written texts of tradition.

borders. Nowadays, even when anthropologists do venture out of the country, the quest for some sort of “Brazilianess” is unavoidable (as attested by the studies of former Portuguese colonies or Brazilian immigrants).

Social sciences from Brazil were never part of the circuits dominated by the centers of intellectual production. Curiously, though, we still consider ourselves as legitimate interlocutors of recognized authors of the Western tradition. It seems that the isolation of the Portuguese language has an affinity with the (local) political role reserved for the social scientist. This affinity, first of all, justifies alterity's ideal types and strategies while, on the other hand, it spotlights a paradox: when we look for differences, we often find a supposed singularity (which is “Brazilian”). Apart from these puzzling aspects, however, the complex process of intellectual and political loyalties has over time contributed positively to the consolidation of an effective academic community. On that note, I conclude this essay by pointing out to three aspects:

*In terms of exoticism:* For Brazilian anthropologists it has been difference, whether social or cultural, and not exoticism, that has provided the focus of attention when they look for alterity. This characteristic perhaps explains why, as opposed to the places where exoticism is threatening to destroy the discipline or, at least, displace it, Brazilian anthropologists tend to share an optimistic perspective;

*In political terms.* Though the political dimension has always been present wherever social sciences develop, in Brazil it has been directed towards a specific type of ideal nation-state, in which differences should be respected and a (national) singularity sought out and revealed;

*In theoretical terms.* Conceived as part of the Western world but not speaking an international language, theoretical dimensions assume a critical role as the noble path to modernity. In Brazil, the political implications of social theory lead to a muddle between specific objects of study and theoretical options. In recent years, the more successful attempts in the social sciences have come from the above-mentioned bricolage of previous but still available theoretical approaches, marked by the empirical situation at hand. In this context, there is room for a variety of approaches. Room first of all for pure mimetism, produced from a belief in being part of a homogenous world that does not exist. This situation leads to the acritical absorption of current foreign authors as a shortcut to the modern world. Second (as a variation on the first approach), there is room for a trivial practice whereby the data is ours but the theory is imported — the interlocution between empirical data and theory is abandoned, and data becomes the mere illustration of theory. There is a third, perhaps more rewarding option. It rests on the idea that anthropology (and the social sciences in general) develops better when expanding, redirecting and broadening previous questions, thus posing renewed problems and questions. In this case, anthropology defines itself as eternally surpassing itself — and in this sense partaking of the Weberian eternal youth ideal of the social sciences. This project does

not deny political differences among intellectual communities, but rests on a sociological understanding of them. If it is correct to think that “a world culture of the times” develops by constant exchanges — out of the metropolis to the ideological peripheries and vice-versa — then the implicit promise is for theoretical and empirical dialogues surpassing boundaries towards “plural universalisms”. In this context, where one lives — in Brazil or elsewhere — is an important but not the only factor in play.

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