

Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (author)

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Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (1928-2006) graduated in philosophy at the University of São Paulo (USP) in the early 1950s, but it was in anthropology that his intellectual trajectory would develop. His first contact with the field occurred while still at USP, attending classes given by the sociologist Florestan Fernandes (1920-1995), who years later would supervise his doctoral dissertation, *Urbanização e Tribalismo: A interação dos índios Terena em uma sociedade de classes* [Urbanization and Tribalism: the Interaction of Terena Indians in a Class-based Society] (1966). After graduating, he pursued his anthropological career in four institutions: firstly at the former Museu do Índio (now the National Museum of Indigenous Peoples) in Rio de Janeiro, in 1954, where he began a project with the Terena Indigenous people living in the state of Mato Grosso (today, in Mato Grosso do Sul) and took part in the specialization course in cultural anthropology run by Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro (1922-1997). In 1958 he became a professor at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, where he continued his work in ethnology with the Terena and also with the Ticuna of the Upper Solimões river, in the Amazon basin, developing the concept of ‘interethnic friction’. There, he created the specialization course in theory and research in social anthropology, based on a model that combined full-time study and theoretical and practice teaching. Subsequently, in collaboration with the British anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis (1929-2007), a professor at Harvard University, he set up the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. In 1972, he moved to the University of Brasília (UnB) with the mission of creating master’s and doctoral programs in anthropology. During this period, he dedicated himself to other research themes, including an epistemological reflection on anthropological practice. This return to philosophy was

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strengthened by another career move, this time to teach in the Graduate Program in Social Sciences at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), in the state of São Paulo, in 1985. His objective was to develop a reflection on the anthropology produced in Brazil and in other countries deemed ‘peripheral’. At the end of the 1990s, he returned to the University of Brasília, where he remained working at the Research and Graduate Centre on the Americas (today the Latin American Studies Department) until his death in 2006.

This brief review of his career path shows how Cardoso de Oliveira participated actively in the institutionalization of anthropology in the country, taking a lead in creating graduate programs in various institutions. Here, we can highlight his involvement in the first national assessments of graduate studies in the area, participating in commissions of the Brazilian Agency for Further Training of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) of the Ministry of Education, and contributing decisively to the development of graduate studies in Brazil. This institutional engagement was accompanied by intense intellectual and teaching work, which resulted in a substantial academic production – in Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Catalan. His main published books are *O Índio e o mundo dos brancos* [The Indian and the World of the Whites] (1964), *A Sociologia do Brasil Indígena* [Sociology of Indigenous Brazil] (1972), *Sobre o pensamento antropológico* [On the Anthropological Thought] (1988) and *O Trabalho do antropólogo* [The Work of the Anthropologist] (1998).

Cardoso de Oliveira’s intellectual output can be divided into two phases: the research on interethnic friction and the research on the practice of anthropology in Brazil and in countries he labeled ‘central’ and ‘peripheral’. His first studies examined the relations between Indigenous peoples and national society. Cardoso de Oliveira proposes seeing this contact as a dispute between the cultural elements to be incorporated and the interdependence of material and natural resources; a contact situation between societies and cultures that unfolds through opposed but interdependent interests. This approach emerged as an alternative to the concept of

acculturation, that is, the gradual incorporation of the Indigenous population into the cultural world of the whites, a concept predominant in Brazil at the time. In Cardoso de Oliveira's critique, the political approach to Indigenous societies began with acculturation studies but found the space to move beyond the contemporary association between politics and power. He introduced the notion of ethnic identity, conceived as irreducible to the social and cultural changes stemming from contact. Nevertheless, his approach still depends on a dualistic separation between 'Indigenous people' and 'whites' that would later be reformulated by João Pacheco de Oliveira (1948-), professor of social anthropology at the National Museum.

This period of Cardoso de Oliveira's work on ethnic relations was also marked by the creation of the Harvard-Central Brazil Research Project, a partnership between the National Museum in Rio and Harvard University, financed by the Ford Foundation, which enabled the development of Cardoso de Oliveira's research, alongside Maybury-Lewis and various students from the Brazilian and U.S. institutions. Two major projects were developed as part of the cooperation: Studies of Interethnic Friction Areas in Brazil and Comparative Study of the Social Organisation of the Indigenous peoples of Brazil. These initiatives not only made Cardoso de Oliveira's research possible, and the development of the notion of interethnic friction, but also helped the development of the work of Roberto DaMatta (1936-) with the Gavião and Apinajé peoples and the work of Julio Cezar Melatti (1938-) with the Krahô. The research produced by Melatti and DaMatta as part of the Harvard-Central Brazil project would be a fundamental contribution to the study of Jê societies.

The concept of 'peripheral anthropologies', for its part, was employed by the author to comprehend how the anthropologies produced in certain contexts incorporated, in their own way and with their own singularities, the disciplinary matrix forged in the 'central countries', regenerating them without detaching from them. The terms center and periphery, as used by Cardoso de Oliveira, relate to a geopolitical sense and above all whether countries are, or not, the original loci of the discipline and its theoretical formulations – the center here corresponding in effect to France, Britain and the United States. His research evolved into a project involving investigations in

various ‘peripheral countries’ and included the participation of other anthropologists: two of his closest collaborators in this endeavor were Mariza Peirano (1942-) and Guilherme Raul Ruben (1947-), who focused on the anthropology produced in India and Canada, respectively. As well as coordinating the research and organizing the material produced from a theoretical perspective through a reflection on the styles assumed by the discipline in diverse contexts, Cardoso de Oliveira undertook a specific inquiry into Catalan anthropology, a product of the research conducted during a period spent as visiting professor in Barcelona in the first semester of 1992.

Internationally, beyond the project funded by the Ford Foundation, Cardoso de Oliveira developed a close relationship with the Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1935-1991) and with Mexico itself, connections thus far little explored by the historiography of the field. This partnership resulted in dialogues with his research on interethnic relations and stimulated the exchange of researchers between Brazilian and Mexican institutions. In this context, he also took part in the foundation of the Latin American Anthropology Association (ALA) in 1990.

The range of Cardoso de Oliveira’s project for anthropology becomes clear when tracing his academic trajectory, which can be reconstructed in detail thanks to his own efforts to assemble a documental archive. This was set to be made publicly accessible while the anthropologist was still alive, a somewhat uncommon occurrence in the history of this intellectual field in Brazil. This extensive material, which covers his entire professional career in anthropology, can already be consulted at the Edgard Leuenroth Archive at UNICAMP. The contributions of his research work and his efforts to institutionalize the discipline in Brazil have helped form a generation of professionals, including some of the anthropologists who took part in the specialization courses at the National Museum and who continued his work of constructing graduate anthropology programs, such as Alcida Rita Ramos (1937-), Julio Cezar Melatti (1938-), Roberto Augusto DaMatta (1936-) and Roque de Barros Laraia (1932-). Cardoso de Oliveira’s work reflects one of the characteristics that

indelibly marked the institutions he helped create: the allying of anthropological teaching to research.

**Editor's note:** in English, Cardoso de Oliveira published some chapters and articles, including “Marriage and Terena Tribal Solidarity” (1961), “Indigenous Peoples and Socio-Cultural Change in the Amazon Basin” (1974), “Plural Society And Cultural Pluralism In Brazil” (1984), “Cultural Relativism and Philosophy: North and Latin American Perspectives” (1993), and in the *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* the article “Peripheral Anthropologies Versus Central Anthropologies” (2000). Mariza Corrêa interviewed Cardoso de Oliveira for *Current Anthropology* in 1991. Because of his continuous contact with Latin American and Catalan anthropologists, he published extensively in Spanish, in academic journals, and edited collections in Argentina, Catalonia, Colombia, and Mexico. Some of his books were translated in Mexico, *Urbanización y Tribalismo: La integración de los indios Terêna a una Sociedad de Clases* (1972), *Etnicidad y Estructura Social* (2007), and *El indio y el mundo de los blancos: Una interpretación sociológica de la situación de los tukuna* (2014). *El trabajo del antropólogo* (2017) was published in Argentina.

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## KEYWORDS

Brazilian anthropology; Brazilian social sciences; interethnic friction; ethnography; ethnology; Harvard-Central Brazil Research Project; Museu do Índio; National Museum of Brazil; State University of Campinas; University of Brasília

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