

Ruy Coelho (author)

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Ruy Galvão de Andrada Coelho (1920-1990) was an anthropologist, cultural critic, and professor of sociology at the University of São Paulo, the only researcher of his generation to have conducted fieldwork outside of Brazil. Between September 1947 and July 1948, under the supervision of American anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1895-1963), he studied the Garífuna (the ethnonym for those currently known as the Black Caribs) of Trujillo, Honduras. This research was presented in his doctoral dissertation *The Black Carib of Honduras: a Study in Acculturation* (1955). Although remembered for his work at the journal *Clima* (1941-1944), which launched the careers of some of São Paulo's most renowned literary critics, such as Antonio Candido (1918-2017), Gilda de Melo e Souza (1919-2005), Décio de Almeida Prado (1917-2000) and Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes (1916-1977), Ruy Coelho was the author of diverse anthropological works that drew inspiration from acculturation studies and studies of culture and personality, both prominent currents in US anthropology in the 1940s.

During and immediately after his university training at the Law School and the Faculty of Philosophy, Science and Letters of the University of São Paulo, Coelho worked as a literary and film critic and as an academic professor before heading to the United States in 1945 to embark on a doctorate at Northwestern University, in Illinois, under the supervision of Herskovits, a leading figure in the establishment of African American studies. In 1946, he joined the Rorschach Institute of New York, directed by the German psychologist Bruno Klopfer (1900-1971), participating in the field research coordinated by anthropologist Alfred Irving Hallowell (1892-1974) among the Ojibwa of Lac Du Flambeau, Wisconsin. The team employed the ethnographic techniques and methods of the time, especially the application of

Rorschach tests and free drawing to collect information on the repercussions, at an individual level, of the changes experienced by the group. In 1947, he went to live in Trujillo among the Black Caribs, a population originally from Saint Vincent Island in the Caribbean, who arrived on the northern coast of Honduras in April 1797, after being deported by British marines under government orders. Coelho's dissertation explores the main aspects of social and family organization, as well as the cosmological universe of Garífuna society. Coelho sought to describe the cultural unity resulting from the synthesis of elements deriving from Amerindian, African, and European traditions, amid the circumstances of the attacks and diverse forms of violence experienced by the group throughout its history. This work is located at the intersection between acculturation studies, aligning with Herskovits's research program, and the studies of culture and personality, with an emphasis on the socio-psychological impact of situations of change under Hallowell's inspiration.

After completing his dissertation, Ruy Coelho joined the University of Puerto Rico as a professor in 1949 and was hired eleven months later by the Social Sciences Department of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). There, under the supervision of the Swiss-American anthropologist Alfred Métraux (1902-1963), he was co-responsible for organizing a series of research projects on race relations in Brazil (1951-1952). In 1952, upon his return to Brazil, he was named assistant professor of the Chair of Sociology II at USP. In the following years, although he did not continue his investigations on the Black Caribs, Coelho published three more articles based on the collected field material: "Le concept de l'âme chez les Caraïbes noirs" [The concept of soul among the Black Caribs] (1952), "As festas dos Caraíbas Negros" [Festivities among the Black Caribs] (1952) and "Personalidade e papéis sociais dos xamãs entre os Caraíbas Negros" [Personality and social roles of shamans among the Black Caribs] (1961). He also translated his doctoral dissertation into Portuguese as *Os Karaíb negros de Honduras* (1964). He subsequently turned his attention to sociological theory, as developed in "Indivíduo e sociedade na teoria de Auguste Comte" [Individual and society in the theory of Auguste Comte], 1963, and to the critical revision of the concept of social structure and its expression at the level of psychological dynamics,

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in “Estrutura social e dinâmica psicológica” [Structure and psychological dynamics] (1969) – an interest that would eventually lead to his last writings on “Planos de cognição e processos culturais” [Cognition plans and cultural processes] (1989). In these studies, Coelho revisits the French intellectual training of his formative years, revisited in light of the theoretical-conceptual postulates of the studies of culture and personality. After being arrested with his wife, the Brazilian psychologist Lúcia Maria Salvia Coelho (1937-2023), for alleged subversive activities during the repressive years of the military dictatorship, Coelho went into exile with his family in Aix-en-Provence, in the south of France, where he was hired by the Department of Portuguese-Brazilian Studies of the University of Provence, working there between 1974 and 1977. Returning to Brazil in 1977, he resumed his activities in the social sciences course at USP and was elected director of the Faculty of Philosophy, Languages and Literature, and Humans Sciences (FFLCH) in 1982. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, in 1984, helping set up the degree in anthropology at the Department of Life Sciences and deepening the debate on epistemology in the social sciences.

Coelho’s pioneering study of the Garífuna has continued to be cited and is influential in Honduras, ever since its translation into Spanish in the 1980s as *Los negros caribes de Honduras* (1981). Although the culturalist framework in which the research was conducted has since been superseded, the description of the main social institutions and religious ideas of this population in a short documented period of their history has made the study an essential bibliographic reference. Likewise, the keen insight shown by the themes on which he focused, considered decisive by the people studied, still fascinates Honduran readers, especially the Garífuna, to this day. Although Coelho’s anthropological work is seldom read in Brazil, the growing enthusiasm among anthropologists for questions linked to cognition and perception may perhaps stimulate interest in his contribution to the debate on the relations between anthropology, psychology, and psychoanalysis.

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acculturation; black diaspora; Brazilian anthropology; Brazilian social sciences; Caribbean; culturalism; cultural change; ethnography; psychology; University of São Paulo

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