



“Direito à preguiça”, de Camila Betoni, 2021, acrílica sobre tela

## Commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Brazilian Anthropology Meeting (1953 – 2003)\*

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### *Seminar: History of Anthropology in Brazil*

4<sup>th</sup> session - ABA meetings and anthropological thought in Brazil

### *Postscript to The Brazilian anthropology meetings. Fifty Years.*

The comments I would like to make here are a kind of postscript to the publication that I prepared for the anniversary of our meetings. The most important thing is to say, from the outset, that the book is very incomplete and that I hope this edition will encourage our colleagues and students to correct what needs to be corrected. Just yesterday, when I opened the ABA website, I saw that there are two names identified there, in the official photograph of the First Meeting, that are not here, in the book. On the other hand, there are two others that are here and not there. It's not a question of detail: I think this reflects the dispersal of our archives and information. I would like to suggest that ABA mark this commemoration by creating a permanent commission to care for recording our history, which is already so voluminous that it cannot be tackled by a single researcher. This committee could begin its work by collecting the records of our meetings - photos, programs, etc. - a task that has only just begun to be done here, and to support the recovery of personal archives that are important to our history - such as the archive of Thales de Azevedo, for example, whose birth centenary will be next year, and which I know is already on the agenda of the current board of directors.

Reading this material as a whole, which is incomplete as it is, leads to a series of reflections – I will raise a few of them, just to begin the debate.

The first obvious point to note in these fifty years is the *diversification* of the anthropological field: just compare the first meeting programs with those of recent years. It's not only a question of a diversification of themes, which have grown considerably, but also of an enormous institutional, generational, theoretical, and methodological plurality. However, it seems that this diversification is illusory and that the first reading of it results more from an effect of the growth of our community than from real internal differentiation. In a very interesting paper presented at this year's ANPOCS meeting, Lilia Schwarcz pointed to the incredible coincidence of themes in the courses of the country's postgraduate programs, suggesting that anthropology is the most coherent and homogeneous discipline among the social sciences in Brazil in terms of the training of its students. That is, we have in fact created a field of anthropology education in which there is much more agreement than dissonance. She wonders, with good reason, how a discipline in which the emphasis on *difference* is so important, could constitute such an *equal* field of training, almost what she calls a straitjacket for thinking about Brazilian reality, which seems to be our main objective.

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\* Translated by Jeffrey Hoff.

\*\* *In memoriam* (1945-2016). Corrêa was founder of the Núcleo de Estudos de Gênero-Pagu and a professor in the department of anthropology at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), Campinas, SP, Brazil. Editor's note: The list of bibliographic references does not constitute part of the original text, as it is a conference presentation. It was added at the insistence of SciELO as a condition for publication.

What can also be read in our programs over the years is not only the trajectory of *anthropological thought*, but also, and perhaps above all, the issues that have occupied our society over the years: human rights, racism, social movements, the mobilization for the re-democratization of the country, and others. Certainly the programs also express the fluctuations of international theoretical trends - we had our Lévi-Straussian, Foucauldian, and Geertzian moments, etc. - but this was shared with our colleagues from other places, and I believe they express more the intellectual curiosity of Brazilian anthropologists than a supposed subordination to these fashions. But it's as if we use these fashions as we please, from *our* perspective, to understand *our* reality. I don't know if this is good or bad, but it seems to be, in any case, a characteristic of the anthropology we have been building over the last fifty years: an anthropology of national society from a multinational anthropological perspective.

The second point, which is perhaps not so obvious, and which relates to this concern with the broader issues of Brazilian society, is that although ethnology is the most developed sub-field of Brazilian anthropological thought, it is perhaps not yet seen as such by members of ABA - or by anthropologists in general.

I say that this observation refers to the first point because the issues raised by our relations with indigenous societies - *ours*, as anthropologists, and *ours*, as part of Brazilian society - continue to dominate our public presentation. Look at the program for this meeting: we have a session entitled *The ABA and indigenous issues*, but no ethnologist is sitting in our session. In other words, it's as if *ethnological thinking* - if you can put it that way - isn't part of the *anthropological thinking* we are discussing here and is only relevant in terms of *indigenous issues*.

I think this point deserves some reflection, since the Indian - perhaps a generic Indian - has always been the most visible face of our association's political concerns. I remember that when I took over the presidency of the ABA, and after doing a quick survey of the bulletins published so far, I joked with our secretary, ethnologist Marcio Silva, that we were going to innovate by not putting any Indians on the cover of the Bulletin (I don't remember if there ever was an Indian *woman*). Although we included other images in the series we edited for the Bulletin, we still didn't get away from the image that is our visual trademark. And when we published a cover in homage to Berta Ribeiro, we chose a beautiful photo of her with her face painted as an Indian.

I believe that the first symbol chosen for an ABA meeting was a badge with a Jê anchor axe that Herbert Baldus had minted for the VI Meeting in São Paulo in 1963. [I no longer remember what was on the banner that only Professor Castro Faria has from the first meeting and which we never photographed.]

So it doesn't seem unreasonable to talk about a certain dissonance between the image we display on our public face and the internal reflections we make about *our* historical trajectory. I emphasize *our* trajectory because I'm not talking here about one of the most spectacular developments in the field of anthropology in Brazil, that of indigenous history, in which is well expressed the also enormous incorporation of audio-visual resources into the field of contemporary anthropology - which was the "novelty" announced by Herbert Baldus as part of the activities of the VI Meeting. I am, in fact, thinking aloud about the lack of influence of ethnological thought, also spectacularly developed in the last thirty years, on theoretical reflection in other fields of anthropology in Brazil. I believe that this house is the right place to remind us of this gap, since it is the cradle of contemporary ethnological studies and since so many new concepts have been coined here that express the maturity of *ethnological thought*, also expressed in its international circulation.

I often tell my ethnologist friends that this lack of anthropophagy in relation to ethnology on the part of anthropologists in general is their own fault, for having created such a self-referential field. But it's also our fault, for closing ourselves off in our own thematic fields. Many years ago, for a regional meeting of ANPOCS, I wrote a brief note about this, entitled, *rural, urban, tribal*, in which I said that the field of family studies would only benefit if we could exchange and compare the results in these three areas of research. The remark fell on deaf ears and only recently, with the advent of another theoretical trend, that of gender studies, have these exchanges begun to take place, more from the initiative of ethnologists than from us, who study other social groups from a feminist perspective.

The third and final point I want to raise here is as much a desire to draw attention to myself as it is an expression of self-criticism. While it is true that the history of anthropology has developed a great deal in the last twenty years – this can be verified by comparing the bibliography available on this subject today and that found in 1984, when Julio César Melatti's *Roteiro* (1984) was published - it is also true that until now we have been so preoccupied with *registering* our history - a justifiable concern, since there is still so much to be done in this direction - that we have neglected a more critical reading of this history, which should address crucial aspects of it, such as the participation of anthropologists in national development projects or in state apparatuses; their funding and their relations with national and international funding agencies; the role of anthropologists' political lobbies in various injunctions in our recent history; or the presence of biases, so often pointed out when it comes to analyzing broader society (racism, authoritarianism, sexism, clientelism), and in the institutions in which we work and with which we collaborate. A history of FUNAI, for example, would certainly be instructive with regard to many of these aspects. These few examples can and should be expanded and I know that many colleagues here have their own critical list of our history.

I'll stop here because I think the idea of this session is more to start raising points to think about the proposed issue than to present well-finished proposals.

### Reference

MELATTI, Júlio Cezar. Antropologia no Brasil: um roteiro. Boletim Informativo e Bibliográfico de Ciências Sociais (BIB), n. 17, ANPOCS, 1984, pp.1-92.