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Between Studies about Women and The Family, and The History of Anthropology. Evoking Dialogues with Mariza Corrêa*

Adriana Piscitelli*

Abstract

In this text I present documents written by Mariza Corrêa in the 1990s and 2000s, considering the issues they address and the innovations they offered to the fields of knowledge in which they were produced. Relating these aspects to the author's research trajectory, I also contextualize the texts taking into account the moments in which they were written. Thus, the article offers elements to contribute to a history of Mariza Corrêa's legacy and, in parallel, to the history of anthropology in Brazil.

Keywords: Mariza Corrêa, History of Anthropology, Feminisms, Gender.

* Translated by Juliana Valente.

* Feminist anthropologist, researcher at Unicamp in the Nucleus for Gender Studies PAGU [Núcleo de Estudos de Gênero PAGU], a professor in the graduate program in anthropology and social sciences of the same university, and a researcher of CNPq, Campinas, SP, Brazil. piscitelliadriana@gmail.com / <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6436-344X>

While reading the beautiful presentation written by Amanda Gonçalves Serafim to these documents, I thought about the different encounters that are elicited by Mariza Corrêa's texts. In my case, reading these essays resulted in conjuring my memory, as I in many ways I accompanied the different moments in which they were written.

I was excited when the possibility arose to write a few pages that would situate these documents and hoping that one of the pieces by Mariza that I have pursued for years was amongst them. It is titled *As armas e os barões assinalados* [*The prominent weapons and barons*] and it was written/presented at an academic conference during the first years of the 1980s. At that moment she still treasured the idea of developing studies about the family in Brazil, and of perhaps coordinating a collective research project on the theme. It was a short piece, but instigating, that addressed the issue of marriages amongst families of merchants from Rio Grande do Sul towards the end of the nineteenth century. The analysis of the archival material to which she had access at the time allowed her to suggest that marriages amongst members of a few of the more economically and politically powerful families in Porto Alegre were reiterated over various generations. Such alliances renewed ties that in turn allowed for the growth of resources, as well as the expansion of businesses.

Mariza gave me a xeroxed copy of this essay when I began my master's in social anthropology at Unicamp in 1984, confirming my interest to study families from a feminist perspective. At that moment, I became her third advisee¹. I kept my gift for many years in a greenish gray metal file-holder, with hanging file folders, the kind of storage for papers we used at the time. Finally, I lost it while moving to a new home.

At the time, I read over this article with interest, but it was only many years later that I realized how much it marked the analytic paths I pursued during my master's and doctoral training (Piscitelli, 1989; 2006). This piece, for which Mariza felt a particular fondness, was written with her unique writing style, which is involving, and in which theoretical choices embedded in the text are not necessarily made explicit. It anticipated ideas that are close to the concept of marriage strategies formulated by Bourdieu (2004) in essays that I would only read years later.

This essay expressed the concerns Mariza Corrêa had at the time. After analyzing the relative norms of femininities and masculinities activated during trials of "crimes of honor" (Corrêa 1981; 1983), she turned her attention to the family, the central realm in which what at the time received the name of "gender roles" were delineated. These concerns are expressed in important articles by the author that were presented at conferences and/or published a few years later (Corrêa, 1982; 1984a; 1984b; 1988).

The essay I am looking for still hasn't been found in Mariza's archives, but to evoke its memory contributes to situating the documents that are published here. When I arrived at Unicamp, she was already involved in projects about the history of anthropology that she would develop many years later. At that moment, Mariza considered she had "inherited" these projects. According to Mariza, they had been conceived of by Manuela Carneiro da Cunha and Mariza considered she started by collaborating with her. However, Manuela had just left Unicamp to join USP.

Mariza's curriculum is available online, on the Lattes platform, but is incomplete². She didn't like the work involved in updating the platform, expressing an aversion that, I believe, went beyond the "laziness" this task generates in almost all of us. I think it was associated to a certain shyness, connected to humility, that marked her personality. Despite being incomplete, it offers clues to authenticate my memory. According to the Lattes, the first projects on the issue of the history of anthropology by Mariza took place between 1983-1984, under the same name and financed by different research financing agencies: *History of Anthropology in Brazil (1930-1960): testimonies*³.

In 1985 Mariza offered the students in the master's program a class about the history of anthropology. All the students who partook in the class traveled together, by bus, to an academic meeting in Belo Horizonte and presented papers about one aspect of the history of anthropology, or

¹ Heloísa André Pontes was her first advisee, and Néstor Perlongher the second.

² <https://buscatextual.cnpq.br/buscatextual/visualizacv.do>, accessed on November 4th, 2023.

³ These projects were financed by different agencies, from the Financing of studies and projects, that possibly predates the current FAEPEX, fund that supports research at Unicamp, to Fapesp and CNPq. The first one was conceived of just two years after Mariza finalized a project financed by the Ford Foundation (1979/1981) titled "Images of Women".

on one of the authors contemplated by the project. As I was still insecure with my limited knowledge of Brazil, I decided to present a paper about the history of anthropology in Argentina. Mariza had a bit of funding that paid for the trips, our accommodations, and cheap food, and still invited us to an “expensive” dinner at a restaurant that served “hunting” dishes and which she liked going to when she lived in this city. This event, the first in which I presented my work in Brazil, was unforgettable to me. The pride she felt was evident, showcasing the initial results of the research project through her students’ presentations.



Belo Horizonte, 1985. Mariza Corrêa and students from the course History of Anthropology in Brazil. Below, at the right and wearing glasses, is Jose Augusto Laranjeiras Sampaio, who later would become professor at the State University of Bahia and a specialist in indigenous rights. Standing, at the right, is Mariza Corrêa, wearing glasses, and Adriana Piscitelli, amongst two other colleagues.

Mariza's remarkable ability to gather students around her made it so that later we became her collaborators, receiving the interviewees that arrived in Campinas to give their testimonies. I have fond memories of a visit by Thales de Azevedo, whose book, *Namoro à antiga, tradição e mudança* (1975)/ [Old Fashioned Dating, tradition and change] we had all read at Mariza's urging and about which she expected that we would ask questions.

During these initial years of the project that would later involve generations of students, Mariza was already profoundly interested in the role of women in the history of anthropology, which made complete sense given her research trajectory. Almost from the beginning she noticed the (non-recognized) important role wives of prominent anthropologists played in the research produced, given that on many occasions they were themselves scientists and practically co-authors of the publications.

I had decided to do my dissertation in the field of family studies, which made Mariza happy. However, every now and then she asked me if I wouldn't rather change my theme of research to investigate women in the history of anthropology instead. I would reply laughing that I was not interested, to which she would say "so I'll have to do it myself". Over the years, these interests were investigated by her in research supported by the productivity fellowships from CNPq, in the projects Science – singular feminine noun (1998/2003) and Female Anthropologists and Anthropology (1999/2003).

"Girl Friday", presented in 1992 in Amsterdam at the conference titled *Alice in Wonderland, First Conference on girls and girlhood* is part of this trajectory. It was written at a moment in which Mariza was amazed as she realized the recurring trend that the wives of important anthropologist had received training, some as anthropologists themselves, and left their careers upon marrying, becoming, like Helen Pierson, "assistants". However, despite this self-perception, Mariza considered that they were fundamental figures in the execution of fieldwork and in the subsequent anthropological writings that resulted from the research.

At PAGU, we discovered the existence of the conference in Amsterdam. And the term discover is appropriate for a time in which the internet was still being developed and this type of call for papers came by mail or were communicated through word of mouth. Margareth Rago, professor in the Department of History at Unicamp and a member of PAGU at that time, and myself, a doctoral student in Social Sciences, proposed to Mariza that we travel to present our ongoing research. At that moment, Mariza was the Director of the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences at Unicamp, role that she had between November of 1989 and October of 1993, and was reluctant to leave the Institute in order to participate in the Conference.

Finally, she accepted. We obtained funding for all three of our airfares. Mariza also obtained a per diem, which she generously shared with us. Thus, we ended up on a third-floor walk-up in a small hotel, in Amsterdam, where all three of us shared a room to make the per diem last longer. I think it was Mariza's first trip to Europe. She had previously lived in the United States, accompanying her husband, the sociologist Plínio Dentzien⁴. It was Spring in Amsterdam, and she was fascinated by the beauty of the city, museums, and the food.

The trip was a delight and the theme of the conference, *girlhood*, elicited ideas that contributed to one of the important insights by Mariza about her work with female anthropologists and anthropology: "to begin a career as researcher, it was important to be (or be seen) as a girl – when one was not yet a wife. To become a wife, however, did not guarantee a continuity in this career. The testimonies of anthropologists of that time are filled with the names of women who began their careers as **girls**, and, once married, considered such careers had ended" (document 1). While rereading this document I became emotional when I realized the citations to the beautiful book by Helena Morley, *Minha vida de menina*, published in 1942, in which the childhood of rural young girls in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century is described, and which Mariza gifted me as it was related to my master's research.

⁴ She made subsequent trips to London, where she participated, at the invitation of the Ford Foundation, in the *International Meeting on Strategies to Address "Crimes of Honour"*, in 2002, and to Lisbon, due to an invitation to participate in conferences and in an international project organized by PAGU in collaboration with the Universidade Livre de Lisboa.



Amsterdam, June 1992. At the left, Mariza Corrêa, and at the extreme right, Margareth Rago.

The second documents by Mariza Corrêa that is published here, *Meus encontros com Ruth Landes* [*My Encounters with Ruth Landes*], which came out in 2003, expresses the author's "long term" interests in gender relations which, at that moment of her trajectory, turned to women in the history of anthropology. However, this piece is guided by a different line of thought than the first document.

In this document, the author reflects on the difficult trajectories of those scientists who went into fieldwork without the legitimating companionship of husbands. The text is self-explanatory in terms the interest Ruth Landes' case elicited in Mariza. Such interest began when Mariza lived in the United States during the 1970s and continued intermittently.

We heard Mariza speak about this author many times. She would frequently remember how circumstances and theoretical problems in the research that she developed in Salvador for her doctoral thesis about Nina Rodrigues (2000) would remind her of Landes' experiences in the same city. Her interest seemed to have been kindled for a second time during the working group Gender and Race, coordinated by herself and Suely Kofes⁵ during the XX Brazilian Anthropology Meeting and the I Conference of Ethnic and Racial Relations in Latin America, which took place in Salvador in April of 1996.

During that occasion, Mark Healey, professor in the Department of History at Duke University presented the paper *Os desencontros da tradição em cidade das mulheres: Raça e Gênero na etnografia de Ruth Landes* [*The mismatches in the women's tradition of the city: Race and gender in Ruth Landes' ethnography*] (Healey, 1996). In the article, the author argued that Landes was the

⁵ Incidentally, the working group was important in the study of race and gender in Brazil. The papers presented were published in a dossier Race and Gender in the journal *cadernos pagu* and included, amongst the authors, with the participation of Nilma Limo Gomes (1996), a pedagogue and later rector of the Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira (UNILAB), in 2013. In 2015 Gomes was nominated by president Dilma Rousseff to take over the new Ministry for Women, Racial Equality, and Human Rights that united the secretariats for Policies for Women, Racial Equality, and Human Rights, and part of the role of the General Secretariat. During this meeting, Mariza Corrêa presented the paper *Sobre a invenção da mulata* [*About the invention of the mulatta*] (Corrêa, 1996).

victim of academic exclusion during the 1940s, particularly due to her focus on the analysis of gender, but that she had been reclaimed during the 1990s as a feminist pioneer in terms of carrying out ethnographies of race and gender. Healey pointed to the novelty of the author, in terms of her simultaneous analysis of race and gender. He also signaled that this attempt nevertheless abided to aspects of Ruth Benedict and Margareth Mead's work. The author also highlighted that Landes reiterated a colonialist perception of the "primitives". In this essay, published in the journal *cadernos pagu*, Healey thanks Mariza Correa, as well as other intellectuals, for helping to write and rewrite the essay. And, in fact, at the time, conversations between Mariza and Healey were intense.

The difference is that she distances herself from this discussion about race and gender in Landes' work, situating the piece through an innovative reading. In the document published here, Mariza provides a radical turn to discussions about Ruth Landes' work by situating this anthropologist's difficult experience of research, the persecution, and exclusions she suffered, and her analysis of race and gender. These, from the optic of a history of science, or, in her terms, an intellectual history, are marked by gender and unfold in various different dimensions: local, in Salvador; national, in which intellectual leaders disputed the definitions in the science they professed and where they occupied strategic positions; and, finally, international, where these discussions were expressed and gained resonance.

Finally, the third document, in celebration of the 50 years since the first Brazilian Anthropology Meeting, also published in 2003, expresses unease and ideas about the shaping of national anthropology which she perceived, at that moment, as an anthropology of Brazilian society produced from the optics of a multinational anthropology. With her acute critical spirit, she questioned the divisions in Brazilian anthropology, the enclosing of anthropology into thematic fields, and takes ethnology as an example. And once again, research on the family and research on gender are evoked as fertile ground, in the sense of being a locus where this segmentation was being surpassed, and where exchanges between the "rural, urban, and tribal" were happening.

I end my commentaries about these documents here, hoping to have offered a few ideas about the context in which I think they were written. I also hope to have contributed to support my suggestion about the relations of "long duration" which, according to my perception, have oriented Mariza Corrêa's work between studies about women and the family, and the history of anthropology.

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