

# Am I still a Brazilianist?

## *Sou ainda uma Brazilianist?*

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### RESUMO

Este artigo questiona a utilidade da categoria de “brasilianista”. Esta expressão, uma verdadeira “etiqueta” para o estrangeiro que estuda Brasil, surgiu nos anos 1970, numa época de expansão dos estudos brasileiros nos Estados Unidos, a qual coincidiu com os “anos de chumbo”, no Brasil. Por isso, o conceito nascido no contexto da Guerra Fria fatalmente invocava uma figura norte-americana com uma orientação política específica e cujas pesquisas levaram, em si, as marcas do seu ponto de origem. O argumento do artigo é que esta imagem do “brasilianista” talvez tenha possuído uma certa utilidade naquela época, mas dos anos 1980 para frente, várias mudanças no mundo acadêmico, tanto no Brasil quanto nos Estados Unidos, complicaram qualquer esforço para diferenciar a produção acadêmica segundo o “lugar” do pesquisador. Ao mesmo tempo, certos aspectos persistentes do mundo acadêmico, inclusive linguagem e público, continuavam criando ligeiras divisões entre os brasilianistas e os historiadores no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: brasilianista; lugar; transnacional.

### ABSTRACT

This article questions the usefulness of the category of ‘Brazilianist.’ This expression, a ‘label’ for foreigners who study Brazil, emerged in the 1970s, at a time of expansion of Brazilian studies in the United States, which coincided with the *anos de chumbo* (literally the years of lead, the period of harsh political repression during the dictatorship) in Brazil. For this reason, the concept, born in the context of the Cold War, fatally invokes a US figure with a specific political orientation and whose research contains in itself marks of its point of origin. The argument of the article is that this image of Brazilianist perhaps had a certain utility at that time, but from the 1980s onwards, various changes in the academic world, both in Brazil and in the United States, complicated any effort to differentiate academic production according to the ‘place’ of the researcher. At the same time, certain persistent aspects in the academic world, including language and public, continued creating some divisions among Brazilianists and historians in Brazil.

Keywords: Brazilianist; place; transnational.

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This article was inspired by the theme of the 2015 ANPUH National Symposium – “Places of Historians: Old and New Challenges.”<sup>1</sup> Amongst other things, this intriguing phrase led me to think about the polysemic nature of the word ‘place,’ (both in Portuguese and in English). It can signify location, space, role, or symbolic or physical place. I decided to use this theme to return to a question which appears to incorporate almost all the meanings of the word – in other words, the place of historians known by the label of *Brazilianists* – *brasilianistas* in Portuguese – and, thus, my own place in the community of historians working with Brazilian studies.

The question which serves as a title of this article, “Am I still a *Brazilianist*?”, can be interpreted in the first instance literally. In this case, the literal and timely answer is: “Yes, I am still a professor of Brazilian history and a research whose studies are principally dedicated to the history of Brazil.” And I continue to live and teach outside of Brazil, in the United States. Of course I am not considering this question in its strictly literal sense. I am, for the purposes of this article, assuming that the category of *Brazilianist* has a specific genealogy and built into is a series of meanings which go far beyond its most simple, direct, or obvious sense. As is widely recognized, the word *Brazilianist* emerged at the beginning of the 1970s, and became a ‘common place’ during that decade. According to various sources, it was the journalist Elio Gaspari, in an article published in *Veja* in 1971, who first diffused this term, using it for academics based in the United States who studied Brazil (Moreira, 1990, p. 67). According to Gaspari (and various other authors), the term implied a series of qualities or particularities which went far beyond the mere physical location of this academic.

Generally speaking, Brazilian historians ‘from Brazil,’ from my age upwards, have a very specific notion of the Brazilianist, perhaps somewhat stereotyped, of an individual who spoke Portuguese with a strong accent, whose behavior or way of acting was instantly recognizable as ‘North American,’ and who appeared a figure out of place, even after many years living with Brazilians. Of course there are variations: the other side of this coin is the American who speaks excellent Portuguese (and who commonly hears: “How well you speak!”), dances samba, makes a very good *caipirinha*, etc. – an almost Brazilian figure – but who has never lost that ‘North American’ touch.

But the Brazilianist as a figure is not the heart of the question – what interests me more here is their (*or my own?*) intellectual place and their contribution to the historiography of Brazil. My concern in this article is also a little

different from the analysis used by José Carlos Sebe in his 1984 book, *Introdução ao nacionalismo acadêmico: os brasilianistas*, which highlighted the role of anti-imperialism in the 1970s in the rejection or the suspicion of Americans studying Brazil. According to Sebe, “to a certain extent, Brazilianism represented the perfecting of the anti-imperialist discourse, and thus the debate spread very quickly, leaving Brazilians perplexed. Without understanding very well the ‘invasion’ carried out by US researchers, everyone asked: Who are these people? Who do they represent? What do they want? And above all, who do they work for?” (Sebe, 1984, p. 9). Without ignoring these questions linked to the problematic of the place of the *Brazilianist* in imperialist projects, at this time I think it is possible to concentrate arguments more on the intellectual side of the subject.

Returning to the historian/*Brazilianist* archetype of the beginning of the 1970s, the intellectual image that prevailed was of a researcher without much concern with theoretical questions and very much turned to empiricism. While at the time the standard dissertation in Brazil was habitually structured with a chapter detailing the theoretical and methodological references used in the dissertation and involved an abstract debate, the *Brazilianist*, in his introduction, either presented a “‘concrete’ historical context” (without problematizing the notion of historical context), or located it within a narrow historiographical debate. Of course this contrast, this ‘theory/empiricism,’ dichotomy, like all binomials, had the effect of exaggerating the divergences between Brazilian historians and *Brazilianists*, but at that time there was a certain validity in this option; it was not only a stereotyped image, but one that served to understand some of the real divergences between historians of Brazil ‘in Brazil’ and ‘in the United States.’ There was also – and linked to the supposed empiricism –, a sense of the *Brazilianist* as someone who enjoyed certain privileges in relation to access to archives and to the ample research resources of US academia, something which fed (perhaps with reason) an attitude that at times was rancorous on the part of Brazilian researchers.

In more specific terms (speaking of this epoch which lasted until the end of the 1970s), there was another mark of difference between historians of Brazil in Brazil and *Brazilianists*: the level of intertwinement with Marxist theory. Despite the conditions of repression and censorship during that period – or precisely because of them –, a large part of historians in Brazil continued working within one or other current of historical materialism. But in the United States, in the middle of the Cold War, for a historian to be labelled ‘Marxist’

continued to be a direct path, if not to unemployment, but to a certain marginality.<sup>2</sup> Actually, the end of the 1960s and the following decade formed a period of transition, marked by the publication of the first works of Eugene Genovese, and the circulation of the books of E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm in US academia. The 1970s witnessed the peak of the ‘new social history,’ with its decidedly materialist current and its valorization of the category of social class. But this new current had more force among historians dedicated to the study of the United States and Eastern Europe; among Brazilianists at the time, the influence of new social history was less evident; the majority of them continued to follow an empiricist line, at times lightly touched by modernization theory, which was not concerned with the more wide-ranging and controversial questions about class conflict, the role of the material sphere in the construction of historical identities and their transformations, the relation between structure and superstructure, etc. A minority dialogued with Marxism, but generally, with the aim of disputing it – in other words, demonstrating, through empiricism, that political, economic, and social relations were always more complicated than indicated by Marxism and materialism.

There was another quality, or possible ‘defect’ which supposedly characterized the *Brazilianists* and distanced them from Brazilian historians. Perhaps the best manner of introducing this subject is by making a small citation from the introduction to the recent book by my esteemed colleague James Green, whose title in the Portuguese version is *Apesar de você: oposição à ditadura brasileira nos Estados Unidos* (the English original is *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States*). According to Jim, the idea for the book emerged out of a conversation in the 1998 LSA Congress: “between one session and another, a young leftwing Brazilian historian spoke of his frustration with the very superficial knowledge of the *Brasilianistas* (as US scholars are known in Brazil, in both an affectionate and an ironic manner) about the history and culture of their country. Moreover, he added, little had been done to oppose the military dictatorship” (Green, 2009, pp. 29-30).

It was the latter accusation which interested Jim, who ended up dedicating his book of almost six hundred pages to proving the contrary. But it is the first collocation, about the superficial knowledge of Brazilianists, which interests me in this article, and particularly because it was made more than two

decades after the emergence of the notion of *Brazilianist* as a separate category of researcher.

Summarizing, the image of the historian of Brazil based in the United States had a series of elements – empiricism, the rejection of Marxism, a superficial knowledge of society and of Brazilian culture, and a lack of engagement with the country's (leftwing) politics, qualities which, supposedly (and in certain cases, really) distinguished them from their Brazilian counterparts.

Before continuing, I want to open a brief parenthesis. Despite the personal question which serves as the title of this article, I do not intend to look at this question from an 'autobiographical' point of view. Thanks to the research of José Carlos Sebe, we can count on a type of collective biography of colleagues who compose what he called the 'Brazilianist Colony.' Sebe's books about this theme allow us a comprehension of the trajectories of US scholars whom he classifies as Brazilianists. And, amongst other purposes, I think that Professor Sebe was wanting to show the variety of perspectives and experiences which constitute this type of 'colony,' and which to a certain extent offer an important correction to the stereotyped Brazilianist.

At the same time, it is difficult to work with a category such as *Brazilianists* or call them a 'colony' without reinforcing certain notions associated with this group. However, I should say that from the very beginning I never fully identified with the 'average *Brazilianist*.' Especially because my principal motive for studying Latin America in general, and Brazil in particular, was my commitment to leftwing politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, I was part of a generation of '*radical historians*' who openly adopted a Marxist or 'neo-Marxist' perspective. For us, there was nothing worse than a historian being merely 'empiricist,' something which from our point of view, served as fiction and which hid the 'liberal' assumption of this type of historical research. Moreover, through a series of unforeseen circumstances, in my graduate studies I ended up working with a 'retired' professor from USP, Emília Viotti da Costa.<sup>3</sup> Therefore unlike the large majority of Brazilianists, I did my doctorate with a renowned Brazilian historian, and this caused me to consider myself more 'inside' the Brazilian academic world than my other US colleagues. The first publication of my career was an article incorporated as an appendix in the book *O Bravo Matutino* (1980; see Weinstein, 1980, pp. 135-176); the principal chapters of this volume consisted of the masters' theses of Maria Helena Capelato and Maria Lígia Prado, two researchers who in the following decades would be recognized as among the most important historians of their

generation. Finally, here was the question of gender. Despite the presence of various American women in the area of Brazilian history, the archetypical figure of the Brazilianist had a male aspect.

Looking backwards, I understand why I felt an 'exception' among the Brazilianists, especially among those who belonged to a previous generation, with the prototypical figure being Thomas Skidmore. In a tribute to Skidmore, made in 2006, the former Brazilian ambassador in the United States and his Minister-Counselor stated that "since the end of the 1960s at the very least, he [Skidmore] has been converted into the living symbol of the exemplary Brazilianist" (Barbosa; Almeida, 2006). And unlike me, Skidmore (who José Carlos Sebe puts in the subcategory 'Children of Castro') did not see any reason to distance himself from that designation: according to him, "I am an assumed Brazilianist... I was born in the United States and work here... The reasons which led me to study Brazil depended on the US political context and its reflexes on our university system..." (Meihy, 1990, p. 268).

Far from assuming this identity, I was uncomfortable with the concept of Brazilianist and with everything it implied for my place in the Brazilian academic world and Cold War politics. And this anxiety did not operate only at the level of sensibility; it had an impact on my intellectual trajectory. A good example was the choice of theme for my doctoral dissertation, a decision I made around 1976. Inspired by the works of Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Michael Hall, and Boris Fausto, I thought of doing research about the formation of the working class in São Paulo. Paulo Sérgio, who knew of my interest in this subject, sent me a dissertation proposal from one of his supervisees from Unicamp, which was very similar to the proposal I was preparing. I immediately became concerned about appearing imperialist and invading the academic territory of a Brazilian history, so I ended up giving up on that subject. One of my principal reasons for choosing to study the rubber cycle in the Amazon was the assumption that few of the students doing a Master's or Doctorate in the universities in the Center-South of Brazil had an interest in the history of the Amazon.<sup>4</sup> I never regretted having opted for the rubber cycle, but now it seems very funny that I had really believed that there was not room for two dissertations about the formation of the *Paulista* working class. It was precisely this anxiety for distancing myself from the 'typical Brazilianist' that left me incapable of perceiving that there was ample space for both of us.

Even after having changed my theme, I continue to be concerned about the possible implications of my condition as an American researching Brazilian

history. For example, I found a range of important documentation for my dissertation in the Chermont Notary Office, the oldest commercial notary in Belém do Pará. I soon perceived that the notary allowed me easy access to that material precisely because he liked the novelty of having a ‘*gringa*’ doing research in his office. Even in the Public Archive of the State of Pará, with its more professionalized staff, I had the strong impression that the workers were more willing to help and accommodate me than assist the Brazilians who appeared in the archive from time to time. There was thus no possibility of totally escaping the identity of *Brazilianist*, both in relation to its advantages and disadvantages.

But these small advantages, true or imagined, in the end were less important than the question of positioning within the academic world and for the university labor market. It is this which will constitute my principal concern in the second part of this paper.

To fully understand the meaning of the concept of *Brazilianist*, it is necessary to take into account not only the circumstances of the education of this group of historians in the United States, but also the fact that its emergence coincided (and probably not by chance) with a very specific period in the history of Brazilian academia. In his collective biography of the ‘Brazilianist Colony,’ Sebe divides the 32 academics interviewed into three groups (Meihy, 1990). In the first group, ‘The Pioneers,’ there are few historians, and amongst them there is someone like Stanley Stein, who despite having written two books about the history of Brazil – including *Vassouras* (1957), a masterwork of the historiography of slavery – was not easily classified as a Brazilianist, and was not identified, in general terms, as such within the US academic community. It is the second group – ‘The sons of Castro’ (11 professors, seven of whom are historians) – which includes the names which many people associate with the concept of *Brazilianist* (Tom Skidmore, Warren Dean, Robert Levine, June Hahner etc.). Of course they are designated ‘Children of Castro’ not because they were partisans of *Fidelismo* (in their political tendencies they were a very diverse group); the expression indicates the role of the Cuban Revolution in generating interest on the part of the US government in Latin America, in general, and in Brazil, in particular. Leaving aside the political developments of these initiatives – there exists a wide-ranging bibliography analyzing the creation of ‘*Area Studies*’ during the Cold War (Berger, 1995) – what I want to accentuate here is that this renewed interest in Brazil created the conditions for the formation of a generation of *Brazilianists*, many of whom were highly

productive and taught in the most important US universities, where Brazil rarely appeared in history courses.

This group – in which I would also include Joseph Love, John Wirth, Eul-Soo Pang, Richard Graham, Ralph della Cava, Bradford Burns, Michael Conniff, amongst others – emerged at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the following decade, exactly during the period in Brazil known as ‘The Years of Lead.’ I think it is unnecessary to explain why in the production of the discipline of history in Brazil in those years, suffered limits, and because that period was not and could not be a period of great innovation. Many renowned historians had to flee Brazil, and censorship fell on the academic world, especially in Letters and the Social Sciences. Grants for Brazilians to travel to archives outside their region of residence were almost non-existent. And regional and national symposiums such as ANPUH were something inconceivable. The result? When I began my post-graduate studies in Latin American History, I was faced with the scenario in which for many US historians studying Brazil, the greatest references were works in English written by Americans. Of course the classical works of Brazilian historiography – the books by Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, José Honório Rodrigues, and others – circulated amongst us. But these generally did not serve as closer references for those who were choosing their dissertation theme, and it was not principally with them that the Brazilianists were dialoging.

To the contrary, the Brazilianists of the time were either dialoging amongst themselves or with US scholars from the area of Latin American studies. This state of things was reflected in the title of the already cited article by Elio Gaspari, published in *Veja*, in 1971: “The History of Brazil: the past of the country is being written in English.” And it is very possible that some Brazilianists from the time believed that the center of gravity of the historiography of Brazil could be found in US academia. I personally believed, and I still believe this, that even during the ‘years of lead,’ this was nothing more than an illusion; the best historians of Brazil in the United States would never imagine that they could ignore and even less treat with contempt Brazilian academic production. (Even during this sad period of the history of the academic world in Brazil, there were historians such as Carlos Guilherme Mota, Maria Odila Leite da Silva Dias, and Fernando Novais doing research with a great impact in the area). However, in the United States, the increase in funds for research in Latin America and the multiplication of places in history departments in the decade after the Cuban Revolution not only expanded the community of



Brazilianists, but created this group of US historians exactly when the situation here in Brazil was becoming especially difficult. It is not by chance that it was at the beginning of the 1970s when the word *Brazilianist* became the preferred manner of referring to US scholars in Brazil and brought in its wake the already mentioned characteristics.

In fact, the conditions which produced the prototypical Brazilianist did not last for very long. Starting with the developments on the side of the United States, the end of the post-war demographic explosion, the so-called '*baby boom*,' resulted in a sharp fall in the size of post-graduate classes. This, together with the fact that the universities had contracted many new professors in the area of Latin America the decade before – all of them very far from retirement age – combined to create a crisis in the labor market for those with doctorates in history, and even more so for those who worked in some area of Latin America. A 'crisis' which intensified in the second half of the 1970s.

Among the consequences of this market crisis was a small but significant migration of professors from the United States to Brazil; some came here for personal reasons, others due to the reduced options in the States. Unicamp – a relatively new and open institution, at that time – received Michael Hall (1975) and Peter Eisenberg (1978), and a little later, Robert Slenes, who first went to Universidade Federal Fluminense (1979-1983). However, more than the contraction in the labor market in the United States, these years witnessed some profound changes in the US academic world, and especially in the discipline of history. Due to a wave of radicalized students filling the ranks of post-graduate programs, motivated by their experiences of activism in the anti-Vietnam War movement and other social movements in the 1960s (and until that moment, indifferent to the provisions of a lack of places at the university level), the area of history was being transformed. Feminist studies, the history of afro-descendants and other minorities; various currents of the new social history, and a greater interest in a renewed Marxism, from the more Gramscian or cultural line following the influence of E. P. Thompson – all of this marked that 'new generation.'<sup>5</sup>

A few years later in Brazil, at the end of the 1970s, and the beginning of the following decade, it was possible to perceive a series of developments linked to the expansion of the university system and to the political opening in general, which allowed the formation of new classes of historians, many of them seeking to distance themselves from the supposed 'sacred cows' of previous generations. The influences of Gramsci and neo-Gramscian theorists had

appeared in Brazil before the United States – perhaps because of the greater exchange with Argentinian colleagues –, but there was a propensity on both sides to rethink questions of power and domination through the concept of hegemony.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the easiest convergence was to perceive the general impact of the new social history and its tendency to reduce the emphasis on structural factors and to stress the protagonism of poorer groups, an academic proposal which fitted in very well with the emergence of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party) in the Brazilian political scenario.

It is not necessary to reprise the trajectory of the history profession in Brazil in the final decades of the twentieth century. My proposal is not to recount a narrative of a widely known recent past; I simply want to suggest that the tendencies in the discipline of history at the time (end of the 1970s and the beginning of the following decade), whether in the United States or Brazil, allowed a certain convergence of themes, theoretical approaches, and political proposals. By implication, this signified that it was ever more inviable to construct a dichotomy between the historical studies of Brazilianists and the research of Brazilian historians.

Among the elements reinforcing this convergence, there was in Brazil an intensified valorization of archives and research in not previously explored primary sources. The enthusiasm for the new social history and a little later, the growing interest in micro-history, led the new generation of historians to look for sources in notary offices, judicial deposits, trade union archives, oral history, etc. Of course this does not mean that previous generations were not concerned with research in primary sources. It was more a question of emphasis than of radical transformation. The social environments of plebeians and subordinated groups which became the principal objects of research were exactly those which were difficult to find in the sources typically consulted, and, therefore, the historical studies of that time obliged historians to dive into documentation previously left aside. Another supposed distinction between the Brazilian historian and the *Brazilianist* – the level of commitment to research in the archives – which is perhaps an exaggeration, became totally inadequate as a dividing line.

As well as these qualitative changes in the academic world, it is necessary to mention some quantitative tendencies as well. During the last fifteen years of the twentieth century, there was a fall in the number of historians specializing in Brazilian history in US universities. On a general scale, there was a reduction in interest in Latin America in the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> The teaching of

Portuguese, while previously was not very common in the university environment, at this moment became even more marginalized within Latin language departments. For this reason, exactly at this moment of renewal and expansion of the community of historians in Brazil, Brazilian history as a sub-discipline of Latin American studies in the United States was going through a period of shrinkage. It was impossible, under these circumstances, to imagine a group of Brazilianists who could or who wanted to follow their own agenda, and even more who managed to impose their interests in the area of Brazilian studies. This next generation (which, actually, was mine), called by José Carlos Sebe as ‘the specialists,’<sup>8</sup> as well as counting on few historians, was a highly eclectic group in its themes and orientations. While for a brief period at the beginning of the 1970s, it was possible to believe that the production of Brazilianists manifested a certain homogeneity and coherence, and which was defining the field of research about Brazil, this certainly would not be the case in the following decades. Even the Brazilianists of the ‘model-generation,’ the ‘children of Castro,’ sought to increase their intermingling with the new lines of interpretation which were being produced by Brazilian academia; increasingly Americans were following the intellectual orientation of Brazilian historians.

This new and entirely healthy direction was especially clear for me when the LASA journal, the *Latin American Research Review*, sent me in 1993 four books about imperial and republican Brazil to review. They were all by American authors, two of whom – Richard Graham and Robert Levine – were well-known *Brazilianists*. The books dealt with very diverse themes, but all these authors, in one way or another, were dialoging with the work of José Murilo de Carvalho and with other historians who were rethinking the transition from Empire to Republic not as a sign of progress but as a consolidation of a certain project of conservative modernization which favored foreign interests and the *Paulista* elites.<sup>9</sup>

Of course the historiography of Brazilianists in the 1970 had already taken advantage of the ideas and interpretations of Brazilian historians and intellectuals. In these four books, what impressed me as a true novelty was that the authors were participating in a conversation, in a dialogue which emerged out of the political concerns of that moment in Brazil, which was a profound deception with the transition to the supposed democracy and when, once again, many people were trying to say “this is not the republic of my dreams.”<sup>10</sup> The authors were also dealing with a moment of supposed commemoration of the centenary of the abolition of slavery, which ended up generating an extremely

critical production about racism and inequality in Brazilian society. It would have been difficult for any of these Brazilianists, old or new, to support the declaration of Skidmore, affirming that “the motivations which led me to study Brazil depended on the US political context and its reflections in our university system” (Meihy, 1990, pp. 267-268). Since in this new phase it was less the US political context, *stricto sensu*, which was motivating Brazilian historians in the United States, and more the political anxieties of the Brazilians themselves.

While, in this set of books it was obvious for me that the authors were all influenced by the research of a Brazilian historian (who actually did a doctorate in political science in *Stanford University*), there were other lines of research and interpretation which did not leave so clear ‘the point of origin’ of a certain argument or concept. A good example is the question of the participation of slaves in their own emancipation, an idea that is almost common sense among historians of Brazil. Emília Viotti was the first historian, to my knowledge, who highlighted the participation of slaves in the province of São Paulo in the process of abolition due to their mass exodus from the coffee plantations. In her classic 1966 work, *Da Senzala à Colônia*, the leading role was given to abolitionists who supposedly stimulated the mass flight of slaves. Furthermore, for her, the slavery system was already in a phase of desegregation when the slaves began to abandon the plantations. Five years later, a US historian, Robert Brent Toplin, published a book about the abolition of slavery in Brazil which cited the work of Emília, but – clearly following the influence of the new social history – stretched the argument even more, privileging the role of the slaves themselves (Toplin, 1972). Exactly four years after Toplin, Warren Dean published his famous book about slavery in the coffee region of Rio Claro (Dean, 1976). Similar to Toplin’s book, Dean’s work situated the slaves as the protagonists in this final phase of their emancipation, though going even further, since he minimized the role of white abolitionists and insisted on the profound commitment of *Paulista* plantation owners to the institution of slavery. For Warren Dean these initiatives of slaves, instead of being the final straw, forged the instrument of their emancipation which finally won, despite the intransigence of the plantation owners-slavocrats. The works of Toplin and Dean prepared the path for later studies, released in the 1980s and 1990s, by Célia Marinho de Azevedo (1987) and Maria Helena Machado (1994) about the mobilization of the captive population in São Paulo in the final years of slavery, and the panic of the elites in light of disorder and the loss of a highly lucrative source of labor.

The notion of slaves as agents of their own emancipation soon widened beyond the borders of the old province of São Paulo. By chance, in 1986, I was in Unicamp, doing research in the Edgard Leuenroth Archive, due to a seminar taught by the US historian Rebecca Scott, whose principal research until then had been concerned with the emancipation of slaves in Cuba (Scott, 1985). The reaction of the audience – principally post-graduate students in Unicamp, many of them supervisees of Bob Slenes working with themes linked to slavery and emancipation –, was very lively and enthusiastic. In addition to the evident quality of Scott's research, the general excitement reflected the fact that she was working with the case of Cuba, another society in which slavery supposedly ended through a gradual, judicial and non-violent process, which did not need the mobilization of slaves or the use of violence. However, Scott demonstrated, through a micro-historic analysis, that Cuban slaves had a fundamental role in the emancipation process and in the formation of anticolonial movements. Based on this she built a very strong argument against Manuel Moreno Fraginals' interpretation of abolition, whose classic book, *El ingenio* (1964), supported the idea of the structural incompatibility of capitalism and slavery, thereby minimizing the protagonism of the slaves.<sup>11</sup> Scott's research left little space for doubt that it was not capitalism, at least in the structuralist sense, which dismantled the slavery regime in Cuba. The very enthusiastic reception of Scott's work can thus be explained by the many convergences with the concerns already circulating among this group of young historians of slavery and the African diaspora in Brazil. A few years after this seminar, Sidney Chalhoub (who was in the room that day) defended his doctoral dissertation which became the book *Visões da Liberdade* (1990), in which he worked with judicial and police documentation, with a micro-history approach, to demonstrate in a wide ranging manner that many slaves (and not just those fleeing from *Paulista* plantations) participated in their own emancipation and prepared the path to abolition.

The purpose of this long parenthesis is not to establish a definitive genealogy of an important historiographic current – there certainly exist other paths through which the new generation of historians opened innovative interpretations of slavery and emancipation. My proposal is more modest and is only to offer a good example of the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility of associating a certain concept or approach with a specific point of origin. For example, on that beautiful day in Unicamp in 1986, I was sitting in a room full of post-graduate students, many of them doctoral students of Bob Slenes and Michael

Hall, Americans long based in Brazil, and these students were watching the talk from the US *Cubanist* Rebecca Scott, and preparing to rewrite the historiography of slavery and emancipation in Brazil.

For a series of reasons, scholars of slavery and emancipation, whether in Brazil of the Caribbean, or the United States, have shown themselves to be particularly willing to exchange, circulate, and appropriate ideas initially proposed in different contexts. But there are many other themes which show the marks of intertwined research, such as the history of gender and the history of worker movements. In all these areas, from the 1980s onwards, what has become more evident is the convergence of interpretations, independent of their supposed points of origin.

Changing the framework to the academic world in the last twenty years, we can see another series of transitions, both from the North and South, which complicated even more any attempt to establish a clear division between Brazilian historians. A general trait of Brazilianists was – and continued to be – studying in US academia, in first place, as *Latin Americanists*. In fact, it is very probable that the majority of the generation of Brazilianists from the 1960s/1970s had studied in Latin American studies programs, in which there was no professor specialized in the history of Brazil. Nowadays this is much less common, since in the present day a young American wanting to graduate in Brazilian history would generally chose a post-graduate program which has among its historians of Latin America at least one specializing in Brazil. At the same time, the area of studies of this American doctoral student would continue to be designated as Latin America, a reality which would be reflected in the compulsory courses, in the questions included in exams, and in the preparations to enter the labor market. This route, which would oblige the future *Brazilianist* to pass through Latin America, continues to be something apparently particular to the education of Brazilianists, but not as much as in the past. While there was a movement of Brazilian scholars in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting the strong commitment to the ‘Latin-Americanism’ of the time, in the discipline of history, the hegemonic context continued to be ‘the nation’ and there were few resources (in Brazil) for those who wanted to define themselves as Latin American specialists. In recent decades, thanks to the new resources for research abroad, the efforts of a group of historians dedicated to training doctoral students in Latin American history and even more the history of the Americas – especially my dear colleagues Maria Lígia Prado and Maria Helena Capelato – the identity of the Latin American

specialist stopped being something principally valorized abroad. Within Brazil, the ANPHLAC congresses offered an essential space for historians whose research went beyond national frontiers, increasingly including those who study the history of the Americas in a really hemispheric manner.

In fact, of all the alterations in the professional landscape which served to reduce the differences between *Brazilianists* and Brazilian historians, perhaps the emergence of a transregional or transnational (or even global) global vision created the most profound changes.<sup>12</sup> I want to leave clear that I am not saying that previously a vision which went beyond the national context was lacking among Brazilian historians. To the contrary, many Brazilians went to study outside the country, doing doctorates or post-doctorates, and we should also talk of the long influence of foreign historians (especially the French) in the formation of the history profession in Brazil, the widespread circulation of theoretical and methodological debates in the Brazilian intellectual environment, added to other factors, also contributed to a cosmopolitan tendency within the Brazilian university universe. However, the consequences of the bias and its developments have impacted on the profession of historian, within and outside of Brazil, in a much more profound manner, reorganizing the actual notion of history as a discipline which was always profoundly committed to the birth of the nation state.

One of the repercussions of the growing inclination of historians everywhere to overcome the limits (in all senses) of the nation is the establishment of new 'research areas' and work groups which cut across nations and regions, such as, for example, the 'Atlantic World' or the 'African Diaspora.' Specialists in the history of slavery and emancipation, as has been mentioned, are reconceptualizing the study of these themes in a way that goes beyond the experience of a single nation.<sup>13</sup> The transnational conversation is not dispensing with local singularities, but what is being highlighted now is the circulation of discourses about slavery and race, the histories connected by judicial disputes, the concepts of liberty, the meanings of free territory, the nature of capitalism constructed on a foundation of slave labor, the precariousness of liberty and supposedly 'free' labor in a society with slaves, the role of African ethnicities in the construction of networks of solidarity and political action. The 'national' context does not disappear in these dialogues, but it is not necessarily the most timely context. And this led me to ask an already evident question: what does being *Brazilianist* mean in this new phase of historical interpretation, when

one of the principal preoccupations is the redemption of the 'history' discipline from the hegemony of the nation?<sup>14</sup>

In the 1980s, during the peak of academic debate about feminist theory in the United States, the so-called '*standpoint theory*' emerged as a very influential approach (Ryan, 2005). The most simplistic version of this 'theory' insisted on a direct connection between collective identity and the perspective/view of the author. For example, according to this theoretical approach, intellectual production with female authorship will always manifest traits of the assumed condition of woman (or Latino, Afro-descendent, gay, and so forth). Moreover, the authority of the knowledge of a certain author reflected the *standpoint*, in other words, a *point of view*, which thus exposed their social position. The concept of the *Brazilianist* forged at the beginning of the 1970s more or less followed the logic of this version of *standpoint theory* which, despite its somewhat simplistic aspects, had a certain applicability in that context.

With the growing impact of post-modern theories during the 1980s, *standpoint theory* underwent a series of modifications. The greatest problem was the persistence of a degree of essentialism, and various feminist theories sought to rethink it, insisting that a single individual could adopt multiple perspectives and that the authority of knowledge should be thought of as an effect of political struggles, and not simply as fixed elements in a pre-configured identity (Harding, 2003). This theoretical revision sought to maintain the notion of the connection between identity and authority and, at the same time, to give up essentialism and homogeneity in favor of post-modern concepts of hybridity and instability. While the initial version of *standpoint theory* offered an easy response to the questions: "who is a Brazilianist?" and "what is his place?", this new version of *standpoint theory* hindered any attempt to give an answer which placed the Brazilianist and the Brazilian historian based in Brazil in distinct and fixed places. And for this reason it is useless to look for marks of identity in the production of historians depending on their 'place of origin.' I do not intend to insist on a coincidence between theory and ontology, but I believe that both the innovations in the conceptualization of identity and the changes in the discipline of history conspired to complicate the question which serves as a title to this article.

Until now I have dedicated most of my analysis to a series of arguments with the purpose of showing that the concept and initial image of the Brazilianist are antiquated notions, if not archaic. But it would be an



exaggeration to express that historians currently work in space which transcends place and context. Even with all the transformations in the discipline, there are certain aspects of the academic location of the historian of Brazil based in the United States which influences the direction of their research, and which tends to distinguish them from their counterparts in Brazil. For example, usually the American historian of Brazil is the *only* professor in his department who works in this area of specialization. Therefore, when a supervisee of mine is preparing for a public competition, I know that they will face a room in which will be present perhaps just one person who does research about Latin America, and absolutely no one else who has specialized in this area, principally in the history of Brazil. My students seeking to enter the labor market arm themselves to explain in a few words the importance of the theme of their dissertations and generally seek to link their research to a question – gender, racial prejudice, urbanization – which facilitates a connection with the historiography of the United States or Europe. Many questions of great relevance for historians based in Brazil – especially in the sphere of political and intellectual history – are less feasible for doctoral students in US universities, precisely because the importance of these themes is less evident for the academic public in the United States.

There exists another ‘anxiety’ among Brazilian history scholars in the United States which I believe also exists in Brazilian academia, but in a different manner. This is the concern with the places occupied (in this case, perhaps a synonym of ‘prestige’) by the history of Brazil and by the history of Latin America in general, within the discipline of history. Due to the privileged place occupied by ‘western civilization’ in US academia until very recently, Latin American scholars almost always occupied a relatively peripheral position. At the peak of the Cold War, the US government valorized certain lines of research on Latin America, but this did not generate the same level of valorization in the highest academic circles. For this reason, many Latin American scholars – including those from Brazil –, in the United States, now intellectually identify with the post-colonial project articulated in the most eloquent manner by the Indian historian, Dipesh Chakrabarty. In his now canonic book, *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Chakrabarty mounted a profound and instigating critique of a historicist line which associated the history of Europe (and related places) with the universal and the history of places like India, Africa, and Latin America, amongst others, with the particular. This criticism first emerged from the School of Subaltern Studies, with its roots in the south of

Asia, but this perspective has referenced the current work of many historians in Latin America.<sup>15</sup> It is outside the purpose of this article to prepare all the implications of this new intellectual commitment, but for me, one of the most significant repercussions is the total refusal of the question of US exceptionalism and the notion of Brazilian (or Indian or Mexican) history as a narrative of 'failure.' The first generation of Brazilianists – with various historians who identified with leftwing politics or who had profound criticisms of the role of the United States in Latin America –, did not escape from a certain perspective which positioned the United States as a successful nation, and Brazil (with its authoritarianism and its serious inequalities) as a failed nation. The new perspective, inspired by post-colonial theory, does not dispense a critical vision, but insists that demographic practices and social policies have to be historically understood in their transregional or transnational context, also taking into account the constant construction of hierarchies of difference and power which form the parameters of success and failure, and interfere in the distribution of resources, both material and symbolic.

Among the various proposals which emerged from this (relatively) new post-colonial perspective, there is the insistence on the value of intellectual production outside of the 'Global North' and its indispensability to the construction of a historic vision which avoids the re-inscription of western triumphalism. Even the new orientation which produced thematic areas such as the Atlantic World and the African Diaspora does not guarantee a broader vision of historic protagonism – many studies in these areas do not go beyond the Anglophone world and ignore, for example, the pioneering work of Artur Ramos and José Honório Rodrigues, and many books which are exclusively available in Portuguese.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the question of language is something which continues to create certain forms of inequality in the sphere of historical studies in general and specifically among historians of Brazil according to their place of education. English continues to be the *lingua franca* of the academic world, and the potential for a broader circulation of works written in English compared to those written in Portuguese is undeniable. I should mention that there are signs of a small alteration in the publication policy, however. The last decade brought the launch in English of various books written by Brazilians, including works by Laura de Mello e Souza, João José Reis, Mariza de Carvalho Soares, Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, Lilia Schwarcz, Paulo Fontes, and finally in 2012, *Roots of Brazil* by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. However, there are many

renowned Brazilian historians whose works remain accessible only to colleagues who manage to read Portuguese.

Translation for English are not the only means of facilitating the circulation of works beyond the frontiers of Brazil. Some years ago a colleague from the Department of History of NYU, whose current research deals with indigenous slavery in the Caribbean, told me that she was studying Portuguese. The reason? She thought it absolutely indispensable to read John Monteiro's book, *Negros da terra*, about indigenous slavery in colonial São Paulo. I thought about suggesting that she read his dissertation, defended in the *University of Chicago* and naturally written in English.<sup>17</sup> However, John had incorporated much new research and refined arguments in the book and for this reason the dissertation defended in 1985 was not a full substitute for the text published in 1994. Nevertheless, I liked the idea that my colleague felt obliged to learn Portuguese.

The tragically abbreviated career of John Monteiro exemplifies until what point a historian can reimagine his 'place' and go beyond the conventional geographies of knowledge. Although John was born in Minnesota and did his degree and post-graduate studies in the United States, he dedicated himself to the Brazilian university world; he published his masterwork in Portuguese, and created new parameters to interpret the history of the indigenous population in Brazil. But he returned various times to the United States to give courses, participated in many international congresses and seminars, published important articles in English, and became an indispensable reference for historians and anthropologists working with questions of slavery and indigenous cultures everywhere in the Americas. And in the final years of his life, he was going even further, researching ideologies of race and racial mixing (*mestiçagem*) in Brazil and Portuguese India.<sup>18</sup>

John Monteiro managed to build an exceptional intellectual identity which crossed many frontiers, including of country and discipline. It would be impossible to call him a *Brazilianist*. In comparison, the majority of Americans who study the history of Brazil follow an academic trajectory which reflects their foreign localization; when they/we are in Brazil researching, lecturing, or *matando saudades* to use the Brazilian expression, they/we continue to be (even without wanting to be) a little out of place. After all, I believe that the old image of the Brazilianist is something of the past; new generations, new perspectives, and new directions in the discipline of history have transformed this figure into an anachronism. However, some traits remain and certain

innovations generate new divergences and new challenges. To conclude, I would say that I am still a Brazilianist, but not so much.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The first version of this text was presented in the form of a talk given at the 2015 ANPUH symposium in Florianópolis, on 29 July 2015. I would like to thank Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, president of ANPUH Nacional 2014-2015, for the invitation.

<sup>2</sup> This is a small confirmation of something that we all knew – that the Cold War imposed a notorious level of intellectual censorship on the academic world, even in supposedly democratic countries.

<sup>3</sup> In relation to the academic trajectory of the historian Emília Viotti da Costa, consult her profile, written by myself in the *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates and Franklin W. Knight. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016 (in print).

<sup>4</sup> The young historian in question was Francisco Foot Hardman who certainly did not know of my crisis of conscience. The book which resulted from the proposal is *HARDMAN*, 1983. To show how much my reasoning did not make sense, his doctoral project dealt with the history of the Amazon Region. See *HARDMAN*, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> In relation to the radicalism of my generation of historians (or a large part of them), see WEINSTEIN, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent introduction to the trajectory of the influence of Antonio Gramsci and the concept of hegemony written by one of the greatest Gramsci scholars in Argentina, see ARICÓ, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> The only exception was the region of Central America, principally due to the Sandinista Revolution, in Nicaragua.

<sup>8</sup> This category, different from the ‘pioneers’ and ‘children of Castro,’ does not have much analytical value and indicates to which point this generation as a group avoids any coherent identity.

<sup>9</sup> WEINSTEIN, 1994; in the words of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, “the Empire of plantation owners only began in Brazil ... with the fall of the Empire” (cited in CARVALHO, 1988, p. 21).

<sup>10</sup> This phrase is generally attributed to the historical republican Joaquim Saldanha Marinho (1816-1895).

<sup>11</sup> Scott maps the path for this conclusion in the “*Afterword*” of the new edition of her book (SCOTT, 2000, pp. 295-302).

<sup>12</sup> In relation to the transnational bias, see SEIGEL, 2009, pp. 1-4; WEINSTEIN, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> The comparative approach, which reached its peak in the 1970s, continued privileging the nation. The most radical critique of this approach is SEIGEL, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> This phrase comes from the title of the book by the historian Prasenjit DUARA (1997).

<sup>15</sup> Some examples are THURNER and GUERRERO, 2003, and MIGNOLO (2005).

<sup>16</sup> GILROY's (1993) important work about the 'Black Atlantic' ignores almost completely the non-English-speaking world (in the book there are precisely two references to Brazil).

<sup>17</sup> MONTEIRO, 1985. An English version of *Negros da Terra* is being prepared and will be released by Cambridge University Press, in 2017.

<sup>18</sup> See the final chapter, pp. 194-216, "Raças de gigantes: Mestiçagem e mitografia no Brasil e na Índia portuguesa" in MONTEIRO, 2001.