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## Brazilian Studies and Brazilianists: Conceptual remarks

Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to see people's reactions, whether they are academics or not, when they ask me what I do and I respond: I lecture and research in Brazilian Studies. A second question almost invariably follows this response: 'but what *is* that?' And the surprise moment comes next, when I reply that I don't know exactly what it is, but that it is this very question that draws me to this area.

In academia, we are accustomed to clearly defined areas of knowledge, each plainly displaying their own methods, theories, and objectives – 'a principal of science!' When proposing a 'new' area, epistemological definition is necessary; even in purportedly interdisciplinary times, we continue to define areas of knowledge in a Kantian manner. It almost seems like a defence mechanism or a protectionist undertaking; perhaps even an *existential* endeavour: 'I am' an anthropologist, 'I am' a political scientist, 'I am' a linguist, 'I am' a chemist. Ultimately, these disciplinary labels of themselves evince particular worldviews, methods, and objectives.

This does not seem to be so straightforwardly the case in Brazilian Studies, or even in 'area studies' more generally; these 'fields' often resonate more with something akin to 'battlefield' than 'fertile ground'. In this essay, I will outline my thoughts about the concept of Brazilian Studies and how I situate myself in relation to it. I do not intend to outline a defence for a new discipline, or to propose paradigms for that elusive field called 'area studies'. Nor do I intend to produce a philosophical or scientific text; rather, I will, bring some personal reflections on what I have found myself doing as a researcher and a lecturer. There are more questions than answers – questions that force

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me to stray out of my usual epistemological and methodological space, to rethink structures and models of thought and of research and (why not suggest it) make me rethink *myself* existentially. Therefore, whilst not scientific, *strito sensu*, this essay will indeed comprise an epistemological, ontological, and methodological reflection, but without pretensions to universal application. Finally, it seems necessary to make clear from the start that *yes*: I work in Brazilian Studies and being called a Brazilianist does not cause me offence.

### **The terms 'Brazilianist', Brazilian Studies, Brazilianism**

I ended the previous section saying that being called a Brazilianist does not offend me. I say this because, historically, the term was not well regarded in the Brazilian academic sphere. In the 1960s, it was employed to denote *foreign* academics, especially North Americans, who studied Brazil. Francisco de Assis Barbosa was probably the first person to make use of this term, using it in 1969 to describe Thomas Skidmore, when he published his *Brasil: de Getúlio Vargas a Castelo Branco (Brazil: From Getulio Vargas to Castelo Branco)*.

During the 1960s, in American academia, the number of 'specialists in areas of the world' began to increase and Brazil was one of the areas within their purview. The reaction within Brazilian academic circles was not passive; considering the fact that many Brazilian researchers suffered restrictions under a regime that actively *repressed* actions and ideas, having a 'foreigner' studying Brazil, often with greater access to data and archives than Brazilians, gave an impression of submission to 'American imperialism'.

On this matter, Darcy Ribeiro, in a memorable text entitled 'Três pragas acadêmicas' ('Three Academic Pestilences'), provides a useful portrayal of the debate

and perceptions of the Brazilianists in the 1960s. Ribeiro begins with an admonition in his characteristic style:

Evidentemente nós, os intelectuais, não somos nenhuma maravilha. Somos, de fato, um frágil material corruptível. Quem de nós, isento de culpas, poderia assumir legitimamente o papel de juiz? Eu não, certamente. Apesar disso, às vezes não se pode fugir a contingencia de apontar prevaricações demasiadamente notórias. Sobretudo quando, encobertas, elas ameaçam generalizar-se, viciando nosso ambiente acadêmico já tão acanhado e medíocre.

Este e o caso de três pragas vorazes que desde 1964 caem como gafanhotos sobre cada matinho de integridade intelectual e de consciência crítica que, a duras penas, consegue medrar aqui e ali, tudo corroendo, insaciáveis. (Ribeiro, 2011: 211)

Ribeiro's text goes on to discuss the Brazilian academic sphere during the military regime, and subsequently arrives at what interests us: Ribeiro's vision about the Brazilianists. The citation is long, but necessary:

A segunda praga foi a dos *brazilianistas*. Proibidos os brasileiros de estudarem criticamente nossa realidade social, o Brasil se viu invadido por dezenas de bisonhos universitários norte-americanos, ansiosos todos por nos entender e nos explicar através de teses doutorais e de relatórios de pesquisa. Aos brasileiros não se permitia estudar nada. Aos *brazilianistas* tudo. Inclusive o militarismo e até o próprio regime que foram objeto de dezenas de *papers*, tão copiosos quanto inócuos ou

cúmplices. Assim é que, com os principais estudiosos brasileiros proscritos das universidades e dos institutos de pesquisa e às vezes até expulsos do país, se abriu um espaço prontamente coberto por jovens talentos ianques. Alguns não tão jovens, mas todos muito sabidos que passaram a tudo inquirir exaustivamente e de tudo falar incansavelmente. Aprendemos neste tempo de provação como a comunidade universitária norte-americana e rica de gente predisposta a assumir as funções mais torpes, revestindo-as de disfarces acadêmicos. (Id: 213)

The text clearly portrays the academic situation of the period, and, importantly, indicates the criticism to which so-called *Brazilianists* of that time were subjected. Even when spelling the word, Ribeiro writes a 'z' and not an 's' (the latter conforms to current Portuguese orthography), ironising the strange distancing of the concept. It is easy to understand why the term Brazilianist sounds offensive even today, and why it is refuted by many researchers, including those who class their area as Brazilian Studies. Having said this, Darcy Ribeiro evidently did not disregard *all* foreigners who studied Brazil, and included a qualification in the same text:

E bom esclarecer aqui que sempre foram bem-vindos ao Brasil – e continuam sendo – os verdadeiros estudiosos norte-americanos ou de outros países, aos quais tanto devemos. Qualquer brasileiro pode citar muitos deles dentro de sua especialidade. São mestres e colegas que respeitamos e prezamos, os quais não podem ser confundidos com a praga dos falsos acadêmicos que nos empolhou nestes anos de negror. (Id: 214)

This caveat clarifies Ribeiro's understanding of Brazilianists. He does not understand Brazilianists in the sense of those who do 'Brazilian Studies', but rather as specialists within their specific areas; thus, when Ribeiro criticises the Brazilianists, he views them only as researchers within specific disciplines (history, political science, anthropology, sociology, etc.), who happen to take Brazil as their object of study. The concept of 'area studies' was still not a defined academic reality during the 1960s. Furthermore, another 'complicator' in the debate began to surface during this decade: the concept of Latin American studies, to which I will return later in this text.

Brazilian Studies, however, appears to pre-date the wave of Brazilianists that surged in the 1960s. Anthony Pereira, in a text for the first edition of the journal *Brasilliana*, reminds us that

In 1912 the Brazilian diplomat, scholar, and bibliophile Manuel de Oliveira Lima (1867-1928) gave six lectures at Stanford University that encapsulated his views of what we now call Brazilian Studies. In these lectures he advanced arguments about what made Brazil distinctive and interesting; how the country's history, culture, and contemporary society should be understood; which stereotypes about it were not particularly accurate or helpful; and what exciting new developments would shape the country in the future. The lectures make fascinating reading today, not only because they show the contours of one person's vision of Brazilian Studies at the beginning of the last century, but because they reveal differences and similarities between Oliveira Lima's intellectual horizon and the one we face today (Pereira, 2012: 3).

Pereira's text explores the content of Oliveira Lima's lectures, and parallels his version of Brazilian Studies in 1912 with the perspectives of Brazilian Studies today. We will return later to Pereira's text; at this point, I would like to draw attention to the fact that Oliveira Lima's speeches treat Brazil as a specific object of study distinct from the other American countries. The speeches were published in 1914 with the title *The Evolution of Brazil Compared with that of Spanish and Anglo-Saxon America*. Oliveira Lima vehemently defends Brazil's individuality in relation to the other American countries, and highlights its specific colonial heritage. His analyses were strongly influenced by an undisguised Eurocentrism and by common contemporary ideas concerning race. Somewhat paradoxically, however, he sometimes *likens* the situation of the Spanish American countries to that of Brazil, especially when he wants to highlight a contrast with the Anglo-Saxon colonisation; nevertheless, he makes a point of reaffirming Brazil's uniqueness within South America.

More recently, Daniel Buarque dedicated a chapter of his book, *Brasil, um país do presente (Brazil, A Country of the Present)*, to what he called the 'formation and evolution of Brazilianism' ('*formação e evolução do brasilianismo*'). In his title, attention is immediately drawn to the word 'brasilianismo' (Brazilianism); the noun created by the suffix '-ismo' prompts further speculation of how Brazilian studies might be understood, and the significance of its use is riddled with ambiguity. At this point, I will not extend this speculation; not because it is unnecessary to do so, but to avoid deviating from the text for an overly Byzantine tone.

What interests me in Buarque's text is his reflection on how Brazilian Studies is viewed and represented in BRASA – Brazilian Studies Association – the largest association in the world that assembles Brazilianists. Buarque bases his text on conversations and interviews realised during the tenth meeting of BRASA, which took place in Brasília in 2010. In the first paragraph, Buarque defines Brazilianists as “...

observadores externos que estudam o país...’ (Buarque, 2013: 213). Personally, however, I do not share this perspective; for me, being a Brazilianist does not necessarily require being either an ‘observer’ or ‘external’, nor does it inevitably require ‘studying the country’. Buarque emphasises that Brazilianists of the North American academic sphere have transformed from what they were in the past: one of those academic pestilences of Ribeiro. Buarque writes:

Em vez de formar os tradicionais brasilianistas, estudiosos que se debruçavam sobre a realidade histórica, social e cultural do país como um lugar exótico e distante, a academia norte-americana passou a encarar o Brasil como um importante ator global, referência em diferentes assuntos científicos e passando por quase todas as áreas do conhecimento. (Buarque, 2013: 214)

From this, we can infer that North American Brazilianists no longer see Brazil as solely an object of study, but are perhaps starting to appreciate it as a Subject that produces knowledge. Or, in the words of Randal Johnson, cited by Buarque in his article: ‘[O] Brasil deixou de ser exótico’. Johnson’s comment is curious, because it implies that Brazilian Studies was, until now, the study of the exotic that was *expected* of Brazil. It is even more curious coming from Johnson, who was identified by Buarque as ‘um dos mais antigos brasilianistas em atividade no início da segunda década do século XXI’ (Id: 216).

Buarque’s text continues describing the ‘new Brazilianist’ (‘novo brasilianista’) who, according to the author, became part of a more diverse group of researchers, which was also more multidisciplinary. Buarque’s observations suggest that Brazilian Studies is not a discipline, but an approach, or ‘um exemplo’ (Cf Id: 220). Citing Meihy, Buarque



explains that, for this researcher, 'a globalização fez os 'estudos de área', que tratam dos países de forma isolada, ficarem menos importantes. 'O pesquisador agora tem de estudar o Brasil como um caso de feminismo ou racismo" (Id: 220).

These observations lead me to question whether the tendency toward interdisciplinarity is, in fact, common in all of academia, rather than being exclusive to area studies? Might not the capacity for interdisciplinarity inherent in area studies be its most relevant aspect in relation to the present academic context? In fact, I understand and defend interdisciplinarity as a route for area studies, including Brazilian studies; however, I also question whether, when people use the term 'interdisciplinarity', they truly understand its implications: multiple theoretical applications, methods and hermeneutics; considering a plurality of semantic and epistemological meanings of a single object, aiming for a comprehensive perception, rather than a univocal understanding of the subject studied. I still question whether this interdisciplinarity, as regards Brazilian Studies, acknowledges these multiple visions (methods), or whether it still considers Brazil an object to be submitted to diverse disciplinary views.

### **Brazilian Studies, Latin American Studies, Area Studies**

It seems appropriate, at this point, to turn to the issue of Latin American studies and the potential insertion of Brazilian Studies in this frame – to discuss the limits of the area of Brazilian Studies.

It is not possible to discuss this issue without recourse to Leslie Bethell's (already) classic text, 'Brazil and 'Latin America'', published in the *Cambridge Journal for Latin American Studies* (2010). In this text, Bethell, mediating between a history of ideas and a history of international relations, examines the relationship between Brazil and what is often called 'Latin America' in a historical perspective. According to Bethell, for

more than a century after the independences, intellectuals and politicians of Spanish America considered Brazil part of Latin America. Brazil, however, had its eyes turned toward Europe and, after the Republic, toward the United States (with the exception of Brazil's historic interest in the Rio de la Plata region). According to Bethell, it was only during the Cold War that the United States began to see and to treat Brazil as a Latin American country. Furthermore, apart from several intellectuals of the Left, many Brazilian thinkers did not consider their country to be a part of 'Latin America':

When did Brazil finally become a part of 'America Latina'? When 'America Latina' became 'Latin America' – that is to say, when the United States, and by extension Europe and the rest of the world, began to regard Brazil as an integral part of a region called Latin America, beginning in the 1920s and 1930s but especially during the Second World War and the Cold War, and when at the same time Spanish American governments and intellectuals began to include Brazil in their concept of 'America Latina', and when even some (albeit few) Brazilians began to identify with Latin America. (Bethell, 2010: 474)

Whilst Bethell's text covers a much broader scope than is relevant here, I introduce it as a point of departure, because the relation between Brazilian Studies and Latin American studies is inevitable, whether in the United States or in Europe. I do not know if this concern will surface in Brazil, or even in Mexico, Argentina, Costa Rica, or other so-called 'Latin American' countries. I say this because I am unaware of the existence of Brazilian Studies, *in the sense of area studies*, in Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I am aware of the Institute of Brazilian Studies at USP; however, it appears that this institute offers individual subjects (rather than a full programme) for under-graduates and a multi-disciplinary post-graduate course in Brazilian cultures and identities, with Brazilian Studies as a focus area. The Institute describes itself on its website:

It is important to note the classification of Brazilian studies as an 'area study' when considering, institutionally speaking, the origins of Brazilianists and 'Latin Americanists'. The group includes, for example, anthropologists and social/political scientists, whose object of study involves Brazil. It also includes those who conduct comparative studies in diverse areas, who treat Brazil as a 'case study'. Another involved group is that of scholars of languages and literature (the group from which I originate) who often work in departments of Latin American studies, or Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies (departmental classification can vary significantly). Within this group, scholars of purely *Brazilian* literature are always few in number, and are often additionally required to teach non-Brazilian Lusophone literature and to cover both language and literature. In academic institutions, they remain at the margins of the margins, especially given the current situation, at least in the European context, of languages and literature teaching. Often, departmental considerations are influenced more by a desire for diversity in research, and by financial and departmental administrative constraints, than by any *epistemological* considerations that might inform an *episteme* of 'Latin American studies'.

My own academic experience has included posts in Germany, Denmark, and the United Kingdom, and I have visited many other European universities. This experience has taught me that the fight for 'Brazilianists' to achieve adequate recognition in departments of Lusophone studies, Hispanic studies, Latin American studies, Iberian studies, Romance studies, or whatever such variant on the theme, is *arduous*. It is difficult for Brazilianists to find an appropriate space within the administrative and bureaucratic space of the institution. For now, placing Brazilian studies within Latin

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'Founded by Sergio Buarque de Holanda in 1962, the Institute of Brazilian Studies is a multidisciplinary center for research and documentation on Brazilian history and regional cultures. Its basic challenge is the reflection about Brazilian society as a whole, involving the articulation of different areas within the humanities. (cf: <http://www.ieb.usp.br/historico>). This is not, therefore, the understanding of Brazilian Studies as area studies, in the way I mean here, but of a study based in the humanities and founded on research in history and culture.

American studies seems a more productive strategy (or condition) of existence that does epistemological affirmation in an area that is still in the process of defining itself.

This example of languages and literature departments could perhaps be extended to other traditional departments, such as those of history, social science, political science, etc., which, for reasons often more economical than conceptual, habitually hold posts for specialists in Latin America, including Brazil. Nevertheless, as Bethell observes, 'It is probably fair to say, however, that the majority of Brazilian intellectuals, like most Brazilians, continued to think of 'Latin America' as signifying Spanish America, of Brazil as not part of 'Latin America' and of themselves as not essentially 'Latin American'" (Id: 483).<sup>3</sup>

Having said this, I do not mean to suggest that Brazil is *not* part of Latin America. However, I believe that to imagine that there is an ontological, epistemological, and cosmological comprehension that accounts for a plurality of peoples, languages, histories, experiences, and socio-political realities so diverse as that of the space called 'Latin America' can incur a somewhat Eurocentric reductionism. I do not wish to imply that there are no synergies, dialogues, exchanges, trade-offs, influences, imitations, and other such relations and interactions between countries labelled 'Latin American'. I believe, however, that, in the same way that these relations and interactions occurred and occur within the space called 'Latin America' and within Brazil, they also occur between Brazil and Africa (perhaps in a particularly poignant manner), between Brazil and Asia, and between Brazil and Europe. Thus, I believe that understanding Brazilian

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<sup>3</sup> Here, it is worth citing the study conducted by Janini Onuk, Fernando Mouron and Francisco Urdinez entitled 'Latin American Perception in Comparative Perspective. Regional Identity and Contested Leadership', published in *Contexto Internacional* (2016). In this study, the authors seek to analyse if public opinion became a factor of influence in the formulation of foreign policy in democratic regimes. To explore this argument, they used data from the project 'The Americas and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy' to analyse whether 'Latin-Americans' share a common feeling of regional identity, and whether Brazil is seen as a regional leader. They used data from TAWP about 'regional identity self-perception' in seven countries included in the project. Out of a total of 10,544 cases, the authors calculated the percentage of those who considered themselves 'Latin American' in each country. Whereas this identification was commonly identified in Spanish-speaking countries, in the Brazilian case, only 4% identified themselves as 'Latin American'.

Studies without the prism of Latin American Studies would contribute much more to understanding the web of relations and interactions in Brazil and the rest of the world, including between the Spanish-speaking American countries and those of Iberian colonisation.

Furthermore, I do not allege a simple distinction between Brazil (and Brazilian Studies) and Spanish-speaking American countries (and Latin American studies aimed at these). Nor do I see these countries as an objective unity subjected to a generalist interpretation. I imagine area studies that concern themselves with specific realities and I see nothing wrong with promoting Argentine studies, Costa Rican studies, Nicaraguan studies, Mexican studies, etc.<sup>4</sup> I am aware, obviously, of the practical impossibility of accommodating each and every one of these specific area studies in their own university department, but it is important to understand that the grouping of these studies in university departments is often motivated by political and practical reasons, rather than for epistemological reasons, as I mentioned above.

The 2015 issue of *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 50, no. 2, included a particularly meticulous and revealing article by Enrique Mu and Milagros Pereyra-Rojas. The study, entitled 'Impact on society versus impact on knowledge. Why Latin American scholars do not participate in Latin American Studies', observes that, even though 8% of the world's population lives in Latin America (including Brazil), only 1.7% of academic work *about* Latin America is produced in this area. The authors argue that the limited presence of Latin American scholars in Latin American studies constitutes an immense loss for understanding of this space. To test their hypothesis, Mu and Pereyra-Rojas conducted interviews with Latin Americanists in the United States and the United Kingdom, and with academics based in Latin American countries. Their article suggests that researchers based in Latin American countries do not

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<sup>4</sup> I will, however, leave the debate about the validity or viability of such studies to those who dedicate themselves to them. Here, I repeat, I am restricting my focus to Brazilian studies.

participate effectively in the international context (meaning, in this context, the United States and Europe) because they identify themselves as agents of transformation in their own context, motivated to search for solutions and to respond to the social demands of their region; the academics from the US and the UK, on the other hand, see themselves as experts in the area, and appear to be more motivated by the hope that their studies will contribute to collective knowledge about the region.

The study is perceptive and brings much light to the comprehension of the academic sphere in countries called Latin-American and the understanding that researchers from these countries have about what it means to study 'Latin America'. The conclusions undo some preconceived ideas, such as the idea that Latin American academics do not participate actively in the international academic community (again, the authors understand international to mean the United States and United Kingdom) because of a limited grasp of the English language, insufficient training about academic publications, or lack of resources. One particular point of the whole study stands out for me:

Our research shows that even for those who have training and language skills, US/UK journals themes and topics of interest (many times highly theoretical) are not their main concern. As one of our interviewees said (referring to US/UK journals), 'Their research questions are not our research questions' (Mu; Pereyra-Rojas, 2015: 235)

This affirmation is extremely revelatory and, in my opinion, aptly reveals the core meaning of area studies. With a small stretch of thought, we can observe how this comment demonstrates the necessity of acknowledging the radically different possible distinctions in the understanding of area studies. Understanding them as an endeavour

to produce impactful knowledge about a region can, too easily, make them incur in a colonialism disguised in honest interest in a certain area of the world (again, perhaps, making it exotic?). Ultimately, the objectification of the 'other' continues if this manner is acknowledged.

Here, I appeal to Edward Said and trace a parallel between his criticism of 'Orientalism' and the concept of Latin America. Taking the various definitions of 'Orientalism', we can substitute the term (and the term Orient) for 'Latin-Americanism' (and Latin America), without being too loosely interpretative. Said says that 'Orientalism' can be: 'a classic tradition of study'; 'the manner of viewing the Orient'; 'the Western mode of dominating, restructuring, and exercising power over the Orient'; 'a combination of ideas restricted to values, presented in a generalised way, mentality, characteristics of the Orient'; 'corporate institution of knowledge responsible for the perpetuation of stereotypes'; 'an archestyle of thought based on the ontological distinction between the Orient and the Occident' and 'the system of representation of the Orient patent in science, conscience, and in the policies of the empire' (cf: Said 1978). Said argues that, as a political and academic Eurocentrism took over, disfigured, and assimilated an 'other', naming it the 'Orient', it structured the perception and the knowledge produced about this 'other', forging a vocabulary, a syntax, and a new imaginary. Remembering what was said by the interviewee of the survey by Mu and Pereyra-Rojas, in the case of Orientalism, 'research questions' about the Orient were imposed, and Orientalism became the answer: a combination of categories, values and theories that respond to political and social necessities and political and academic Eurocentrism, without asking for the 'research questions' of the Orient. Echoes of what happens with Latin American studies.

In this sense, the contribution of area studies that pursue, not the objectification of a country or region, but questions that this country or region proposes to the world as



a whole has a significant perceptual effect... An interesting epistemological twist, decolonising...and risky...

Ultimately, I do not believe that we are truly adopting a postcolonial sensibility when we knot a hermeneutic horizon around a concept of Latin American studies that considers the discipline to efficiently consider all the socio-historical-cultural contexts present in our countries called 'Latin America'. Indeed, the very concept of 'Latin America' is already colonial; 'Latinity' is somewhat of a synthetic heritage imposed on the continent. Again, I am not defending an isolationist approach that proscribes Brazilian Studies from dialoguing with other area studies. I argue, however, that this dialogue should not be established under disciplinary impositions that are not justified 'epistemologically'. For me, dialogues with other area studies should occur through observations of diverse socio-cultural-historical interactions into which this space called Brazil steps and through which it passes, internally and externally. In *this* manner, I position myself as a Brazilianist, and in *this* position I can conduct Brazilian Studies in relation to Latin America, Africa (and its plurality of spaces), Europe, etc. I can also conduct studies relating to multiple subjects in the socio-historical-cultural space that we call Brazil, with the indigenous people, the communities of European immigrants, the diverse cultures of African roots.

The concept of Latin America, seen in this manner, is not taken as a natural category, but as a conceptual category. As such, it serves certain analytical and critical ends, but does not limit the diverse array of meanings inherent in each of its constituent components. Other constructs will also be necessary, not to deconstruct this Latin America, but to truly show its validity in particular circumstances, in which it serves to enable a critical stance, post-colonial or otherwise. In other words, Brazilian studies are just as Latin American as they are African, Atlantic, European, Amerindian, Asiatic, or



whatever other constructed concept can permit dialogues between the socio-historical-cultural conditions illustrated by the idea of area studies.

### **The place, or function, of area studies that are not nationalising or nationalist**

Still following the, almost apophatic, approach that I have adopted up until now, there is yet another explanation that I believe fails to define Brazilian studies. Perhaps there is some risk that it may be considered a study with some sort of nationalising or nationalist character. Said in another way, there is a risk in thinking that Brazilian studies will help with the construction of an idea of what Brazil is, as nation or as institution. Or even that Brazilian studies will instruct a supposed national identity. We are already distant from those years of the 1920s and 1930s, when a modern interest in 'knowing Brazil' more profoundly, documenting it, registering, photographing, 'ethnographising' a pre-modern Brazil that was dying out faced with the wave of modernising progress guided hundreds of studies of, once more, the *object* Brazil.

To my mind, Brazilian studies has a fundamental role in the deconstruction of a national macro-narrative, or methodological nationalism, for Brazil; and in its academic rigour, it can be a camp for *subalternated* and neglected voices to find their space and contribute in the reformulation and a discourse of which they have always been a part, yet as objects. Brazilian studies, in my opinion, should be less concerned with speaking of a single Brazil, but should acknowledge various epistemological, cosmological, and ontological views and voices, which result from historical conflicts of identity that had, and have, as their stage, this space called Brazil.

In this sense, Brazilian studies perhaps have a singular importance in avoiding what Spivak outlined in her text 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. In her essay, originally published in 1988, Spivak demonstrates her concerns about the ways in which post-

colonial studies, ironically, re-inscribe or relate imperatives of neo-colonial domination, often in new models of re-erasing cultures, models that are complicit in new sophisticated models of imperialism. Spivak questions whether post-colonialism is not just another Euro-centric, privileged, academic model of an institutionalised masculine discourse that objectifies the other (the subaltern) in a similar manner to the models of colonial dominance that it is meant to criticise.

In *Dialética da Colonização (Dialectic of Colonisation)* (1992), Alfredo Bosi, in a chapter about the catechetical activity of Anchieta, reminds us:

Quando escrevia para os nativos, ou para colonos que já entendiam a língua geral da costa, o missionário adotava quase sempre o idioma tupi. O trabalho de aculturação lingüística é, nesses textos, a marca profunda de uma situação historicamente original. O poeta procura, *no interior dos códigos tupis*, moldar uma forma poética bastante próxima das medidas trovadorescas em suas variantes populares ibéricas (...). Redondilhos, quintilhas, consonâncias finais: estamos no coração das praxes métricas da península, agora transplantadas para um público e uma cultura tão diversos. (...) O projeto de transpor para a fala do índio a mensagem católica demandava um esforço de penetrar no imaginário do outro, e este foi o empenho do primeiro apóstolo. (64-65)

Adapting this reading for our purposes, in my view, there is a risk of proceeding in this same manner with regard to area studies today. There is some risk inherent in moulding languages in order to try to express an imaginary that is alien to you in your own language, in order to give an impression of this other you are speaking. I am not here speaking of language as such, but rather of discourse. The proliferation of theories of

cultural studies in the ambit of area studies – many of these post-colonial (and deconstructionist, post-modern, of subalternity, etc.) – the majority in European ‘poetic forms’, eventually make this same ‘effort to penetrate the imagination of the other’, like Anchieta in the catechisation. The impression is that the subalternated is speaking; however, they are dependent on a discourse that is not theirs, thus reproducing a Eurocentric reinforcement of their place as object.

The challenge for area studies, and for Brazilian studies specifically, is to allow for diverse imaginaries (with their ontologies, epistemologies, cosmologies) that originate in the socio-historical-cultural space that we call Brazil, to express themselves in their own and in other languages; to express their readings of themselves, but also to formulate their critical questions on a more global scale, representing alternatives of subjective thought, and not only existing as objects to be illuminated and explained. Moreover, diverse imaginaries, through area studies, should also stand as a criticism of Eurocentric or colonial theories that pretend to be universalist.

In this sense (considering the multiplicity of epistemologies, cosmologies and ontologies originated in this socio-cultural-historic space called Brazil), this approach avoids definitively proposing a national or united Brazilian way of thinking. This observation, furthermore, prompts another: that it makes a lot of sense to speak of Brazilian studies *within* Brazil, and not only of that attitude that Brazilian studies is conducted by foreigners studying Brazil.

**So, what are Brazilian studies? What is a Brazilianist?**

So far, this text has espoused a range of negative assertions. Until this point, I outlined what I did *not* consider to be a Brazilianist, and what I did *not* consider to be Brazilian studies, rather than what I think these things actually are. Honestly, as I already confessed in the first paragraph of this text, I do not have a complete response to this question; I am searching to construct some horizon of comprehension of what I understand by Brazilian studies and Brazilianists.

Pereira, in his (already cited) text for the inaugural edition of *Brasiliانا* – Journal for Brazilian studies – which began in 2012 at the university of Aarhus as an academic forum for debate about Brazilian studies, concludes his text with the following words:

Today, professional academics are pressured into becoming more and more specialized. Nevertheless, I agree with Gildo Marçal Brandão (2007) that modern academic specialization is a barrier to asking and answering the really interesting questions about Brazil's economic, political, social, and cultural trajectory. One solution to this dilemma is to bring academics from a number of different disciplines together, and give them the liberty to collaborate, teach, and research together, focusing on selected issues concerning Brazil. This is what many contemporary centres and institutes focusing on Brazil in universities do. An alternative is for an individual to try to emulate Oliveira Lima and become a wide-ranging generalist, capable of reading broadly in the humanities, history, and social science, and interpreting Brazil to a non-specialist audience. This is a more difficult option in the modern university, but an appealing one nonetheless. (Pereira, 2012, p. 18)

Pereira's perspective aptly describes the Brazil Institute, which he funded and runs, at King's College London, where I am also a professor. The Institute is characterised by a multi-disciplinarity among its body of professors and researchers and it is one of the most solid institutions focused on Brazilian studies in Europe. In addition to this multi-disciplinary perspective, we, at the Institute, also search to provoke similar reflection about the term Brazilian studies, and about what it means to be a Brazilianist. Building on what Pereira says, I search for a third option in addition to the two suggested by the director of the Brazil Institute, of the creation of more multidisciplinary groups or of more generalist researchers, like Oliveira Lima.

To try to better explain this third option of understanding that I propose as Brazilian studies, I refer to what Derek Pardue wrote in the introduction to his book about hip-hop in São Paulo (2011):

I left the United States to Brazil in 1995 looking for a different way of thinking about the world. I remember having conversations with graduate students, librarians, and faculty members at PUC (Pontific Catholic University) and USP (University of São Paulo). I wanted them to point me in the right direction so that I could become acquainted with Brazilian paradigms of social theory. While, of course, the content of the research projects discussed was Brazilian, new paradigms were not forthcoming. In fact, the more I studied and participated in seminars, I realized that Brazilian scholarship in the social sciences (especially anthropology) was and continues to be, for the most part, depending on trends in British history, French sociology, and American cultural anthropology. I remained frustrated until I discovered that dependence does not require imitation. Dependence and adaptation are not, of

course, mutually exclusive. Many early Brazilian scholars (Freyre, 1933, 1936; Buarque de Holanda 1936; Cunha 1903) distinguished themselves by reworking European and U.S. theories of 'culture'; which themselves were based on observations or imaginations about 'other' places such as Brazil. In fact, relations of dependence, whether in intellectual theories or in popular culture, reflect much more about relative positions in transnational markets of material and ideological production than about issues of cultural meaning or use. (Pardue, 2011: 9-10)

Pardue's observation serves as a point of inflection in my understanding of Brazilian studies. In order to understand what is meant by Brazilian studies, and more generally area studies, more than a paradigmatic change is needed. What is required is a *syntagmatic* change; not simply the inclusion of new paradigms. Borrowing these terms from the Linguistics, what I mean with this syntagmatic change is a rearranging of both old and new paradigms, rephrasing grammars, challenging hierarchical positions on the discourse and consequently, challenging ways of thinking. This change of position would enable Brazil's insertion into critical subjectivity, and would allow it to move away from being only an object of study.

I am not calling for epistemological revolutions, but I would like to highlight the importance of what Pardue says about dependence, adaptation, and dialogue. Not simply linguistic adaptation in the same manner as Anchieta – and the Jesuits proceeding – during colonisation, but a dialogue open to accent, in Teresa Caldeira's sense of *thinking* with accent (Caldeira, 2009: 9), when writing in a non-native language can transpose, for example, Portuguese syntax into English – a transposition which creates not only linguistic accents, but also epistemological, cosmological, and

ontological fruits of an existential condition of which language is an important part. Results in this sense, are reality.

Brazilian studies, in this form, would be a thought with accent, provoking a syntagmatic change, adaptable to various paradigms. We already have some examples of similar approaches, such as the Perspectivism of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the Cultural Anthropophagy (known through Oswald de Andrade's Anthropophagic Manifesto), the concept of syncopation in music and Brazilian culture (a theme with its own dedicated edition of *Brasiliانا*). Many other epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies, whether indigenous, of Afro-Brazilian roots, or of other pluralities of this socio-cultural-historic space called Brazil, invite this syntagmatic provocation.

As I said at the beginning of this text, I do not have complete answers for what Brazilian Studies is and what it means to be a Brazilianist. However, I continue to consider myself one, and in the exercise of searching for these answers, I also exercise a critical thinking – with accent, without doubt. In this text, I tried to outline some of the reflections that result from this critical exercise. I do not intend this text to be a manifesto, but I will be satisfied if it provokes reflections that will perhaps broaden the space and the value of Brazilian studies, not as subordinate and objective, but as a subjective construct of the production of knowledge.

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