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Interview with RENATO ORTIZ^a

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RENATO ORTIZ IS certainly one of the most influential thinkers of the social sciences in Brazil and one of our most recognizable intellectuals internationally. Some of his books, such as *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (1985), *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988), and *Mundialização e cultura* (1994), became *new classics* of the social sciences in Brazil, and are practically mandatory references in studies on a wide range of topics in the area of communication. Others, such as *Otro territorio: ensayos sobre el mundo contemporáneo* (1996), *Los artífices de una cultura mundializada* (1998), and *Mundialización: saberes y creencias* (2005), were published initially (or exclusively) in Spanish.

In August 2017, the author was honored by the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo (ECA-USP) with *Colóquio Renato Ortiz*, which brought together researchers from different institutions of the country¹. In April, along with his colleague Elide Rugai Bastos, he was honored by the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences of the University of Campinas

¹ The complete schedule is available from: <<https://goo.gl/mhY5aW>>. Access on: Dec. 18, 2017. Videos available from: <<https://goo.gl/Tx9sPh>>. Access on: Dec. 18, 2017.



² Refer to <<https://goo.gl/GZwRJM>>. Access on: Dec. 18, 2017.

(IFCH/Unicamp)². In the following interview, granted in September of the same year, Ortiz speaks of his trajectory and discusses some of his major works, ideas, and current research concerns.

Renato Ortiz holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the Université Paris 8 (1972), a master's degree in Sociology from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, under the guidance of Edgar Morin (1972), and a PhD in Sociology and Anthropology from the same institution, under the guidance of Roger Bastide (1975). Currently, he is full professor of the University of Campinas (Unicamp). His most recent book, *Universalismo e diversidade*, was published in 2015 by Boitempo.

MATRIZes: Your formation in the social sciences was out of Brazil and far from the tradition set forth here. At the same time, you focus, in your early works, both on Brazil and on the issue of culture – little present in the studies produced here during the period. In what sense being outside Brazil favored this look on the Brazilian culture?

Renato Ortiz: Looking back, the fact of having gone to France, although not premeditated, was something positive for me. Octavio Ianni always used to say: “Renato, don't complain, you had big luck.” We were very close and at first I didn't understand very well his statement. In fact, by traveling abroad, I had a type of training that I would hardly have obtained in Brazil³. First, because of the Brazilian intellectual tradition. Second, by the fact that we were living in the rough moment of the military dictatorship. At that time, you had to be for or against the authoritarianism of the military forces; there was not much freedom of choice. In France, this pressure did not exist, and I could read a whole critical literature that was not necessarily marked by political tension, as in the Brazilian context. There was, moreover, a cultural effervescence at that time in France, shortly after May 1968, and it was nice to have my intellectual training in this environment, because I met renowned, recognized, intelligent, and thought-provoking intellectuals. I also attended courses taught by some of them, and that was enriching for me. I don't know if it was the same to the French – I even already asked myself that question (laughs) –, but for me, undoubtedly. I had crossed the Atlantic to venture somewhere unknown and I came across an intellectually challenging environment.

The cultural theme came from before. When I was in São Paulo, I politicized myself by the sphere of culture, since there was a heated discussion about Brazilian culture and national identity. *Arena conta Zumbi*, *Tropicália*, *Bossa Nova*, the cinema of Glauber Rocha. It was a time of reflection and political struggle,

³ Renato Ortiz was born in Ribeirão Preto and moved to São Paulo in 1966, year in which he entered the University of São Paulo as a student of engineering at the Polytechnic School. Four years later, he abandoned the course and traveled to France, where he resumed his studies in the field of Humanities.

a process that necessarily passed through the theme of culture. The theater, the cinema, the popular music were within this critical panorama. Let's say I internalized this dimension before leaving for France. There, before a different situation, I may have given a different direction to that initial impulse.

The trips I made in inland Brazil, for example, were very important in my training, or in the process of *becoming aware*, as it was said at the time. I went through Belém-Brasília Highway when it was not yet paved, in a Bus with a group of friends; from Belém, we went to Imperatriz, in Maranhão, and the Bus broke... We took a ride back by the Northeast. Then, I made a trip down the river São Francisco, from Pirapora, in Minas Gerais, navigating to Juazeiro, in Bahia. A week on the boat down the river. They were travels of discovery of the *deep* country that we saw in the cinema screens with Glauber and Ruy Guerra. It was something that inhabited the imaginary of the more critical university culture.

MATRIZES: Although you have developed works on specific topics during your training – newspaper *O Pasquim* (master's degree) and Afro-Brazilian religions (PhD) –, the two main works of what we can define as the first stage of your career – *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (1985) and *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988) – are works that focus on a historical look at the social thinking and the development of the industry of symbolic goods in Brazil. What led you to take up this kind of work, seeking this broader view and taking a historical perspective?

Ortiz: Actually, I've always had a great interest in history. I find it hard to make social science without a historical reflection. I say this despite having had a good semiologic formation in France. The work on *O Pasquim* is also basically semiologic. I have also read a lot about structuralism, it is part of my initial training. I believe it was beneficial, since structuralism helps when you want to understand the meaning of the symbols, structures, discourses. But, of course, it has an Achilles' heel: history. I remember, when I was still in Paris, having read a book by Michel Foucault that impressed me a lot, *The Order of Things* (1966). I appreciated his argument about the different types of *episteme* in the world of science over time. But, at the time, I also read a criticism by Sartre, saying that he also liked the book, but he asked Foucault a question: how was it possible to move from one *episteme* to another? Of course, the question was tricky; to be answered convincingly, one had to introduce history in the interpretation framework. But the structuralist perspective was unable to do this. The idea of historicity (of the events, but also of the concepts) has always been important to me. Even in my doctoral dissertation, *A morte*



branca do feiticeiro negro (1978), it is present, since it deals with the birth of a religion and its legitimation in the Brazilian class society.

In *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (1985) and *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988), this is evident, as you noted. In the first book, I tried to get away from the traditional debate about national culture. It bothered me that there was a perspective that posited as hypothesis (and thesis) the existence of a Being: the Brazilian. My nonessentialist approach led me to define identity as a symbolic construction that is done in relation to a referent (in this case, the nation). In this sense, discussing the authenticity or inauthenticity of the national identity seemed to me a false problem. This was the starting point; it was then necessary to understand how this symbolic construction took place in distinct historical moments. Which led me to the past – the raciological interpretations of the interpreters of Brazil – and to the present – the Brazilian society of the 1970s-1980s.

In the case of *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988), it was impossible to escape the problem of history, after all, the theme of national identity was closely tied to the construction of modernity in the periphery. What did it mean to be modern? How to understand the idea of Brazilianness as a project to be held in the future? The temporal dimension was inescapable. However, upon returning to Brazil, the way the country was perceived bothered me. Maybe the fact of having lived many years abroad affected this. The country had changed quickly with the coup of 1964, going through an accelerated modernization process. One of the icons of this change was the TV. However, the debate about modernity and Brazilian culture took place as if we were still in the 1950s. People talked about underdevelopment, alienated culture, American imperialism, anyway, categories that seemed inadequate to grasp what was going on. I felt this dissatisfaction when I wrote *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (1985), but I think it became more evident with *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988). To articulate the problems of the Brazilian culture regarding modernity, I sought, on the one hand, to reverse the intellectual tradition that understood modernity as something entirely positive, i.e., uncritically; on the other, to show that a *tradition of modernity* existed among us.

MATRIZES: *Cultura e modernidade* (1991) is a work dedicated to the 19th-century France and that precedes *Mundialização e cultura* (1994). For the readers, this seems a clear transition in your work, since you will hardly resume Brazil as object of research in your later works. How was it to turn to France as an object of research, since during your training and early career in Europe⁴ your research and teaching topics were Brazil and Latin America?

⁴ Between 1974 and 1975, before returning to Brazil, Ortiz taught at the Université Catholique de Louvain, UCL, Belgium.

Ortiz: I came back from Paris in 1976 and remained a long time away from France. In this period, I wanted to have a North American training: I lived in New York and Indiana, and after that I returned several times to the United States. It was something that I thought important: completing my intellectual training opening up to a tradition of thought that I only knew tangentially.

There, I was able to develop my previous training, especially regarding communication (I wrote my master's thesis in the Mass Communication Center, guided by Edgar Morin and Roland Barthes). I took the opportunity to get to know a whole literature on the cultural industries and the media. This helped me to create the plan for the research on the soap opera⁵ and for the book *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988), but not so much for *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (1985), because the book was already finished in 1981, it only took time to be published. I lived in Belo Horizonte⁶, outside the Rio-São Paulo axis, and I found it difficult to enter an intellectual niche that was totally unfamiliar to me. The book was turned down by several publishers and, ironically, ended up being published by Brasiliense, the first one in the list of rejections.

I was, for a period of time, away from the French things. In fact, in *Cultura e modernidade*, the French were a *pretext* for something else: the problem of globalization. The return to France had, therefore, another dimension. I had even written a research project on the *international-popular*, but, given the (mainly theoretical) difficulties of doing it, I ended up choosing to resume the question of modernity in the 19th century to search for elements that would help me understand globalization. For this, I chose France as a heuristic object.

At the time, the predominant debate in the social sciences was the conflict between modernity and postmodernity. I read a lot about the subject, and the more I read, the more confused I was. I even wrote a text, "Reflexões sobre a pós-modernidade: o exemplo da arquitetura" (1992), which somehow helped to organize this type of discussion. The architects had a coherent concept of what was being postmodern. But I realized that the debate wouldn't go far, maybe by intuition or by the fact that it was really confusing. In the case of Latin America, that made even less sense. Saying that we were postmodern before knowing modernity was a somewhat anecdotal way to work around the problem. It presupposed that we were before what we would be after. In this case, the notion of "post" would be foolish. Given this, I decided to return to the 19th-century modernity, taking France – not so much Paris, as did Benjamin – as a reference.

⁵ Ortiz refers to the book *Telenovela: história e produção*, written with José Mário Ortiz Ramos and Sílvia Helena Simões Borelli, and published in 1989.

⁶ Ortiz was professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) between 1977 and 1984. From 1985 to 1988, he taught at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC/SP) and, in the latter year, joined Unicamp.



Cultura e modernidade (1991) was an effort to create a certain archaeology of themes still prevailing in the 20th century: culture and market, space and time, consumption and luxury. But all this was sewn by the perspective of globalization, that is, I wanted to “tune the violin” (Ianni’s expression) to then dive into what I called *international-popular*. The fact of setting aside Brazil was not simple; many colleagues did not understand my proposal very well, and some even told me that nothing original could be done, that everything had already been said and written. But in these things I’m a little persistent, when you have a good idea you need to carry it out. *Cultura e modernidade* (1991) is about France and the 19th century, but the reader understands that it is a broader movement opening itself to contemporaneity. This was the original intention, and from it I dealt more specifically with the problem of the globalization of culture.

MATRIZES: You have already noticed in other interviews and texts that the theme of globalization corresponds to objective changes in the organization of society, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the advent of the internet... Also because of this, the book comes at a time of intense political and ideological debate. Have you felt that the book provoked a more ideological debate, which deviated a little from the traditional field of academic discussions?

Ortiz: It was controversial, yes. I had already faced some controversies; in *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (1985), I had to listen to and answer some criticisms. An example is the chapter on scientific syncretism, in which I consider how the *raciological* explanations – actually racist – were inconsistent, but convincing as an explanation of Brazil. This naturalization of the explanation was something that deserved to be discussed, that is, to become a problem; however, the traditional literature that dealt with it saw it as something *natural*, part of what we call *Brazilian thinking*. I always thought this was terrible. Actually, I even believe the book became more current years later, since it presented a critical reading regarding Brazil’s own mythological explanations. *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988) also brought discussions; especially on the left wing, some people thought I had decreed the end of the national popular culture. I even attended a discussion in Rio de Janeiro, organized by Carlos Nelson Coutinho, at which Octavio Ianni and Muniz Sodré were present. Several criticisms were made, praises also, but especially criticisms.

However, in the case of globalization, it is different, the controversy was deeper, involving theoretical and political-ideological questions. First, because the main conceptual discussion in the social sciences revolved around the shock between modernity and postmodernity, globalization was a peripheral, secondary

matter. Both in the national and international level. There wasn't, therefore, a tradition that dealt with the theme. Second, the theme, when addressed, appeared in a few texts of economics, but, above all, in quite superlative terms in the marketing and business administration literature. Therefore, a kind of *mistrustful* literature, since it is articulated to the interests of the market. For me, however, despite its explicitly ideological character, it was suggestive, talking about a process that I sought to understand. In *Mundialização e cultura* (1994), there is a whole chapter about the craftsmen of a globalized culture, that is, these marketing men who take the globe as a performance space. Only much later some authors such as Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (1999) became interested in this type of literature. Third, in the case of Brazil and Latin America, there was the national issue, in which the centrality of the nation-state was considered a fixed truth. I took part in several discussions, not only in Brazil, but in Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, in which globalization was seen as a neoliberal ideology, and not as a social process. Anyway, all of this contributed to improve my view on the subject. The book *Um outro território: ensaios sobre a mundialização da cultura* (1996) came a little from the various conferences I gave and from the discussions I had to face. Before the defense of the nation-state, it was problematic to talk about globalization; in France the topic didn't even exist, and maybe that's why much of the bibliography of *Mundialização e cultura* (1994) is in English. It was a difficult book to write, since there was no tradition in the social sciences to support me, and in every sentence I had to dismantle the previous arguments (often ideological, sometimes not) to advance my reasoning.

In the late 1990s, the debate about postmodernity was fading and, slowly, disappearing. The debate on globalization, on the other hand, was consolidated and became widespread. But there was a lot of adversity in the beginning. I even used to joke with Ianni, and he used to say to me: "Renato, aren't we going crazy?" And I answered: "Calm down, Octavio, history will give us reason." And he laughed. I chose a trend, and sought to answer questions and, sometimes, criticisms, in a conceptual way.

For example, to the question "is globalization an ideology?" my answer was simple: if it is an ideology, it is a world view, right? If it is a process, no. There was, therefore, a conceptual problem, because a social process cannot be confused with an ideology. That doesn't mean that there are no ideologies inside of it. There are, it is true. But for me there was a logical contradiction in the ideological criticism.

MATRIZES: In *Mundialização: saberes e crenças* (2006), you dedicate a text to cultural studies ("Sobre os estudos culturais," p. 173-182), which you



wrote because you were appointed by a group of researchers from Stanford University as one of the most prominent Latin American representatives of this area. What do you think about this?

Ortiz: I have the impression that cultural studies didn't work out in Brazil, in the sense of not being consolidated as such. I wrote this text because I received a request from Stanford University, coming from a group of people interested in cultural studies in Latin America. My name was often associated with those of Néstor García Canclini and Jesús Martín-Barbero. At first I left the questionnaire aside, since many of the questions seemed displaced, out of place, to me; then, I reevaluated and decided to write the text instead of answering each question. I start by saying that I was associated with cultural studies by people outside Brazil, but not by Brazilian peers or readers. This division between *inside* and *outside* seemed to be a good trail to approach the topic. When I was in Scotland, in a seminar that Stuart Hall also attended, we met and talked at length about the subject. I was there for three or four days; it was a closed seminar, small, with few participants, and he was very angry with North American cultural studies. He didn't recognize himself in that, and I think he even wrote about his uneasiness.

In the mid-1980s, but especially in the 1990s, there was an attempt to introduce North American cultural studies in Latin America. There was, on the one hand, the interest to create a specific discipline; on the other, an effort to spread a certain North American research canon, which was clear to me. My relationship with cultural studies was close and distant. To the extent that I worked with the cultural problem, there were common points, but it seemed to me a mistake to be deceived by the idea they were inaugurating something new in Latin America. There was a whole previous intellectual tradition, in force since the 19th century. Several authors in Brazil – Gilberto Freyre, Florestan Fernandes, Antonio Candido – had addressed the cultural issue. It didn't make sense to match this intellectual tradition with what was going on in the North American academic universe.

Once I was in a seminar on cultural studies in Pittsburgh with a colleague who works in the area of culture, George Yúdice. Finding it a mess, I said to him: "George, I can't understand anything." He smiled and said: "Renato, for you to understand what's going on, you have to understand the North American academic market." I never forgot that. It was a Bourdieusian observation, and Yúdice has nothing of Bourdieusian. In fact this was true, the constitution of cultural studies was something resulting from an entire academic game in the United States, of which we did not take part. Thus, they had difficulty spreading in Latin America; in the case of Brazil, even

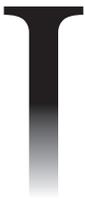
schools of communication did not open that much space to them, continuing to exist as schools of communication. Of course that didn't mean people didn't read books by authors who addressed the cultural sphere, be they of different approaches, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, history... But turning this into a *scientific field* is something else. In addition to being a complicated and little achievable proposal, it didn't seem promising to create other borders to the development of intellectual work.

MATRIZES: In addition to being close to several researchers of the region, you are also often mentioned and read in Latin America, with a few of your books being published originally in Spanish. Considering that your training and early career took place in Europe, I would like you to speak a little of this proximity.

Ortiz: Some of my books were published first in Spanish, such as *Um outro território: ensaios sobre a mundialização da cultura*, *Mundialização: saberes e crenças*, and my latest book, *Universalismo e diversidade*⁷. But the relationship with Latin America was gradually established. When I started teaching at the Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium), I taught two courses: urban anthropology and anthropology of religion in Latin America. For that, I had to read and study hard. At that time I lived in Paris, traveled every week, and I tried to get acquainted with a whole literature that I didn't know; I basically used the library of the Institute of Latin American Studies. I thus managed to build a quite broad set of theoretical and bibliographical references. I read a lot about economic underdevelopment and development, dependency theory, but was also interested by the slums in Peru, popular religion in Mexico, black people in Colombia, Cuba, and Haiti, as well as related topics.

However, I had no direct contact with the Spanish Latin America. Only in the mid-1980s, when I started to research soap operas, I started to travel. I was invited by Nestor García Canclini to teach a course at the National School of Anthropology and History in Mexico City, where he worked, and I met Jesús Martín-Barbero, who was delighted with the theme of the soap opera and invited me several times to go to Cali, where he lived, and, after, to Bogotá. From these meetings and the books *Telenovela: história e produção* (1989) and *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988), I was increasingly in touch with the research on communication carried out by several Latin American colleagues. The first translations of my books were made from these contacts. It is the case of *Mundialização e cultura* (1994). The first edition was released in Argentina, and I owe that to a friend, Hannibal Ford, researcher in the field of communication,

⁷ The full list is: *Otro territorio: ensayos sobre el mundo contemporáneo* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1996); *Mundialización y cultura* (Buenos Aires: Alianza Editorial, 1997); *Otro territorio* (expanded edition, Bogotá: Convenio Andrés Bello, 1998); *Los artifices de una cultura mundializada* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 1998); *Modernidad y espacio: Benjamin en Paris* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2000); *Lo próximo y lo distante: Japón y la modernidad-mundo* (Buenos Aires: Interzona, 2003); *Mundialización y cultura* (new edition, Bogotá: Convenio Andrés Bello, 2004); *Mundialización: saberes y creencias* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2005); *La supremacía del Inglés en las Ciencias Sociales* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2009), and *Universalismo/ diversidad: contradicciones de la modernidad-mundo* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2014).



who really appreciated my work. The second edition was released in Bogotá thanks to Jesús Martín-Barbero and Germán Rey. *Um outro território: ensaios sobre a mundialização da cultura* (1996), first version, was released by the National University of Quilmes, by the initiative of Carlos Altamirano, who became a good friend. The book was successful in Argentina, and because of this I met Beatriz Sarlo and several other colleagues.

As my books were being published in Spanish – eight so far, in addition to the articles –, the proximity with Latin America was being strengthened, and I say, honestly, that I really like it. It is a way of deprovincializing myself, of leaving the Brazil and seeing the continent differently; an unusual thing for us, in academia. Maybe by having a French and North American training, I was able to undertake the Latin American route with a certain independence, heedless of the quarrels in the Brazilian province.

MATRIZes: After addressing the theme of globalization, you published only one research more directly focused on a single country. And, curiously, the chosen country was Japan⁸. You explain in the book that it was a ruse to capture the globalization of culture. Still, I would like you to talk about your motivations for undertaking this research and producing the book.

Ortiz: The intention was to leave the comfort of a situation familiar to me (Brazil, Latin America, France, United States). I thought it would be worth risking my ideas in another context. Japan seemed ideal (at that time, China not so much). Japan was one of the few Eastern countries that was modernized in the 19th century, *pari passu* with Germany and the United States. The issue of industrial modernity had already been the subject of several sociological studies, which offered a rich material to be explored. For me, it was an incredible intellectual experience. Deep down, I didn't want to find what was different in Japan, object of most studies and reflections, but to understand how it was inserted in the process of globalization of culture, that is, how the tension between the popular national and international took place.

That was the key idea that guided me. For this, I extensively read about the history of Japan, opening myself to a significant horizon to understand the debate between East and West, not using only the book by Edward Said (1990), which I valued but was specific to another geographical area, the Middle East. I thus could better understand how East and West are categories constructed within specific historical contexts; that they refer us to representations and have no *essence* at all. Reaching such understanding made me escape some pitfalls of the discussion on *Orientalism*. Curiously, the beautiful book by Said is a scathing criticism of this Orientalism built by European intellectuals,

⁸ O próximo e o distante: Japão e modernidade-mundo (Ortiz, 2000)

but he forgot to say there was another Orientalism, built by intellectuals from this region of the world. That is, Orientalism and Occidentalism were symbolic representations.

The readings I did to carry out the project helped a lot in this sense. There is a whole chapter in the book about the changes of habits, especially food and clothing, which show precisely how Japan is inserted in the globalization. What is different from thinking in terms of Japaneseness, considering that symbols such as Pokémon or Issey Miyake's *haute couture* are not national. For me, it was an extraordinary experience, but costly, including financially, since most of the research was self-financed. In addition, I had to follow a detailed research program that consumed a lot of energy. In the end, the book doesn't seem to have been very successful. The Spanish translation had a better fortune. I believe this is due to a certain obsession with Brazil existing among us; we talk about Brazil as if it were a world.

MATRIZES: In your last book, *Universalismo e diversidade* (2015), you speak of an uneasiness of universalism. Could you detail this antagonism between universalism and diversity, as dealt with in the text?

Ortiz: The idea of the book, composed of a series of essays, was born as a result of a trip to Paris. Indicated by Jesús Martín-Barbero, I received, on the occasion, an invitation to participate in a discussion group at UNESCO. It was a conversation with a small group, about eleven people, including Néstor García Canclini and some other European intellectuals. The request of UNESCO had a certain air of incongruity, but what would be discussed there interested me theoretically. It involved a department that had the following assignment: to classify as universal works regarded as *exceptional*, such as Ouro Preto, Pão de Açúcar, and many other world heritage sites. The intention was to approach the topic of universality, because the institution was having practical difficulties to classify such works. What an illusion, they thought a meeting of intellectuals would create a practical definition of what is universal. I thought that was ironic and fantastic. I said: "The works cannot be universal if they are exceptional," because, being exceptional, they are unique. However, the joining of these opposites terms seemed to make sense (that's why we were there). From this oxymoron comes the idea of uneasiness that I worked with in my book. I even wrote a short text at the time, but I suspect that UNESCO never published it.

That's when I started to follow this debate in various places of Europe, Germany, France, and Italy, and also in the United States. It wasn't hard to see that, in Europe particularly, the shock between universalism and diversity



covered different realities, from multiculturalism to the Islamic issue. The uneasiness originated in this situation, in which, in a globalized world, diversity acquired a *universal value*. Following the guidance of UNESCO in Latin America, *diversity* was a specific category, intrinsically good, indisputable. My intention was to do a critical reading of all this. This was the effort that I made in this series of essays. For me, the critique of universality was quite familiar, because there was a whole literature that emerged after May 1968, which was part of my training. However, conceptual criticism (not ideological) regarding diversity was rare. Again, my intent was to escape the false problems; it made no sense to say that the diverse would *kill* the universal, as several philosophers defended. What seemed more thought-provoking was the question: why has this category become so important in contemporary times? That's why I say that diversity is a kind of symbol of the contemporary world. And the answer I give has to do with the globalization of the world, in which diversity acquires a new meaning.

In the context of globalization, we find an economical and technological standardization, but, as I used the idea of globalization of culture, I was able to rescue the theme of diversity within another perspective. Thus, I included a chapter about diversity and market in the book, returning to a whole marketing literature that was familiar to me. The intention was that the reader had a view within this literature, being able to realize that the notion of diversity varies depending on the groups that use it.

MATRIZes: Recently, we have seen a right wing, which claims to be *alternative*, appropriating visibility strategies, such as demonstrations, social networks, and video production, which are traditionally linked to identity affirmation groups. Do you believe this is a materialization of what you call *uneasiness of universalism*? Can the elites be assuming an identity affirmation discourse as a reaction to the space acquired by multiculturalism?

Ortiz: I think people, uncritically, have associated diversity with the idea of democracy and pluralism. And that is not true. One just has to look at the right-wing movements in France and Germany to realize that the search for identity is an affirmation to discriminate the other. The *defense* of the national and of ethnic groups has different and often antagonistic developments. It can mean the struggle against colonialism, but, in the Brazil of the military dictatorship, also an apology to authoritarianism. The book *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (1985) has a whole chapter about it. Thus, let's say that the progressive social movements do not monopolize identity construction.

Thereby, multiple constructions appear, and certainly right-wing groups are involved in them. This is here to stay. It doesn't seem a random episode to me. It is part of the differentiation of interests and the heterogeneity of the public sphere. The point is to know what we are saying when talking about diversity. Are the right-wing demonstrations made recently in Porto Alegre regarding the closing of Santander's exhibition an expression of diversity? Should we tolerate them, or isn't this the denial of the democratic spirit? Of course I am inclined to the second interpretation. But one must understand who are the intellectuals who build these identities, and which power relations they cover up. That is, one must locate diversity in the historical and social context in which the political disputes take place.

MATRIZES: Continuing in this matter, discussion have recently emerged in the media and social networks on the issue of *cultural appropriation* and of the legitimacy of certain groups using or not certain symbols. What do you think of this issue?

Ortiz: The issue of cultural appropriation is old, one just has to read about Cultural Anthropology. An example is the appropriation that the participants of Afro-Brazilian cults make of the Catholic tradition. What is called syncretism is a huge movement of appropriation of elements of a tradition, in this case, popular Catholicism in Brazil by slaves of African origin. Another example: the absorption by classical music, such as Villa-Lobos', of popular elements. The folklore is the material to be worked by the classical perspective. Only a few traces of popular culture, which were appropriated by the composers, are relevant to the classical code. The idea of appropriation requires at least two groups with distinct traditions: the group that carries out the appropriation and the group that gives some elements to it. There is an internal and an external dimension. This brings us to the question of identity; it always delimits a boundary, *we*, and those outside it. If you look at it this way, the current debates can be seen as a kind of exacerbation of identities. The topic of appropriation emerges because of this. And I would add, identities that are constructed in a context of contrast and conflict, and often political struggle. In this sense, the public sphere is tensioned by disputes around the appropriated symbols. Actually, it's not the size of the phenomenon that matters, but the political meaning that it acquires.

MATRIZES: The issue of the popular crosses your work. We have the appropriation of the popular by the national, the national-popular as a left-wing political project, the national-popular redefined in market terms from



the 1970s and within the conservative project of the military dictatorship, the transition from the national-popular to the international-popular... Before this changing picture, do you think that the concept of popular is still a valid investment to think about contemporary culture?

Ortiz: That is a good question. I think it would be worth making a reflective and critical balance regarding this. There is a polysemy of the concept of popular culture. Traditionally, especially in the folkloric aspect, it is associated with the idea of tradition. But popular festivals such as Parintins Folklore Festival could hardly be understood within this type of interpretation. There is tourism, and the interests of politicians of the region. When we speak of indigenous culture today, new dimensions arise, such as human rights. An entirely different universe refers to the cultural industries. It would be interesting to resume all this in a research seminar, to understand the meaning of the concept of popular in the contemporary world.

In a certain way, I tried to develop an aspect of this discussion, only one aspect, in an essay that appears as appendix in the book *Universalismo e diversidade* (2015) (“Imagens do Brasil”). I hadn’t written about Brazil in quite a while. The text is the result of an *external* demand; by this I mean that I hadn’t planned to write anything about it. I received an invitation from the Graduate Program in Communication of the University of Brasília to teach an inaugural class on Brazilian culture and national identity. I replied saying that I had nothing new to say, since I had already written about the subject; thus I suggested an idea to the coordinator of the program: I would do a reflection on the issue of Brazilian culture in the context of globalization. It was the first time that I developed some arguments from scratch. A while later I received another invitation; I was asked to do the inaugural conference of a meeting of photographers in Fortaleza. As they were professionals of that field, they wanted to discuss the changes that occurred in Brazil to understand what would be the *best* images that could comprise these changes. I was fascinated with the question and the metaphor: *images of Brazil*.

I decided to work on my notes, develop them, which resulted in the text. I recognize that it is incomplete; it could be transformed in a small research project, and not just an essay, with ideas and insights. But it’s an example of how it is possible to resume traditional themes and perceive them in a new context. The same could be done concerning popular culture.

MATRIZES: Can we think about the new working class as a consumption force and about its representation in audiovisual productions such as the soap opera *Avenida Brasil* (Brasil Avenue, João Emanuel Carneiro, Rede Globo,

2012) and the film *Que horas ela volta?* (The Second Mother, Anna Muylaert, 2015) as an update of this scenario?

Ortiz: I believe it is possible to resume a series of *old* issues from the perspective of recent transformations. This is a challenge for artists and social scientists. But for this one needs to situate Brazil in the global context. While we look at a certain country, we must also see it inside the world. A reflection confined only to national borders seems unsatisfactory to me. The example of popular music is suggestive. The study of Michel Nicolau Netto (2009) shows there are several ways to export Brazilian popular music. It is identified with the national (MPB), such as the songs of Chico Buarque or Caetano Veloso, to the regional, such as Manguebit, but can also be exported in English (Cansei de Ser Sexy). Thus, one can talk about Brazil in three different wave circuits. How is this possible? To answer this question, one must understand each of these circuits, placing the problem of popular music in a context different from its relationship with the national identity as we were used to consider.

MATRIZES: In 2010, you published *Trajetos e memórias*. The book brings a first-person narrative of your intellectual trajectory, and also an important reflection on the development of the social sciences in Brazil, on writing, and on academic research. Anyway, this is an unusual exercise within Brazilian academia. I would like to know what were your motivations to publish this book more than twenty years after writing the memoir that originated it.

Ortiz: In fact, when I started writing the memoir, my intention was not to do what ended up being done. I joined Unicamp in 1988 and my *livre docência*⁹ was defended a year later. At that time, the requirements of the University for this position were not many and, as I had written several books, I had the possibility to present a kind of compilation of these previous writings without the need to develop a new thesis. That was quite convenient for me; however, among the demands, there was the memoir. I looked at what other colleagues had done and found it very boring. That's when I had the idea of *memory*. This was a dear topic to Roger Bastide and, as his student, I was familiar with it (national memory, memory of the Afro-Brazilian cults, popular memory etc.). But to do so convincingly, I had to develop a different way of writing. A strictly academic language, with citations and footnotes, didn't seem suitable for this type of narrative. As the memories are from a narrator, I took this position, exploring a lighter writing, between literature and essayism.

After presenting the memoir, it was filed; only the examination committee, of course, had read it. The exception was Caio Graco, from Editora Brasiliense.

⁹ In Brazil, *livre docência* is an academic title granted by public universities, by public tendering. It represents a higher position in the academic hierarchy, indicating exceptional quality in research and teaching.



When we talked, he became interested, ask for a copy to read, liked it, but said that something like that would hardly be published, as it was too erudite. It was curious, because the observation about publication came from him; at the time, it never occurred to me to do that. I mean, at least consciously. But Sartre may be right, one always writes to the other. Anyway, I left the text aside.

Years later, when I finished *A diversidade dos sotaques* (2008), I didn't have a larger project, didn't know very well what to do. I rediscovered the memoir. The text was filed on diskette, but computers could no longer read this media type, so I had to resort to the printed version and type it all again. The digital copy served as a reference point that I was changing and rewriting, but following the timeline and rhythm of the original narrative. I still had doubts in publishing it; I thought it could be confused with something purely self-centered. I asked then for some students and former students to read it; they were younger and had a certain distance from the text. That's when I realized that I had written the memoir for the new generations, and not for mine. I was mistaken. By critically describing the process of institutionalization of the social sciences in other parts of the world, but particularly in Brazil, I touched a reality of the new generations. They were living what was still on the move, in consolidation, at the time of my youth. There is, of course, the personal story in the text, but I sought to reduce it to the narrative thread of a character that, through his trajectory, was discussing the intellectual work and its adversities. Perhaps the book will remain as a testimony of an author.

MATRIZES: In this work, you talk about the sociologist profession and about the importance of writing in this activity. You resumed this question during the *Colóquio* held recently in ECA-USP, in your honor. I would like you to come back to this topic.

Ortiz: The theme of writing has always interested me. After all, that's what we do, we write. I have even two types of notebooks. In one of them I do research notes; not exactly a summary, but often observations, comments, and ideas that can eventually help future writing. I started to develop the other type of notebook in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but I did not advance much; maybe I wasn't convinced at the time of the usefulness of this kind of thing. Today I regret not taking notes while living in Paris, or soon after I returned to Brazil. Only in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I started to use this type of notebook more systematically. In it, I write varied things; for example, I read a story in the newspaper that I find interesting and I make some comment on it. Sometimes, I go to some conference that discusses something that calls my attention, in other times I write about movies, books, any conversation.

What interests me is the writing exercise; I write about different things and in different ways.

There is no social sciences outside the text, thus the concern with writing is essential. It is an illusion to think that it is simply a means of communication, a neutral object that we can handle. The language and the writing mold the sociological object. Not long ago I was teaching a course that I called “sociological workshop,” and a part of the classes was about the exercise of writing. I sought to discuss its importance to the creation of the sociological text, something unusual in the social sciences. Maybe my interest in the subject comes from the semiologic training I had when I was still in Paris.

Anyway, my books are made for an audience that is not necessarily specialized (this is deliberate). The texts, lectures, and conferences are organized in this way. Of course, they are directed to a, so to speak, *culturalized* audience, but are not reduced to the small group of academic specialization. The books and texts thus have a larger scope. Writing is a topic quite explored by literati. They are fully aware of that. They speak with ease about how they do their novels and short stories. In the social sciences, and I refer to them in general – communication, history, politics, sociology, anthropology –, language and writing are seen as naturalized, as if they were created by nature. We need to cultivate a reflection regarding language and writing, to remove them from this *natural* state.

MATRIZes: Your intellectual work tends to be expressed by books, while the metric used to assess the academic production tends to value the production of articles. This was a theme brought by at least two of the speakers attending the *Colóquio* of ECA-USP. How do you see this issue?

Ortiz: I privilege the book. That doesn't mean I don't write articles; I published dozens of them. But, from the point of view of the author's utopia, I prefer the books. Some of my articles even appeared in books, but they were rewritten.

The predilection exists because I believe the book represents a larger unit, both when it is a single object – as is the case of *A moderna tradição brasileira* (1988) and *A diversidade dos sotaques* (2008) – or even when it is formed by a series of essays, which are tied to a unit, a coherent thread that articulates them – as in *Um outro território: ensaios sobre a mundialização da cultura* (1996) and *Universalismo e diversidade* (2015).

The book allows us to build a totality, shape the object; in this sense, it is more complete than the article. The journal always involves a fragmentation, which is not necessarily bad, because it makes possible, in a later time, to develop and give continuity to the ideas. For example, in the book *Mundialização:*



saberes e crenças (2006), there is an article called “O senso comum planetário,” little read, but interesting. It would be possible to develop it into a book. I even considered this possibility. The problem is that it is impossible to put all you think into practice. Among the themes and ideas available, one has to choose a direction. Perhaps the articles exist to be read and forgotten more quickly. The books, at least as intention, exist to last a bit longer, particularly in the case of the social sciences.

MATRIZES: In your researches, you often use several files, statistics, empirical data, tables etc. These procedures are not so common in the Brazilian social sciences. Do you see this as a characteristic of your work?

Ortiz: Maybe I learned to use empirical data, I mean maybe, with Roger Bastide. When I was his student, I was impressed with the amount of data that he worked with on his books. The combination between them and the research brings two important elements for the intellectual work. First, it helps to build the sociological object, making it richer. Second, it helps writing the text. These are two close but distinct operations. When I was researching for *O próximo e o distante* (2000), I was in Central America, in Guatemala I believe, with a colleague, Jean Franco, an English woman settled in the United States who wrote a beautiful book on Latin American literature. We were having dinner, and she asked what I was doing. I told her about the research on Japan. I spoke with enthusiasm, I’m like that when I throw myself into these projects. I was taken by the intellectual enterprise. I briefly explained the main ideas, and she continued to ask: how do you work? I told her that, as I was starting the project, I was reading all that didn’t matter directly to the problem, things like Confucianism in China and Japan, the Samurai society etc. Surprised, she said: “Renato, you’re becoming increasingly crazy.”

But I have some convictions, and this is one of them: if you do a broader reading about a particular topic, you can map a set of references that can (or not) be explored at the time of building the object; it’s like having a larger repertoire of harmonies and sounds when you create a song. The result is different if the repertoire is smaller. This is valid both for building an object and for writing. When diving into a project, I do readings in various directions, and then I do the writing. It’s tiring, but fruitful.

An example is the chapter “Cultura e mercado” of the book *Cultura e modernidade* (1991). To create it, I decided to explore two themes, the feuilleton and photography. But I had to read texts of diverse nature to do this. In the case of feuilletons, the literary criticism addressed this subject, but, as they were published in newspapers, I went after the history of newspaper companies. There

was also the reader, which made me understand the changes of this readership in France. The feuilleton was criticized by literati; I had, therefore, to understand the disputes between the art world and the market in the 19th century. Same thing with photography. I had to read about photographic techniques of the time and the little content that had been written about photography, since historians and sociologists had not been interested in this topic. Thus, I resorted to the chroniclers of the time, and they taught me about something not thematized by the social sciences. I still lacked a background in which to insert the feuilleton and photography: the economic, political, and social history of the considered period. My intention wasn't to be a specialist in the subject, it was not that, but when I was assembling the chapter, I had a rich material at my disposal as a starting point. In this sense, in a research, it is not only the amount of things you do that matters, but also the diversification of sources. They come with data collection, before the object is born. They are there, available, for your construction.

My belief is that, if I performed the same work without making this journey, the result wouldn't be the same, the text would lose in strength and persuasion. As I say in the introduction to the book *Ciências Sociais e o trabalho intelectual* (2002), writing is done with many threads. It's as if you worked with a variety of hanks to weave the mesh of argumentation. If the hanks are scarce, the text comes out monochromatic, in black and white. To get a richer text, with different ripples, it takes several hanks. Of course, there is a danger: getting lost in these *textile* references. This is the risk; at one point, the research and the writing must stop.

MATRIZES: You recently published on the blog *Nocaut* a text that uses the literary figure of Dorian Gray¹⁰ as a criticism to the political misconduct of a country stained by the ugliness and rottenness of the events. How do you see the question of the intellectual's political positioning?

Ortiz: I thought I should write a text to convey the current uneasiness. It is a personal but also collective uneasiness. The problem was how to narrate it. In 2016, I had written a short text about a *pichação*¹¹ that appeared on the wall of the Institute of Philosophy of Unicamp. It said "death to communists." I was appalled and wrote a letter that circulated on the internet and was even read at the City Hall of Campinas, but nothing beyond that. The *pichação* bothered me; I wanted to translate my indignation before its clearly fascist nature. After all, the theme of death is commonplace in fascism. However, my intention was to talk about that breaking the common language used in politics. I wanted to run away from the common sense acclaimed in magazines and newspapers.

¹⁰ Available from:
<<https://goo.gl/shPQqk>>.
Access on: Dec. 18, 2017.

¹¹ In Brazil, *pichação* is a type of wall writing, but it is different from graffiti. The latter is considered a form of art, and the former, a crime. For more information, see: <<https://goo.gl/udUxKP>>.
Access on: Jan. 10, 2018.



I really like Italo Calvino. In one of his books, *Seis propostas para o próximo milênio* (1990), there is a chapter on lightness. Calvino wants to escape from the tyranny of heavy words; they imprison the author, leaving him inert before the text. One must transform heaviness into lightness, especially when it comes to politics. Words are marked by partisan accusations, by media analysis; it is difficult to use them well without prior extraction of the meanings they carry. I developed this strategy in the letter against the “death to the communists,” and I did the same thing with the “The Picture of Dorian Gray.” Soon after the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, I had a feeling of frustration and shame. I took some notes in the notebook, but I wrote nothing; that was stuck in my head for a long time, mulling over, the picture of Dorian Gray haunting me. One day I woke up, it was a Saturday, I had breakfast at the bakery, came back, sat before the computer, and wrote. Thus arose the tale of Dorian Gray.

I didn’t want to talk about Lula’s presidency, neither of Dilma Rousseff; I had no interest in discussing whether or not there had been a coup d’état, for me the democratic rupture was clear; I didn’t even want to talk about the rise of the right wing in the public sphere. My intention was to name it differently, that is, as the image suggested by the picture. When I finished writing, I contacted Fernando Morais. I didn’t know his blog, *Nocauté*, but some close friends recommended it. He was very kind in publishing the text. I think it worked well, the fable doesn’t speak only of Brazil, I designedly didn’t say the name of the country. I figured maybe an American, victim of the Trump government, could feel the same uneasiness. I invented a short story that transcended the Brazilian context, emulating *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, so to speak.

MATRIZES: Do you still see yourself as motivated to undertake large research projects? Can we expect a new book soon?

Ortiz: Of course, all these tributes I have been receiving, particularly the *Colóquio* organized by ECA-USP, are important, it is a recognition. And, in the case of Brazil, this is very rare, especially in the academic field, in which “everyone is equal.” My impression is that difference is a problem among us.

But I also worry about this; as one is acclaimed, one runs the risk of being imprisoned by it. This can affect the future. My attitude is to absorb the joy, but not conform myself. Currently, I am developing a project about the universe of luxury. It is quite advanced, but your question will be put when I finish it. The advantage of being older and doing intellectual work is that, as long as the head is working, you can continue. This is the intention, not stopping. I don’t know what I will do, I have nothing planned, but I don’t worry,

provided that the intention to continue remains. I have a series of ideas for texts that were left aside throughout my research; it might be worth devoting some time to them. Larger studies, as the one I'm working on now, cost a lot of time and work; once they are finished, it takes a rest period before the next project. When working on a specific object, one must master it in the best way possible, which is ensured by the research, but the intellectual craftwork is only complete with writing, and it is always slow. All this takes energy, and when we get older it is no longer the same. But the intent is to continue, as they say in Candomblé, "feed the head."

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Renato Ortiz: warp of writing, web of memory

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