

RUTH CARDOSO: A TRIBUTE

School of International and Public Affairs Columbia University

April 9-10, 2009.

THE YOUNG RUTH CARDOSO. HER REFLECTIONS ON THE INTEGRATION PROCESS OF JAPANESE IMMIGRANTS IN BRAZIL.

Célia Sakurai

The reflections of professor Ruth Cardoso on urban social movements began in the early 1980s, at which occasion I had the opportunity of beginning my first research projects. In late 1979, I was her student during my Social Sciences undergraduate years at the University of São Paulo, in an optional class named Political Participation in Urban Environment. In my sophomore year of college, I was faced with the challenge of going into the field to research the organization and member profile of a neighborhood association in the city of São Paulo. The persistence and permanent encouragement of Prof. Cardoso motivated me to accept the challenges required by all research works, and it was with her that I walked the first steps of my academic life. I never forget to follow her advice when in the field: she would always say: "*look clueless*", meaning to say that we don't know everything and are always learning.

At the end, and achieving the 'clueless' look without much effort, I was introduced to a world far apart from this young, middle-class girl with no prior contact with the city's outer periphery or slum dwellers. I then realized that I was clueless for a fact and had a lot to learn from those people. Those experiences changed my way of seeing and feeling things. That first research project was the basis for the master's dissertation that I presented a few years from then.

I have taken the liberty of focusing a little on the beginning of my research career because Prof. Cardoso's path and mine crossed once again after I began to study Japanese immigration, subsequently to obtaining my master's degree. I took my first steps within this theme almost twenty years ago and am working on it to this day. Two things happened for me to say that my path crossed with Prof. Cardoso's: a personal discovery of the Japanese side of me, and the discovery that the first academic works written by Prof. Ruth Cardoso were about this theme. They are little known because she spoke very little of them. But they could not be ignored at this opportunity. These works contain important issues that remain fresh, despite the many publications on the history of Japanese immigration in Brazil that have been written since then.

Departing from this session's theme, I would like to review some issues presented in the articles: "*O Papel das Associações Juvenis na Aculturação dos Japoneses*" (The Role of Youth Associations in the Acculturation of the Japanese (1959), "*Organização Familiar entre os Japoneses de São Paulo*" (Family Organization among the Japanese of São Paulo) (1963), "*O Agricultor e o Profissional Liberal entre os Japoneses no Brasil*" (Farmers and Independent Professionals among the Japanese in Brazil) (1963). The first and last among these were published in the *Revista de Antropologia* anthropology journal, while the second was published in the *Revista* (journal) of the Museu Paulista. Her doctoral thesis, "*Estrutura Familiar e Mobilidade Social. Estudo dos Japoneses no Estado de São Paulo*" (Family Structure and Social Mobility. A Study of the Japanese in the State of São Paulo), was published only in 1995.¹

¹ "*O Papel das Associações Juvenis na Aculturação dos Japoneses*". *Revista de Antropologia* vol. VII no. 1 and 2, pp. 101 - 122(1959); "*Organização Familiar entre os Japoneses de São Paulo*". *Revista do Museu Paulista*. New series, vol. XIV pp. 277 – 282 (1962), "*O Agricultor e o Profissional Liberal entre os Japoneses no Brasil*" *Revista de Antropologia*, vol. XI, no. 1 and 2 pp. 53 – 60 (1963); **Estrutura**

Academic studies on the Japanese in Brazil began in the early 1950s, following the discussions of the time on immigrant assimilation and acculturation. The Japanese in particular had stood out since before World War II due to the peculiarities of their origin, both as regards culture and the racial issue. Several publications targeted or praised the performance of these immigrants, or condemned them as elements that were incompatible with the national projects under attempted implementation at the time. Ever since the first discussions began on the arrival of Japanese immigrants in the late 19th century, the racial issue has been the most controversial. Within the context of race discussions at the turn of the 19th into the 20th century and given that concerns about miscegenation and the "whitening" of the people were central at that time, Asian immigration was seen as a problem for Brazil. How can we solve the racial issue if we introduce another element in our already confusing grid of racial relations, argued those against the coming of the Japanese. On the other hand, to fill in the manpower gaps left by the irregular inflow of other nationalities of immigrant, Japanese immigration was permitted in the end.

These immigrants continued to be seen as a viable labor alternative when the inflow of Italians diminished considerably. Though the Japanese were expensive as immigrants, the São Paulo government and coffee farmers subsidized their coming until 1921. When the United States closed their gates to Asian immigrants in 1924, the Japanese government took the initiative of encouraging emigration to Brazil by funding their trip and offering financial aid to each Japanese citizen who wanted to come to Brazil. Despite the restrictions, Brazil was the only destination at the time that offered to

receive permanent farmer immigrants. It was thus that the Japanese arrived en masse in the 1930s, until in 1939 Brazil applied to them a quota of 2% of total immigrants.²

The Japanese military government's direct participation in emigrations to Brazil created discomfort in the Brazilian political environment, as the "yellow peril" was on the discussion agenda in Europe and the United States at the time. The Japanese emigration companies began to buy land and create colonies of small landowners that were provided with an infrastructure of machinery and warehouses, as well as a body of agricultural professionals - agronomists and agriculture technicians. These colonies soon began to draw attention for their productivity and introduction of new products. Colonies like Bastos, in the state of São Paulo, produced silkworm cocoons, while in Pará their black pepper plantations were beginning to achieve success, and in the state of Amazonas they developed a type of jute that was widely used to make bags for São Paulo's coffee. They also drew attention to the expanse of their lands: in the Amazon states of Pará and Amazonas, each colony held one million hectares.

Adding up all the restrictions, one may say that the image of Japanese immigrants was not very favorable, especially from the second half of the 1930s, when the nationalist policies of Getúlio Vargas during the *Estado Novo* (1937-1945) implemented the guideline of limiting foreigner activity by forbidding schools and newspapers in foreign languages. Obviously, the Japanese suffered restrictions during World War II, as they represented the enemy. The major issue came about after the war was over, with the Resistance movements against the defeat of Japan, the best-known of which was *Shindo Renmei*.

²Estrutura Familiar e Mobilidade Social. Estudo dos Japoneses no Estado de São Paulo. 18

It is precisely within this post-war context, with the uncertainties concerning the means by which Japanese immigrants and their descendants were integrating themselves into Brazilian society, that the first works of Ruth Cardoso are inserted. Her choice of theme was not random, for this was an ongoing process, differently from other nationalities that had immigrated to Brazil before the Japanese. In the 1950s, Japanese families were setting aside their Japanese reference values in order to adapt to the conditions they found in Brazil. Professor Cardoso's initial question in those four publications was a reflection on how, despite all material and ideological hardships, there was a very rapid upward movement of the Japanese as compared to immigrant Italian and German families. From farm hands in coffee plantations, they moved on to rural landowners or proprietors of small urban businesses. Prof. Cardoso found the Japanese families who arrived in Brazil as coffee farm hands, and were found in the capital of São Paulo in the 1950s, occupying positions of low social prestige in the services sector, such as dry-cleaners and produce sellers at farmer's markets. Their children divided their time between work and study, but with the unequivocal difference that *"the immigrants' children, with the impact of the declaration of war against Japan, became aware of their particular situation which was due to their Brazilian nationality"* (RA, 1959: 109). Likewise, immigrant parents admitted that *"they could not fully reproduce, here, the standards of Japanese culture"* (Estrutura Familiar: 120).

From this perspective of the parents, the author fleshes out her central reflections on Japanese immigrants: the relational movements between Brazilians of Japanese origin and their immigrant parents. From her first article in 1959 to her doctoral thesis, one notices the work of an effervescent intellectual, in other words someone who was trying to understand the 'Japanese immigrant' within the theoretical perspectives available to

her at that time. Over the thirteen years that passed from initial article to thesis, there were significant changes in the use of theoretical tools to analyze a phenomenon which had, in 1972 (when the thesis was defended) also already changed in relation to the initial period of her studies. This is why she was such a seething intellectual, who was trying to see what was happening with the Japanese throughout their process of cultural change, and how theory could explain these ongoing phenomena. Cardoso uses the term acculturation in her 1959 article: - "The Role of Youth Associations in the Acculturation of the Japanese". However, the concept is gradually discarded along the article, as we will see ahead, and is definitely put aside in her doctoral thesis thirteen years later. *"When we analyze the relations between the Japanese group and Brazilian society, we do not use this concept (acculturation)"* (Estrutura Familiar: 171). When she concludes her thesis, she is able to say that the concept of social integration at that moment, backed by the theories of Edward Leach, whose work was published in 1964³, points out that inconsistencies are a part of processes of social change, in a clear response to acculturation: *"We have had to use the word integration, and can refrain from using the notion of acculturation. The integration process of Japanese immigrants is characterized in this work on one side by its social mobility, and on the other by the reduction in cultural distance between them and society as a whole, i.e., a lesser use of distinct systems of expression"* (Estrutura Familiar: 175).

The doctoral thesis thus includes Japanese immigration into broader contexts, targeting the insertion of the Japanese into the history of changes that took place in the State of São Paulo since before the war, as it also dedicates a chapter to discussing the family structures of Japan and Japanese immigration in the West. To produce her thesis,

³ Leach, E. *Political Systems of Highland Burma*. London, G. Bell and Sons, 1964.

Cardoso could already count on the results of an extensive quantitative survey⁴ performed in 1958, which drew a social and economic profile of Japanese immigrants in Brazil, their descendants and their families' status in Japan. With these data at hand, she could provide additional arguments to discuss other aspects of the upward mobility of the Japanese.

From the start of her career and despite the temporal distance, her contributions to a debate continue to be very current, especially in lessons on how to work on cultural changes based on a group, such as the Japanese. Professor Ruth Cardoso habitually used a phrase that synthesizes, perhaps due to its informality, what she had thought from the beginning: *"don't throw the baby out with the bathwater"* What does it mean? It means that hasty conclusions often throw out the most important part: the baby.

In her concept there is not one baby - the Japanese community as a whole -, but several. There were differences in the actions and thinking of those born in the capital, those who migrated along with their families, and those who were only in São Paulo to study, without their families. *"To think of the nisseis (first generation of Japanese descendants) of São Paulo as a single unit is a major mistake"* (RA, 1959:114). She affirms that *"the Japanese colony in Brazil does not comprise a unit. On the contrary, it is dispersed into several different groups and situations, integrated into different regions, and interacting with Brazilians under several different circumstances"* (RA, 1963:53) and, therefore, by pointing out these differences, she indicated that there were several different acculturation processes taking place according to different life histories (RA, 1959: 114), and different players also handled the Japanese systems of expression differently.

⁴ SUZUKI Teiichi, (1964) **The Japanese Immigrant in Brazil**. Tokyo, Tokyo University Press. I consider this publication as the most complete quantitative work on immigrants in Brazil.

So how do acculturation processes take place? It's regarding this point that her analysis gains robustness and steps away from naive statements that this is a 'natural process'. When she uses the term 'Brazilianization' at several points in her texts, there is a significant advance in her contribution to immigration studies. Cardoso uses the expression 'conscious Brazilianization' (RA, 1963:59), i.e., during their acculturation process, the Japanese immigrants consciously designed their own strategy for insertion into Brazilian society. One should remember that the Japanese who went to Brazil before the war had been socialized within a concept of Japan that emphasized its cultural and racial uniformity: in Japan, children, youths and adults periodically attended refresher courses to maintain their idea of a strong and victorious Japanese nation (Japan had won wars against China and the Russian Empire). For this reason, a conscious quest for Brazilianization may seem paradoxical, especially as *issei* immigrants "*intended to transform the nisseis into heirs of Japanese cultural tradition*" (RA, 1959: 102).

The events of the war strengthened such nationalism, on one hand, but on the other, Ruth Cardoso shows in her doctoral thesis how the Japanese were undergoing a very rapid social ascension process during that same period. They left the condition of paid workers and became leasers or buyers of land over an average period of less than five years. How? Newly arrived from Japan and after the initial impacts of the change, they worked and they saved. With the results of their labor, they achieved the minimum required to escape from paid work and engage in the Japanese form of organization: "*Given that the Japanese immigration was familial in nature, these newly arrived domestic units in Brazil remained relatively isolated, dispersed across the farm colonies. For that very reason, relations within the group did not change much. On the*

other hand, their life conditions and opportunities for success encouraged them to keep alive the standards that favored greater cooperation and, consequently, a higher family income. Japanese tradition, which stresses the managerial authority of the chief and thus centralizes decisions, maintained the internal cohesion of families which was perceived as fundamental to achieve a better financial status" (Estrutura Familiar 1995:113). The family head's centralizing role in task assignment and expense control favored this rapid climb. The author does not, however, naively assign the entrepreneurial success of the Japanese to family organization alone. In the first chapter of her thesis, she makes a lengthy analysis of the changes in São Paulo agriculture, showing how these changes made room for their upward mobility. The fragmentation of large coffee estates and tendency toward urbanization were two concurrent movements that enabled them to sever their ties with salaried work and pursue other forms of survival, even with little capital at hand.

From her 1959 article to her doctoral thesis, professor Cardoso raised another issue that remains implicit in her texts, but is highly relevant in studies about immigration. It is understanding immigration within processes that entail an analysis spanning more than one generation. If it weren't for this, Japanese immigration would be seen only as Japanese bitterly facing the difficulties of adapting to a new environment. Expanding the analysis to the following generation brings forth the matter of conscious Brazilianization and the mechanisms which truly give emphasis to the processes of integration. The generation of descendants "*is, therefore, the hope of these families who are engaged in acquiring prestige and raising awareness of the advantages that they had in mind when they abandoned their country of origin*" (RA, 1963: 57). However, the nissei generation lived between two worlds, the one inside their families and the

outside world. In Cardoso's own words, they were half Brazilian and half Japanese, *"creating, for this very reason, special life conditions for these youths who were between two superimposed and non-parallel cultural worlds"* (RA, 1959: 107). It is important to note the observation that these were superimposed cultural worlds, an experience lived by everyone of the nissei generation.

Within this context, youth associations in the São Paulo capital were organized as an agglutinant that helped in the Brazilianization process of Japanese descendants. In Japan, as in pre-WWII Brazil, youth associations played a special role in the moral education of Japanese youth. However, from the war onward, these associations took a diametrically opposed role: from teachers of Japanese militaristic morals, they became transformers of young Japanese descendants into Brazilians, *"thus acquiring a different function than the original"* (RA, 1959: 108). Gathering up exclusively Japanese descendants, they organized sports clubs (judo, table tennis, baseball), religious congregations, and cultural associations that branched into the neighborhoods and, consequently, across the entire city. When they gathered, these youths did not engage only in leisurely activities, but also had the opportunity to 'practice' being Brazilian *"providing them with at least the adequate behavior patterns"* (RA, 1959:110), *"to behave as Brazilians outside of their family circles"* (RA, 1959:104) *"to keep them from ridicule for attitudes that were strange to Brazilian eyes"* (RA, 1959:112). Firstly, they communicated in Portuguese, *"the mastery of which is an important condition for success in academic and professional life"* (RA, 1959:110). Then, they introduced activities that stepped away from the standards in which they had been socialized, such as dances, beauty pageants, and soccer instead of baseball. During the 1950s and 60s, local Miss Colony pageants were extremely popular, as were Saturday dances or

Carnaval balls. Sunday picnics on the beaches of Santos were also common. As a consequence of all these new activities, romantic relationships and even marriages were frequent between the participants.

How did the parents of these youths view these changes? They were supportive in the hope of professional success after having invested in their children's school careers, and on behalf of this goal they accepted the changes. *"Tolerance in Japanese families, which seems to have started after the war, indicates that nisseis live in two different worlds, that of their families and that of the Brazilian groups that they frequent. Profoundly affected by the acculturation process, the standards of Japanese family behavior no longer have their old coherence: thus, their youths are placed between two sets of influences which cannot, however, be identified with the family and the Brazilian groups..."* (RA, 1959: 107). The reality of the families themselves also changes in the post-war period: *"it is not just the nissei generation that is acculturating itself, it is a general process that affects the entire colony..."* (RA, 1959: 107) with their going to the cities and moved toward the formation of nuclear families⁵. The extensive families housing three generations, both on the men's and the women's side⁶, tended to disappear in the urban environment. Arranged marriages by *miai* were also gradually replaced by marriage without parental interference, given that there was no longer a need to perpetuate the family as an economic unit, as was the case in the rural environment. In the past, the ties of cooperation and trust between two families were sealed with the

⁵ According to Cardoso, 78% of families left agriculture to engage in non-agricultural occupations - data from 1959 - Family Structure..., 1995: 60.

⁶ The presence of the bride's relatives is an adaptation that resulted from immigration, for this practice does not exist in Japan. See Cardoso, Ruth. "Organização Familiar entre os Japoneses de São Paulo". Revista do Museu Paulista, 1962. New series, vol. XIV: 278.

marriage of their children, in order to maintain such commitment. Now, it's the possibility of youths joining together aiming for professional success that governs marriages and changes the notion of matrimonial ties.

Cooperation and solidarity behaviors within the group while they lived in isolation in the rural environment, "*because they wish to create a culturally homogeneous community*" (Estrutura Familiar: 122), were gradually changed when descendants begin to act as true Brazilians. The professional success aspired to by the *issei* translated into placement in non-manual occupations that were considered more prestigious than those of their parents, but without surpassing the limits of the urban middle classes, with technical, office or sales positions. If on one hand the youth associations drove forward the desires of the elder Japanese, Cardoso concludes that "*the ideology of ascent covered up the limitations of the mobility that was effectively achieved, for, ultimately, most Japanese descendants were able only to replace the agrarian professions of their parents and grandparents with modest positions in urban services and commerce*" (Estrutura Familiar: 178). She also calls attention to a matter which is very little understood to this day, namely that "*it is by seeking ascent firstly as a group and, after the initial advance, as individuals, that the Japanese aspire to better positions*" (Estrutura Familiar: 176), in other words, "*social ascent creates professionals who, at work, practically do not distinguish themselves from their colleagues of other origins. At that moment, the traditional rituals have lost their purpose, and those who have ascended do not need to rely on distinct systems of expression, because their experience is entirely contained in one – the Western system*" (Estrutura Familiar: 176). That was the end of the integration process of the two first generations of people of Japanese origin in Brazil.