

# ON RUTH CORREA LEITE CARDOSO: AN ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL STATEMENT

By Lucio Kowarick

## 1. WHY PERSONAL?

Before embarking upon an academic statement, I would like to lay out some personal points that help to more fully comprehend the relationship that I had with Ruth for many years. It began in the second semester of 1970, when I started lecturing at the Social Sciences Department, in the Chair of Political Science.

Those were difficult times, the reactionary force of the repressive military dictatorship was at its height, and it was also casting its shadow on the University of São Paulo (USP): two professors from the Political Science Department had been arrested and tortured, and four more had been exiled abroad. Other lecturers, the intellectual elite of USP, had been forced into retirement: Florestan Fernandes, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Otavio Ianni and Paula Bieguelman. There were also casualties at the Architecture, Economics, History, Physics and Biology faculties, among others. Various students were arrested, the police were observing our lectures and there were even murders, including Alexandre Vanuchi, from the Communications and Fine Arts School, who was later honored by his colleagues when they chose his name for the Academic Center of that institution.

I have begun this statement with a brief background of the repression, because it was a major part of our day-to-day existence until the end of the 1970s: we were afraid, but, above all, we knew that our lectures, as well as our fanatical effort in teaching the social sciences was also a form of cultural resistance, and this would surely have political resonance.

This academic climate of those heady days resulted in immense solidarity between professors and made us recognize ourselves as citizens who struggled, with the written and spoken word, against the Military Dictatorship. There were three of us professors in the Chair of Political Science in 1970, and, under Francisco Weffort's academic and intellectual leadership, which was absent in many sectors of the Philosophy, Arts and Human Sciences Faculty (FFLCH), we managed to reconstruct, little by little, our undergraduate and graduate courses.

It was in these circumstances that I came into contact with colleagues, usually in opportunities like commemorations, defenses of theses and, when friendship was also involved, at lunches, dinners, birthday parties, or at the cafeteria, in what later became known as "happy hour". Ruth and I became friends, and we often went to Eunice's place for a drink, where we discussed the trials and tribulations of USP, new courses, who should, or should not, be hired and, of course, we bad-mouthed the Rector, before the appointment of Goldenberg.

Before I examine in detail Ruth's academic life, I think it's important to mention a community that began to spring up in 1979, when I was building a house near the Ibiúna Reservoir, in the countryside of the state of São Paulo. Ruth and Fernando, Dulce and Juarez already had places there, and we, along with others, began to get together there during many weekends for over 20 years. During these days and nights, many conversations took place about a plethora of subjects, from the schools of our children to academic issues, from cooking recipes to the political situation during the Geisel-Figueiredo era, the Franco Montoro-led victory of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) for the State Governorship and Fernando Henrique being elected Senator of the Republic. During these times, we watched our children transform: for some, their teenagers became adults, and for others, their children became youths. We experienced the death of many of our parents and, sometimes, even spouses. There were certainly many losses, but also many gains, especially those acquired in conversations, whether lounging in front of fireplaces or around swimming pools. All this, and much more, created strong ties of companionship, and, indeed, friendship.

Here, the temptation is so great, and so I must digress a little, for the aside that I am about to tell did not involve Ruth. It concerns our poker games, played around a table for five. Juarez never played well, Boris always complained about other people's luck, Pedro Paulo knew all about the good luck of his friend, Fernando Henrique, who would often get a four-of-a-kind, and me, who used to win more often than not. Fernando Gasparian and Guilherme O'Donnell came sometimes, the former was a chatterbox and the latter played aggressively. Occasionally a neighbor, who didn't play, showed up to watch, looking over a randomly chosen player's shoulder and paying attention to how many cards the other concentrating players asked for. When he left the room, the group was unanimous: he, a showy politician, efficient and prudent in his crankiness, was definitely bad luck to whomever he was watching over. And somebody would say: - "get lost, vulture"!.

What I most remember about Ruth is that she was someone who was immensely generous, balanced in her suggestions, firm in her opinions on controversial issues, and she had the gift of alterity, that is the ability of understand a strange argument and, if it thus appeared to her, reject it elegantly.

## 2. Academic Statement: Research in the Cidade Jardim Slum (FAVELA).

In 1974, Ruth and I decided to coordinate an investigation in the slums of São Paulo, entitled "Integration and Disintegration of MARGINAL Populations" (on the Fringes of Society), financed by the Ford Foundation, Rio de Janeiro, Mimeo (Kowarick and Cardoso, 1974). Our study group was comprised of five graduate students on scholarships and for eight months we immersed ourselves in the day-to-day routines of a few of the families that lived in an agglomeration of wooden shacks located in an area with no running water between the Pinheiros freeway and Cidade Jardim Avenue, just before the bridge of the same name. The men were laborers in the civil construction sector, working on the buildings going up along Faria Lima Avenue, or else they did gardening work, collected scrap or other informal jobs. It was a time when the slum-dwelling population was only 1.3% of the total population of São Paulo, in other words, a little more than 130,000 people, almost nothing compared to the 1.4 million that currently reside within the county.

Besides detailing their life stories, especially with regards to work and housing, we wanted to find out about this new, trespassing lifestyle in São Paulo: if the slum and its population was different from other living spaces where the poor resided, in residences they had built themselves on the outskirts of the city, in so-called "clandestine" subdivisions, there was no actual substantial socio-economic difference, despite the fact that they were poorer and that they had been uprooted when the steamroller of urban sprawl demanded, in keeping with the natural progression of real estate speculation. And this was what happened. Small, "hole-in-the-wall"-type kiosks inside the slum sold essential products in small quantities: four eggs, 10 cigarettes, 1/2 kilo of coffee etc. They were more expensive, but one only had to pay at the end of the month. And, obviously, we also addressed one of the issues of the time: did living in chanty towns lower the cost of reproduction of labor force? A technical question, whose qualitative data doesn't result in an adequate answer. But deeper things were discovered: without being exhaustive, I emphasize the fact that there was an intense social network – with

both positive and negative aspects - between the slum-dwellers and the upper-middle classes that resided in the surrounding area. From the latter, the former obtained water, clothes, food and, sometimes, furniture and even stoves or refrigerators. Inside the slum there was also a clear spatial segregation between the residents who lived on the margins of a creek that flowed through the jumble of shacks – who were called "the ragamuffins" – and the other slum-dwellers, whose shacks were located on flat areas, easily accessed from the surrounding streets. It is worth pointing out that on the edge of the Cidade Jardim slum, there lived a civil construction laborer and weekend beggar called Zé Luis, who, in the company of his wife and children, all appropriately dressed, used to go out on Sunday and beg in front of churches around the Jardins neighborhood. During the four Sundays of each month, he earned more than double his salary as a formally registered employee.

Many other details regarding this investigation could also be delved into. However, it is enough to touch on the teachings that Ruth provided us with: a field research notebook and notes soon after the interview and/or participative observation carried out, preferably, by more than one student. The name of the game was empathy with the interviewee, ignoring the distance factor proclaimed by positivist methodology: get to know the other, at the same time get to know yourself, and thus turn the research into an unraveling that will reveal the past and make sense of the aspirations, projects or values that settle into the free spaces of the present, forming the foundations of future time. The results were not insignificant: Ana Maria Niemayer, full professor in the Anthropology Department at Campinas University (UNICAMP), drew up her doctorate thesis from this investigation (NIEMAYER, 1985); Ana Maria Fisher, faculty member in the Administration Department of the Economy and Administration Faculty at USP (FEA-USP), did her Master's dissertation on it (FISCHER, 1977), and Ruth published several articles (CARDOSO, 1977 and 1978). Moreover, from these studies I constructed the notion of urban usurpation (KOWARICK, 1979 e 2000).

These and other subjects related to ethnographic research would be present in much of her work: empathy for the revelation of the said and the unsaid, of the silence that cries out to be revealed. Defamiliarization, in the sense of paying attention to what was said and participative observation, engagement as a means of getting to know the other and also knowing oneself, and in getting to know oneself, a process that aims to warn against an ethnocentric vision - I end up getting to know better what is in the shadow of words: positivist neutrality in the relationship between the subject/object of research is

replaced with a mutual relationship of trust by both parties: in the Cidade Jardim slum, researchers became sources of information for the residents about how to obtain worker registration cards, the location of the nearest health centers, schools etc., and they often actually accompanied the interviewees to these places and, in one case, actually taught children and adults to read and write. This exchange, necessary in deep-reaching qualitative research, as well as our parts in the evolution of the investigation, was repeatedly reiterated by Ruth, and is, to a certain degree put together in one of her later writings (CARDOSO, 1997).

It is worth emphasizing that this was a pioneering study that later became the parameter for investigating poor populations in São Paulo.

### 3. Academic Statement: Urban Social Movements and etc.

Firstly, the etc. In the footnotes that I wrote in the article "Uses and Abuses", I acknowledge that the part regarding female labor was partially rewritten by Ruth Cardoso (KOWARICK, 1978). I mention this passage to point out that from the middle of the 1970s, Ruth had already been concerned with an issue that would come to be one of the subjects of her lecturing career and academic investigations in 1980s, after she had transferred from the Anthropology Department to the Political Science Department. In this department, she developed issues whose relevance was already well recognized in Europe and the United States and that, up to this point, made little headway in this tropical backwater. I make use of this rather un-academic term on purpose: a proposed course on female issues was resisted by the Graduate Studies Commission of the FFLCH; from what I remember, it was due to the fact that this subject was not considered by some to be an academically pertinent object of investigation in our political and social reality. And this time, other departments, along with ours, united to denounce the narrow-minded and misinformed parochialism that continued among some of our colleagues who still had their heads buried in the orthodoxy of the so-called "fundamental contradictions". I mention this episode in order to emphasize that the arguments developed by Ruth in this context led to important investigations and theses with significant consequences, both theoretical as well as practical, because they served as guidelines for agents who would go on to foment the creation of the Council on the Female Condition the Council on the Affairs of Children and Adolescents.

As for the Urban Social Movements (USM), Ruth wrote several articles that became cornerstones for a critical review of this issue that was dominant in her research and academic activities in the 1980s (CARDOSO, 1984, 1987, 1988 e 1997). I start with the last article, in which Ruth makes a relative distinction between the two stages of the MSU, the first of which took place in the 1970s, which could be characterized as a "heroic moment". This concerns the metal workers' strikes of 1978-80, as well as the demands that sprang up from time to time around the outskirts for access to land, housing, day care, running water and sanitation, and, last but not least, improvements to public transportation, as it often took up to 4 hours to get between one's place of work place and home. In my understanding, it was Eder Sader (SADER, 1988) who best understood the dynamic between workers and labor union movements, among others that habitually develop within satellite neighborhoods. In the last pages, the author talks about the "defeat of the movements". This happened because the social and political horizons of that time indicated a radical transformation of society. It was an expectation that did not come to fruition, but it had its reason for being from the theoretical-neo-Marxist standpoint, laid out in the writings of E. P. Thompson – and maybe also, to a certain degree, from the angle of concrete reality, because these popular movements of the time threatened the very foundations of the military regime.

The second stage follows on from the state government elections of 1982 where Franco Montoro was elected governor of the state of São Paulo, and whose campaign motto had been "Decentralization/Participation". Montoro's victory opened opportunities for dialogue with the movements, especially since many public agencies had started negotiating with them. As I understand it, it was Ana Maria Doimo in her doctorate thesis (DOIMO, 1994), mentored by Ruth Cardoso, who best analyzed the new circumstances of the MSU, which were about to splinter into others, but which always maintained a dynamic for negotiating demands, which themselves started to become more and more institutionalized within the Councils for Housing, Health, Women and Children and Adolescents, not to mention the current City Statute.

In other writings, Ruth discovers that urban movements are not united; they have local foundations, but they didn't carry forth deep ideological changes, because, it was for this reason they didn't enter the struggle and, above all - as many theoretical apologists wanted - they didn't revolutionize day-to-day life, but, as Ruth would doubtlessly point out, "(they gave)...a new meaning to the traditional relationships based on the exchange of favors" (CARDOSO, 1988 : 381).

It demystifies the issue of autonomy in two ways: on one hand, for the discovery that at the center and in neighborhood clusters there are lawyers, doctors, architects, teachers, political activists of various orders and degrees, and, above all, the Catholic Church, that, with its priests and nuns, progresses its theology of liberation, sustained by the encyclicals of John XXIII, and the theories of Paulo Freire with his methods of literacy supported by "the pedagogy of the oppressed", which act as an umbrella, a true defensive fortress confronted by the prepotency and will that flooded the poorer neighborhoods throughout the 1970s. They are not an integral part of the movements, but they help to propel them, sometimes in the wrong direction. In truth, it would be very difficult to regulate a "clandestine" sub-division without the support of a lawyer who understands the intricate urban legislation, an architect/urbanist to delineate the area, according to the gradient of the land whilst maintaining the areas of common use, and a councilor or congressman to pressure, in conjunction with the movement – through protests, petitions etc. - the authoritative organs in order to fulfill the demands of the community (CARDOSO, 1984). As for their relationship with the different spheres of the political parties, Ruth is also clear and direct: the people are "manipulated", but they also "manipulate", and with "external assistance", they are able to competently negotiate the execution of their demands (CARDOSO, 1984).

However, it is above all concerning relationships between the movements and the public authoritative spheres, in other words between Society and the State, that Ruth, in my understanding, produced the most important contribution to the analysis of this issue: "a vision to which...a democratic essence, which comes from the people, and an authoritarian one, which comes from the State (...) "must not prevalence (if this happens)...popular movements will appear...as a spontaneous response to governmental authoritarianism and incompetence " (CARDOSO, 1984: 219).

Going over Ruth's and my own texts after many years, I rediscover a coincidence between our writings, for which I take pride: Ruth weaves a ferocious criticism of analyses that, emphasizing the "Strength of the Outskirts" or the "Explosive Potential of Urban Struggles", acquire a clearly evolutionist language that speaks of "germs" and "gestation" and whose position is situated on the libertarian or even revolutionary horizon. Such a style of interpretation is "nothing more than a...utopian desire held by analysts" (CARDOSO, 1987 32). In the same issue of the magazine, taking into consideration "stagist" authors, I speak of "finalist genetics" and I refer to the "catastrophic optimism" of some studies regarding the "urban chaos" and the "logic of

disorder", in a simplified version of Marxism, they consider that, the worse the situation, the better the chances of deep political transformations (Kowarick, 1987 : 45). Later on, in a more recent text, I will refer to the breakdown of such analyses, terming them "anarchist-catacumbist" in the sense that such writings positively emphasize the USM that turned their backs in the State, since it is, by definition, authoritarian and co-opting. (Kowarick, 2000: 127).

I wish to make two final points. In a classic text on social movements, Ruth introduced the idea, which is to my mind basic, that "some component of social conflict needs to be found in all social conflicts (...) this is a meta-social principal (Tourraine, 1985 : 762 and 778, I highlighted and translated this text). To my mind, despite not adding to each other, to be parochial, which, according to Ruth, unites movements - at least the worker/union, urban, ethnic and similar ones - would be the struggle to obtain and consolidate citizenship rights, in other words, processes that would lead to greater equality of opportunity, which in the words of Hanna Arendt is nothing more than the "right to have rights": "everything that is written today, that is spoken about participation, touches on the issue of citizenship". (Cardoso,1984: 89).

My last point is about the fact that I believe there to have been two great "scholars" at FFLCH-USP over the last 30 years, who I consider great because they have educated intellectuals to carry the teachings of the their respective masters forward. I am referring to Antonio Candido and, among others, his successors Robert Schwarz and Davi Arigucci, without mentioning the illustrious younger ones.

The other great "scholar" of these recent decades is Ruth Correia Leite Cardoso. I will not mention the investigators she has educated in the realms of Urban Anthropology, because the list would be too long.

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