

ARTICLE

# Brazilian Social Theory in Circulation

## Analysing the German Translation of Darcy Ribeiro by Suhrkamp

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the paradigmatic case of the Brazilian Darcy Ribeiro, the Latin American social scientist most translated into German between 1976 and 1985 by Suhrkamp, a prestigious publishing house in the Federal Republic of Germany. From the perspective of the sociology of translation, this article explores the key role of mediators, genres, and styles in specific contexts, which explains the unusual recognition that Darcy Ribeiro received through translation by a publishing house with high symbolic capital in the production and circulation of social theory, despite the fact that he produced from the periphery.

### Keywords

Darcy Ribeiro, sociology of translation, social theory, Suhrkamp, centre-periphery

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### INTRODUCTION

In the epilogue to the German translation of Darcy Ribeiro's book *Ensaaios Insólitos* published in 1979 by Suhrkamp, its translator—the sociologist Manfred Wöhlcke—stated that “the Brazilian Darcy Ribeiro is undoubtedly one of the most important anthropologists and social scientists alive, although many Germans may take this statement with scepticism because they have never heard of him” (1979: 368, own translation). This provocation opened an extensive text, in which Wöhlcke assumed the role of introducer of Ribeiro's work and trajectory to potential readers, who were mostly unaware of the development of Latin American social sciences, their theoretical traditions and genres, and their academic and political relevance. Darcy Ribeiro (1922-1997) was the most translated Latin American and Brazilian author published by Suhrkamp, one of the most prestigious publishing houses in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Ribeiro's entry into Suhrkamp began with the publication of a central theoretical work: *O Processo Civilizatório* (*Der zivilisatorische Prozess*, 1971), followed by *Ensaaios Insólitos* (*Unterentwicklung, Kultur und Zivilisation. Ungewöhnliche Versuche*, 1979) and *As Américas e a Civilização* (*Die Ursachen der ungleichen Entwicklung der amerikanischen Völker*, 1985). Additionally, Suhrkamp published two of his literary works: *Maíra* (1982) and *Utopia Selvagem* (*Wildes Utopia*, 1986). An example par excellence of the “committed intellectual” (Werz 1986), a “militant anthropologist” (David 2019), an “undisciplined” sociologist

(Bomery 2001), and a pioneer of decolonial/postcolonial studies (Ruvituso 2021a), Ribeiro was incredibly multi-faceted and productive as a politician, essayist, social scientist, and writer,<sup>1</sup> although his circulation outside of Latin America has been little studied to date. The present article analyses the circulation of Darcy Ribeiro's social theory (including in the form of essays) in the FRG, with emphasis on his translation into German within the framework of several collections by the Suhrkamp publishing house.

Current analyses of the international circulation of social theory underscore the historical and presently increasing global asymmetries and inequalities: Alatas (2003) points to the existence of an international division of labour—between recognized “centres” as producers of universal theories and “peripheries” as producers or objects of empirical research—within the framework of a long-term international “academic dependency.” The preponderance of Anglo-Saxon production and the indexed publication system increase the South–North gaps and marginalization, in spite of advances in digitalization and access to information (Gingras and Mosbah-Natanson 2010; Hanafi and Arvanitis 2014; Collyer 2018). However, Latin America developed its own autonomous and alternative circuits of production of social theory with national and less-researched transregional impacts (Connell 2007; Keim 2011; Beigel 2013; Svampa 2016; Ruvituso 2020). How can the translation of social theory be analysed when considering the direction of the flow of knowledge from “peripheries” to the so-called “centres”? The sociology of translation has developed over the last few decades (Heilbron 1999; 2000; Sorá 2003; Bielsa 2011; Sapiro 2018; Sapiro et al. 2020; Sorá 2021) and appeals to a perspective linking analyses of the national disciplinary fields—their singular forms and their strategies of use and appropriation in specific contexts—with transregional logics, which are especially marked by historical asymmetries and hegemonic paths. Following Sapiro, these flows reflect uneven power relations that need to be interpreted in light of different factors favouring (or hindering) the translation of scholarly books: power relations between peripheral, semi-peripheral, and central languages, symbolic capital and other properties of the author, the properties of the book, and the symbolic capital of the publisher(s) and networks (2018: 61). The role of agents (who have their own strategies and positioning) and the material conditions (books, journals, gatherings such as book fairs, conferences, grants, etc.) are the main analytical focus: “The mediators and the conditions provide explanatory factors for understanding, which theories and paradigms circulate and which do not” (Sapiro et al. 2020: 2). The sociology of translation mostly concentrates on different examples of the international circulation of literature and social theory produced in the central languages—English, French, and German—and their spaces. Nevertheless, some authors have recently analysed the processes of the translation of knowledge produced in “semi-peripheral” languages and peripheral spaces—for example, Dutch literature (Heilbron 2020), the Latin American dependency theories in Germany (Ruvituso 2020), and Argentinian authors published in France (Sorá 2021)—opening new dimensions into analyses of asymmetries and exchanges.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> After studying ethnology at the University of São Paulo until 1946, Darcy Ribeiro undertook ten years of field research in semi-isolated indigenous communities (including the *ururú kaapor*, *guaraní kaiowá*, and *kadiwéu*). This experience marked his theoretical work and political commitment: He was co-founder of the *Parque Nacional Xingu*, still the largest indigenous reserve in the world, and founder of the *Museu do Índio*. He was the creator and the first rector of the University of Brasília and served as Minister of Education (1962–1963) and as *Chefe da Casa Civil* (1963–1964) during the presidency of João Goulart, until the coup d'état in 1964. During his long exile (1964–1976) in Uruguay, Venezuela, Chile, and Peru, he was advisor to the governments of Salvador Allende in Chile and Juan Velasco de Alvarado in Peru. He returned to Brazil in 1976 and was only able to resume his university work in 1980. He was elected Deputy and Governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro (1983–1987) and Senator (1991–1997). On the extraordinary political and intellectual biography of Darcy Ribeiro, see: Bomery (2001) and Vasconcellos (2015). Ribeiro's memoirs were collected in the book *Confissões* (Ribeiro 2012). On the construction of his archive in Rio de Janeiro, see: Quillet Heymann 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The reception of decolonial (Boidin 2009), postcolonial thought (Brahimi and Fordant 2007; Brisson 2018), and epistemologies of the South (Afresne 2021) in France have been also a topic of research.

With regard to the analysis of the translation processes of social theory produced outside the traditional scholarly centres, in five sections I will: (1) differentiate the position of Darcy Ribeiro in relation to other Brazilian social scientists translated into German in the FRG during the same period, and compare translations of his work (in terms of publishers and scope) into German, English and French. Using the analysis of various documentary sources: letters, epilogues, book covers, journals reviews, and interviews; (2) I will analyse Ribeiro's entry into Suhrkamp's collection *theorie* through the mediation of the sociologist Heinz-Rudolf Sonntag and his introduction in dialogue with the Marxist tradition and critical theory; and 3) I will reconstruct the mediations of the editor and writer Michi Strausfeld and the translator and sociologist Manfred Wöhlcke in the introduction to Darcy Ribeiro's scientific essays in the collections *edition* and *taschenbuch* between 1978 and 1985, focusing on the indigenous question, utopia, and the emancipatory future of Latin America. Finally, (4) I will reflect on the paradigmatic example of Suhrkamp's translations of Darcy Ribeiro regarding the key role of mediators, the mix of genres, and institutional and political contextual factors, enabling a recognition of social theory from the periphery in a space considered one of the centres of social theory production.

### **BRAZILIAN SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CIRCULATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DARCY RIBEIRO'S POSITION**

The circulation of Darcy Ribeiro's work in the FRG developed in the context of political and cultural changes marked since 1959 by the impact of the Cuban Revolution, the experience of the Chilean *Unidad Popular* (1970-1973), and the Sandinista triumph in 1979. During this period, Latin America had a hitherto unprecedented period of centrality in political and cultural perception in Europe. This favourable context explains the growing recognition of Latin American political imaginaries as well as part of their cultural and scientific production in Europe (Kuhn 2011; Weitbrecht 2012; Kalter 2016). The acclaimed late "boom" of Latin American literature in the mid-seventies in the FRG (Einert 2018) was preceded by the reception of Latin American social scientists, with impact on the heated debates around underdevelopment, Western development aid, and revolution/liberation options within and outside the academic fields (Ruvituso 2020; 2021b). Likewise, in the FRG the construction of area studies and the agenda of "development aid" contributed to the creation of new networks with Latin America and other regions of the so-called Third World (Puhle 2018; Ruvituso 2019). Most of the social scientists translated into German during this period were from Brazil, which was, together with Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela, one of the "peripheral centres" of the production of social theory in Latin America (Beigel 2010; Svampa 2016; Giller 2020). Although different publishing houses were involved in the translation of Latin American social theory and political thought into German since 1968, the publication in Suhrkamp—the centre of the West German intellectual renewal—guaranteed circulation among a very wide audience. Suhrkamp had symbolic capital and scope incomparable to that of other publishers (Fellinger 2003; Niese 2017).

Table 1. Translations of Brazilian social theory into German (1968-1985): Top 10

	Author	n° Trans- lations	Books	Chapters or articles	Publishing house/ <i>Journal</i>
1	Darcy Ribeiro	7	3	4	Suhrkamp, Rotbuch, <i>Die horen, Lateinamerika heute</i>
2	Fernando H. Cardoso	6	1*	5	Fink, Suhrkamp, <i>Peripherie, Prokla</i>
3	Celso Furtado	4	2	2	Suhrkamp, Fink, Verlag für interkultur. Kommunikation
4	Florestan Fernandes	3	2	1	Suhrkamp, Fink, Verlag für interkultur. Kommunikation
5	Ruy Mauro Marini	3	1	2	Wagenbach, Rotbuch, Suhrkamp
6	Theotônio dos Santos	1		1	Suhrkamp
7	Octavio Ianni	1		1	Hoffmann und Campe
8	Francisco Weffort	1		1	Fink
9	Hélio Jaguaribe	1		1	Nomos
10	Miguel Wionczek	1		1	<i>Zeitschrift für Lateinamerika</i>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>	

\* with Enzo Faletto

Source: Own research at the Library of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (Berlin).

The Brazilian social scientist most translated into German during the period 1968–1985 was Darcy Ribeiro, followed by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Celso Furtado, Florestan Fernandes, and Ruy Mauro Marini (see Table 1). Most of these authors identified with the dependency theories. The so-called *dependentistas* emphasized the global nature of development and underdevelopment, placing them in the context of the centre–periphery model and connecting economic and technological dependencies that forced countries to specialize in exporting raw materials with unfavourable exchange terms and into consumption patterns determined by the centre (Vessuri 1996: 188-189). Regarded as a Southern Theory, dependency was one of the most influential responses arising from the colonial experience and its consequences in Latin America, and it articulates the construction of social theory in the peripheries (Connell 2012). Although Ribeiro shared the critical perspective of the dependency theorists regarding the structural asymmetries between centres and peripheries, and he supported the concept of “dependent capitalism,” his view and scope was distinct: “There is a matrix of origin that differentiates him from the other national authors,” explains Guillermo David (2019), “and it is the indigenous question—and, above all, the indigenous experience—which was absent in the previous proposals, from which a perspective was opened up to question the general movement of society involved in the development process (*desarrollismo*) of his time” (2019: 30, own translation).

Table 2. Translations of Darcy Riberio's books into English, French and German

Title and original edition	English	French	German	Genre
<b>O processo civilizatório (1968) Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira</b>	The civilizational process (1968) Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press	-	Der zivilisatorische Prozess (1971) Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp	social theory
<b>Las Américas y la civilización (1969) Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina</b>	The Americas and civilization (1971) London: Allen & Unwin	-	Amerika und die Zivilisation (1985) Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp	social theory
<b>Propuestas acerca del subdesarrollo (1969) Montevideo: Arca</b>		L'enfantement des peuples, (1970) Paris: Les Éditions du Cerfs		social theory
<b>Fronteras indígenas de la civilización (1971) México: Siglo XXI</b>		Frontières indigènes de la civilisation (1979) Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions		social theory
<b>Maíra: Romance (1976) Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira</b>	Maíra (1984) New York: Vintage Books	Maira: roman (1980) Paris: Gallimard	Maíra: Roman (1980) München: Steinhausen  Maíra: Roman (1982) Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp	novel
<b>Ensaio Insólitos (1979) Porto Alegre: L&amp;PM Ed.</b>	-	-	Unterentwicklung, Kultur und Zivilisation. Ungewöhnliche Versuche (1979) Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp	essay/social theory
<b>O Mulo: Romance (1981) Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Nova Fronteira</b>	-	-	Mulo (1990) Zürich: Ammann	novel
<b>Utopia selvagem: (1982) Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Nova Fronteira</b>	-	Utopie sauvage (1990) Paris: Gallimard	Wildes Utopia: (1986) Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp	fable
<b>O Povo Brasileiro (1995) São Paulo: Companhia das Letras</b>	The Brazilian People (2000) Florida: University Press of Florida	-	-	social theory
<b>Migo: Romance (1988) Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Guanabara</b>		-	Migo: Roman (1994) Zürich: Ammann	novel

Source: Own research at the Library of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (Berlin) and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris).

The indigenous question, that of their survival and of how to live together in the difference, ran through all of Ribeiro's theoretical, essayistic, and literary work, as well as his political action and commitment (David 2019). Ribeiro argued that the entire history of humanity needed to be re-read in a new way to include the role of the peripheries and of marginalised people, especially Indigenous people, in the so-called "civilisation process." His voice provided a more distinctive critique than that of the dependency authors, evidencing not only economic, social, and political North-South asymmetries, but also the Eurocentrism of the existing theoretical and emancipatory imaginaries, including Marxism, as well as the hidden colonial violence of the so-called Western rationality and humanism (Mignolo 1995). The translations of part of his theoretical works into German exceeded those into English and French in terms of quantity and symbolic capital (see Table 2). In France, only two literary works reached a leading publisher such as Gallimard. Spaces for translations into English were more eclectic and were provided by different academic or commercial publishers in the USA or England, without reaching a space comparable, in terms of symbolic capital, to Suhrkamp in the FRG or Gallimard in France.

### HEINZ-RUDOLF SONNTAG'S MEDIATION: THE CRITICAL THEORY OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The sociologist Heinz-Rudolf Sonntag (1940–2015) was one of the central agents in mediating the entry of Latin American social theory into the Suhrkamp publishing house. Sonntag became involved in Latin American issues at the so-called "Social Research Centre" (*Sozialforschungsstelle*) at the University of Münster, where the sociologist Hans-Albert Steger directed the section on the "Sociology of Developing Countries" and one of the first Latin American studies programmes in the Federal Republic, the so-called "Contact programme for social science research in Latin America" (*Kontaktprogramm zur sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung in Lateinamerika*). It was in this context that Sonntag met the Venezuelan sociologist Elena Hochman (1940), who began working as a scientific assistant to the programme in 1963. As a couple, Sonntag and Hochman decided to immigrate/return to Venezuela at the end of 1968. Already before their journey, the young Marxist Sonntag had established contacts with Günther Busch, editor of the Suhrkamp collection *edition*,<sup>3</sup> as well as with the editors of the left-wing journal *Kursbuch*, Karl Markus Michel and Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Sonntag's recommendations for texts by Latin American authors that should be translated intensified with his arrival in Caracas and made possible the translation or introduction of several authors' work into German. As a West German Marxist scholar situated in Latin America during a period of increasing internationalism and Third-Worldism promoted by the New Left (Weitbrecht 2012), Sonntag experienced a privileged position as a mediator for the publishing house Suhrkamp, especially between 1968 and 1971.<sup>4</sup> In 1969 Sonntag first met Darcy Ribeiro, who had just arrived in Caracas during one of his passages through his long Latin American exile, which began with the Brazilian coup d'état in 1964 (Darwich Osorio 2015). Sonntag successfully mediated the entry of Ribeiro, who was still unknown in the FRG, into Suhrkamp. In October 1969, Sonntag sent Michel

<sup>3</sup> Between 1963 and 1980, Günther Busch edited the first 1000 books of the collection *edition*, one of the most influential collections of a mix of literature, essays, and theory by the publishing house Suhrkamp that is considered the centre of the renewal of critical theory in the FRG (Fellinger 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Sonntag mediated the translation of the following books in the collection *edition*: *Die wirtschaftliche Struktur Lateinamerikas: Drei Studien zur politischen Ökonomie der Unterentwicklung* (The economic structure of Latin America: Three studies on the political economy of underdevelopment) by the Venezuelan economists Armando Córdova and Héctor Silva Michelena in 1969, Armando Córdova's *Strukturelle Heterogenität und wirtschaftliches Wachstum* (Structural Heterogeneity and Economic Growth) in 1973, and *Venezuela. Die Gewalt als Voraussetzung der Freiheit* (orig. Venezuela violenta/Violent Venezuela) by Orlando Araujo in 1971 (see: Ruvituso 2021b).

the English edition of the recently published *The civilizational process* with stimulating arguments for its publication:

With the same mail I send you the English edition of Darcy Ribeiro's book. It should be noted that the Portuguese edition is much more detailed, as it contains an excellent summary criticism of the developmental theories of the academic social sciences, as well as those of "classical Marxism" whether by Lenin, Stalin, Kuusin, Konstatin or others. Perhaps, if you are thinking of publishing the book, you could take this part of the Portuguese edition (...) I hope that the book will first arouse your interest, then a certain enthusiasm and finally the desire not to hide it any longer from the readers governed by the SPD–FDP of the Federal Republic. I would like to hear from you soon.<sup>5</sup>

After several insistent letters, Michel—the editor of the Suhrkamp collection *theorie*—decided to commission Sonntag himself to translate Ribeiro's work and proposed to publish a preliminary study for German readers. While the other Latin American authors translated by Suhrkamp had been included in the collection *edition*, Ribeiro entered a very exclusive collection: he was the only Latin American author to be part of the collection *theorie*, together with approximately 200 other titles by European or US-American authors (mostly male), selected between 1966 and 1986 by Hans Blumenberg, Jürgen Habermas, Dieter Henrich, Jacob Taubes, and Niklas Luhmann. The translation, made by Sonntag as a mix from the Portuguese and English versions and in exchange with Ribeiro, also included an epilogue followed by Sonntag's interview with Ribeiro. With the translation of *The civilizational process* into German, Ribeiro was introduced in the FRG with a theoretical work that proposed nothing less than a new historical interpretation of the entire civilizational process, including the perspective of Latin America as part of the Third World in a pioneering way.

Like the dependency theorists, the starting point of the work was the question of the "causes of the unequal development of the American peoples." According to Ribeiro, it was necessary to develop a new general theory of evolution that included "the multi-linear paths" of socio-cultural developments. Ribeiro initially elaborated a classical structuralist model: the history of human society over the last ten thousand years can be explained as a consequence of "technological revolutions" and "civilisation processes." For Ribeiro, however, there are no linear stages in this process: socio-cultural evolution includes the possibility of progress and regression and, above all, of mixed social formations and phases. In fact, according to Ribeiro, all societies present more or less deep irregularities or gaps. The originality and provocation of the scheme consisted of the fact that the focus of the civilisation process was no longer Europe and its phases and expansions, but rather multi-linear paths from different periods that included Africa, Latin America, and Asia on the same level. Ribeiro provoked his Marxist contemporaries with his theses on feudalism/capitalism: feudalism, according to Ribeiro, is not a socio-cultural formation or a phase of human evolution, but rather a regression. Inventions like the steam engine and the locomotive are not Western, white, or Christian achievements, but rather human achievements. He also pointed out that technological advances could have negative consequences for humanity: from the loss of autonomy to the destruction and disappearance of the diversity of cultures, which is manifested first and foremost in the "*índios*" (Indigenous people). Ribeiro not only exploded contemporary approaches to modernisation (liberal and Marxist), but also the Western conception of the actors of development/civilisation and their history. He also proposed new terms for a dialectical explanation of underdevelopment: Socio-cultural development

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<sup>5</sup> Letter by Heinz-Rudolf Sonntag to Karl Markus Michel (Caracas, 13.10.1969), in: Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, own translation.



is a dialectical movement of progress and regressions, historical integrations, and evolutionary accelerations.

In the epilogue of Sonntag (1971), Ribeiro was presented in dialog with the dilemmas of Marxist thought, the critical theory, and the dependency theories. Sonntag explained Ribeiro's position as "a critical theory from the perspective of the underdeveloped world," and this brought about substantial changes in views on emancipation and development. The Eurocentric interpretation of the "class struggle" had to be revised, because the population of vast regions of the Third World could not be interpreted within these categories, neither in their historical configuration nor in their future projection. At the same time, Ribeiro's position differed from the current development theories at the time that postulated "the development of underdevelopment" in their inability to include broader historical processes, such as the pre-colonial period. Finally, after explaining in detail Ribeiro's theory of evolution and civilisation and the criticism he had received, Sonntag compared Ribeiro's "structuralism" with that of his famous French colleague Claude Lévi-Strauss, especially from a political and geopolitical point of view. The central difference between the two scholars is that Ribeiro, beyond explaining, wanted to draw practical consequences:

Rather, it is a structuralism with an inverted sign: The structure is built precisely to expose the practical consequences it implies. Darcy Ribeiro insists that his scheme of development, that his theoretical work, is not a play on words devised by an intellectual for intellectuals. This statement is justified. His theory formulates a 'possible consciousness' (Lukács-L. Goldmann) and thus becomes a 'driving element' in the historical process. As far as the social sciences are concerned, they overcome a dilemma; the critical theory of underdevelopment assigns to them new fields of work and a class analysis appropriate to the complexity of the situation in underdevelopment [...]. Only those who still believe that the navel of historical events lies somewhere between Vienna, Berlin, Bonn, Moscow, Washington, and Rome will resent the fact that this is a theory of the Third World and for the Third World, which gives the First World a marginal role in the realisation of the 'future society' (Sonntag 1971: 254–255, own translation).

Despite Sonntag's claim that Ribeiro represents a "Third World theory for the Third World," some reviews of the book demonstrate the effects that Ribeiro had on European reading. The sociologist Wolf Lepenies wrote in the prestigious daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: "Ribeiro's book should make Europeans even more reflective, because it was written by someone who was involved in the events described, and it shows us that 'underdeveloped' peoples are now able to see their own situation and thus lay the foundations for improvement" (Lepenies 1971). In his late commentary, the journalist Rupert Neudeck (known during the 1990s for his actions to save Vietnamese refugees) compared Ribeiro to Frantz Fanon: "The first man who frightened Europeans and gave us a new awareness of the Third World. In *The civilizational process* Ribeiro had developed a new imaginary of history with centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America, trying to reawaken 'the often pharisaic conscience of Europeans'" (Neudeck 1982).



## DARCY RIBEIRO IN THE MEDIATION OF MICHI STRAUSFELD AND MANFRED WÖHLCKE: THE INDIGENOUS QUESTION WITHIN ESSAY

In 1976, the Frankfurt Book Fair was held with Latin America as a special guest. In that context, Suhrkamp prepared the launch of 17 Latin American authors (all men) in German, initiating the (late) translation of Latin American literature in the FRG (Einert 2018). The following year, Michi Strausfeld—the central mediator of the so-called “boom” and continuing German reception of Latin American authors for several decades<sup>6</sup>—travelled to São Paulo to participate in a seminar on Brazilian literature. It was in that context that she heard about the “surprising and original” first novel by the still “legendary” Darcy Ribeiro (Strausfeld 2019: 316). The novelty was the novel *Maíra*, published in 1976 in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>7</sup> Together with the Italian editor Inge Feltrinelli, Michi Strausfeld travelled to Rio de Janeiro to meet Darcy Ribeiro, who had cancer and had been able to return to Brazil to begin treatment. In his book of memoirs, Strausfeld describes this unique encounter with Ribeiro at his home in Copacabana, which was decisive for the subsequent translation into German of, among other works, Ribeiro’s second book: *Ensaíes Insólitos*, published in the collection *edition* by Suhrkamp in 1979.

We quickly agreed by letter to publish a selection of his essays, which came out in German in 1979 under the title *Untereentwicklung, Kultur und Zivilisation. Ungewöhnliche Versuche*. The novel *Maíra* was published and inspired both readers and critics—it was a description of the indigenous peoples, which, without exoticism or tropical clichés, described their lives in their harshness and beauty and at the same time explained the dangerous influence of the whites. The author also exposes en passant the mostly misunderstood conflict between ‘nature’ and ‘civilisation’ (2019: 317, own translation).

The translator chosen at Ribeiro’s own recommendation was the sociologist Manfred Wöhlcke,<sup>8</sup> one of the few German experts on Brazil in the FRG. Wöhlcke, who had already translated a book by the Brazilian economist Celso Furtado, not only agreed to translate the text, but also proposed to write the introduction for German readers, which was finally published as an epilogue, similar to Sonntag’s for the first book. However, in contrast to the academic style of *The civilizational process*, this second book opened up a more provocative dimension for its reception in the German academic field: Ribeiro’s essays did not comply with the norms governing the borders of disciplines or genres, mixing anthropology with literature, scholarly quotes, political positions, and diagnoses of the present and the future from a national, continental, and global point of view. The book was presented as a

<sup>6</sup> Michi Strausfeld (born in 1945 in Recklinghausen) was responsible for Latin American, Spanish, and Portuguese literature at the Suhrkamp publishing house from 1974 to 2008 (more than 350 publications). She holds a degree in English, Romance, and Hispanic Studies from the University of Cologne (MA 1969) and a PhD from the University of Bonn (1975) on the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez. During the 1980s, she organized the literature section of the West-Berlin Festival Horizonte ‘82 and the German Book Week in Madrid in 1985, organized by the Frankfurt Book Fair. For her long trajectory as mediator of Latin American writers in the FRG see: Einert, 2018, and her own memories: Strausfeld 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Darcy Ribeiro’s first novel *Maíra* reflected the tragedy of the indigenous village “Marium” and was based, according to him, on the memories of his experiences living with semi-isolated communities in the Amazonia.

<sup>8</sup> Manfred Wöhlcke (born in 1942 in Berlin) spent part of his childhood in the care of an adoptive family in Brazil. He studied sociology, political science, and Romance studies at the Christian Albrechts University in Kiel from 1964 to 1966 and received his doctorate with a dissertation on religious change and interethnic marginality at the Friedrich Alexander University in Erlangen in 1969. In 1967, during the preparation for his PhD thesis, Wöhlcke spent a research stay at the University of São Paulo under the supervision of the cultural anthropologist and sociologist Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiróz. In 1979, he completed his *Habilitation* at the Free University of Berlin with a study on the theory of dependent development. At the end of the 1980s, Wöhlcke left the social sciences to pursue his artistic vocation under the name Manfred von Glehn (interview conducted by the author with Manfred von Glehn, 09.09.2020). See also: <https://www.manfred-von-glehn.de/Vita-Werk>

set of short texts or “unusual attempts”<sup>9</sup> that had been written by Ribeiro between 1965 and 1979 in different circumstances (from Brazil, in exile, or in some passage throughout Europe), reflecting his social, political, anthropological, and philosophical thought in the form of an academic lecture, journalistic report, letter, or political speech. The central issues in these texts were the indigenous question, emancipation, and the future of the left.<sup>10</sup>

In the first part entitled “Obviousness,” Darcy addressed, in an ethical-philosophical tone, issues related to science and “racist” common sense in history, the indigenous question, Western humanism, and the utopias of the future. In the following excursus, “Gentlemen’s” (*Gentidades*), Ribeiro presented imaginary dialogues and memories with four central figures to his own intellectual and political trajectory: the sociologist Gilberto Freyre and the pedagogue Anísio Teixeira, as well as João “Jango” Goulart and Salvador Allende, the two defeated presidents with whom Ribeiro had worked very closely. In the third part, “Indianities,” Ribeiro returned to the anthropological tone to address the past, present, and future of the indigenous question, strategies for living together within the nation, the role of anthropology, and the danger of growing cultural uniformity. Finally, the last three essays under the title “Diversities” dealt in a political-historical tone with the unity and difference of the Latin American continent.

Like Sonntag, Wöhlcke (1979) took on the role of mediator of Ribeiro’s work for German readers. Reflecting on the fact that Ribeiro was still unknown in the FRG, Wöhlcke pointed out that this was the product of a historical situation in which there has been a tendency to expand the political and economic classification between industrialized and developing countries into the fields of culture and science. Wöhlcke then lamented that the “scientific essay” is increasingly sidelined in the German social sciences. In contrast, he explained, this genre is quite common in Latin America, where intellectuals like Ribeiro—a “fighting anthropologist”—consider social and political transformation as part of scientific commitment. From Ribeiro’s case, Wöhlcke positions himself in the discussion on the validity of the essay in the social sciences, criticizing the current tendencies of German social scientists to “fear the essay form,” related to the erroneous assumption that the results might lose scientific meaning and objectivity, and that the door will be opened to an infiltration of “ideologies.” Meanwhile there is a tendency to believe that computer-generated results are not ideological, but it could be their best “packaging.”<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, Wöhlcke explained that Ribeiro’s studies were explicitly associated with values of socio-economic, political, and cultural emancipation and with the idea of “luck” (*Glück*) as a critique of “progress” and “rationality”:

As axioms, emancipation and luck produce a different science than (the supposed) freedom from values, which usually conceals the axioms of rationality and progress, although one could debate at length what rationality and progress mean exactly. Reading Darcy Ribeiro for the first time, one is reminded at the same time of Herbert Marcuse as of E.F. Schumacher (1979: 370, own translation).

<sup>9</sup> The original title *Ensaio Insólitos* was changed and published as “Underdevelopment, Culture and Civilization. Unusual attempts” (*Unterentwicklung, Kultur und Zivilisation. Ungewöhnliche Versuche*).

<sup>10</sup> There are some differences between the Portuguese version published in 1979 in Rio Grande do Sul and the German edition: The first two sections with the subtitles “Obviedades” and “Gentidades” were translated in full, only two of four essays—the last two sections—of “Indianidades” were translated, and from “Diversidades” three of five essays were translated.

<sup>11</sup> Wöhlcke based his arguments on the text “Objectivity in Social Research” by the Swedish sociologist and economist Gunnar Myrdal, which was translated into German and published as a book by *edition Suhrkamp* in 1971.

Wöhlcke also tried to explain Ribeiro's political position for West German readers: He could be seen as a "red-green" (*rotgrün*), wrote Wöhlcke, although this differed from the German categories, because "at the centre is the idea of anti-imperialism and democratic socialism as a precondition for overcoming underdevelopment, ethnic emancipation, and guaranteeing a sustainable ecological and human world" (1979: 371, own translation). After this introduction, Wöhlcke organized the arguments dispersed in Ribeiro's essays into three fundamental aspects that structured his theoretical and political work: The civilizational process from the point of view of Brazilian and Latin American development, popular education, and ethnic emancipation, explaining all three aspects in detail. At the end of the text, Wöhlcke summarized his experience as a translator of Ribeiro with the following words:

Darcy Ribeiro really doesn't make it easy for a translator; he writes very lively, syntactically complicated, sometimes very humorous, sometimes ironic, often proverbial, suddenly very scientific and brittle, and then again quite undemanding; he draws a lot from the Brazilian language, which is often difficult to express in German; sometimes the translator feels he has to teach an ox to fly; I didn't make him fly, but at least I tried to show him some birds (1979: 396, own translation).

Following this conclusion, Wöhlcke added several pages of notes with explanations of words, places, people, and events mentioned in the text, completing an arduous task of translation.

The next translations of Darcy Ribeiro's essays into German were made in the framework of the Festival Horizonte '82 held in May-June 1982 in West Berlin, one of the most important European events focused on Latin American cultural production.<sup>12</sup> Michi Strausfeld, who had revisited Ribeiro in Rio de Janeiro in preparation for the festival, invited him to write the opening text for the *Magazin*, a large publication on the festival's programme and scope:

For the *Magazin* of the Festival Horizonte '82 he wrote the opening text 'Latin American Nation' which begins with the phrase: 'Latin America has always existed under the sign of the utopia. I am even convinced that this is her place.' After that Ribeiro gave a concise and clear vision of the development of the continent over almost five centuries [...] He culminated with his personal utopia: that US imperialism can finally come to an end: 'I know that we will flourish as soon as we free ourselves from this imperialist oppression, and that they will be there too, because they will be free from the anti-historical role they embody today' (2019: 318, own translation).

Michi Strausfeld's central position in organizing the literary events of Horizonte '82 was accompanied by her key role in the publication of three compilations by Suhrkamp dedicated to different genres of the Latin American intellectual production prepared specially for the event. The translation of the essay "Cultural Creativity" by Ribeiro was included in the compilation of historical texts and documents edited by Ángel Rama under the title *Latin America's long fight (Der lange Kampf*

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<sup>12</sup> Horizonte '82 was a festival of unprecedented characteristics in Europe with a focus on Latin America, held in West Berlin from 29 May to 20 June 1982. In this context, symposia, debates, readings, concerts, art exhibitions, film, theatre, and dance cycles were held in different parts of the city, with the participation of numerous Latin American writers, musicians, actors, filmmakers, painters, and social scientists. This was the second edition, within the framework of the *Berliner Festspiele*, of the "Horizonte" format under the direction of Gereon Sievernich, who had been appointed director of Horizonte '79, a festival focusing on the African continent.

*Lateinamerikas*) in the Suhrkamp collection *taschenbuch*. Additionally, Suhrkamp republished the novel *Maira* (published in 1980 in German by the publishing house Steinhausen in Munich).

Among the guests of the festival were Darcy Ribeiro and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the most translated Brazilian social scientists at that time, representing different academic and political positions. While Cardoso remained true to his diplomatic and dialogic style and his pessimistic–realistic views on Latin America’s present and future, Ribeiro took on his sweeping critical, radical, and confrontational style, accompanied by a vindication of utopia and the promise of an emancipatory future for Latin America. Invited to a roundtable called “North–South dialogue,” in which Günter Grass, among others, participated, Ribeiro said:

... that the West Germans had prepared Horizonte ‘82 as a showcase to show their people, as a further entertainment, picturesque curiosities of a huge and miserable region of the world, a region that will remain strange to the overfed Germans, unable in their present consumerist prosperity to elaborate utopias of universal meaning and scope, as they did in the past (in: Tibol 1982, own translation).

Interviewed by the Spanish channel Rtv, Darcy Ribeiro argued: “The impression I have, what I feel, is that they bring me here like someone who buys a leopard skin to decorate their house.” He also called the idea of a “North–South dialogue” a “joke,” since Europe is more like “a museum where we come from time to time to look at antiques,” where Latin America is “misunderstood.”<sup>13</sup> Ribeiro’s constant provocations in the framework of the West Berlin festival were framed in his critiques of the South–North dependencies, the Eurocentrism of Marxism and critical theory, and the forgotten indigenous question, themes that had accompanied his theoretical reflections and political action for several decades and that had found a singular space of reception in the FRG through the translations by Suhrkamp. While some Latin American intellectuals, led by Mario Vargas Llosa and Octavio Paz, criticised the figure of the worn-out “committed intellectual” and art as the bearer of ideologies—characteristic of the sixties and seventies—Darcy Ribeiro claimed utopia as the engine of the future for Latin America. After the festival, Ribeiro continued his presence within Suhrkamp, both as a social scientist and a writer. In 1985, the editors of Suhrkamp hired Manfred Wöhlcke to translate the theoretical book *As Américas e a civilização*, originally published in 1969 in Buenos Aires and edited in Portuguese in 1977 (Rio de Janeiro, Editora Vozes). Entitled *Amerika und die Zivilisation. Die Ursachen der ungleichen Entwicklung der amerikanischen Völker*, this publication was the longest text by Ribeiro translated into German by Suhrkamp, in total 685 pages. The book was introduced as the second part of *The civilizational process* and contained a detailed history and typological conceptualisation of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, as well as a conceptualisation of their future within the framework of current socio-cultural and technical uniformity. Already installed in the Suhrkamp canon, and in a format that returned to the academic and scientific style of his first translated work, this volume needed no mediation and no epilogue or introduction to German readers. The leitmotif of Ribeiro’s final book translated by Suhrkamp was utopia. The book *Utopia Selvagem*, presented as a fable, was published in Rio de Janeiro in 1982 and appeared in the Suhrkamp collection *edition* in 1986. This final translation, in the German publishing house’s most influential book collection, closed Ribeiro’s extraordinary trajectory at Suhrkamp.

<sup>13</sup> Darcy Ribeiro in a report on Horizonte ‘82 for the Spanish broadcaster Rtv, 1982. Available at: <https://www.rtve.es/play/videos/el-arte-de-vivir/arte-vivir-cita-berlin/3311366/> (accessed 05, January 2021)

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I addressed the translation process of the Brazilian author Darcy Ribeiro at the prestigious German publishing house Suhrkamp. From the perspective provided by the sociology of translation, I analysed different stages of the role of mediators in specific contexts, explaining Ribeiro's entry and continuity in the Suhrkamp publishing house in a period that spanned from 1971 to 1986. The extraordinary translation of Ribeiro at the Suhrkamp publishing house could be seen as a break in the strong, unequal international circulation of social theory between "centres" and "peripheries." I distinguish four main interconnected factors explaining this unusual direction and the intensity of Ribeiro's circulation in the German language:

1. *A favourable institutional and political context:* The recognition of Darcy Ribeiro in the form of his translations by Suhrkamp took place during a period in which Latin America enjoyed increased international political centrality. During the period 1968-1989 and in the context of the Cold War, the institutional development of Latin American studies and area studies, the construction of development aid policies, and the centrality of the development agenda along with the relevance of the Third World liberation movements for the European New Left increased interest in Latin American cultural production, social sciences, and political ideas. This was the context of the reception of Latin American dependency theories, the theology of liberation, and some Latin American literature, songs, and cinema, to name only a few examples. In addition, I underlined the relevance of some key cultural events focused on Latin America in the FRG, such as the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1976 and the Festival Horizonte '82 in West Berlin in 1982, as crucial institutional factors influencing the decisions of editors and publishing houses.

2. *Originality and global scope:* In his work, Ribeiro announced nothing less than a new perspective on the "civilizational process," questioning the Eurocentric western imaginaries of history, progress, rationality, humanism, and emancipation a pioneering way and putting indigenous people at the centre of global ethical concerns. He distinguished himself from his contemporaries, the so-called *dependentistas*, not only through the diversity of his work in terms of genres and disciplines, but also in his conceptual proposals. Although he supported the concepts of dependent capitalism, centre periphery, and marginality, Ribeiro put the question of Eurocentrism, the ethical function of the social sciences, and indigenous people at the centre of the debate. With this, he spearheaded a significant turn in the social sciences, which later circulated globally as decolonial and postcolonial criticism. Although the originality and pioneering character of his conceptual and epistemological contributions undoubtedly contributed to the interest in his work in a favourable context for the circulation of Latin American authors, these factors alone do not explain his translation into German by the publishing house Suhrkamp.

3. *The active role of mediators:* I analysed Ribeiro's entry into Suhrkamp's exclusive collection *theorie* in 1971 through the direct intervention of the sociologist Heinz-Rudolf Sonntag, who sent from Caracas the recommendation letter to the editor in Frankfurt am Main together with the recently published English version of the book *The civilization process* in the USA. With Ribeiro, Sonntag, who had already been successful as a mediator for other Latin American authors in the collection *edition*, managed to get a Latin American author into the exclusive collection *theorie*, which was composed mostly of (male) theorists from the centres. Sonntag introduced these texts in dialogue with Marxism and critical theory. The Latin American literary editor Michi Strausfeld, who met Ribeiro during her trip in Brazil in 1977, was the key agent for the continuation of Ribeiro's Suhrkamp translations. Ribeiro's social theory in the form of essays was reintroduced by his second

translator, the Brazilian sociologist Manfred Wöhlcke. In an extensive epilogue to the German translation of *Ensaíos Insólitos*, Wöhlcke contextualised Ribeiro's eclectic and original position between social science and political commitment in Latin America, explaining the central place of the essay in Latin American intellectual and academic fields. Thus, the German editors and translators of Darcy Ribeiro acted not only through direct intervention with recommendations to publish, but also by their introduction of Ribeiro's thinking in prefaces that tried to position him in central debates within the intellectual field in the FRG: Marxism, critical theory, underdevelopment, emancipation, and the future of the left.

4. *The diversity of genres and the translation into other "central" languages:* The fact that Sonntag introduced Ribeiro with the book *The civilizational process*, a theoretical text with a global/universal scope and as part of the Marxist and critical theory debates (that were central to the West German intellectual field), together with the fact that the text had already been translated into English, could explain the early recognition of an author who had been unknown to the Suhrkamp editors until that moment. Following Heilbron: "It also holds that once translation into a central language does occur, the chances of being translated into other languages increases" (2020: 140). Three years later and within the framework of the late "boom" of Latin American literature in the FRG, the second discovery of Ribeiro took place through the novel *Maíra* by the literary editor Michi Strausfeld, who mediated the continued translation of both Ribeiro's social theories in form of essays and his literary works, focused on the indigenous question. I argued that expanding the breadth of style and genre of Ribeiro's translated work, far from impeding interest in his work, increased its circulation. Thus, from universal theories to eclectic essays, novels, and fables, Ribeiro's unusual mix of genres and disciplines aroused the enthusiasm of intellectuals of different fields and in different contexts in the FRG. This explains how Ribeiro became part of different collections in Suhrkamp, being published in *theorie* and *edition*, as well as in the *taschenbuch* collection.

Despite the number and scope of the translations, the centrality of Suhrkamp in the FRG, and the long epilogues that accompanied his books, as well as the relevance and pioneering character of his conceptual and epistemological contributions, the Brazilian Darcy Ribeiro did not manage to establish himself as part of the current canon in the social sciences outside Latin America. The translation of part of his work into German between 1971 and 1986 (and also into French and English), as I have explored in this article, provides a sound material basis for revisiting Ribeiro as a pioneer global thinker denouncing the Eurocentrism of the social sciences and historical narratives, trying to put the indigenous question at the centre of a global ethical debate while at the same time investigating strategies for living together in difference.



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