

BOOK REVIEW

Cordeiro, Neri: Sociology in Brazil

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Cordeiro, Veridiana Domingos and Hugo Neri (2019) *Sociology in Brazil: A Brief Institutional and Intellectual History*, Sociology Transformed, Cham: Palgrave Pivot.

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How does one write the history of the sociology of a peripheral country? Moreover, how might one achieve this in a country as vast and complex as Brazil? This is a very difficult challenge to perform. Cordeiro and Neri's book, *Sociology in Brazil*, published by Palgrave-Pivot in the *Sociology Transformed Series*, has managed this task well. The book aims to produce an integrative reconstruction of sociology in Brazil over a period of almost 130 years. The volume deserves to be read since it gives a sound analytical description of the intellectual and institutional development of the discipline of the country. In addition, this historical account offers a re-interpretation of traditional narratives from a perspective combining both cognitive and institutional factors. It also aims to achieve a comprehensive narration of disputes between local sociological traditions, institutions from different cities and regions, and local key intellectual figures.

The book clearly identifies one of the main features of Brazilian sociology - its uncommon institutional structure - an essential piece of knowledge if we are to undertake a comparative perspective. The country has no undergraduate university degrees in sociology, but there are social science programs that combine anthropology, the political sciences and sociology. Academic specialization occurs at the graduate level (master and doctorate). This paradoxical situation has forced sociology over recent decades to establish a productive dialogue with similar disciplines. At the same time, it has encouraged sociology to re-think and strengthen its disciplinary borders, as well as seek to capture an international audience. This institutional distinction has hastened the development of the discipline. Over a period of almost ninety years, sociology in Brazil has developed from a couple of sociology chairs to 56 graduate programs distributed across 24 of the 27 states. Cordeiro and Neri's map also shows 1,870 sociologists teaching in local universities and nearly 30 top-ranked sociology journals. The authors also examine the tensions and problems of the institutionalization of the field and the complexity of the discipline's increasing professionalization.

The book is organized into eight chapters. The first is an introductory section (pp. 1–5), in which the authors reflect upon the difficulty of writing a brief history of the discipline in a certain region. They

chose to focus on the national contents of the discipline rather than a mere description of its development. Thus, the book emphasizes this idea, defining sociology in Brazil as “an entirely autonomous and independent body of work on both theoretical and empirical matters” (p. 2), which Cordeiro and Neri strongly defend as “Brazilian Sociology.” Hence, the authors clearly set an analytical perspective that privileges the connection between sociology and national matters, so the development of international sociology and their links and influences remain secondary in the narration.

The introduction also underlines the significant role of the first period of local sociology – from the late 19th century to the 1920s – as a means to understand the entire history of the discipline in the country. This is unusual in the history of sociology in Latin America, since historians tend to favor the postwar period. Cordeiro and Neri also briefly compare the situation of Brazilian sociology with that of other Portuguese-speaking countries. At the end of this section, a table shows a historical map in which the authors illustrate the evolution of sociology from 1880 to the present, including relevant national issues, intellectuals, influences, institutional and research topics. This map operates as an analytical and comprehensive summary that helps readers to follow the whole work. It also visibly illustrates one of the key points of this history: the correlation between social changes and historical dynamics and the evolution of sociological ideas.

The second chapter focuses on the period prior to the 1930s (pp. 7–20). It aims to show that interpretation of the Brazilian social reality is much older than the institutionalization of sociology itself. Since the end of the 19th century, there have been many books published on social topics, such as the formation of the nation-state, identity, and racial issues. This intellectual production involved a kind of “social imagination,” offering critical thought about Brazilian social reality, albeit under the influence of both culturalism and positivism. The first culturalist approach influenced further works and established a tradition of Essayism, which creatively combined literature, history, and sociology; whereas positivism decreased in importance over the decades. The book thus underlines the idea that Essayism played a key role not only in Brazilian sociology, but also in the general interpretation of Brazil’s national history. Essayism was thus a definitive reference for scientific sociology because it raised questions for further exploration. But it also provoked reactions against its writing style and lack of scientific rigor. This is a key concern in the history of sociology in Brazil.

The third chapter centers on the 1930–1940 period, during which the first academic institutions were created (pp. 21–30). This period marks the official foundation of the history of sociology in Brazil, when the main institutionalization factors emerged. After the 1930 revolution, São Paulo elites found in the social sciences a way of training young leaders and bureaucrats to face the challenges of modernization. Thus, two key university organizations were established in the city: (1) the Free School of Sociology and Political Sciences of São Paulo, and (2) the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Languages at the University of São Paulo. In this section, the authors follow the institutional development of both, showing the nature of teaching and research. The first received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, hiring sociologists from the US (among whom Donald Pierson was probably the most influential), and following the legacy of the Chicago School, there followed a teaching of sociology and also research on social change and mobility. Despite rapid take-off and growth, its momentum waned in the mid-1940s when funding was cut. Pierson’s departure could also have influenced this loss of institutional dynamism.

The second organization, which was created in 1934, was given significant funds and the political support of the São Paulo State. In contrast to the first, this university found sociological inspiration

from France, with both Claude Lévi- Strauss and Roger Bastide arriving in the city and taking research posts. The former had only a brief stay but the latter remained for a long time and became quite influential. Bastide and the local scholar, Fernando de Azevedo, formed a leading duo, providing both political and sociological guidelines for teaching and research. Given those names among professorship the inheritance of structural functionalism was strong. Race and immigration were the main research topics, but these shifted in the following period.

Chapter four (pp. 31–51) moves the focus to the rising careers of the first generation of local sociologists. This period, lasting from the 1950s to 1960s, is identified as a golden era as a consequence of the high number of sociology publications, the impetus of the research, and the establishment of state agencies oriented to promoting university activities. Key figures were Florestán Fernandez along with his young students, Fernando Cardoso and Octavio Ianni, among others. These individuals were promoted to top academic positions in the 1950s and subsequently started their own research agendas at the University of São Paulo. The racial question gained more traction, receiving generous funding from UNESCO, but topics such as national identity and economic development were also added. Cardoso established sociology as a genuine scientific discipline. In doing this, he opposed the previous tradition of Essayism, including folk studies. This section of the book includes a detailed analysis of the teaching in São Paulo, including the revision of the so-called “Marx Seminary.”

The fourth chapter additionally reviews two cases outside São Paulo. The first of these is the intellectual project of the Superior Institute for Brazilian Studies, located in Rio de Janeiro. Its Sociology Department was directed by Alberto Guerreiro Ramos. This institution aimed to produce a sociological understanding of national development. Consequently, it promoted the political use of sociological knowledge. This was markedly a less autonomous intellectual institution than that of São Paulo. The rivalry between Ramos and Fernandes was notorious, given their different focus and strategies. Although they shared the diagnosis of the need for sociological teaching as an independent discipline, the first defended sociology as an ideological discourse, linked with a phenomenological position, whereas the second confined sociology within a territory of positivism and science. The second case is about María Isaura Pereira, who played an outstanding pioneering role in developing rural sociology studies. Having graduated in São Paulo and earning her doctorate in Paris in 1959; Pereira’s investigations of rural social movements plainly questioned the idea of evolution rooted in Brazilian sociology. She argued that traditions are not factors to be eliminated for progress. On the contrary, the past is a crucial part of the social dynamics of the country. Nevertheless, she did not recover the writing style and romantic values of previous periods because her research was based in robust empirical research and creative and modern theoretical analysis. According to Cordeiro and Neri, her name deserves to be singled out as an innovative Brazilian sociologist.

The following chapter focuses on a different period, 1964–1985, during the military dictatorship (pp. 53–70). In previous pages (p. 40), the authors had anticipated the changes in research that the 1964 coup d’état would bring. Using the metaphor of a ‘twinkle in the eye’, the book calls attention to the volume and speed of modifications within the field. The main outcomes were the obsolescence of racial studies (since the new political regime distrusted the topic), the massive exile of sociology professors, university purges, and repression. Nonetheless, the reform process facilitated the creation of departments, surpassing the old-fashioned chair system. In addition, both state funding and sociology courses were expanded. By the end of the 1970s, the number of university undergraduate courses in the social sciences peaked at 83 (p. 59). Local sociologists found new strategies to keep

sociological research alive. American agencies continued to fund new independent research institutes and individual grants. Meanwhile, Brazilian sociologists exiled abroad kept close interactions with their home institutions, strengthening networks and agenda. During that time, CEBRAP, one of the institutions free from state bodies, was very successful. It had been founded by Cardoso and other colleagues, and as a research and consulting organization focused on topics including planning, democratization, and social change.

Within that political and institutional atmosphere, paradoxically, a new and fundamentally theoretical framework emerged. This was “dependency theory,” which had as a germinal point the world-wide famous volume *Dependency and Development in Latin America* by Fernando Cardoso and Celso Furtado. Cordeiro and Neri’s book reviews in detail the nature of this theory, briefly illuminating some subtle differences among figures and positions. This development inspired a productive debate that has lasted until the present. The authors show the significance of dependency analysis in the history of the discipline in Brazil. The shift from the national framework to the Latin American scenario is not well explained, however.

The sixth chapter focuses on the way Brazilian sociology underwent, once again, a radical shift when democracy returned to the country in 1985 (pp. 71–80). During that period, local sociology diversified its research objects and at the same time moved to more practical and urgent social problems, in which gender studies prevailed. This chapter compares the sociological topics researched in the 1980s and the 1990s in terms of their theoretical references and objects. According to this map, Brazilian sociology was gradually leaving behind its singularity. The idea that local social reality was a unique problem was abandoned. Moreover, one of the main events during that time was a long legislative scuffle to re-insert sociology into the secondary school curricula. In explaining this conflict, the authors re-construct the history of teaching of sociology in schools.

Sociology in Brazil was introduced into basic education relatively early during the 1920s. That occasion was constantly celebrated by local sociologists. Hence, when this teaching was constrained during the 1940s and subsequently proscribed by the military regime in 1964, the sociological community challenged the prohibition and demanded the re-establishment of sociological teaching in schools. This movement enhanced the organization of local sociology, giving a sense of professional and academic identity, assisting in a cohesive demand for democracy against authoritarian rules. This battle was extremely victorious. In 1983, a law was promulgated allowing modification in the curricula. Sociology was thus re-introduced in various schools in São Paulo, Brasília, and Rio, although conflicts persisted. Much later, in 2008, sociology became mandatory in all high schools in Brazil. A very helpful table in the book (p. 75) clearly summarizes the various changes in curricula at schools.

Chapter seven aims to map the current situation of sociology in Brazil through quantitative data (pp. 81–92). This description shows a fruitful period for academic sociology. The expansion of state funding since 2003 has resulted in new federal universities and increasing research grants, benefiting the social sciences as a whole. The overview indicates the existence of 84 social science undergraduate programs with approximately 16,000 students. Also, it provides an estimation of 40,000 degrees awarded since 1934. Using information from the national university system, the authors analyze the composition of sociology professorships by age and gender. An important point is the comparative scrutiny of topics addressed in master and doctoral dissertations in sociology in both the 1980s and 2010s. It gives clear ideas about how classic issues such as social and labor movements, power, and government have lost relevance during recent times. Alternatively, research

on the body, gender and sexuality has had considerable growth. Topics linked with technology, social media, and cyber-culture are also very common. One can see therefore a shift from structural analysis to micro-sociological issues. Lastly, the chapter examines the weight of publications, both journals and books, within the sociological field.

Finally, chapter eight is a conclusive section in which Cordeiro and Neri review the main ideas of their argument (pp. 93–99). First, Brazilian sociology provided broader explanations of social problems during all of the periods discussed. However, it assumed a missionary role of understanding national singularities, which limited its flexibility to adapt emergent theories from abroad. Second, the field was particularly conditioned by its institutional teaching framework, in which, as aforementioned, there is hybridization at the undergraduate level and specialization in both the postgraduate programs and research activities. Third, Brazilian sociology has a very close connection with the sociological theoretical canon coined as the “triad”: Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. These three classical names have become the core of theory. All phenomena or theory, including new sociologists and ideas, are required to be measured and evaluated by the words and, metaphorically, the ‘eyes’ of the sociologists. The authors also recall the important influence of Karl Mannheim in the past, but recognize that this German figure has since been forgotten. Fourth, Cordeiro and Neri reflect upon the importance of theory in Brazilian sociology regarding French-German continental thought. In spite of American funding, the Chicago School legacy of the 1930s and the positivist tradition, which in combination had oriented the discipline toward empirical research; local sociology in Brazil has historically had a philosophical basis. Thus, sociology in Brazil never failed in naïve realism. Data should be theoretically read, which, according to the authors, meant a creative epistemological position. As a final point, the book outlines the perspective of sociology after the elections of 2018, when a far-right president won the elections. Hence, after two decades of left and center-left politics that fostered higher education and research, a new and very uncertain scenario has opened.

As a whole the book meets the goal of briefly telling the history of sociology in Brazil. The authors insist that Brazilian sociology is characterized by its insulation, and one can clearly see the development of a strong national tradition within the field. However, one might add to the history the important links between Brazilian sociology and international organizations and sociologists. Indeed, the book’s narrative privileges domestic factors but omits some international ones. Some points reviewed in the book (American funding and foreigner professors) are sufficient reasons to take global issues into account, although the authors considered how the discipline was able to neutralize that inheritance. It is true that the failure of the UNESCO research center in Rio during the late 1950s and early 1960s could have stirred a memory of remoteness. However, the inclusion of the role of both the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) in the training of Brazilian sociologists could have enriched the analysis. Also, the maturity of dependency theory is not understandable with the isolation thesis. Moreover, Cardoso and Faletto’s most recognized work is an attempt to outdo the Brazilian case and offer a comparison between Brazil and Argentina. The reception and creative use of ideas from sociological theory (e.g., Foucault, Bourdieu or even Gramsci), reveals many material and intellectual connections with others from abroad. Thus, the volume is plainly accurate in recognizing the role of national traditions but reproduces and almost exaggerates the image of isolation. The uniqueness of the language within the Latin American context could have compounded this insulated orientation. In this case, the myth of societal and national singularity is likely to combine with the isolation of the local discipline.

In conclusion, *Sociology in Brazil, A Brief Institutional and Intellectual History* demonstrates the power of the history of sociology, both in theoretical and empirical terms, to reconstruct the institutional and intellectual development of a discipline in a certain national context. In this case, the authors have carefully scrutinized secondary materials and databases, offering a comprehensive narrative. The book underlines the tension in the local teaching sociology flanked by the undergraduate hybridity and postgraduate specialization. However, the volume decisively recovers the attempts within the field to spot disciplinary borders and to keep sociology as an autonomous bulk of knowledge, although it missed the chance of better recuperating the stimulating dialogue amid sociology, anthropology, and political science. One could ask the authors how Brazilian sociology could have been improved by the important and well-known local anthropological traditions, even more with the remembrance of Levi Strauss' visitation. Also, it is the interrogation of the impact that discussions about democracy in political science courses had on local political sociology.

Furthermore, the point reviewed in the book on the role of sociology at local Secondary Schools is crucial. This led to the emergence of an active sociology of education, in which the name of Fernando de Azevedo, mentioned in the volume, should be recognized as a pioneering figure. The volume almost disregards this research area and focuses more on the achievements of political sociology or cultural studies. The Brazilian experience is in fact a leading case in the global context, since local sociology teachers have stimulated an extensive and productive discussion on how to teach sociology. This debate formulates pedagogical questions that should be raised and spread internationally. The issue of establishing a didactic of sociology ought to be considered, not merely as practical teaching tools but as a fundamental epistemology to be used when defending the legitimacy of sociology within public debates, including in schools. Thus, the Brazilian case could be a lighthouse in discussions about sociology's difficulties as a discipline internationally.

Finally, this call for the importance of sociology is related to the context of challenges and questions discussed in the final pages of the book. The current President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, has accused sociology of being an ideology rather than a discipline of scientific knowledge. His project, called "School without party," has proposed to ban any curriculum content related to topics such as gender and politics. Evidently, these issues are taught mainly in sociology courses. Therefore, the threat to sociology is real. At least, fortunately, Brazilian sociologists are well organized and have a history of battling against authoritarian rules. As this volume has masterfully portrayed, this conviction has moved Brazilian sociology to a time of institutional expansion, based on a solid theoretical framework. This is a discipline oriented to understanding the development of a country trapped by poverty and marred by racial and gender segregation. Nevertheless, the future of local sociology is linked with the future of the country itself. There are many tensions ahead, but this book is a guideline to be used during the journey.