

# The birth of cultural materialism?

## A debate between Marvin Harris and António Rita-Ferreira

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### Abstract

This article addresses a specific phase in the career of Marvin Harris, the founder of cultural materialism: his fieldwork in Mozambique. In particular, it examines the debate on the migration of the “indígenas” of Mozambique to the mines of South Africa, in which he engaged with António Rita-Ferreira, a colonial civil servant and amateur anthropologist (or “self-made scholar”, as he liked to represent himself). The article analyses that debate from two related perspectives: a disciplinary or anthropological perspective, and an historical-political one, marked by the movement of decolonisation in the second half of the 1950s.

**Keywords:** cultural materialism, Marvin Harris, Mozambique, António Rita-Ferreira, Portuguese colonialism

# O nascimento do materialismo cultural?

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### Resumo

O artigo aborda uma fase da trajetória de Marvin Harris, fundador do materialismo cultural: seu trabalho de campo em Moçambique. Examina, sobretudo, o debate acerca da migração dos “indígenas” moçambicanos às minas da África do Sul, travado com António Rita-Ferreira, funcionário colonial e “antropólogo amador” (ou self-made-scholar, como ele gostava de se auto-apresentar). Para tanto, o artigo situa as coordenadas daquela controvérsia em um duplo registro: de um lado, disciplinar ou antropológico e, de outro, histórico-político que foi marcado pelo movimento de descolonização na segunda metade da década de 1950.

**Palavras-chave:** materialismo cultural, Marvin Harris, Moçambique, António Rita-Ferreira, colonialismo português

# The birth of cultural materialism?

## A debate between Marvin Harris and António Rita-Ferreira

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### Introduction

This article examines a specific fragment in the long career of the anthropologist Marvin Harris, namely his fieldwork in Mozambique from June 1956 to March 1957, when he was expelled from Mozambique due to the increasing discomfort that his investigations into the exploitation of the *indígenas*' workforce was causing to the colonial authorities. . An important legacy of his brief stay in Mozambique was the debate on the causes of migration of the *indígenas* of Mozambique to the mines of South Africa in which he engaged with the colonial anthropologist António Rita-Ferreira.

Having mapped the political and personal coordinates of this debate/controversy, I discuss the wider political context, in order to better understand the Harris "affaire". For this purpose, I situate this enquiry in a double register: on one hand, a disciplinary or anthropological register and on the other, a historical-political register, marked by the movement of decolonization in the second half of the 1950s. North American Anthropology could be characterized at that time by the hegemony of the post-Boasians, which reached its peak with cultural materialism). This took place in the context of the Cold War and the growing international criticism against the Portuguese presence in Africa. The protagonism of Harris touches precisely on these two coordinates.



António Rita-Ferreira during a conversation with the author (March 14, 2012). This photograph was taken by Maria, a Portuguese secretary who worked once a week with Rita-Ferreira at his home in Bicesse.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Marvin Harris (1927-2001) began his studies at Erasmus Hall High School, before progressing to the College of Columbia, where Charles Wagley taught a course in anthropology. Later, he entered the Columbia University, where the imprints left by Franz Boas and his disciples were slowly being erased by the new streams of neoevolutionism. In 1953, he completed his doctorate degree and began to teach anthropology at the Columbia University (Margolis & Kottak, 2003). After a short time, he traveled to Brazil as part of the "Columbia University/State of Bahia" project, conceived under the auspices of Anísio Teixeira, and which had Thales de Azevedo (Bahia) and Charles Wagley (Columbia) as its principal mentors. By the time he arrived in Mozambique in 1956, the young Marvin Harris was already an experienced field researcher.

<sup>1</sup> The term *indígena* was used by the Portuguese to refer to those autochthonous Africans who had not been admitted to the status of *assimilados*.

From the start of his time in Mozambique, Harris relied on two dissimilar figures to help him enter the field: the anthropologist and colonial officer António Rita-Ferreira (1922-2014) and the opponent of the regime, António de Figueiredo (1929-2006). Initially, he established a cordial relationship with the first, subsequently disagreeing with him on the analysis of labour migration from the south of Mozambique to the South African mines. This debate between them was published in *Africa*, journal of the International African Institute in London. With António de Figueiredo, Harris maintained a lasting friendship based largely on their great political affinity.

This article reconstructs the background to this dispute and investigates the political environment that led, thanks to the protagonism of Harris, to the elaboration of the first organized critique of Portugal's colonial policies on African labor and the *Regime de Indigenato*<sup>2</sup>. With these objectives in mind, I had a number of long conversations with Rita-Ferreira at his home in Bicesse, a suburb of Lisbon, between February and March 2012. During these conversations, the Portuguese administrator and ethnologist mentioned Marvin Harris's trip to Mozambique several times, and reported some of his impressions on the relationship between the two. After his death in April 2014, I was fortunate in gaining access to the unpublished exchange of letters between António Rita-Ferreira and Marvin Harris.

António Rita-Ferreira was born in the interior of Portugal in 1929. In 1942, at the age of 19 he joined the colonial government working as a temporary worker in the district of Mongicual in the present day province of Nampula<sup>3</sup>. Over time, he became one of the most prominent Portuguese "anthropologists" of his day, or rather, a "self made scholar", as he preferred to refer to himself. In effect, with the exception of a course on *Bantu Studies* that he took in the former Union of South Africa (present-day South Africa), Rita-Ferreira never undertook any formal studies in anthropology; however, he knew Mozambique in more depth than anybody else. From the nineteen sixties and seventies, he maintained an intense intellectual exchange with the great Africanists, among them, the South African anthropologist David Webster, later assassinated by the apartheid police, the historian Edward Alpers, and Henri-Philippe Junod, son of the famous swiss ethnographer and Missionary Henri-Alexandre Junod. Rita-Ferreira was also friendly with the most important Portuguese anthropologist of the time: Jorge Dias. Rita-Ferreira exercised, among other positions, the function of Inspector of Emigration in Ressano Garcia, on the border between Mozambique and the Union of South Africa. He was also inspector in the Western Transvaal of the "Indigenous Portuguese" migrant control in South Africa. In other words, through his administrative functions, he had an in-depth knowledge of the migrant labor of the *indígenas* of Mozambique in the South African mines. He would later publish a pioneering work on the subject, under the auspices of Jorge Dias and Adriano Moreira<sup>4</sup>.

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2 The laws on the "indígenas" have been the target of several reforms since 1926. During Marvin Harris's time in Mozambique, the "Estatuto dos Indígenas Portugueses das Províncias da Guiné, Angola e Moçambique" (Decree Law no. 39,666, of May 20, 1954) was in force. The Statute of Indigenous People (Estatuto do Indigenato) – which distinguishes juridically between "indígenas" and "assimilados" – reaches its zenith in the Political, Civil and Criminal Statute on Indigenous Peoples (Estatuto Político, Civil e Criminal dos Indígenas) of October 23, 1926. The distinction between indigenous and assimilated Africans was abolished in 1961, when Adriano Moreira was Foreign Minister. With this measure, in principle at least all the inhabitants of Mozambique, Angola and Guiné-Bissau became Portuguese citizens.

3 For more details about his career as an administrator, see also the interview granted by António Rita-Ferreira to Maciel Santos (2010) of the University of Porto, Center of African Studies.

4 Adriano Moreira represents the most emblematic profile of late-Portuguese colonial policy. Born in 1922 in the province of Trás-os-Montes, he trained as a lawyer and became an expert in international law. He was professor of overseas administration and, between 1961 and 1963, Minister for Overseas Territories. He was director of the *Centro de Estudos Políticos e Sociais* (CEPS) of the *Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar* when Marvin Harris arrived in Mozambique in 1956.

## The beginning of the dialog

The first epistolary contact between António Rita-Ferreira and Marvin Harris took place on October 2, 1955, while Rita-Ferreira occupied the post of secretary of the administration in the district of Homóine, in the province of Inhambane. Harris was planning his disembarkation in Lourenço Marques (present-day Maputo) for the next year. Prior to Harris's fieldwork Rita-Ferreira had taken the initiative of writing to him, saying that had become aware of his future visit to Mozambique from an "official circular". In this letter, Rita-Ferreira presents himself as a specialist in matters of history and ethnology of Mozambique, informing Harris of his first ethnographic monographs. Among them, he mentions a work on the Azimba (or Zimba), a group of Chewa origin that lived in what is now Angónia (province of Tete)<sup>5</sup>. It was around this time that Rita-Ferreira was writing his work "Bibliografia antropológica sobre Moçambique" which attracted Harris' great interest. We know that Harris not only became interested in the ethnographic work of Rita-Ferreira, but also made some harsh comments about the weakness of his anthropological interpretations. Months later, on learning about the monograph on the Azimba, Harris did not hesitate to offer him his critical comments<sup>6</sup>.

From the beginning, António Rita-Ferreira made himself available to help Marvin Harris: "I'm interested in contacting with you after your arrival here, and I think I can give you very useful information about the local natives"<sup>7</sup>. The response arrived a few weeks later. On December 1, 1955, Harris, while still in New York, wrote to Rita-Ferreira to thank him for his kind offer to assist him in his forthcoming visit to Mozambique. In the same letter, Harris stated that he did not yet have any concrete plans on where he would conduct his research, but was open to suggestions and advice "from authorities such as yourself"...<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Harris took the opportunity to announce that during his fieldwork in Mozambique, he would be accompanied by his wife, Madeline and young daughter, Susan. These domestic circumstances made Harris a little apprehensive ["...I shall be accompanied by my wife and an infant child whom I should not feel free to take into all parts of the interior..."<sup>9</sup>]. On that occasion, it seems, Harris was more interested in conducting fieldwork among "unaccultured" groups. But, if those groups were very isolated, or were located in "dangerous" areas, from the point of the child's health, then he would have to forgo that opportunity. Ultimately, Harris would consider the possibility of leaving his wife and daughter in Lourenço Marques to move to the interior. He then put to Rita-Ferreira the following question: "...It is still my hope that some profitable ethnography can be carried out in the South, perhaps among the Thonga,

5 Rita-Ferreira lived in this region, more specifically, in the Macanga District, at the end of the 1940s, where he served as "Secretary of Administration". The ethnography to which he refers was published in 1954, in the *Boletim da Sociedade de Estudos de Moçambique* (vol. 24, paragraph 84), under the title "The 'Azimba' (Ethnographic Monograph)".

6 "In reading your essay on the Azimba, I have found myself lamenting the lack of library facilities here which prevented you from really coming to grips with the peculiarities of Azimba social structure. The issue of matriarchy vs. patriarchy is a completely spurious one. Matrilineality (i.e.; the existence of matrilinear descent groups) has never been associated with matriarchal political control...You give no indication that the Azimba practice sororal polygamy. If this is not the case, I believe that the Azimba are unique in the world in having non-sororal polygyny coupled with matrilocality. Something must be wrong here and I am anxious to discuss these problems with you..." Marvin Harris to Rita-Ferreira, Lourenço Marques, August 5, 1956, Personal Archive of António Rita-Ferreira (henceforth I shall use the abbreviation PARF to refer to this archive). Rita-Ferreira's response, extremely cordial, arrived quickly, on August 27, 1956.

7 António Rita-Ferreira to Marvin Harris, October 2, 1955, PARF.

8 Marvin Harris to António Rita-Ferreira, December 1, 1955, PARF.

9 Idem.

but I understand that little of the native culture is still preserved in that area. Is this correct?”<sup>10</sup>. Apparently in strategic terms, Harris shows himself to António Rita-Ferreira as an anthropologist interested in unacculturated peoples. We cannot affirm whether Harris, before setting foot in Mozambique, was feigning a lack of interest in issues that were problematic or sensitive in the local political situation, such as forced labor and migratory labor. At the end of this letter, Harris asks for Rita-Ferreira’s opinion once again, on the possibilities of conducting research close to the Inhambane “...from the point of view of degree of preservation of native cultures and living conditions for my wife and child...”<sup>11</sup>.

On January 7, 1956, Rita-Ferreira sent a long letter to Harris, giving guidance on the various possibilities of ethnographic research in Mozambique. On the occasion, Rita-Ferreira mentioned the *Vandau*, in the center of the country [“However this group has been fairly well studied by Boas, Dora Earchy, Herskovits, Junod (son), Schebesta, Spannus, etc.”<sup>12</sup>]. In fact, Boas’ Works on the Vandau had been written in collaboration with Kamba Simango, a young man from central Mozambique who had studied at the Columbia University in 1914, assisted by the congregationalist missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. This letter highlights Rita-Ferreira’s vast knowledge of the ethnology of Mozambique. He goes on to mention the *Shona*, the *Macua*, and the *Maconde*, as other possible groups for study. In relation to the possibilities for research in the south of the country, he states that the region does not have great anthropological importance because of the widespread “disintegration” of the Thonga caused by the emigration to the mines of the Union of South Africa. Ironically or not, that was precisely one of the subjects that Marvin Harris would become interested in, and write about, and it was also the issue that sparked the polemic debate with Rita-Ferreira.

In June 1956, Marvin Harris arrived in Mozambique, settling into a house in Lourenço Marques with his small family, at no. 23 Avenida 31 de Janeiro, the present-day Avenida Agostinho Neto. On the 24th of that month, he wrote to Rita-Ferreira, announcing his arrival and informing him of the preparations for his fieldwork. From the outset, Harris was quite cautious, as he knew it would be necessary to obtain the required permits from the Portuguese authorities in order to conduct his research. And so Harris waited – on the advice of the American consul in Mozambique – for an interview with Afonso Ivens-Ferraz de Freitas, administrator of Lourenço Marques. In this letter, Harris confesses: “I am very anxious that the government authorities understand the nature of my work and approve of it so that other ethnologists from the States will be welcome here after I leave. Thus I intend doing nothing until properly authorized”<sup>13</sup>

It is possible that Harris was aware of the possibility that his letter would be intercepted by the colonial authorities, which would explain why he showed respect for the rules that the political period demanded. Harris also disclosed to Rita-Ferreira some of his research goals, which were apparently related to more or less inoffensive or uncontroversial subjects in regard to the colonial situation. One of the topics that interested him was the study of the kinship system: “...What I want to do is to take up residence in a Ronga village for ten or eleven months and investigate the present-day condition of the kinship organization especially as this relates to the survival of extended families and clans...”<sup>14</sup>. We recall that many years later, in the chapter on British social anthropology (ch. 19) of his most well-known book (*The Rise of*

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<sup>10</sup> Idem.

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

<sup>12</sup> António Rita-Ferreira a Marvin Harris, January 7, 1956, PARF.

<sup>13</sup> Marvin Harris to António Rita-Ferreira, Lourenço Marques June 24, 1956 PARF.

<sup>14</sup> Idem.

*Anthropological Theory*), Harris would address issues of kinship among the Ronga<sup>15</sup> based, above all, the avunculate (the role of the maternal uncle) elaborated by Henri-Alexandre Junod and Radcliffe-Brown. Next, Harris mentions a subject that would prove uncomfortable for the authorities: the economy. Once again, Harris expresses his desire to include this problem only if the context were appropriate: "...If the situation is appropriate, I should also like to study the economic aspects of the kinship system. Although one might object that Junod's work among the Tsonga is quite definitive on most ethnographic subjects, I think that precisely because such a fine start has been made in the South additional investigation will prove most rewarding..."<sup>16</sup>. In these attempts, we see the first indications of Harris' materialistic anxieties, as the primacy of infrastructures and the economy would become, as we know, one of the fundamental explanatory devices of his cultural materialism.

That first contact between the two is of a reciprocal cordiality. The tone of the exchange of letters is marked by codes of camaraderie between two colleagues who share similar interests. This spirit of reciprocal collaboration would continue – albeit with some minor tensions – until the end of Harris' stay. Disagreements between them did not emerge until much later, when Rita-Ferreira began to become aware of the articles denouncing Portuguese colonialism that Marvin Harris –now back in the United States – was publishing in international journals.

### **The fieldwork and the political situation**

In the next letter from António Rita-Ferreira to Marvin Harris, a certain tension over the political situation was starting to become apparent, but it still did not affect the relationship between the two. We recall that Portugal's political police (PIDE - Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado) had already been set up in Mozambique. Back in the mother country, the political environment was also one of agitation, and the Salazar dictatorship was keeping a watchful eye on possible opponents. The local members of this political police had been authorized, with the promulgation of Decree 39,749 of August 9, 1954, to act in Mozambique. In a letter dated July 13, 1956, Rita-Ferreira recommended that Harris contact three local figures. One of them, Doctor Vitor Hugo Velez Grilo, who was a medical officer with the local government interested in conducting research on physical and biological anthropology among the Africans in the region. However, this letter represents a shift from the unconcerned tone of the previous correspondence; in it, Rita-Ferreira gives two very clear political warnings to Harris:

- 1) "...In any case you must not mention my name, when speaking with administrator Freitas and other officials. I will explain some day to you the position..."
- 2) "Another important recommendation: you must avoid talking about the way the natives are treated in Mozambique..."<sup>17</sup>

The second warning given by Rita-Ferreira to Harris is particularly delicate. Under no circumstances was Harris to refer, in his fieldwork, to the working conditions of the *indígenas* of Mozambique. Rita-Ferreira then warns about the presence, in the territory of Mozambique, of a strong distrust of the presence

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to emphasize that the Ronga or Ba-Ronga (the prefix "ba", in the languages of Bantu origin indicates the plural) were a sub-division of the "tribe" that Henri-Alexandre Junod called the Thonga (or Tsonga). The Ronga or Ba-Ronga inhabited the area around Lourenço Marques and the Delagoa Bay region.

<sup>16</sup> Idem.

<sup>17</sup> António Rita-Ferreira to Marvin Harris, July 13, 1956, PARE.

of Americans: “Some Americans (notably John Gunther<sup>18</sup>) made recently very bad references to our system of native policy, and all Americans are under suspicion when they show too much interest on the natives”<sup>19</sup>. Once again, Rita-Ferreira insists: “For this reason, avoid CONTACT WITH OFFICIALS LIKE ADM. FREITAS...”<sup>20</sup> (sic).

The final sentence of this letter demonstrates the political environment of denunciation and suspicion that characterised Mozambique at this time. Rita-Ferreira’s recommendation is emphatic: Harris should burn the letter as soon as he had read it, as its content could cause problems for Rita-Ferreira. It is possible that the PIDE had been watching Marvin Harris’s movements since his arrival.

That warning, as we shall see, made Harris uncomfortable. Yet, Harris continued to share his research plans with Rita-Ferreira. He was considering conducting a study with Dr. Grilo, on the Djonga economy<sup>21</sup> [“... in which we intend to measure work out-put and in-put in terms of calories ...”<sup>22</sup>]. In his next letter to Rita-Ferreira, we can already see glimpses of the influence of the neoevolutionists, such as Leslie-White and above all, Julian Stewart, as well as the incipient cultural materialism that Harris would later develop in several of his books. He explained more about his theoretical preferences: “My own theoretical orientation is such that I do not consider it possible to understand the pre-literate world without constant reference to relationship between technology, ecology, and social organization”<sup>23</sup>. This concern would also lead to a criticism of one of the most important ethnographies on the south of Mozambique: that conducted by Henri-Alexandre Junod on the Thonga. For Marvin Harris, this ethnography was too closely linked to an idealistic paradigm, and was therefore ignorant of material and ecological conditionings.

We recall, briefly, that the first version of Junod’s ethnography was published in 1898 under the title of *Les Ba-Ronga: étude ethnographique sur les indigènes de la Baie of Delagoa Bay*<sup>24</sup>. Later, in 1912, a revised version in English included the “northern tribes” of the area of Transvaal. It was published in Neuchâtel under the title of *The Life of a South African Tribe*. In 1926-27, after gathering new material, a second revised and expanded edition was published, this time in London. Later, in 1936, came a new French edition, *Moeurs et Coutumes des Bantou* and, finally, in 1946, the first edition in Portuguese: *Usos e costumes dos Bantos. A vida duma tribo Sul Africana*, published by the Imprensa Nacional de Moçambique [Mozambique National Press] in Lourenço Marques. Although Junod (Henri-Alexandre) was also a missionary, his work was well received by the international anthropological community. His son and biographer Henri-Philippe Junod reports how his father’s work was celebrated by the “founder” of British social anthropology himself, Bronislaw Malinowski: “...without wishing to flatter,” said Malinowski “...this monumental work is the only work I have ever seen to cover all the manifestations of the life of a tribe...” (Junod, 1934: 70-71) Harris, without doubt, was aware that criticizing the work of Henri-Alexandre Junod also involved questioning the epistemological foundations of much of Africanist anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s.

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18 In 1955, the journalist John Gunther published his book *Inside Africa*, the result of a trip to Africa. In some paragraphs, he criticizes the system of forced recruitment of African labor as a result of the 1928 labor code.

19 António Rita-Ferreira to Marvin Harris, idem.

20 The “Freitas” to which Rita-Ferreira refers is Afonso Ivens-Ferraz de Freitas, administrator of Lourenço Marques, who later directed the Service for the Centralization and Coordination of Information; Idem.

21 Djonga is one of six sub-groups that Henri-Alexandre Junod classified as being part of the Thonga “tribe” (the six sub-groups are Ronga, N’ualungo, Chêngua Lhangano, Bilhah, and Djonga). The latter three, in turn, comprise a set of clans, which Junod generally called the “Northern Clans”.

22 Marvin Harris to António Rita-Ferreira, August 5, 1956, PARE.

23 Idem.

24 This first version was published by the *Bulletin de la société neuchâteloise de géographie*, 1898, X.

Returning to the dialog between the two protagonists, Harris reveals, in the last two lines of his letter, a certain irritation with the warnings of his interlocutor over the “secrecy” that should be maintained over how the *indígenas* of Mozambique were treated: “I do not understand your great anxiety about the government’s attitude toward my research. Everybody goes out of his way to tell me how the natives are treated in Mozambique, so I can’t very well avoid the subject...”<sup>25</sup>. This response, dated the beginning of August 1956, indicates an important change of direction on the part of Harris, who went on to explain his interest in conducting research on the living conditions of the African workers. This interest in the question of the situation of the *indígenas* coincides with the contact Harris had with another António: António de Figueiredo, a young man who had been involved in clandestine activities against the colonial regime and the Salazar dictatorship. The political affinity between the two was immediate, and, as I have already pointed out, Figueiredo and Harris would become firm friends.

Years later, in a newspaper article, António de Figueiredo himself would recall his encounter with Marvin Harris at Lourenço Marques:

My encounter with Marvin Harris represented a unique opportunity to mobilize the voices of protest overseas. One of the most intelligent men I have had the privilege to meet, the young professor Marvin Harris quickly became aware of the situation and the value of my appeal not to waste his time in a work of mere academic erudition (Figueiredo, 1978).

Contradicting his promises to the colonial authorities, and with the complicity of António de Figueiredo, who clandestinely exercised a fervent opposition to the regime, Marvin Harris became interested in the conditions of exploitation of the Africans governed by the *Estatuto dos Indígenas*. During his time in Mozambique, one of the actions that angered the authorities was when the American anthropologist moved to the premises of a sugar company in the Limpopo valley, and began to question the workers, to ascertain whether their labor contracts were “voluntary” or “forced”.

We recall that later on, Figueiredo, as the local representative of the anti-Salazarist movement led by General Humberto Delgado (in 1958, there were elections advocating his candidacy, which represented a great hope for the “democratic movement” in the overseas territories), would have had access to the famous report of Henrique Galvão on forced labor. The PIDE accused him of being the (co)author of Marvin Harris’s monograph *Portugal’s African Wards*, published by the *American Committee on Africa* in 1959. This was a pioneering text in terms of criticism against the *Indigenato* regime. Figueiredo was arrested in January 1959 and remained in solitary confinement for three months. He would also be accused of being a representative of Humberto Delgado in Mozambique, and of propagating the condemnations - initiated by Henrique Galvão in 1947 - of forced labor. Galvão would end up being sentenced to three years’ imprisonment in 1952; later, he took the path of exile (Thomaz, 2002).

However, at the end of 1956, António Rita-Ferreira was appointed head of the “Curatorship of Indigenous Affairs” maintained by the Portuguese government in South Africa to oversee the migration of Mozambican workers to that country (*Inspecção do Transvaal Oriental/ Curadoria dos indígenas portugueses na África do Sul*). He therefore moved to the Eastern Transvaal, to the small town of Sabie (in the present-day province of Mpumalanga). Taking advantage of the move required by his new post, he enrolled in the University of Pretoria to take a course in “Bantu Studies”. It was during this period that Rita-Ferreira received Harris’ visit, at his home in Sabie. But the situation became tense, as Harris brought with him undesired company: the “clandestine” activist António de Figueiredo.

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<sup>25</sup> Idem.

The fact that Marvin Harris had been involved with António de Figueiredo was considered, by Rita-Ferreira, as a personal and political betrayal. From that moment on, the relationship between the two was strained. The visit of António de Figueiredo and Marvin Harris to Rita-Ferreira's house in Sabie marked a watershed in their relationship. After that meeting, Rita-Ferreira composed a letter to Marvin Harris, this time written in Portuguese<sup>26</sup>. In it, there are still vestiges of cordiality between the two, as Rita-Ferreira lists a series of bibliographies and documents that would be useful for Harris' research. However, on referring to the visit of Harris together with António de Figueiredo, Rita-Ferreira spares no words in expressing his unease: "Unfortunately I believe the presence of Sr. Figueiredo ruined our last discussion. It was entirely impossible to converse like two intelligent beings, due to the irritating and pretentious presence of this gentleman. I ask you not to bring him with you any more, as I am not interested in talking to him. He annoys me"<sup>27</sup>.

The figure of the anti-colonialist António de Figueiredo would again be the object of a subsequent exchanges of letters between Harris and Rita-Ferreira, in which Harris would defend his friend Figueiredo<sup>28</sup> and Rita-Ferreira would again attack him, this time with a certain degree of irony<sup>29</sup>.

Marvin Harris stayed in Mozambique until March 1957. By the end of his time there, his relationship with the colonial authorities was beginning to become complicated. Due to his investigations into the working conditions of Africans, Harris received a warning from the Governor of the Province. Translated in the language of the time, the warning was nothing more than an "invitation" for Harris to leave the country. The unease over his presence in Lourenço Marques had grown to the extent that the Portuguese authorities were complaining to the American consulate; finally, Harris' research grant was suspended<sup>30</sup>. Faced with these difficulties, Harris and his family abandoned Mozambique. The governor of the province of Mozambique at that time was Gabriel Mauricio Teixeira. Later, in a note on one of his essays on the colonial situation in Mozambique, Harris explained how and why he left Mozambique: "In March 1956 [sic], the then Governor-General Teixeira called me to his office and informed me that I had violated the hospitality that his government extended to me. He informed me that I had been asking questions which were none of my business and that if I persisted I would be asked to leave the country" (Harris, 1966, 157, Note 1). There is an obvious "error" in the date that appears in this note. This rebuke from the colonial authorities must have occurred in March 1957 and not March 1956 as stated, since Harris arrived in Mozambique in June 1956. In fact, the last letter addressed to him from Rita-Ferreira is dated March 19, 1957, Harris' last month in the country. Rita-Ferreira was still in Sabie, and possibly unaware that Harris would be returning to the

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26 All translations from Portuguese to English are my own.

27 António Rita-Ferreira to Marvin Harris, 22 October 1956, PARF.

28 "...I was very surprised to learn that you were not pleased by Mr. Figueiredo. The pretentiousness which Antonio exhibits in conversation with those of superior education and experience is a defense which he employs to compensate for his own lack of formal education..." (Marvin Harris to António Rita-Ferreira, November 5, 1956, PARF).

29 "...As for Figueiredo, I know myself well enough to know that it is impossible for me (even making a considerable effort) to maintain social or intellectual relations with him. This is not an *avis rare*: I have known in Mozambique dozens of individuals like him, and my attitude is always one of repulsion. Perhaps [it is the] effects of the famous 'tropical deterioration' that makes me lose all patience..." The underlining in the letter is by Rita-Ferreira himself. António Rita-Ferreira to Marvin Harris, November 9, 1956, PARF.

30 In an article on the career of Eduardo Mondlane, Livio Sansone mentions, in a footnote, a testimony about Harris given by the administrator Afonso Ivens-Ferraz de Freitas: "...as [Harris] was inciting certain indigenous peoples not to assimilate, it was thought of inviting him to abandon the Province, but the American consul general anticipated this and stopped paying his monthly salary, which led him to leave..." (op. cit. Sansone, 2012: note 12, 111).

United States. In any case, we do not know whether this last letter, in fact, arrived in Harris' hands, since the epistolary "feedback" ends precisely on March 19. It could also be speculated that this letter was only a draft, which ended up remaining in the personal archive of António Rita-Ferreira. The last paragraph of this "draft" (or letter) demonstrates the continuity of Rita-Ferreira's cordial tone towards Marvin Harris: "I hope your research is progressing satisfactorily, and that the final book will be as good as the one you wrote about the Brazil. The book that you are going to publish I would like to have written myself. I have great confidence in and admiration for you..."<sup>31</sup>.

We should remember that the book "about Brazil" to which Rita-Ferreira refers in its letters was published by Harris in 1956, under the title *Town and Country in Brazil*. As regards Mozambique, António Rita-Ferreira did not suspect that the writings of Harris would take the direction of a fierce criticism of the *Indigenato* system. Whether knowingly or not, this would be the prelude to a fierce dispute that began in 1959. "Trust" and "admiration" were, then, overshadowed by an open and merciless intellectual debate.

## The debate

Back in the United States, one year after his retreat from Mozambique, Harris published, in 1958, one of the most condemning essays against the Portuguese colonial regime of his time: "Portugal's African 'Wards'. A First-Hand Report on Labor and Education in Mozambique". The first version of this critique was published in the journal *Africa Today* published by the *American Committee on Africa*. Two years later, *Africa Today* published the essay in the form of a reprint. But Marvin Harris's onslaught was not limited to this work. At the beginning of 1959, he published in "Africa", *Journal of the International African Institute* (London), a critical analysis of the migration of Mozambican workers to the present-day South Africa, entitled: *Labor Emigration Among the Mozambique Thonga: Cultural and Political Factors*. Visiting Lisbon, Rita-Ferreira, by this time in charge of Administration in the District of Beira in central Mozambique, became aware of the article and was furious over its contents. On the eve of his return from Lisbon to Mozambique, he sent a letter to one of his superiors, requesting permission to stay one month in Lourenço Marques, as this would give him the tranquility to write a critical response to Marvin Harris's essay. It was, he claimed, an urgent matter, as Harris's article was jeopardizing "national prestige":

If you find my idea interesting and profitable, could you please communicate my intention to the General Governor in order for him to authorize me to spend a month in Lourenço Marques, in order to elaborate my criticism of Marvin Harris. To make matters worse, I am located in Beira, where I will probably have to follow the busy routine of that city, and I fear I will not have the time or tranquility to write, and above all, the resources I need... This issue is extremely important, because as far as I know, this is the first time in the history of Mozambique that a social scientist (not a mere journalist, such as John Gunther) has referred, in an international journal, to facts that greatly harm our national prestige, using official sources, partially gathered in the "Negócios Indigenas" [Indigenous Affairs] and other government offices. It seems to me that it would be disastrous not to respond <sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> António Rita-Ferreira to Marvin Harris, March 19, 1957, PARF. Another topic discussed in the letter, concerns an application for a job in the colonial administration that Rita-Ferreira had just carried out. His performance was evaluated very negatively. Rita-Ferreira attributed this result to the "official anger" against him: "As you must already know, I was very badly placed in the examination for administrator: no. 22! The official anger appears to have focused on me: not only did I get service information of "good" instead of "very good" as I hoped, but they also gave me a 12 (60%) for indigenous policies, and 14 (70%) for ethnography (the qualification was granted to me by an unfamiliar inspector Leite Pinheiro!). I have already made two complaints, but I have little hope that they will be answered...as you see, my dear Marvin, you have in Mozambique at least 21 lads who are worth more than me!..." (Idem.)

<sup>32</sup> António Rita-Ferreira ao Insp. L. M. Pinto da Fonseca, Director of the Indigenous Affairs Services in Lourenço Marques, April 29, 1959, PARF.

In the article that sparked Rita-Ferreira's ire, Harris argued that due to the impositions of colonial policy, the Thonga of southern Mozambique had no option: or they were obliged to sell their labor, becoming salaried workers in the South African mines, or to sell it under precarious conditions, as salaried domestic workers in Mozambique. As a consequence of the oppression caused by this "double bind", the development of subsistence farming was completely undermined. In his reply, Rita-Ferreira criticized Harris' lack of ethnographic sensitivity, for having placed the Thonga and the Chopes under the same cultural identification. He also questioned why Harris had ignored the fundamental contributions of Henri-Alexandre Junod, especially as regards the importance of the obligations of kinship among the Bantu (what we might today call "reciprocity"). Among these obligations, the most important institution is the *lobolo*.

We should remember that the institution of *lobolo* is widely disseminated throughout southern Africa. Sometimes wrongly referred to as "bride price", it denotes property in cash or kind, which a future husband or head of his family undertakes to give to the head of a future wife's family on the occasion of his marriage. Historically, this property was in the form of cattle, but over time – as Rita-Ferreira argues – it became mostly cash. As Hilda Kuper states, although *lobolo* is generally translated as "bride price" "...it is clear that a woman is not regarded as a commodity by the people involved. On the contrary, she is a valued member of the community, and her past status and future security are symbolized in the transaction. By giving *lobolo*, her children are made legitimate and become entitled to the benefits of the father's lineage..." (Kuper, 1963: 23).

Thus, while in Harris' argument "no third choice existed" (1959: 60) for the populations of the South of Mozambique, for Rita-Ferreira, on the contrary, they strategically "chose" the better salaries that the work in the mines supposedly offered. Thus, Rita-Ferreira concluded that migrant work enabled a desirable integration into the modern economy and, in the long term, a higher standard of living (1960:147). But, above all, migratory work enabled family reproduction, through the payment in pounds sterling of the *lobolo* (formerly paid in cattle and hoes).

Rita-Ferreira's comments would be followed by a reply from Harris, in which he accuses Rita-Ferreira of not deciphering the main enigma: why did the 1899 labor code need to legislate on "forced labor" or "compulsory labor"? According to Harris, the supply of voluntary labor within Mozambique ended up being diverted to the South African mines ["My answer was, briefly, that the voluntary supply was being drained off by the mines"]. Faced with this shortage of internal labor, the Portuguese administration had to resort to "forced labor" (known as *xibalo*, or *chibalo*). In his article, Harris once again criticizes the work of Henri-Alexandre Junod, alleging that Junod was under an illusion, in attributing the preeminence of agricultural work to the Thonga women. Harris argues, in contraposition to Junod, that the "option" taken by these women for agricultural work was mainly due to the absence of male labor, which was being systematically drained to the mines of the Transvaal (Harris, 1960: 244)<sup>33</sup>.

Harris' admonition related, therefore, to the imposition of the 1899 labor code. Rita-Ferreira would contest it in no uncertain terms:

There is no secret about the main reason for the passing of the 1899 labour code. Portugal was faced with a serious economic and financial crisis, lacking funds to develop its overseas dominions and confronted by international ambitions. On 30 August 1898 Germany and Great Britain signed a secret pact regarding the

33 To understand the consequences of the impact of the migrant work on the Thonga women - and also on the children of southern Mozambique – it is essential to consult the recent book by Jeanne Penvenne (2015). This relational and less "androcentric" aspect of the problem – albeit outside of the scope of this article – is, without doubt, fundamental for extending the interpretative horizons of the debate in the future.

division of the Portuguese colonies. António Enes, the main author of the code, summarized the situation thus: “Portugal needs, desperately needs, to develop immediately her African inheritance and its prosperity rests on its productivity”. But the native had for long been used to the much higher wages obtained in the Transvaal and Natal and when he decided to get a job to obtain money, he naturally preferred to go where he was better paid (Rita-Ferreira, 1961: 75).

At that time, there was an almost inevitable corollary: while, for Harris, the 1899 labor code was “disciplinary”, for Rita-Ferreira it was “civilizing”. However, in his subsequent and final work on the subject – *O movimento migratório de trabalhadores entre Moçambique e a África do Sul* (1963) – António Rita-Ferreira finally recognizes that the 1899 labor code “led to some abuses” (1963:155). The *xibalo* regulated by this law, whereby the settler requiring African workers could obtain them from the authorities for a period of six months, was vehemently resisted by the *indígenas*, who preferred to leave Mozambique to take up migratory work in the South African mines. The *xibalo* would later be prohibited by Decree 917 of December 7, 1906. However, it would continue in “dormant form”, as Rita-Ferreira states, for many years. On this point, Rita-Ferreira remains ambiguous: he prefers to minimize the consequences of the *xibalo* regulation in its first years of its application<sup>34</sup>. But he also avoids focusing attention on the contradictions of the 1928 labor code and its supposed reform, with the new *Estatuto Indígena das Províncias de Guiné, Angola e Moçambique* of May 1954.

In the 1950s, when Marvin Harris arrived in Mozambique, forced labor was widespread, despite the good intentions of the laws. One of Harris’ pivotal criticisms relates to the fact that subsistence farming was seen as idleness. i.e. small-scale farm work was seen as a symptom of delay or backwardness, or as non-productive work. This “civilizing” view would have huge consequences for the lives of the Africans:

....approximately 400,000 Mozambique Africans were left with no choice but to seek employment as contract laborers in the mines and farms of the neighboring English-speaking territories. Approximately 100,000 *indígenas* from Southern Mozambique were caught by their administrators and puppet chieftains and were turned over to European enterprises to become *shibalos* (the African’s word for forced laborer). In the north, over 1,000,000 *indígenas* were subjected to the compulsory cotton-planting campaign, whereby African farmers were obliged to substitute cotton for subsistence crops for the benefit of monopolistic concessionaires who lost nothing if the cotton failed to grow, while the Africans starved by the thousands (Harris, 1966: 159)

During this period, the *xibalo*, besides being used in rural areas, began, directly or indirectly, to feed an incipient state capitalism in the urban areas, especially Lourenço Marques. Jeanne Penvenne, in her extensive investigation of oral history, gathered narratives on the *xibalo* in the 1950s. Often, it was synonymous with punishment or reprisals against any attempt at protest or strike. The insurgents were sent to the *xibalo*. Another feared punishment was the *palmatoria*: “... a flat paddle which had five or six holes in it that sucked in flesh so that each blow caused swelling and bleeding. The *palmatória* was used to terrorize, humiliate, and discipline Africans into self-surveillance (Penvenne, 1994:108). Sometimes the *palmatória* was more feared than the *xibalo*, because the humiliation and pain lasted longer.

Harris’ efforts led to the inauguration of a series of other works that, in the 1960s, were extremely critical towards the situation in Mozambique at that time, in particular the work of James Duffy (1963)

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<sup>34</sup> Besides the “opening of some roads” and the “construction of small buildings”, Rita-Ferreira does not identify a “mass” search for labor through this system. He also attributes this weak demand to the fact that agriculture was “embryonic” and industry, “nonexistent”.

and, especially, the pioneering work of Perry Anderson. “The most notorious aspect of the Portuguese colonization in Africa”, announced Anderson at the beginning of his book published in 1966, “is the systematic use of forced labor” (Anderson, 1966:41). It was precisely this systematic characteristic of exploitation of labor that led Perry Anderson to coin the term *ultracolonialism* to describe and explain Portuguese colonialism. This means that it is the “...modality that is simultaneously the most extreme and the most primitive of colonialism” (1966:55). Anderson classifies the work in the Portuguese colonies in four categories, all of which are variants of forced labor: 1) correctional labor; 2) compulsory labor; 3) contract work; 4) voluntary labor. It is worth emphasizing that the 1928 Labor Code only considered compulsory labor as forced labor, i.e. work done for public purposes. Article 293 states: “compulsory, forced or compelled labor is understood as everything that an *indígena* is coerced into providing, by the threat or violence of those who impose it on them, or by simple demand from the public authorities”. Harris differs from the two authors referred to above - James Duffy and Perry Anderson - in his pioneerism. In an era when anthropologists and anthropology were accused of complicity with the colonial regimes in Africa, Harris’ work was an *in situ* criticism of the *Indigenato* Regime.

In 1928, faced with growing international criticism, Portugal established a new Labor Code for the *indígenas* that supposedly did away with forced labor, except for the purposes of penal correction and necessary public works. However, in addition to the laws and regulations, the *xibalo* was perpetuated through private labor recruiters. According to Jeanne Penvenne, one of the last public buildings to be built in Lourenço Marques using forced labor and work done by prisoners (“correctional labor”) was the Cathedral, inaugurated in 1944. In her 1977 enquiry, Penvenne identified a strong resentment towards the Portuguese, among the former workers who had participated in the construction of this building: “The construction of the Sé cathedral evoked particularly bitter memories. Nearly thirty years after the Sé’s construction, the lines on men’s faces hardened and anger flashed in their eyes when they recalled the brutal and humiliating conditions experienced by the men and women who built the cathedral” (Penvenne, 1994: 137).

The words of Penvenne only serve to reinforce those of Harris. The migratory “option” was, as we have seen, a way of escaping the *xibalo*. Meanwhile, to the north of the Zambezi River, the work was organized through forced cotton growing. In this “modern” slavery, says Harris, the role of the medieval lord was exercised by twelve private Portuguese companies, which received monopolistic concessions on the cotton production in vast areas of Mozambique (Harris, 1958:30).

Back in the United States, Marvin Harris continued to criticize the Portuguese regime in Africa. At the beginning of 1960, the “other” António - the anti-colonial activist António de Figueiredo - was living in exile in London. From there, he maintained an intense exchange of letters with anti-colonialist intellectuals all over the world, among them Marvin Harris himself. In November 1965, Harris sent him a letter advising greater proximity and solidarity with the cause of FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front) and with its president, Eduardo Mondlane, who was to visit London to enlist support for the cause of independence<sup>35</sup>. António de Figueiredo had received no academic training in the social sciences. However, his occasional activities as a journalist, and his writings on the situation of the Portuguese colonies, attracted the attention of important historians and political analysts of the African situation, including the above-mentioned James Duffy, and Basil Davidson. At the beginning of 1966, Figueiredo received a proposal

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35 Letter from Marvin Harris to António de Figueiredo, New York, November 17, 1965, “António de Figueiredo” Papers, Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, University of Coimbra.

from Amnesty International to create a Centre for Luso-Brazilian Studies in London. To collaborate with the Centre, Figueiredo invited the historians and political scientist Ronald H. Chilcote, James Duffy, and Marvin Harris. “There is not, in the whole of Britain,” wrote Figueiredo to his friend, “any scholar with anything like your knowledge of Portuguese colonialism”<sup>36</sup>.

Finally, and in addition to the criticisms of Marvin Harris, we cannot underestimate the pioneering work of Henri-Alexandre Junod in contributing to an understanding of the experience of the Mozambican workers in the South African mines. In his important work on the migration of workers from Mozambique to South Africa, the historian Patrick Harries does not hesitate in describing Henri-Alexandre Junod as “The writer who probably knew more than any other about the lives of Mozambican migrant workers” (1994: XI). However, in his historiographic contextualization, Harries places the work of Marvin Harris next to that of James Duffy, which he classifies as belonging to the literature of the “antislavery” genre. Patrick Harries recognizes, however, that this literature, despite all its critical efforts, depicts the “Africans” almost as anonymous figures that are “acted upon” “...innocent victims of employers and colonial officials”. Here we see a necessary paradigm shift to which Patrick Harries invites us:

“In this way, the literary heritage passed on to a new generation of writers and readers reinforced an old picture, as African workers remained passive and depersonalized objects of history rather than subjects capable of assuming command of their destiny. This image was to maintain a tenacious grip on the history of labour in Southern Africa” (1994: XIII).

The debate between Marvin Harris and António Rita-Ferreira is, without doubt, a dated one. However, it is a controversy that reveals a series of local, regional and global tensions that produced substantial reforms in the colonial territory. In September 1961, the *Estatuto dos Indígenas* was abolished. And with it, at least on paper, all the inhabitants of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea were considered Portuguese citizens. But in reality, little had changed. The “new” citizens were obliged to carry identity cards that stated their former condition as *indígenas*, and forced labor, although deprived of its legal justification, would continue in “indistinct” forms at least until 1965 (Cahen, 2016). However, the Indigenous Labor Code would finally give way to the Rural Labor Code, promulgated in April 1962.

### **Was cultural materialism born in Mozambique?**

In the history of anthropological thought, Marvin Harris is part of a more or less consecrated ancestral pantheon. While Claude Lévi-Strauss appears in the manuals of the discipline as the founder of structuralism, or Clifford Geertz, of interpretativism, Marvin Harris is credited as the founder of cultural materialism. In various passages of his works, Harris gives some definitions of cultural materialism. These definitions do not always assume the same nuances. In the preface to his book *Cultural Materialism: The struggle for a science of Culture*, Harris defines cultural materialism as an effective strategy that he found “...to understand the causes of differences and similarities among societies and cultures. It is based on the simple premise that human social life is the response to the practical problems of earthly existence” (1979:IX).

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<sup>36</sup> Letter from António de Figueiredo to Marvin Harris, London, May 17, 1966, “António de Figueiredo” Papers, Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, University of Coimbra.

Throughout his work, Harris looked for support in the writings of the linguist Kenneth Pike, in order to distinguish the “emic” and “etic” modes (derived from the distinction between “phonemic”/“phonetics”) of human behavior. It is not our place here to understand the different heuristic uses of this distinction. But for the time being - and risking over-simplification - we could say that one of these distinctions corresponds to the mental dimensions (emic) of behavior, while the other corresponds to the objective dimensions (etic). Another way of understanding the opposition is to identify one of the poles (emic) with the approaches that emphasize the perspective of the “native”, while the other pole (etic) is situated from the perspective of the “observer” or analyst.

In one of his most recent books, Marvin Harris states that “... the materialism of cultural materialism is concerned with the locus of causality in sociocultural systems and not with the ontological question of whether the essence of being is idea (spirit) or matter” (Harris, 1999: 141). Although the latter years of Harris’ life showed a little more flexibility to assign the same importance to both the “etic” and “emic” dimensions of social life, his critics claim that he was merely a vulgar materialist, a determinist Marxist, and at worst, an empiricist and neoevolucionist. It is not within the scope of this article to reproduce these interminable debates, but rather, to investigate the possible connections of meaning between the ideals of cultural materialism as an explanatory strategy, and the political and anthropological concerns that Harris expressed in Mozambique. Was Mozambique the empirical laboratory of cultural materialism?

We must accept that Marvin Harris was interested, from the outset, in the “etic” aspects of production and reproduction, “as constituted by a conjunction of demographic economic, technological and environmental variables...” (1999: 141). We remember that in one of his letters to Rita-Ferreira, dated 1956, Harris explained his theoretical choice based on concerns related to “technology”, “ecology”, and “social organization”. In that letter, criticizing the “idealistic” (emic) bias of Junod’s work, Harris explained his intention to return to the evolutionist legacy in “multilinear”, “functional”, and “ecological” terms: “Junod’s pre-occupation with the ideological, and ‘ideal’ patterns leaves much to be desired from the point of view of those who have been influenced by contemporary attempts to revive 19th Century evolutionary theory along multilinear, functional, and ecological lines”<sup>37</sup>. These theoretical and empirical options were consistent with the great admiration that Harris showed, in particular, for the work of Julian Steward. We recall that Steward was a professor of anthropology at the Columbia University, where Harris had studied from 1946 to 1952.

Obviously, when Harris set foot in Mozambique in 1956, his theoretical ideas had not yet matured. Nevertheless, we can affirm that his cultural materialism is due to his Mozambican field experience. The “indications” shown in the exchange of letters with António Rita-Ferreira permit us to believe that this connection makes sense. In fact, in a journalistic text, with an almost hagiographical tone - his great friend and interlocutor, António de Figueiredo, left this intuition open when, in a tribute to Harris, he gave to his article published in the magazine *New African*, in October 2003, the title of “Cultural materialism, born in Africa”. Besides the phrases of effect and laudatory biographies, the connection between cultural materialism and his fieldwork in Mozambique deserves to be taken seriously. As Verena Stolcke (apud. Montserrat, 2008) states, “*En toda teoría hay algo de biografía*” [Every theory contains a measure of biography]. In the case of Marvin Harris, this maxim is fully applicable. Thus, his theoretical preoccupation derive from his ethnographical and political experience.

When Harris returned to Columbia after his fieldwork in Mozambique, he turned his attention to writing a voluminous history of anthropological theory. As one of his first students, Mario Bick, reminds us, Harris’

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37 Marvin Harris to António Rita-Ferreira, August 5, 1956, PARE.

seminars on anthropological theory would result in the book *The Rise of Anthropological Theory. A History of Theories of Culture*, first published in 1968<sup>38</sup>.

A student who was even closer to Marvin Harris, David Price, was the organizer of Harris' files at the *Smithsonian Institution* in Washington. When, in October 2014, I informed Price of my interest in the anthropological and political consequences of the debate between Marvin Harris and António Rita-Ferreira, I received from him this encouraging response:

I'm so glad to learn that you are working on Marvin's relationship with António Rita-Ferreira [...] I was very close to Marvin from the mid-1980s (when I moved to Florida to work with Marvin on my dissertation research) until his death. I was his research assistant for four years and learned a lot about the writing process and honed theoretical skills working with him, and he became a close friend; I helped Marvin and Madeline Harris' daughter Susan work with the Smithsonian to establish a good home for his papers [...] I wish I had more direct information on António Rita-Ferreira, but I only have pretty limited knowledge about him, though I know he and Marvin were friends; I do know bits and pieces about the deep impact of Marvin's time in Mozambique in forming many of Marvin's political and even theoretical views that shaped his anthropology and activism later in life<sup>39</sup>.

These words of David Price invite us to relocate the period in which Marvin Harris was in Mozambique within a broader context of the intellectual and political history of anthropology of the time. Harris even commented to his student on the importance of the research in Mozambique for the formulation of one of the main heuristic devices of cultural materialism: the emic/etic distinction. To a large extent, the fieldwork experiences in Mozambique would have acted as a kind of empirical incubator of cultural materialism. Or, as a Price reminds us: "Marvin Harris once told me that his 1956-57 fieldwork experiences in Mozambique were instrumental in developing his interest in the theoretical distinctions between what were later referred to as emic and etic components of cultural life..." (Price, 2002: 16).

The fieldwork in Mozambique was also important for his elaboration of a criticism of the preferred ideology of the regime: lusotropicalism. Elaborated by Gilberto Freyre, lusotropicalism became, from the 1950s on, the omnipresent language in the discourses of the proponents of the Portuguese overseas territories. For these spokespersons, it was necessary to show that "the world that Portugal created" was different: Portugal, they claimed, was a miscegenating, assimilating country and a promoter of "racial" and cultural hybridisms. Consequently, according to this vision, its colonies would be simply Overseas Provinces, something like "spiritual" extensions of the mother country. The much vaunted assimilation of the *indígenas* implied not only an operation of legal change but, above all, a long process of spiritual incorporation of the *indígenas* into Portuguese values. Two models of colonization were, therefore, at stake: the British through *Indirect Rule*, which promoted the so-called "separate development", and the Portuguese through the tutelage exercised by the *Indigenato* regime, but which glimpsed, on far horizon – a very far-off horizon, certainly – "assimilation" (Fry, 2000).

The debate between Harris and Rita-Ferreira condensed a series of significant anthropological and political tensions. In his last book, Harris would return to the Mozambican experience, this time to argue that "[W]hat we choose to study or not in the name of anthropology is a political-moral decision" (1999:59). This is a difficult option, Harris admits. Against accusations of contaminating scientific objectivity with the subjectivism of

<sup>38</sup> Personal Communication, Mario Bick, August 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Email from David Price, October 2, 2014.

political choices, he defends himself thus: "...my findings about the colonial system (the *Indigenato*) were objective and hence scientific" (1999:60). To put it in the terms of cultural materialism: contradicting the "emic" belief in the lusotropicalist Paradise, Harris reveals the "etic" fact of exploitation of forced labor and the *Indigenato*.

When, in March 1957, Marvin Harris, with his wife and his daughter were forced to leave Mozambique at short notice, they did not have time to take with him the material that he had gathered over eight months. The Ford Foundation offered to act as intermediary with the American consulate, so that the boxes of documents could be shipped to New York. When, months later, his field notes and documents arrived in the United States. Harris was astonished to discover that his material had been inspected and, in some cases, destroyed (Price, 2002:16). It is possible that the hand of the PIDE was behind this loss.

Harris' time in Mozambique left marks of suspicion and mistrust. We must remember, however, that his arrival in the field occurred at a time when relations between the United States and Portugal were still cordial. This relationship would change soon afterwards with the decolonization policies promoted during the Kennedy/Johnson period. The break mainly occurred with the attempted coup of General Botelho Moniz<sup>40</sup>, in April 1961, supported by the CIA. It seems that from that date on, the PIDE kept its eye on all American agents, and forwarded practically no information to the CIA<sup>41</sup>. The pressure of the Council of the United Nations on Portugal to promote the decolonisation would increase. This was the time of the famous phrase of Salazar; "proudly alone", which would cover, in fact, the increasing fragility and political isolation of Portugal. However, a year before that break, another anthropologist from the Columbia University visited Mozambique: Charles Wagley<sup>42</sup>.

Wagley's journey to the Overseas Provinces of Portugal is a sub-chapter of the effects caused by the 'Marvin Harris *affaire*'. The colonial administration believed it was necessary to calm the situation. The storm caused by Harris mobilized, respectively, the concerns of important figures in Portuguese anthropology and overseas policy: Jorge Dias and Adriano Moreira. Attempting to reverse the negative criticism that Harris had left in the international community, anthropologist Jorge Dias invited Charles Wagley, in 1960, to make a trip throughout the "Overseas Provinces" (the journey started in Mozambique and ended in Guinea Bissau). Following the trails of the lusotropicalist ideology, Jorge Dias hope that after this trip, Charles Wagley would take a favorable attitude in regard to the Portuguese presence in Africa and, from that moment, would support the creation of higher studies in "Portuguese Africa". The journey was supported by the Minister of the Portuguese Overseas Territories, Adriano Moreira, and was an attempt to promote academic exchange between the Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos (ISEU) of Lisbon and the Columbia University. Adriano Moreira's goal in supporting the journey of Charles Wagley and Jorge Dias also had the aim of raising funds though the Ford Foundation to underwrite university studies in Angola and Mozambique. From the point of view of the Portuguese, the journey was a failure both in political and academic terms. Wagley was not deceived by his host, Jorge Dias, and far less by the mentor of the trip, Adriano Moreira. Ironically, in 1963, the Ford Foundation would eventually end up supporting the Instituto Moçambicano the training institution set up in of Dar es Salam, in Tanzania by the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique - FRELIMO)<sup>43</sup>.

40 The General Botelho Moniz was the Minister of National Defense. However, along with other conspirators, he undertook an attempted coup against Salazar. The coup - which was supported by President John F. Kennedy - ended in failure.

41 I thank Michel Cahen for bringing my attention to these political circumstances.

42 Let us remember that Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris were friends. They had met at the Columbia University and the friendship between them lasted until Wagley's death. Harris' last book, *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times*, was dedicated to Charles and Cecilia Wagley. Cecilia was Brazilian.

43 The negotiations between the Kennedy administration and Eduardo Mondlane, which preceded the support of Ford Foundation to FRELIMO are described, with detail, in the book by José Manuel Duarte de Jesus (2010).

## Final Words

At least during the ten years that followed his field research in Mozambique, Harris continued to sympathize with the Mozambicans separatists in exile. As shown in a recent paper by Livio Sansone (2012), his friendship with Eduardo Mondlane would continue until 1969, when in February of that year the President of the FRELIMO was killed by a letter bomb at his office in Tanzania.

In 1975, Mozambique gained independence from Portugal. At that time, Marvin Harris, still at the Columbia University, would reach the height of his intellectual life. In the following year, he acted as protagonist in a key debate in the history of anthropology. This time, the target of his criticism would be Claude Lévi-Strauss: the war between the “materialists” and the “mentalists” had been declared<sup>44</sup>.

But what would happen to António Rita-Ferreira, Harris’ “friend”, when colonialism became history? Curiously, with the independence of Mozambique, the members of the FRELIMO responsible for university studies made an agreement with Rita-Ferreira. Fernando Ganhão, principal of the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, awarded him a contract until 1977 to teach about the history and ethnology of the “peoples” of Mozambique. Among his young students were Blacks, “Mistos” and Whites (the latter, the descendants of the former settlers, willing to “remain” Mozambican and unswervingly follow the FRELIMO cause). However, an incident prevented Rita-Ferreira from continuing to honor his contract: a group of students rebelled against the content of what they saw as “immobilizing” and “reactionary” anthropology. Irritated by the young insurgents, Rita-Ferreira abandoned his post, and a short time later, moved definitively to Portugal<sup>45</sup>. We should remember that in 1977, at its III Congress, FRELIMO ceased to be merely a “Liberation Front” and became a “Marxist-leninist” party. These changes also had an impact on the newly created Center for African Studies of the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane. In those days research focused on the study of regional economy, African peasants, miners and the “Worker-Peasant Alliance” rather than “cultural” or “linguistic” issues (Geffray, 1988). To end, a final corollary is given by way of warning. If the debate between Marvin Harris and Rita-Ferreira has remained insignificant, a modest footnote of the history of anthropological thought<sup>46</sup>, one might ask why I chose it as the subject of this paper. The effort to abolish this invisibility has a synchronic counterpart that goes beyond mere voyeuristic curiosity for the past, this “exotic country”, in the words of Stocking Jr. (2001). I would argue, however, that this is not merely an exercise of delayed exhumation. The point of our undertaking is rooted in another *locus*: where

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44 In 1972 Claude Lévi-Strauss gave a conference in English in Barnard College of the Columbia University, entitled “Structuralism and ecology” (published later in French, in Chapter 7 of *Le Regard Éloigné*, 1983). Marvin Harris did not attend the conference of his colleague, but took note of its content and responded with a virulent criticism, published in the important journal *L’Homme*, in 1976, under the title “Lévi-Strauss et la palourde. Réponse à la Conférence Gildersleeve 1972 (*L’Homme*, vol. 16, no. 2-3, pp. 5-22). Lévi-Strauss in turn, responded with an article entitled “Structuralism and empiricism,” also published in chapter 8 of *Le Regard Éloigné*

45 In the long conversation which I had with António Rita-Ferreira in 2012, this incident was reported with some details. Rita-Ferreira commented me that, having decided to leave his post, he talked with Fernando Ganhão, who was very sympathetic. Despite the uncompromising decision of Rita-Ferreira, Fernando Ganhão continued to pay what was stipulated in the contract. It is also worth emphasizing that Rita-Ferreira had a good relationship with Aquino de Bragança, an important intellectual figure of FRELIMO. In 1977, Aquino de Bragança created, with the collaboration of Ruth First, the center of African Studies of the Eduardo Mondlane University.

46 Curiously, in the volume organized by Lawrence A. Kuznar and Stephen K. Sanderson (2007) in a tribute to Marvin Harris and his legacy, his field research in Mozambique is mentioned only in the appendix. More specifically, this mention appears in two paragraphs of the obituary written by Maxine L. Margolis and Conrad Phillip Kottak, which was originally published in the *American Anthropologist* in 2003, and was republished in an appendix to the same work in 2007.

the study of these minimal histories of anthropology lend our ethnographic inquiries new perspectives and approaches. This time, through the Marvin Harris/Rita-Ferreira debate, the search assumes a form that is more extended in time than in space, demanding for a “thick” political description of the places where we still conduct fieldwork.

Translated by Fiona Robson

Received September 18, 2015, accepted December 2, 2015

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NOTE: During February and March 2012, I had lengthy conversations with António Rita-Ferreira at his home in Bicesse, a suburb of Lisbon. At the end of my stay in Portugal, Rita-Ferreira generously allowed me to photocopy some of his personal letters. He died on April 20, 2014, at the age of 92. In 2016, at the time of publication of this article, all Rita-Ferreira’s personal documents and papers are being organized by his son Felipe Rita-Ferreira. These documents are gradually being digitized at the “Arquivo & Biblioteca da Fundação Mário Soares” in Portugal. We hope that in the near future, all of Rita-Ferreiras’ papers will be available to researchers.

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## Acknowledgments

This article would not have been written without the generosity of António Rita-Ferreira (*in memoriam*). Mario Bick was extremely kind in agreeing to talk with me about his experiences as a former student of Marvin Harris in Columbia. His comments on the North American anthropology of the 1950s and 1960s were very enlightening to me. I would like to thank David Price, disciple of Marvin Harris and curator of his archives, for his interest in my work. I hope that our incipient dialog may continue. I thank Jeanne Penvenne for generously providing me with his notes and comments on the debate between Harris and Rita-Ferreira. I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of this work: their comments were extremely valuable in helping me to think of future developments. A special thanks to Peter Fry, whose stimulus was fundamental for this article, finally, coming "off the drawing board".

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