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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/terrabrasilis/11046>

ISSN: 2316-7793

Publisher

Rede Brasileira de História da Geografia e Geografia Histórica

Electronic reference

Daniel Clayton, "Decolonisation and the unhomely tropicality of Pierre Gourou and Orlando Ribeiro, 1943-1982", *Terra Brasilis* [Online], 17 | 2022, Online since 30 June 2022, connection on 30 December 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/terrabrasilis/11046>

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Submetido 15 Jul. 2022

Aceite para publicação 13 Out. 2022

La société ne vit que d'illusions. Toute société est une sorte de rêve collectif. Le réveil de ce genre de rêve est un cauchemar (Society lives only on illusions. Every society is a kind of collective dream. Waking up from this kind of dream is a nightmare). Paul Valéry (epigraph to Chapter 26, 'Les techniques d'encadrement et la développement' (Gourou, 1982a: 350).

- 1 This five-part article explores the connection between the geographers and tropical experts Pierre Gourou (1900-1999) and Orlando Ribeiro (1911-1997), and changing perspectives on their work and legacy, in the context of the double entendre of post-war decolonisation: what this term meant 'then' *qua* what it signifies 'now' (i.e. not only

what matters today but also what, in the recent critical scheme of things, happens to successive interpretations of the past). The focus here is on what I shall describe as the ‘unhomely tropicity’ of these two ‘mainstream’ geographers, and with some comments at the end about how work on decolonisation is more geared to the recovery of hitherto ‘marginal’ (occluded) actors and voices, perhaps on the assumption that critical understanding of ‘central’ figures (such as our two protagonists) is somehow ‘settled.’

Tropics and decolonisation

- 2 Interpretation of Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s work within the framework of decolonisation has shifted between ‘then’ and ‘now’. Decolonisation ‘then’ (c. 1945 - c.1980) was lived and seen as a tumultuous process of transformation spanning late colonialism, anti-colonial struggle, wars of decolonisation, imperial retreat, clashing metropolitan and colonial outlooks, new nationalist and internationalist agendas, Cold War antimonies, and not least the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which granted self-determination as a fundamental right. Decolonisation ‘now’, meaning (for me) over the last thirty or so years, and with some twists and turns within this period, has come to be reconfigured, through postcolonial theory and latterly decolonial approaches, chiefly as an unfinished project, and with critical emphasis placed on the ongoing and violent legacies (and indeed actualities) of colonialism in material terms and in the form of deep-seated racism, ethnic division, and the association of some longer- and shorter-lived parts of the decolonised world (including those, such as Angola and Brazil, that had been in Portugal’s colonial orbit) with disaster and corruption, and with themes of ‘tropicality’ part and parcel of such association (see e.g., Hecht, 2013).
- 3 These two phases and iterations of decolonisation have provided potent frameworks within which the work of Gourou and Ribeiro has been read. Furthermore, while there are some significant overlaps between their lives and careers, they have been written about separately, as belonging to and helping to shape distinct Francophone and Lusophone traditions of scholarship and their late colonial and decolonising entanglements, rather than as part of a comparative story, which is the direction in which recent historical literature on decolonisation heads (see e.g., Thomas, 2007; Young, 2015; Singaravélou et al., 2020). The primary comparative facet of this article is disciplinary (geographical) and comes in two forms: first, through Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s common schooling in, and veneration and adaptation of, the tradition of geographical inquiry spawned by Vidal de la Blache (what I shall term their vision *Vidalienne*) (Gourou, 1966; Ribeiro, 1973, 1989); and second, through one of the epistemological conceits of geography, and science and scholarship more generally during this era, which the French (and communist and anti-colonial) geographer Jean Dresch (1979) described as the geographer’s “*devoir de reserve*” (duty to detachment) (see Clayton, 2020).
- 4 From the 1940s through to the early 1980s Gourou and Ribeiro were lauded as prodigious and well-meaning scholars and fieldworkers who transformed knowledge of the tropics (and from the mid-1960s with Ribeiro working in partnership with his wife Suzanne Daveau) and the part that “European intervention” played in it, and starting, they often signified, from a position of knowledge “ignorance”.¹ Since the 1980s (albeit with an important critical precursor in Gourou’s case), and with increasing postcolonial

vigour in recent decades, Gourou and Ribeiro have both been viewed as duplicitous wielders of ‘tropicality,’ an age-old Western discourse that exoticises and denigrates – ‘others’ – the tropics. On this postcolonial score, these two geographers were authoritative figures who invented and manipulated understanding of, rather than simply revealed or explained, ‘the tropics’. The critical literature on tropicality – and what is more usually and precisely referred to as ‘Luso-tropicalism’ in the Portuguese case – is geared to the postcolonial project of unsettling the lingering effects of colonialism, and with an emphasis on how violent legacies of empire remain, not least, through the enduring power of Western – colonising – discourses such as tropicality, which revolve around binary and essentialist (and thus divisive) configurations of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and ‘native’ and ‘exotic.’

- 5 I shall attest to these changing perspectives on Gourou and Ribeiro in the second and third sections of the article, and also in order to develop a supplementary recognition, which forms the crux of the fourth section: namely, that postcolonialism can be a blunt instrument of critique and to suggest that its core ‘unsettling’ mission needs to be approached reflexively, in relation to specific and changing decolonising and disciplinary situations. In this vein, it is suggested that Gourou and Ribeiro exercised an unhomely tropicality – one that often worked at cross-purposes with both decolonising energies ‘then’ and postcolonial charges about their tropicality ‘now,’ and that did not neatly fit prevailing ‘metropolitan’ or ‘colonial’ agendas and concerns. The critical purpose of this re-reading is not to cultivate the ‘unhomely’ in order to exonerate Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s tropicality from critique, but rather to glimpse something of what the anti-colonial thinker Georges Balandier ([1951] 1966), who extolled the work of geographers (including Gourou), described as “the colonial situation”: a more fluid, complex and ambivalent, although still potently usurping, space of knowledge and power (including geographical writing and fieldwork); a space that at once underpinned and unsettled colonial conditions and understandings. More recently, J.K. Gibson-Graham (2020) has argued that while we still need to question the sweeping, judgmental, paternalistic, and in places racist, tone of post-war western geographical writing about Africa and Asia (all traits of tropicality), this does not mean that we should pass over the sometimes perceptive and probing criticisms of large-scale development schemes, and attentiveness to the fragility of human-environment relations and vulnerability of many (especially peasant and migrant) communities in the face of rapid social and environmental change (and including signs of climate change) to be found in this body of work. Geographers’ work from this era might now be read “against the grain”, Gibson-Graham (2020: 12) suggest, and “play a role in making other worlds possible.”
- 6 The unhomely tropicality of Gourou and Ribeiro will be tracked in two directions: first, through collaborative links between them (including fieldwork together in Angola in 1962 and Mozambique in 1963); and second, through their ‘loftier’ *vision Vidalienne* and *devoir de reserve*, and by which their geography was set up in an expedient but awkward (or lateral) relationship with political actors and colonial and post-colonial states. Neither Gourou nor Ribeiro sought to insulate themselves from questions of decolonisation. They knew it was impossible to do so, and Ribeiro wrote a great deal about the historical geography of Portuguese colonialism. Yet their sense of politics was not trained on the state, capital or political power, but on the geographical idea of what Gourou termed ‘*techniques d’encadrement*’ (a slippery French term connoting landscape ordering and management techniques, and the agency and adjustment

capabilities of people in space), on a shared core interest in rural-peasant populations, and with Ribeiro more specifically interested in how geographical ordering and patterning was integral to the Portuguese character of the tropics and thus to Portugal's tropical identity.

- 7 The time frame for the article is apposite in these regards. 1943 is the year in which Gourou, then teaching in wartime Montpellier, began to map out a grand synthesis (zonal study) of the tropical world (published in 1947 as *Les pays tropicaux*), and the year in which Ribeiro established the Lisbon School of Geography, which became the institutional base for “geographical missions” to Portugal's colonial domains, an entanglement of state and scholarship that lasted until the end of the Estado Novo authoritarian regime in 1974 (Bowd and Clayton, 2019: 180-205; Sarmiento, 2019). 1982 was the year in which Gourou published his semi-autobiographical *Terres de bonne espérance: le monde tropical*, where he revised his opinion about the fortunes of the tropics, giving a more upbeat assessment than before, and reviewed Ribeiro's 1981 comparative study of Angola and Brazil, which offered a more downbeat assessment of Portugal's colonial track record in the tropics. Also, by 1982 the formal dissolution of Europe's colonial empires (including Portugal's) was largely over, western researchers no longer had unfettered access to field sites in the tropics, and radical (anti-colonial and *Tiers-Mondiste*) thinkers and activists were exposing the duplicity of western knowledge in empire.
- 8 The article concludes with a brief reflection on how, in gearing (for good reason) critical explorations of post-war decolonisation today towards the recovery of ‘marginal’ and ‘subaltern’ voices and locations – what, in our domain of inquiry, Federico Ferretti (2019, 2021) terms “other geographical traditions” – the potential benefits of looking again at ‘mainstream’ and ‘canonical’ figures, such as Gourou and Ribeiro, should not be overlooked; they cannot and should not be forgotten, and we should resist the idea that the debunking of their tropicality is a settled matter. The trope of the unhomely – unsettled, uncanny – is useful in this regard. I take it, not least, from Ranajit Guha's (1997: 482-83) essay ‘Not at home in empire,’ which proceeds from the claim that “there is always something uncanny about empire”, chiefly in that empire's palpable “urge to make a home of its territory” is not easily satisfied because the *imperium* it claims for itself and upon which it seeks to operate in colonial contexts “does not arise out of the society of the subject population but is imposed on it by an alien force” – enacting an “irreducible and historically necessary otherness”. Guha's wider point is that if the lingering effects of empire today are not to be stereotyped or disavowed through imperial amnesia and colonial nostalgia, uncanniness – the unhomely – ‘then’, and involving the coloniser, still needs to be seen as unsettling for us ‘now’ (also see Jacobs 1996).

Tropical geography and *la vision Vidalienne*

- 9 For sure, some of the most exacting geographical scholarship on the tropical world came from the pens of Gourou and Ribeiro. They were lauded for it at the time and extolled it themselves in several exchanges reflecting on their mutual labours (Ribeiro, 1967, 1968, 1972, 1973; Gourou, 1966, 1968, 1982b). Gourou's *Les pays tropicaux* was the most widely influential of the twelve major books he wrote during a career spanning eight decades. It ran to four editions, to 1972, was translated into numerous languages

(firstly into English, in 1953, and with Ribeiro writing the preface to the 1968 Portuguese edition) and was hailed as a “masterpiece” of scholarly erudition and literary flare, and “clear-minded” and “balanced” in its appraisal of “European intervention” (both he and Ribeiro used this expression instead of colonisation) (see citations in Bowd and Clayton, 2019: 1-35, 211-233). Gourou’s 1970 study *L’Afrique*, which is also significant to what follows, was similarly praised. Ribeiro’s 1962 *Aspectos e Problemas da Expansão Portuguesa*, Daveau and Ribeiro’s 1973 *La Zone Intertropicale Humide*, and Ribeiro’s 1981 *A Colonização de Angola e o seu Fracasso*, were less widely read outside Portugal and the Lusophone world but were no less important in shaping understanding of the Portuguese tropics, and no less favourably received (Garcia, 1993; Sarmento, 2019).

- 10 By the 1940s Gourou and Ribeiro were also ensconced, as experts, in national and international political and policy networks. Gourou worked first in French Indochina (teaching in Hanoi for nine years), and Ribeiro in Lisbon and Paris, on Portugal’s ‘split’ Atlantic and Mediterranean identity. These initial scholarly endeavours brought their work to the attention of the French and Portuguese governments, respectively. Gourou was invited to join the French Popular Front Government’s 1936 Guernut Commission, which investigated allegations of French colonial abuse in the Far East, and after World War II, and with a joint academic appointment at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and the prestigious Collège de France in Paris (where he formed a close friendship with Fernand Braudel), he undertook census projects and geographical ‘missions’ for the Belgian Government in the Congo and Rwanda, as well as travelling far and wide, to numerous international gatherings (AULB – Fonds Pierre Gourou PP153 and IP-713; ACDF – Gourou – missions; CV; Bowd and Clayton 2019: 206-225). He met Ribeiro in the late 1930s and they became reacquainted at various conferences during the 1950s, forming a close bond and shared intellectual outlook. From his base at the University of Lisbon, Ribeiro led a Portuguese Geographical Mission to Guiné in 1947, and over the next twenty years planned and led further missions to different Portuguese tropical and Atlantic realms, including an August-September 1962 mission to Angola and August-September 1963 mission to Mozambique with Gourou by his side (Ribeiro, 1950; Gourou, 1968; Sarmento, 2022).
- 11 Gourou and Ribeiro were both steeped in European letters. Both also prized their Leica cameras as instruments of observation and representation (many of their books are adorned with their photographs).² And both were feted as authorities and helped to expedite what Timothy Mitchell (2002) has described (partly with Gourou in mind) as a “rule of experts”, with geography a putatively beneficent handmaid of Western knowledge and political planning, and with their expertise supposedly arising more from scientific objectivity than any ideological allegiance to nation or empire.
- 12 France’s preeminent Alpine specialist, Paul Veyret (1973), alluded to the commonalities in their outlooks and style, and linked international estimation of their work, in a review of *La Zone Intertropicale Humide*, noting that the volume exemplified a “tradition” of geographical scholarship on the tropical world that was distinguished by “modesty rather than excess”, the “richness of its documentation”, and by its “sympathy and care” for its subject matter, which was “very clearly developed, very pleasantly written”, born of a “long and strong direct experience of large parts of the tropical world”, and equipped to delivering “fair judgements” (cf. Veyret, 1948, and Bowd and Clayton, 2019: 5-10, for similarly inflected reviews of Gourou’s work). The

“juxtaposition between ‘traditional life and the European intervention,’ involving many sensitive issues” was also key, Veyret (1973) continued: “Different types of traditional life are presented in an extremely precise and lively way” and this is “presupposed by an intimate knowledge of the human problems of colonised regions”; and this framework of “zonal study” is able to “rise above the clutter of national situations” and identify comparative problems and themes (modern techniques, population and resources, and land organisation). For Gourou and Ribeiro (and Daveau) alike, “the examination of the suitability of modern techniques [science, technology, land systems, agricultural techniques, and so on] furnishes opportunities to forcefully recall the lamentable procession of mistakes made by Western policymakers, whose proud faith in their abilities was accompanied by deep ignorance of physical and human realities in the tropics and how technical problems are also deeply human and complex problems.”

- 13 These ventures were shaped by Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s 1930s inculcation into the powerful French School of Geography at the Sorbonne, where they worked with Emmanuel de Martonne and Albert Demangeon, who, in turn, were acolytes of the School’s nineteenth-century founder, Vidal de la Blache. Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s *vision Vidalienne* was rooted in an unwavering interest in the *longue-durée* of *milieux* (human-environment contexts and regional complexes) as expressed in land use, settlement, peasant-agrarian custom, population density, and what Gourou came to call “*techniques d’encadrement*” (as above; and more specifically in this context, the long-adjusted landscape moulding techniques and processes of ‘ordinary’ people and populations rather than the state or capital or international development programmes). Befitting this schooling, both strongly objected to environmental determinism and embraced Vidalian ‘possibilism’ (human agency in the face of environmental constraint, and with convention and identity seen as the product of a long and often fragile accommodation between people and their *milieux*) (see Gourou, 1966; Ribeiro, 1973). The region (at zonal, national and sub-national scales) was their prized unit of analysis, and it was studied through a combination of fieldwork (observation, survey work, and mapping), archival investigation, and comparative analysis.
- 14 In 1966 Ribeiro founded a new Portuguese geography journal, *Finisterra*, and invited Gourou to write a piece summarising his view of geography for the inaugural issue. Ribeiro’s geography emulates Gourou’s in many significant respects, and in a 1973 homage to Gourou’s “system of geography”, Ribeiro relates how Gourou was concerned with the “broad lines”, “essential features” and “above all the humanised landscapes” of the tropics – with “large, comparative complexes” of climate, soil, terrain, vegetation, settlement, production, and seasonality; with “regional chapters” of “tropical variation” as well as “the ancient unities of peasant life”; and with “modern pressures and perturbations wrought by European intervention.” Ribeiro offered a sorn-off version of this same message in this Preface to *Les pays tropicaux* (Ribeiro, 1968; also Ribeiro, 1972). At the heart of Gourou’s project, Ribeiro continued, was an abiding concern with how “people regulate their relationships with each other and their relationship with the physical environment through the ways they transform nature and organise space” (Ribeiro 1973). This, essentially, was their (joint) *vision Vidalienne* (also see Solotareff, 1996). It is writ large in numerous ‘survey’ essays that the two of them wrote about the humid tropics in general, and different parts of ‘la zone tropicale’, and Ribeiro (1967, 1989) vindicates it in other essays explaining his own approach. Both geographers were suspicious of what Ribeiro (1973) described as “new developments in human geography [the discipline’s post-war ‘quantitative revolution’]

that propose to isolate spatial phenomena and mechanisms, lifting them out of their natural contexts and civilisations and treating them as relations of force, gravity and interaction in an ideally uniform space.” While the largely rural-peasant focus of their tropical geography spawned sweeping generalisations, it was also field-based, heeded context and locality, and placed great store by observation and evidence rather than assumption and *a priori* thinking (Bowd and Clayton, 2019: 206-264). It also revolved around an epistemology and practice that Olivier Orain (2009) expresses as “*de plain-pied dans le monde*” (to which I shall return).

- 15 For his part, Gourou declared, in that 1966 essay: “Geography demystifies the relations between human groups and their natural base and thus contributes to giving people a more acute sense of their freedom and responsibilities. Humanity is not a vain word; and this is what geography helps to illuminate”. Gourou exalted how his colleague and friend Ribeiro appraised, in “masterful ways”, the unities and tensions linking the “diverse humanised landscapes of the Portuguese tropics” from Angola and Brazil to Goa, Guiné and Cape Verde, and from the local scale and short-term to long-term processes of human-environment conditioning and large-scale European intervention (the transfer of people, goods, and agricultural practices linking Portuguese Africa, America and Asia).

Tropicality and Luso-tropicalism

- 16 As this thumbnail sketch of two prolific and influential bodies of work hopefully intimates, for both Gourou and Ribeiro geography (and with tropical geography deemed an area of study rather than as a bespoke subdiscipline) was a project of ‘synthesis’ and ‘demystification,’ and with the geographer surveying from on high, seeing patterns and connections in landscapes, between people and environments, and across regions. However, such patterns and connections, and the fastidious fieldwork and detailed observations upon which they were based, were also hardwired to a disciplinary way of seeing and working that other people - including, by implication, tropical peoples - could not discern. It this presumption regarding their entitlement to write in such an ‘authoritative’ way that subsequently came in for criticism. Their ‘god’s eye’ conceit of Olympian detachment, and the fact that they wielded it in their published work with very little commentary or reflection on how they worked (their epistemological assumptions and methodology), lies at the heart of the idea of tropicality.
- 17 In the early 1980s two young French geographers, Michel Bruneau (whose father had been taught by Gourou in Hanoi) and Georges Courade, with tropical expertise in Southeast Asia and Africa, respectively, pointed to the “colonial perfume” of Gourou’s tropical geography – how it oozed exoticism and paternalism, and held the tropical world in suspended animation, as an object of Western scientific inspection and aesthetic response (and with Gourou, and also Ribeiro, at different moments declaring themselves cynical and sanguine about the fortunes of the tropics) (Bruneau and Courade, 1984). Bruneau and Courade acknowledged that Gourou was often critical of European colonial policy, seeing much of it as ill-attuned to tropical conditions, but argued that his work was still “shadowed” by colonialist conceit in the way it spoke on behalf of tropical peoples and places, and eschewed critical analysis of politics, capital, and the state. This was a fledgling postcolonial critique of Gourou, one written, then,

from a radicalised metropolitan situation within which the authority of white-western, and overwhelming male, programmes of research and representation were being questioned in the wake of the political and intellectual upheavals of the late 1960s.

- 18 Key elements of this critique would later be applied to Ribeiro (see Pimenta, Sarmento and de Azevedo, 2011), to which I shall turn shortly. Meantime, David Arnold (2000: 5) saw *Les pays tropicaux* as “a high point in the discursive representation of the tropics (which will be referred to here as ‘tropicality’) that had formed over the preceding century of imperial expansion and control”, and with the text saying “as much about a collective (but by the 1950s already rather dated) northern world-view of the intra-tropical zone as it does about the ‘tropical world’ it seeks to depict”, and with the tropics deemed “impoverished and pestilential”. Arnold coined the expression “tropicality” in conscious parallel to Edward Said’s idea of Orientalism. Both were Eurocentric projects of what Said (1978: 45) called “knowledgeable manipulation”. For Arnold (1996: 142) the tropics, like the Orient, need to be seen “as a conceptual, and not merely physical, space”; and figures such as Gourou wielded tropicality by representing and ultimately judging the tropical world “against the perceived normality of the northern temperate zone” (Arnold, 1998: 83). Indeed, Gourou (1947: 2 and 174) opened and closed his survey with the declarations that: “Compared to temperate countries, tropical regions are afflicted by a certain number of inferiorities. It is generally not impossible to master an elusive and difficult tropical nature, and build in hot, wet lands societies with a superior civilisation”; and “We who live in temperate lands find it difficult to realise how baneful nature can be to humanity or to grasp that in many tropical places and regions water may swarm with dangerous germs, numerous blood-sucking insects may inject deadly microbes into the body, and the very soil may be harmful to the touch.”
- 19 An extensive literature on tropicality (for summaries, see Bowd and Clayton, 2019: 15-32 and *passim*; Sutter, 2014) now shows how this discourse has been projected and grounded through a panoply of modern Western (Anglophone, Francophone, Germanic, Hispanic, and Lusophone) practices and disciplines, from agriculture, art, architecture and botany, to exploration, fiction and tourism, and maritime trade, plantation and penal systems and urban planning. The tropical world has been suspended and manipulated in western geographical imaginations in both positive and negative terms, as Edenic and fecund, but also as pestilential and a green hell for European colonisers. Gourou and Ribeiro can be situated in the strain of tropicality that envisioned the tropical world as a realm of deception and disillusionment, and with Gourou (1968, 1982a) seeing in Ribeiro’s work (principally Ribeiro, 1961, 1981) a powerful statement about the obstacles and difficulties the Portuguese faced in colonising alien tropical environments with an ostensibly Mediterranean mindset and know-how. Gourou himself used a powerful image from Paul Valéry about the illusory tenor of society as an epigraph to a key chapter of *Terres de bonne espérance on encadrements* and development in the tropics (I also use it as my epigraph to this article).
- 20 An important and overlooked precursor to this postcolonial critique of tropicality can be found in the Martinican anti-colonial theorist Aimé Césaire’s 1950 *Discours sur le colonialisme*, where what he dubs the “*tropicalité*” of *Les pays tropicaux* is forcefully chastised, with the “subjective good faith” of liberal Western academics like Gourou deemed “entirely irrelevant to the objective social implications of the evil work they perform as watchdogs of colonialism” (Césaire, 1972: 34). It was not just Gourou’s

assertion that the civilisations of the tropics were inferior to those of the temperate West that irked Césaire, but also the way Gourou granted to himself the right to pronounce on what counted as the condition and fate of the tropics. His geography was not serene, detached, or necessarily relevant, Césaire opined; rather, it was “an impure and worldly [subjective and decrepit] geography” (*géographie impure et combien séculière*) (Césaire, 1972: 43). Gourou claimed he knew nothing of this critique (see Bowd and Clayton, 2019), but he was not blind to what was going on around him, noting in a 1963 high school textbook written with colleagues in Bordeaux that decolonisation was “an irreversible process” – one that stemmed from the ravages of World War II, which had “weakened imperial powers and their colonial empires irrevocably,” and that was fuelled by “progress in the means of communication and transmission of thought” (especially, for him, radio), which had “allowed erstwhile ‘dependent’ countries to become conscious of the political and economic problems of the globe and aspire to independence” (Gourou et al., 1963: 28).

- 21 Ribeiro’s tropicality came in a slightly different guise and via a different colonial genealogy: through what Cláudia Castelo (2016; also Castelo, 2018; Alexandre, 2000; Gonçalves, 2018) describes as the political and intellectual entanglements of “Luso-tropicalism”, which stemmed from late nineteenth-century arguments about “the special ability of the Portuguese for colonisation... [and] idea of a special adaptation of the Portuguese to the tropical climate, as well as a special relationship with colonised indigenous peoples.” From 1951, when António de Oliveira Salazar became President of Portugal with a new national (metropolitan-colonial) project of unity that included Portugal’s colonies, until the toppling of his regime in 1974, Portugal bucked the ‘irreversibility’ of decolonisation, and Luso-tropicalism became a means of extending and legitimising colonial dominance, in material terms through the creation of major new economic development and resettlements projects, in Angola and Mozambique for example.
- 22 While colonial in origin, Luso-tropicalism was given an intellectual fillip by the work of Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, and in late colonial Portugal was well-received by scholars from diverse fields – Anthropology, Ecology, History, Philosophy, Political Science, and including Ribeiro (and Francisco José Tenreiro) from Geography – and with Salazar’s director of the *Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Política Ultramarina* (higher education academy, which trained officials for colonial assignment), Adriano Moreira, playing a powerful role in bridging different disciplinary and political dimensions.. As João Sarmiento (2019: 23) notes, “Luso-tropicalism was conveniently and selectively appropriated as an imperial narrative by the Estado Novo as a means of highlighting the idea that the Portuguese had a special ability to relate to ‘other’ cultures”, and with this “perhaps seen nowhere more clearly than in one of Ribeiro’s [1942] early publications: ‘O Brasil’ ... [which] underscored the specious links in Luso-tropicalism between geography, culture and race. Ribeiro claimed that ‘it is undeniable that the Portuguese have, more than any other Europeans, the gift of acclimatisation in the tropics, remaining strong where and while other [European] peoples hardly settle’”.
- 23 Latter-day Portuguese postcolonial critiques of Luso-tropicalism build on the Anglophone tropicality literature, and the juxtaposition between decolonisation then and now is neatly expedited by Sarmiento (2019: 24), who tracks how “the death knell of Portuguese tropical geography was sounded by the start of the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique in the mid-1970s”, with funding for research in Africa becoming scarce,

and tropical geography instruction soon disappearing from the Portuguese university curriculum. Tellingly, Ribeiro signalled the termination of his own decades-long project of tropical geography in a 1978 letter to Gourou about the “final” book he was writing on the colonisation of Angola (cited Sarmiento, 2019). Indeed, it is at this end of our frame – the late 1970s and early 1980s, and with Gourou reflecting in a similar vein in his 1982 *Terres de bonnes espérance*, as French radicals were beginning to denounce his tropical geography - that the ‘unhomely’ starts to come into view.

The unhomely tropicality of Gourou and Ribeiro

- 24 The tropicality of Gourou and Ribeiro should not be underestimated. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (and akin to Césaire), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013: 122) examines how academic disciplines have both shaped and been shaped by colonial practices, how they install “colonizing knowledges” that invent, re-organise and ‘discipline’ Indigenous knowledges and bodies, and have an enduring power to prescribe and dictate meaning. In vital respects, decolonisation ‘now’ is about dismantling the epistemological roots and sway, and citationary power, of colonising knowledges, of which Orientalism and tropicality are potent examples. Postcolonial (and now ‘decolonial’ – as the parlance gets revised) interest in the unhomely – the uncanny, the unsettling – provides one (although by no means the only) path to such dismantling, and, among other things, involves further enquiry into what Ann Stoler (2008: 247-278) terms “the politics of disregard”: namely, querying the assumption often found in postcolonial theory “that we who study the colonial know both what imperial rule looks like and the dispositions of those it empowers”; querying “the smug sense that colonial sensibilities are a given and we can now quickly move on to the complexities and more subtle, troubled dispositions of the postcolonial present.” In a related vein, for Guha, ‘not being at home in empire’ not only stems from the censure of ‘the colonised’; it also involves the historian/critic’s attention to desire, fear, and anxiety on the part of colonisers, about miscegenation for example, and how they can feel that things are wrong even if they act or pretend ‘otherwise’, pretending that their power and presence are secure.
- 25 In recent years, the recovery of, and reckoning with, the violence of empire, often buried in the imperial archive (and sometimes literally burned - destroyed), has become a way of broaching grievances today about racism, exclusion, imperial amnesia, and colonial nostalgia – and all of this is rekindling interest in the post-war era of decolonisation, and along the lines that it was more complex and fraught than our theories and genealogies of it (Young, 2015). The tropicality literature gets a certain way in this regard, by exposing and challenging the epistemological violence of Western ways of knowing and envisioning the tropics, as a means of ‘clearing space’ for new ways of thinking and working that both heed the achievements of decolonisation (for example, the agency of the colonised, and not least how ‘the tropicalised’ have used tropes of tropicality for their own ‘militant’ ends – see Clayton, 2013), and seek to ascertain the lingering effects of colonialism (long-term and deleterious imagery of tropical conditions).
- 26 Such an orientation, from ‘decolonisation now,’ makes us less sure, for instance, about tropical geography’s methods, results, and in this respect the ‘unhomely’ is about being alert to moments and forms of ambivalence, anxiety and contradiction in an otherwise

accomplished and poised system of representation – about being attentive to moments of doubt or discomfort in the texts of figures such as Gourou and Ribeiro. Questions can be raised about how post-war tropical geography was created and performed – on whose terms, and above all (*pace* Said and Arnold, and Bruneau and Courade) with ‘the tropics’ framed, and by implication imprisoned, by a geographical imagination and practice that appropriates and manipulates.

- 27 It is along this ‘inside’ track that the unhomely tropicality of Gourou and Ribeiro might now be made to travel, and with questions about what there is to their work that might now be deemed unacceptable or harmful not decided at the outset. Two sets of considerations, both of which have been hinted at above, might be sketched (and prompt further exploration). First, and perhaps most obviously, both Gourou and Ribeiro (and from the mid-1960s Ribeiro with Daveau) return again and again in their work to the idea that Europeans were never, and could never be, entirely ‘at home’ in the tropics, because of the alien nature of the environment and European colonisers’ ignorance and inexperience of it.
- 28 In this sense, an assertive tropicality that trades on a temperate/tropical binary of superiority/inferiority and mastery/subservience can be read as an anxiety-ridden response to what colonisers never entirely had within their grasp. Whether in exotic awe or fear of ‘the tropics,’ the tropical zone was unsettling. More particularly, and adapting Guha’s thesis, for Gourou and Ribeiro colonisers were not at home in the tropics because their ways of seeing, settling, and exploiting this part of the world did not arise out of indigenous conditions and know-how but were imposed upon it as an alien force. This is a recurrent theme of their work and is encapsulated in Gourou’s (1982b) detailed review of Ribeiro’s book on the ‘failure’ of Portuguese colonialism in Angola. While, as Sarmento (2019: 27) notes, Ribeiro had sought to defend “an ‘ecological colonisation’, whereby a cultural transplantation from the Mediterranean to the tropics would take place, followed by a tropicalisation of Europeans”, Gourou emphasised how his colleague had come to the realisation that the results of this endeavour, and attendant attempts to explain it through tenets of Luso-tropicalism, were patchy and incomplete.
- 29 While Gourou used *Terres de bonne espérance* (“lands of good hope”) to express a new-found optimism about prospects for tropical development, the book itself is replete with analyses and epigraphs that are about illusion, disillusionment, and failure (in short pessimism), and it is in this direction that Gourou heads in this review of Ribeiro’s book. This was a “very important book on a matter of great significance in understanding the topics”, Gourou ventured, and one marked by “the high degree of impartiality needed to deal properly with such a complex and delicate subject and that one has come to expect of its author”: was Portugal, was Europe, ever really or fully able to “master” the tropics, Gourou (1982b: 378) asked using Ribeiro’s book. Ribeiro’s comparison of Angola and Brazil was revealing, Gourou continued, and his overriding theme of “fracasso” (failure) was entirely apt. Getting beyond “superficial analogies” and probing “divergent developments”, Gourou (1982b: 378) reflected, Ribeiro considered the “multiple [environmental, demographic, and financial] constraints” and “political torpor” facing the Portuguese: “The long-held dream of a Portuguese transversal Africa linking Angola to Mozambique may have aroused imaginations, but the means of achieving it were lacking, and the Africans of the future Angola resisted Portuguese conquest so effectively that Portugal took a limited interest in Angola for a

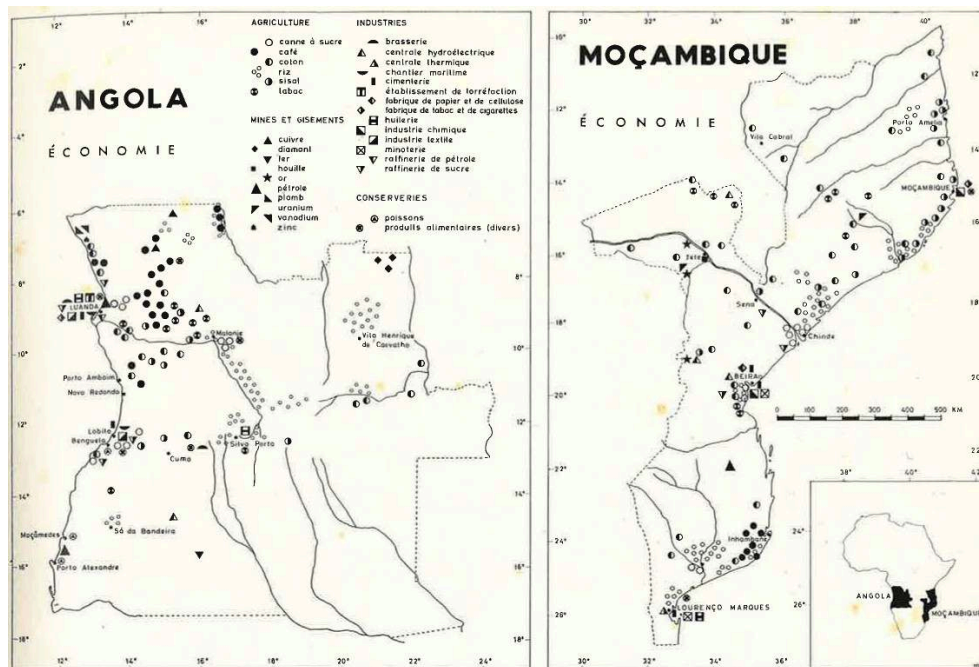
long time.” When such interest was piqued, later, it was through an exploitative “plantation system” and “system of resource extraction” that backfired on Portuguese efforts at miscegenation and assimilation. “Mestizos were few in number and could not contribute to the formation of a new people, as happened more fully in Brazil, which draws its originality from its multiracial sources and fidelity to Portuguese civilisation.” The reality of a “deeply Lusitanian and mixed colonial Angola” remained “illusory”, and long-drawn-out failures like this provided the grounds for a “new separation” between Africans and Europeans through decolonisation (Gourou 1982b: 378-379). In short, Gourou saw a sense of inevitability in what Ribeiro was recounting in the wake of Portugal’s colonial capitulation in Africa, and it was a view of this continent that chimed with his own sense of how unhomey – how disturbed (we would now more likely use the word ‘violent’) – the tropical world was from a European colonial point of view, and with Europe fomenting so many of its problems.

- 30 Daveau (1963: 313-315) had also dwelt on these themes of disillusionment and unhomeyness in a long review of Ribeiro’s earlier book on the geography of early Portuguese overseas expansion, underscoring the many difficulties, and difficulties more than opportunities, in how, “facing a new world rich in economic promise, but refusing the pure and simple implantation of traditional forms of Mediterranean civilisation, the Portuguese found themselves constrained to improvise new methods of colonisation in how they adapted both to the environment and the means at their disposal.” The “distinguishing features of tropical lands that came under Portuguese influence – miscegenation and assimilation – heralded a national concept based not on race”, she read Ribeiro as saying, “but on participation in the same cultural heritage” (Daveau 1963: 315-318). But it also involved “a quick mixing of elements to generate a recent standardisation of tropical countries... and reunification of the tropical world... to which we are often not very alert” – alert in the sense that these processes of mixing and calibration generated their own longer-term problems. An “original mixed culture was created of which Brazil remains, in the world of today, the living champion”, but the “decisive enrichment” of the tropics by the Portuguese, with myriad exchanges and flows across the tropical zone, was not achieved “without cruel bloodletting” and “an upheaval in eating habits”, and with what “was affected by Portuguese traffic” benefitting Portugal foremost (Daveau, 1963: 313-318).
- 31 The other main way of opening up the idea of an unhomey tropicality in the work of Gourou and Ribeiro is by using their *vision Vidalienne* and *devoir de reserve* to unsettle the aura of epistemological entitlement and appropriation that critiques of tropicality bring to their door. On the former count, Vidalian geography was skeptical about modernisation, state centralisation, and rapid change (through economic development, urbanization, and political standardisation). This geography had a pastoral-peasant-paternalist bent and was suspicious of the artifices of modernity. One of Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s key contributions to this intellectual outlook and tradition of scholarship was to extend its sensibilities to the colonial world. Such sensibilities lie behind their criticism, often veiled in their scholarship, of Belgian, French, and Portuguese imperial schemes and colonial policies – even as they came to such issues, they acknowledged, through government and advisory assignments, and with state and colonial backing (or what Gourou referred to simply as the help of “*les autorités*”, the authorities, and with the *Junta de Investigações do Ultramar* key to Ribeiro’s fieldwork). They clung to their research independence tenaciously. For example, when questioned, in 1984, by radical

French geographers about his politics, Gourou (1984: 67) responded, defiantly, “I would rather see a peasant than a politician.”

- 32 On both counts, “European intervention” had an unhomey presence in the patterns and rhythms of the tropical world that Gourou and Ribeiro beheld. In textual terms, and in both of their cases, such unhomeliness was registered with use of question marks. When questions of colonisation bubbled to the surface of their writing, which generally fitted the Vidalian format of proceeding from physical geography to long-evolved humanised landscapes, it was usually in the form of questions that were deployed rhetorically to imply that such matters were intruding into their narratives. This happened more consistently in the case of Gourou than that of Ribeiro, who, in a Luso-tropicalist vein, broached political questions in a more thoroughgoing manner. However, Ribeiro still followed the Vidalian script, and both geographers were oriented towards the traditional-agrarian-peasant base of *encadrements* and humanised landscapes that were being overhauled by Western designs and inroads, and frequently, they judged, with counter-productive results. Gourou (1970: 3, 27, 382) wrote at length about the “increasing poverty” of African *encadrements* in the face of imperial plunder and new nationalist and international development agendas. In his view, whole ways of life were threatened and diminished by both colonisation and decolonisation.
- 33 This stance can be seen clearly in a 1968 essay that Gourou wrote on Angola and Mozambique, which stemmed from his fieldwork with Ribeiro earlier in the 1960s and was written at the height of a decade-long war of independence, and with fuller chapters on Mozambique (Gourou, 1970: 327-333) and Angola (Gourou, 1970: 367-373) - and including photos taken during his trips with Ribeiro - coming later in *L’Afrique*. In this essay Gourou (1968: 7-18) related how the “economic life” of Angola was being transformed by commercial plantations (coffee, sugar) and mines (diamonds, oil, iron ore, and manganese) (Figure 1), and leading to “a certain degree of organisation in railroads, harbours and towns”. “Official agricultural colonisation wants to root families”, he continued, to create “a Portuguese community in Angola that is so large it cannot be questioned.”

Figure 1. "Angola et Mozambique: études de géographie régionale"



In: Gourou, 1968: 13, fig. 4. © Biblioteca do Centro de Estudos Geográficos da Universidade de Lisboa (CEG-IGOT-ULisboa)

- 34 There is a rhythm and naturalism to his description of these two Portuguese tropical colonies, with the physical and human geographies he describes coming from his observations (i.e. without references and sources – the essay does not list any). This is partly what Bruneau and Courade (1984) meant by his “colonial perfume”: Gourou presides, pontificates; we are under no illusion that the knowledge presented is his. But this style is also unhomely in the way it is punctuated by questions that break the sweep of the narrative. For example, immediately after his remarks about the Portuguese community in Angola, Gourou asks: “Do these parameters and forces of colonisation respond to the hopes placed in them?” He follows this with an opinion that places the narrative back into a natural order, averring that “The economic situation of these settlers is not stabilised because their vocation remains ill-defined”; and on he goes in this fashion, punctuating his ‘perfumed’ text with questions that prompt us to query his style (ask about where it comes from, and what is excluded): “You have to ask whether, despite the talent and dedication of Portugal’s colonists and colonial companies, their schemes are not utopian”. “The colony of Matala and Folgares, on the upper Cunene”, he continues,

is a beautiful technical achievement. Electricity produced through the dam is transported to Sá da Bandeira and Moçamedes. Some of the water feeds an irrigation canal whose immense sinuosities emphasise the relief of a tropical peneplain with wide flat-bottomed valleys. These official colonisations are conducted with seriousness. But will they achieve results commensurate with the size of the investments?

- 35 As for Mozambique:

In an Africa too often little favoured by the quality of its soils and water abundance, the Zambezi Delta brings together great fertility benefits and certainly a wide supply of fresh water. And this has brought diverse colonisation dreams and schemes. But should we fear that all of this will not have the happy effects it hopes

for? White settlement policy jeopardises the Luso-tropicalism of Africans by miscegenation.... The existence of tens of thousands of *civilizados* cannot claim to pave the way for progress for 6,600,000 Africans.

36 Gourou predicted a bloody end to the peasant resettlement plan then in the offing in Angola, where upwards of 3000 African peasant families, scattered over a 25,000-hectare area, were being resettled in villages in the east and northwest of the colony. The plan was designed to shore up Portugal's lucrative plantations and mining operations, and the settlements were patrolled by Portuguese militia and a network of spies and informants, to offset infiltration and mobilisation by the National Front for the Liberation of Angola. But the peasants so resettled – up to one million of them by 1974 – looked disdainfully upon the 200-300 Portuguese *colons*, who were handed prize land and mineral concessions in their lands. For the vast majority of the population, Gourou surmised, prospects were being stunted by “the same racial segregation problems as we see in South Africa and Rhodesia.”

37 Gourou (1970: 7, 21) took a similar questioning tack in *L'Afrique*, and did so to enter metropolitan and disciplinary debates in anthropology, sociology and philology about race:

Would Black people be more inclined, by nature, to admit a close interdependence between the natural and the supernatural? How can such a question [asked by these disciplines] be answered honestly? Is it wise to even ask it when you are a white person belonging to a nation whose capital [Paris] has 5,000 astrologers, palm-readers and other soothsayers? (Gourou, 1970: 7)

This African intelligence: Why has it seemingly not constructed anything comparable to the Greco-Latin or European nature, or Chinese, or Indian? Well, it is not individual intelligence that makes civilisations; rather, they are historical, social and geographical constructs... and the key element, the crucial factor in these questions, is the organisation of techniques. (Gourou, 1970: 21)

38 One can hear echoes of Ribeiro's own writing in much of this; indeed, he wrote in a similar way in many of his essays (e.g. Ribeiro, 1967), with questions used to jolt – or ‘unhome’ – the narrative flow of his tropical geography and juxtapose traditional and modern, and coloniser and colonised.

39 Gourou's readiness to question dominant Western systems of thought and colonial policies – and he was particularly searching in his criticism of Britain's record in East Africa (see Gourou, 1954, 1955) – impressed France's top colonial administrator, Robert Delavignette (1972: 280-282), who noted that “the training of new social classes of administrators and policy-makers should not happen without some liaison between the leadership of the administration and geographical research. Obvious geographical facts and findings are often neglected by Governments and Administrations imbued with a sense of their own infallibility.”

40 Furthermore, Balandier (1966: 37-41) lauded Gourou and the field of tropical geography for avoiding the type of “dogmatic mapping” he associated with anthropology's essentialist fixation with tribe and ethnicity, with the psychologising categories of anti-colonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, and with modernisation theorists' resort to abstract economic models which subordinated questions of culture to material drives and aspirations. While Gourou was more concerned with *la longue durée* and a traditional peasant-agrarian scene than with the political contingencies of the decolonising present, Balandier continued, his work also in some ways bucked “the current disregard for the present that characterises French ethnology” through its

concern with “the art of living” rather than just technical or material appreciation of “means of living”. Above all, the importance of such geographical work resided, for Balandier, in its emphasis on “adjustment to place” – in other words, on processes of change that were more cyclical and piecemeal than linear. Balandier saw the geographer’s interest in the agrarian know-how and strategies of African communities as a decolonisation of the scientific gaze and implicit critique of ethnology. In other words, the questions, particularly about European intervention, that Gourou and Ribeiro raised in their books and essays point to something more conditional and equivocal than one gets from plainer critiques of their tropicality/Luso-tropicalism – and something that was enacted between locations.

- 41 Such equivocation also stems from the way their *vision Vidalienne* was expedited through what Orain (2009) expresses as “*de plain-pied dans le monde.*” This complex and clever expression variously translates as ‘on a level with the world,’ ‘to walk in the real,’ ‘to be true to reality.’ It captures the rhetorical and stylistic character of Vidalian geography and how writing in this vein became persuasive and authoritative. “The realist illusion of being level with the world, in the immediacy of the object, rests on the removal of what might emerge in the text about the conditions of its enunciation, and its roughness [noisiness and imprecision] as mediator in the act of communication” (Orain, 2009: 46). Orain argues that this belief in the immediacy of the world and ability to literally transcribe it for the reader invested *la vision Vidalienne* with realism but also with complacency about the need to probe the epistemological grounds upon which its knowledge was generated. The geographer sought to convince the reader that the world was being closely (scrupulously) observed, yet at the same with the writer placed outside of it all, in a realm of observational fantasy, as if the facts and relations seen or disclosed were unclouded by personal whim or methodological artifice.
- 42 Such a metaphysics had obvious political bonuses for the young discipline of geography, which was seeking to gain a foothold in school and university curricula and underscore its analytical gravitas. For Gourou and Ribeiro, the geographer’s attention to terrain and human landscapes, and fastidious recourse to detail, was what anchored this realism. It was also delivered in a high literary style that involved both lyricism and level-headedness to create the illusion that there was no authorial intervention in the passage from world to word and back. Accordingly, geography’s status as a *performance* – a doing, a construction – was obscured. Gourou and Ribeiro both wrote as if the regions they had visited, and the objects and relations that appear in their texts, arose unquestionably from the landscape itself rather than from a trail of methodological decisions that went into the assembly of their work. This trail – the sources and methods they used (including their avid photography), and the voices they solicited or side-lined – was consigned to the background, if it was mentioned at all, again making their interpretative judgements seem as if they arose from the landscape itself.
- 43 Of course, dropping opinion into the text in the form of questions that punctuated this ‘walk in the real’ was a way of extending its illusion: it draws our attention to the very thing that Orain’s *de plain-pied dans le monde* makes us believe, and makes it look all-the-more unhomey. Delavignette (1972: 281) glimpsed something of what I mean, remarking:

Let’s return to Gourou’s *L’Afrique*. The very cover of the book gives off the reddish atmosphere of bush fire. The frontispiece is a photograph of black women, children on their backs and hoe in hand, bent over to dig the earth. Already our attention is

drawn to what is essential: how do you establish a modern administration on an agricultural space where the peasant expends great time and strength working, far from the village, at extensive cultivation? In this situation, political leaders and their administrative lackeys are tempted by easy solutions that adopt the mask of force. (Delavignette, 1972: 281)

- 44 But the point here is that Gourou – and the same applies to Ribeiro, I think – both advance and unsettle their own epistemic privilege by these means, and the reader is left with the impression (however directly it purportedly came ‘from the landscape itself’) that temperate designs often did not fit tropical conditions, and that an imperial will to power faltered not just because there was resistance to it and deep resentment of empire’s brute force on the part of the colonised, but also because of the coloniser’s inadequate knowledge of fragile *encadrements*, the unravelling of which would prove to be a disaster.
- 45 Such unsettling has been given a new lease of life with the publication, recently, of Ribeiro’s Angola and Mozambique notebooks in new critical editions (Sarmiento and Brito-Henriques, 2013; Sarmiento, 2022). Matters are more difficult, in this regard, in Gourou’s case: he left hardly any notebooks or journals (for his lectures or fieldwork) and only smatterings of scattered correspondence (see Bowd and Clayton, 2019).³ However, I have been dealing with their published texts, where such ‘behind the scenes’ work is very rarely on display and was not deemed to be integral to how their work was published at the time. Moreover, while part and parcel of a tropicalist outlook and *de plain-pied dans le monde* mode of exposition, their *devoir de reserve* also gave them the license to question Western imperial attitudes and colonial policies (and they were fortunate that they were not ‘shut down’ by censors) and declare a commitment to the tropical peoples and places they studied.

Mainstream and margin: where next?

- 46 The above discussion of changing views of Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s work, and how they intersect with wider and changing political and intellectual landscapes of decolonisation, brings us to the idea that we are not faced with a question of deciding whether or not Gourou and Ribeiro were ultimately ‘for’ or ‘against’ empire, or development, or ‘progress’, but rather of thinking about the unhomey qualities of their ventures: how they were power-laden but do not neatly fit into boxes, then or now. I shall end with the suggestion that figures like Gourou and Ribeiro should not be written off, as Césaire (1972: 35), and for important reasons, wrote Gourou off, as a “hackneyed” example of a duplicitous liberal-bourgeoisie ‘do-gooding’, but were part of what is now, in a different postcolonial/decolonial time, seen as a more complex mix of attitudes and practices.
- 47 The rush to recover and extol marginal and subaltern knowledges, and of knowing ‘otherwise’ through indigenous worldviews and know-how, is vital and needs to be harnessed. Latter-day postcolonial and decolonial thought is absolutely right about this – and the charge that Gourou and Ribeiro were haughty and Eurocentric should not be toned down. To be sure, they ‘spoke for’ – ventriloquised – the tropics, and no more so than in grandiose survey essays and books on the tropical zone (Gourou, 1947, 1970, 1982a, Ribeiro 1942, 1962; Daveau and Ribeiro, 1973), where they bestrode the world they were writing about akin (postcolonial theory might suggest) to the way Cecil

Rhodes bestrode the map of Africa: they literally put their stamp on it. But they were also part – at least to some degree – of a hegemonic set-up against which marginalised voices and knowledges, including many people they worked with and taught (and voices they heard, and perhaps even understood), are now being reinstated to historical-geographical visibility. Accordingly, important questions need to be raised here about how autonomous and distinct epistemologies and ontologies are placed within the armature of colonial modernity, and different locations within it and legacies of it. Can there be an ‘outside’ to Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s world interior of ‘knowledgeable manipulation’ (a question posed in a more general way by Said – see Young 2015)? If, in the unhomely qualities of Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s work, the ‘marginal’ actors and networks bound up with the representation of these two geographers as ‘mainstream’ are also thereby unsettled, then conversation about the traffic between core and periphery, and what the one owes to the other, can perhaps only be nuanced – or at least not shut down in the case of our protagonists.

- 48 I am not thinking here that the ‘centre’ will or should re-capture the ‘margin’ via some unhomely sleight of hand, but about something more interstitial. Daniel Paiva and Francisco Roque de Oliveira (2021) push somewhat in this direction, considering how Lusophone-Brazilian geography, for example, has been marginal to the Anglo-North American mainstream, and yet how multiple dialogues and exchanges operating outside and around the mainstream forged “international epistemic communities... between semi-peripheral geographic communities”. At the same time, they acknowledge that such communities had their own elite iterations, and it is a question of figuring out how margin and centre belong to “global histories of geography” and “platforms of dialogue”. This article has hopefully provided an allied – and purposively off-kilter – perspective ‘from and around the mainstream’, and with tropes of fragility, vulnerability and disillusionment key to what I have described as Gourou’s and Ribeiro’s ‘unhomely tropicality.’ While it would be churlish to describe their geography as ‘decolonising’, at crucial moments and textual situations in their work they spoke tropical truth to Western power and colonising ambition.
- 49 We might give Delavignette (1972: 286) the last word: “Gourou [and we might also say Ribeiro] elaborated his work at a time when totalitarian racism was rife. And it was in the course of unheard-of upheavals, provoked by two world wars, that he [they] advanced our knowledge ... and showed that the study of tropical regions dispelled the determinism which, it was claimed, oppressed their inhabitants.” Delavignette was of course speaking with his colonial administrator’s hat on, but perhaps not just that hat. The unhomely tropicality described above might be included in a longer, deeper, and more complex (if not entirely liberated – if that is the right word) auto-critique of empire and historical geography of decolonisation.

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NOTES

1. “Intervention européenne”; “Intervenção europeia”; unless otherwise stated, all translations from French are my own; and I am grateful to João Sarmiento for assistance with translations from Portuguese (and the abstract).
2. The relationship between geographic fieldwork, photography, and tropicality is deserving of further critical attention.
3. Although for a comprehensive bibliography of Gourou’s published work, see: Nicolai 1998.

ABSTRACTS

This five-part article explores the connection between the geographers and tropical experts Pierre Gourou (1900-1999) and Orlando Ribeiro (1911-1997), and changing perspectives on their work and legacy, in the context of the double entendre of post-war decolonisation: what this

term meant 'then' *qua* what it signifies 'now' (i.e. not only what matters today but also what, in the recent critical scheme of things, happens to successive interpretations of the past). The article alights on the 'unhomely tropicality' of these two geographers: a tropicality that does not fully fit either a decolonising 'then' or 'now', and that raises some interesting questions about the making and unravelling of epistemic privilege, and centres and margins of signification. We should not assume that the critique of tropicality, including that aimed in recent decades at Gourou and Ribeiro, is 'settled.'

Este artigo, composto por cinco partes, explora a ligação entre os geógrafos e especialistas tropicais Pierre Gourou (1900-1999) e Orlando Ribeiro (1911-1997), e a mudança de perspetivas sobre seu trabalho e legado, num contexto com um duplo sentido, isto é, da descolonização do pós-guerra: o que este termo significava 'então' *qua* o que significa 'agora' (ou seja, não apenas o que importa hoje, mas também o que, no recente esquema crítico das coisas, acontece com sucessivas interpretações do passado). O artigo debruça-se sobre a 'tropicalidade estranha' desses dois geógrafos: uma tropicalidade que não se encaixa plenamente nem no 'então' nem no 'agora' descolonizador, e que levanta algumas questões interessantes sobre a construção e o desmoronamento do privilégio epistémico, e os centros e as margens de significação. Não devemos presumir que a crítica à tropicalidade, inclusive aquela dirigida nas últimas décadas a Gourou e Ribeiro, está 'resolvida'.

Cet article en cinq parties explore le lien entre les géographes et chercheurs tropicaux Pierre Gourou (1900-1999) et Orlando Ribeiro (1911-1997), et les perspectives changeantes sur leur travail et leur héritage, dans le contexte du double sens de la décolonisation de l'après-guerre – ce que ce terme signifiait “alors” ainsi que ce qu’il signifie “maintenant” (c’est-à-dire non seulement ce qui importe aujourd’hui, mais aussi ce qui, dans les schéma critique récent des choses, se produit avec les interprétations successives du passé). L’article se concentre sur la “tropicalité étrange” de ces deux géographes : une tropicalité qui ne s’inscrit pas tout à fait dans un “alors” ou un “maintenant” décolonisateur et qui soulève des questions intéressantes sur la création et le dénouement du privilège épistémique, et les centres et les marges de signification. Il ne faut pas supposer que les critiques de la tropicalité, y compris celles adressées ces dernières décennies à Gourou et Ribeiro, sont “résolues”.

Este documento de cinco partes explora la conexión entre los geógrafos y expertos tropicales Pierre Gourou (1900-1999) y Orlando Ribeiro (1911-1997), y las perspectivas cambiantes sobre su trabajo y legado, en el contexto del doble sentido de la descolonización de posguerra: lo que este término significaba “entonces” como lo que significa “ahora” (es decir, no sólo lo que importa hoy, sino también lo que, en el reciente esquema crítico de las cosas, sucede con las sucesivas interpretaciones del pasado). El documento se centra en la “tropicalidad extraña” de estos dos geógrafos: una tropicalidad que no encaja del todo ni en un “entonces” ni en un “ahora” descolonizador, y que plantea algunas preguntas interesantes sobre la creación y el desenredo del privilegio epistémico, y los centros y márgenes de significación. No debemos asumir que las críticas de la tropicalidad, incluidas las dirigidas en las últimas décadas a Gourou y Ribeiro, están “resueltas”.

INDEX

Mots-clés: décolonisation, tropicalité, étrange, Pierre Gourou, Orlando Ribeiro

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Palavras-chave: descolonização, tropicalidade, estranho, Pierre Gourou, Orlando Ribeiro

Keywords: decolonisation, tropicality, unhomey, Pierre Gourou, Orlando Ribeiro

Palabras claves: descolonización, tropicalidad, sin hogar, Pierre Gourou, Orlando Ribeiro

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