



“Olly e nós”, de Adriana Nunes Souza, 2022, desenho sobre papel.

“She leads expedition”: Maria Czaplicka trajectory in the history of anthropology*

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In the book “*Maria Czaplicka. Gender, Shamanism, Race. An anthropological biography*” (2020), Grazyna Kubica presents the biography of the Polish anthropologist Maria Czaplicka (1884-1921), contemporary of Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Economics. Both left their country to study anthropology from a new perspective, since in Poland it was still perceived as a physical science (Kubica, 2020). The book launched in 2020 is defined by the author as a “history of critical and feminist anthropology”, and her choice to look at Maria Czaplicka’s trajectory is justified by the enigmatic figure of this woman in the history of anthropology. With almost 700 pages and about 31 chapters, it is a breath-taking survey within the field of historiography. The author is a Polish anthropologist who, for years, carried out documentary research around the world, and in this work she proposes a more panoramic perspective that crosses national lines and argues that the historiography of anthropology needs a theory that goes beyond the dichotomy between presentism and historicism. established by George Stocking in the 1960s¹.

The author argues that, due to the logic of fieldwork, women emerged as active researchers in anthropology without facing the challenges present in other disciplines. Male ethnographers did not have access to the “women's world” in their research, so they needed the presence and help of their wives or other researchers. She proposes a redefinition of the discipline's canons to encompass more women and their achievements. The book is located in the research field of women's stories in academia and the objective is not only to draw Czaplicka's life, but to access her work, appreciate and highlight the theoretical impact resulting in the enrichment of our discipline. Right at the beginning, the author defines it as an “anthropological biography”, but throughout the reading it is not very clear what is the real innovation in the use of this term and the reason for claiming it to specify her research.

There are some characteristics of Kubica’s book, especially the focus on a singular character like Czaplicka, which are also present in Mariza Corrêa’s book “*Antropólogas & Antropologia*”² (2003).

* Received on 29 July 2022, accepted on 02 June 2023. Review of: KUBICA, Grazyna. *Maria Czaplicka. Gender, Shamanism, Race. An anthropological biography*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2020. Translated by Ben Koschalka.

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¹ George W. Stocking was the figure who had the greatest impact on the study of the history of anthropology. In addition to publishing widely on the subject, he also acted as a major promoter of research in this area. He is known for using a historicist approach to the development of his research: which understands that every intellectual effort is closely linked to the present conjuncture in which it is carried out, that is, all history is written in the present. Ultimately, the approach intends to study the past in itself, making it an object of central interest. In the article “The limits of 'presentism' and 'historicism' in the historiography of the behavioral sciences” the author proposes to explain his method of analysis, called by himself polemical, in which he opposes the historicist approach to the presentist, from dichotomies: “context” and “analogue”; “process” and “sequence”; “emergence” and “agency” (which is historical knowledge that pays attention to the gradual and processual emergence of a certain phenomenon as opposed to an individual founding agency); “thinking” and “thought” (which seeks to draw attention to the procedural character of thought formulation as opposed to the element that is given and stable attributed to a thought); “reasonableness” and “rationality” (which it is history that must see through the plausibility of the argument in its time, instead of judging it by our present reason); and finally the terms historicism and presentism. In all cases, what Stocking seeks to relate is: understanding the past considering its own context, or studying it according to the writer's ideas of the present (Stocking, 1982).

² Mariza Corrêa (1945-2016) was a Brazilian anthropologist, professor at the Department of Anthropology, Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences, State University of Campinas for 30 years. In the article I kept the title of her book in the original language because in Portuguese it is possible to differentiate the gender of the noun. She chose this title to reference the book “*Anthropology & Anthropologists*” (1973) by Adam Kuper, who only wrote about male researchers.

The anthropologist seeks, through historiographical research, to situate the gender constraints invested in the trajectories of women in anthropology. She develops her arguments through the trajectory of three researchers (which she calls “three heroines of the Brazilian anthropological novel”): Emília Snethlage, German ornithologist; Leolinda Daltro, a sertanist teacher and Heloísa Torres, an anthropologist at the National Museum. Mariza shows us how gender as a social category has affected their lives and careers, but despite being all women, the author emphasizes that the characters are unequal in their trajectories. She reminds us that any analytic category runs the risk of becoming reductionist; however, the brilliance of the book is not in its righteous character of “giving voice” to women overshadowed by the history of the discipline, but in prioritizing the search for understanding and complexity of the contexts and mediations in these three examples brought by her. As she states: “it is possible to explain these very variable contents and these more permanent forms, placing these characters each in their own scenario, trying to understand the reading that their interlocutors made of their presence there and placing them in the context of their contemporaries’ performance. in other parts of the world” (Corrêa, 2003:31). A characteristic pointed out by the author that the three characters share is the fact that they were researchers on their own, and not as the wives of anthropologists. A similar situation that Maria Czaplika experienced in Europe in the 19th century. In each case, there were situations Mariza called anomalous within the history of the discipline, because they escape the “rule” of being wives or research assistants. Such figures were not considered full intellectuals because they were not men, they were not wives of anthropologists and they were not “only women”, they were inserted in categories not yet fully recognized. By choosing Emilia, Leolinda and Heloísa, the author exercises an analytical power over the questions she proposes: as anomalous figures, they did not fit into the pre-established gender categories. Gender constraints overlap with other social markers and Mariza’s quest is to shed light on the different relationships and contexts in each case.

Kubica’s choice of Maria Czaplicka, unlike Mariza Corrêa, was inspired by Sally Cole in *Ruth Landes: A Life in Anthropology* (2003), which aims to create a genealogy of women, a matrilineal anthropology. According to Kubica, as the discipline has few “founding mothers”, there is a need to find little-known or forgotten women ethnographers. Through her book, she seeks to rethink theory by unearthing neglected positions by rereading women’s anthropological writings.

Her career is marked by the history of women in anthropology. In 2002 the author decided to investigate who were the interesting but forgotten women that surrounded Malinowski. She released the book *Malinowski Sisters, or Modern women in the early twentieth century* in 2006, telling the stories of at least twelve women. During the research for the writing of this book, she visited the National Library in Warsaw and came across valuable discoveries: a novel written by Czaplicka in 1911, correspondence exchanged with a writer and poems written by her. For the author, writing an “anthropological biography” requires an analysis of overlapping perspectives: the life of a specific person, that person’s scientific research, the history of anthropology, and the “intellectual atmosphere” of that person’s time in the case, stressing the importance of studying the contexts in which the works were produced (Kubica, 2020:9).

This is the objective of the research field of the history of anthropology, to locate the object (or subject) in its sociocultural and theoretical context of that time; the same defended by Mariza Corrêa to understand the gender constraints experienced by the three characters in Brazil. In the book, Kubica tries to show the “heroine” and her work in the context of the ideological *ethos* of the 19th century Polish left, the positivist model of grant funding, the emancipation of women, as well as Russian colonialism and Polish nationalism. The author argues that history is material for anthropological theory. The task of the historian of anthropology is not only to return to old conceptions, but also to place them in the intellectual and biographical context of a given time, showing where they originated and how they were revealed. The aim of the historiography of anthropology is to make us, contemporary practitioners of the discipline, more reflective. Such an objective does not consist in submitting old theories to the debate of our time, but in reflecting through them, keeping in mind the limitations and positive points about our own theoretical premises, methods and generalizations (Kubica, 2020).

The author traces in detail and seeks to retrace the political, social and family context in which Czaplika grew up and was raised. She does the contextualization work with mastery; while reading the book she takes the reader by the hand and takes us through the descriptive text through places such as Warsaw at the end of the 19th century and comments that the interest in anthropology was common to the reading public in the beginning of the 20th century and had a place of prominent in Polish intellectual life, despite not being an official discipline (Kubica, 2020). When Czaplika was starting her education, formal education in the Russian part of Poland was all taught in Russian. However, there were illegal private schools that taught Polish, an important example being the so-called Flying University. Although there were regular classes, the courses did not give the formal qualifications of a diploma. Most of the students were women and many scientists were initially trained there, including the world-renowned scientist Marie Curie³, her two sisters and the protagonist Maria Czaplicka (Kubica, 2020). In Poland, intellectual noble families who lost their lands went to work in the cities and the only capital they had was education. Czaplicka worked as a teacher in Warsaw, for exhausting underpaid or even volunteer hours, but she always had an active profile and a thirst for knowledge. She participated in the first congress of Polish women in 1907. She wrote poems referring to a platonic passion for Orkan Wladyslaw⁴, an influential writer in Poland at the time. Her poems are not just about romance; in them appear conflicts about feminine corporeality, gender roles of the time and her personal dilemma of having followed the path of science (masculine) instead of surrendering to feelings (feminine).⁵ Thinking about Corrêa’s analytical categories, Czaplicka can be considered an anomalous figure in her context. Her life was an example for Eastern European women that showed that it was possible to go beyond traditional models of femininity (Kubica, 2020).

The author also takes us to meet women anthropologists at the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Royal Anthropology Institute, the Folklore Society and the Royal Geography Society and how Czaplicka’s early British career took place in the context of the time. She tells us about her main mentor during her studies at Oxford, Robert Marrett. Czaplicka entered the London School of Economics in 1910 and at this time, the British Museum reading room was a place occupied by women, where Malinowski and Czaplicka were colleagues (Kubica, 2020). An example of the relationship between Malinowski and Czaplicka is the funding requested by Czaplicka for the Academy of Learning in Krakow, which at the time funded Malinowski but refused to fund her because the grants offered were exclusively for men. A similar case posed by Mariza in her book, in which she mentions that Audrey Richards, one of Malinowski’s students and friends, complains to him in a letter that Evans-Pritchard received a hundred pounds more than her at the London School of Economics and that had a lighter teaching load than hers. He, her advisor, recommended that she should be less delicate and less shy (Corrêa, 2003).

³ Marie Curie (1867-1934) born in Poland was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize. The first, in 1903, was awarded in partnership with her husband, Pierre Curie, along with Antoine Henri Becquerel, for studies with radioactivity. Her second Nobel won alone for the discovery of radium and polonium, two radioactive elements. Marie and Pierre were part of the collaborative work and together they discovered that pitchblende, a mineral discovered by Becquerel, was rich in polonium and radium, two elements more radioactive than uranium. The dedication to the life of science, which she managed to reconcile with her family life, also cost Marie dearly. In 1934 she died of leukemia, like many people who worked with radioactivity chemistry before the harmful effects of these substances were known (Guimarães, 2011).

⁴ Orkan Wladyslaw (1875-1930) was an important Polish writer that Czaplicka befriended in Polish social circles, and in chapter 6 the author describes how he and Czaplicka met and developed a relationship. In the mountains of Zakopane, young intellectuals who have reached their position in life through their own work and talent meet to socialize, practice winter sports and finally exchange experiences. Orkan and Czaplicka met in this context, but he was a married man and she, for personal moral reasons, did not want to relate romantically with him in that way. Despite this, Orkan also wrote poems about Czaplicka: “You are like a wonder divine / Fitting of Botticelli’s palettes” (Kubica, 2020:78). Kubica found in Orkan’s wife’s diaries, Stefania Chmielakówna, reports about such a relationship between him and Czaplicka, in which the wife describes her as an intelligent and interesting woman fascinated by Orkan.

⁵ “[...]A woman’s is my body alone / With an abnormal soul inside: / What for both sexes is a gift / In myself I must abide I have a man’s hungry, unsatisfied eagerness, / Ans steadfast courageousness, / With it, female vacillation and tenderness / And exultant lastingness. If to you I give my suffering / with this strange constitution of mine / I remain alone with my torment - / And all your pain. For I exceed you in my womanhood, / Yet in manhood do not abate - / Derisively proud of this monstrousness / Poisoned with laughter’s weight” (Kubica, 2020:86).

Kubica also tells us the entire process of building the first book *Aboriginal Siberia* (1914) by Maria Czaplicka, and it is interesting how she manages to reconstruct the mentality of the Poles about research in Siberia: a place with a traumatic content due to the exiles of the Tzarist regime, but that for some like Czaplicka, it was an opportunity to do ethnography. Regarding the preparation for the fieldwork, the author traces the entire process of organizing the expedition, the numerous requests for funding and how some of them were refused due to the fact that she was a female researcher. Here it is possible to observe the importance of the mediations involved in the financing process and how Czaplicka herself was perceived among her peers: a young and brilliant anthropologist who was heading such an expedition to the Siberian tundra. As it appears in one of the *Washington Post* headlines from April 1914: “She leads expedition: Russian girl at head of party sent from Moscow” (Kubica, 2020:244).

After returning from the extensive research in Siberia, Kubica writes about her stay in Oxford and Czaplicka’s return to Poland. Houses such as Lady Margaret Hall⁶ provided support for women to continue in science without feeling guilty for being single or for not dedicating themselves only to the family (Kubica, 2020). She says that the end of the war had a negative impact on her teaching career, as the teacher she was replacing would return to his position. Similar process described by Corrêa when mentioning the trajectories of anthropologists Audrey Richards, Camilla Wedgwood and Elsie Clews Parsons: like Czaplicka, none of them held a chair in anthropology that allowed them to form students or a research tradition. All of them followed what was more common at that time, being teachers in girls’ schools or colleges like Czaplicka, helping to build critical thinking in students who would attend universities in the following generations (Corrêa, 2003). In chapter 24 the author dedicates to talk about anthropologists in public debate. She highlights the role of women, who through ethnographic knowledge about women from other cultures, pointed to the multiple cultural models of femininity to support female emancipation in their own culture. Czaplicka had an important role and participation in the public sphere writing for several newspapers and giving lectures, this being her source of income, as she did not have a permanent position in universities like her male colleagues.

In the final chapters, the author traces the most difficult periods of the protagonist’s life, who tried to work in the United States with Franz Boas, but without any success, and then her move to Bristol and all the unhappiness encountered there. She puts together the fragments of a series of misfortunes that likely led Czaplicka to commit suicide in 1921, aged just 36. It is interesting how Kubica puts herself in the text, both in a photo with the biographer’s grave and also sharing her efforts and attempts to restore it, saying that it currently appears with an air of abandonment in Wolvercote Cemetery, in Oxford.

The book brings an unprecedented look at the figure of Maria Czaplicka, a detailed contextualization of the academic universe in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century - the same universe that created Malinowski – and corroborates one of the author’s main arguments, namely: Czaplicka missed opportunities to work and research, possibly becoming one of the canons of the discipline, for being a woman scientist in that context. Like Mariza Corrêa, Grazyna Kubica seeks to look closely at the history of the discipline through the trajectories of women who have not become canons. Kubica’s contribution to the field of historiography of anthropology is extremely relevant due to the details offered to the reader, the precise research and the descriptive writing. The book is recommended for those interested in Czaplicka’s life or in the context of the discipline at the beginning of the 20th century; as well as for those who want to think about the trajectories of women scientists and what they had to face to carry out their work, showing the relevance and actuality of this history of critical and feminist anthropology.

⁶ In chapter 22 “Feeling at home at Lady Margaret Hall”, Kubica develops in detail about Czaplicka’s period living and teaching at this college associated with the University of Oxford. Founded in 1879 by nine women, it was an important university community for Czaplicka, where she received support, energy and encouragement for her work. Lady Margaret Hall replaced her home and family, becoming an even better variant of home, helping her with career decisions. Spaces like this provided a comfortable living condition for women in a scientific career, as they had all meals, room cleaning and fireplaces lit. Residents could spend time focused on the important issues without dealing with the demands of home life, plus they were in a stimulating space, surrounded by other smart people interested in producing science sharing the same dinner table (Kubica, 2020:407).

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