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Indigenous intellectuals embrace anthropology Will it remain the same?

Intelectuais indígenas abraçam a Antropologia. Ela ainda será a mesma?

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The growing number of indigenous students enrolled in graduate programs in anthropology is spawning a grouping of indigenous intellectual who, bringing their own knowledge to academia, have great potential to challenge the discipline's convictions and open new vistas. One hopes the arrival of indigenous scholars in anthropology will expose its illusions, fallacies, blind spots, and contradictions and retrieve it from its present lethargy. The diversity of indigenous knowledge ought to provoke a shift toward an “ecumenical anthropology” willing to embrace new knowledge forms and contents, and benefit from them on equal terms rather than continuing to use them as mere raw material for often idle theories.

Com o ingresso crescente de indígenas nos cursos de pós-graduação em antropologia, está-se gestando uma ala de intelectuais indígenas que, portadores de seus próprios saberes, têm grande potencial de desafiar as certezas da disciplina e influir no traçado de seus rumos. Espera-se que a adesão indígena ao campo antropológico contribua para expor ilusões, falácias, cegueiras e contradições e tirá-lo de seu atual estado letárgico, provocando uma guinada para uma “antropologia ecumênica”, capaz de acolher e se beneficiar de saberes que atualmente são apenas matéria-prima para teorias nem sempre pertinentes.

Educação Superior; estudantes indígenas; Antropologia Ecumênica.

Higher Education; Indigenous Students; Ecumenical Anthropology.

In praise of Abya Yala

Rather than a figment of my anthropological imagination, this text reveals my enthusiasm for those who have endured the role of mere research objects for more than a century. I am talking about indigenous peoples of the Americas in general – the Great Abya Yala Continent – and of Brazil in particular. Many other contexts inspire me, but here I focus on the present-day situation of indigenous intellectuals in this country, especially in the field of anthropology. I am convinced that, as anthropologists, they will “indigenize” the field and will contribute substantially to renovate it. I don’t simply mean devising new approaches, or new empirical research problems and places. I also envisage the possibility that, as full-fledged anthropologists, indigenous scholars can drive the academic establishment toward new attitudes, outlooks, and the will to build what I have been referring to as ecumenical anthropology (Ramos 2014), and Paul Little defines as interscientificity (Little 2010, Bergamaschi 2014). An ecumenical anthropology would consist of the assembly of epistemic foundations, that is, a combination of heterogeneous intellectual traditions. An ecumenical anthropology, then, would bring together the collection of stored ideas about alterity from the “savage slot” (Trouillot 1991) era to the latest views of how to read the world of humans, and, *data venia*, of non-humans as well. Most importantly, it would shelter the great constellation of human thoughts about the inhabited world on an equal footing. Such an epistemological blend would evidence that knowledge hatched in academia, albeit self-proclaimed as science, is not superior, more encompassing or universal than that created in indigenous villages well before the invention of the savage slot or, for that matter, “science” itself.

Interscientificity, in turn, brings together “forms of interaction between traditional knowledge and modern science” (Little 2010, 20), thus stressing the scientific feature of indigenous knowledge systems, often denied or ignored, for example, when it is curiously labelled as “science of the concrete” (Lévi-Strauss 1962), or as cosmologies, a term commonly found in “exo-ethnographies” produced by non-indigenous anthropologists.

Waiting for the ecumene

If we google “ecumene” in English, we will have the impression that the term refers primarily to the religious congregation of different Churches. If we look it up in Portuguese, we find that it refers to “a utopian principle that believes it is possible to have a fraternal co-existence of all the identities that comprise an *oikouméné*.” In Ancient Greece, the term *oikouméné* referred to the known world, both inhabited and inhabitable, that is, a space recognizably human.

If, with a grain of poetic license, we apply this notion to the space of anthropology, we will see that it is entirely inhabited by humans, certainly distinct, but equivalent in their humanity. The anthropological ecumene, so far utopian, would refer to the fraternal co-existence of all the identities that occupy that specific

space, that is, the co-existence, neither paternal nor maternal, but *fraternal*, of all the manifestations of knowledge developed in that universe of equivalent identities.

Henceforth, the imagined anthropological ecumene could convene into the same virtual space the collectivity of non-indigenous and indigenous anthropologists (to speak of indigenous anthropologists is almost a pleonasm) via a common denominator, namely, the search to understand themselves and others. Like *lusotopia*, an ecumene uniting dispersed places where Portuguese is officially spoken (Pina-Cabral 2010), we might coin the admittedly ungainly term *anthropotopia* to designate this American realm (which, by the way, geodetically speaking, is rigorously located in the West). It is an appropriate field, fragmented as it may be, to think and live alterity and *auto-alterity*, this apparent oxymoron, which haunts those who feel strange in a strange land, or worse, in their own land. It is also an exercise in gazing at oneself through the eyes of the beholder, and in managing impressions in Erving Goffman's fashion (1959), if they hope to achieve a measure of interpersonal and intercultural rapport. Such a community is over-imagined – more imagined than that imagined by Benedict Anderson (1983) – because it is still just a thought and yet highly coveted. In it there would be no research objects and subjects, for they would all be potentially research objects and subjects, or rather, all of them would be potential objects and subjects to all the others. Like a vast hall of mirrors, such *anthropotopic* province would be inhabited both by indigenous and non-indigenous members with their own intellectual traditions. In such a think tank, or intellectual commons, members would gaze at each other, puzzle over each other, and debate differences and similarities in a constant rotation of perspectives, as Florestan Fernandes (2009, 36) so wisely pointed out more than fifty years ago. I can glimpse, in an enchanting exercise of wishful thinking, the groves of anthropological academia being fertilized with a constant flow of challenging and democratic cross argumentations in the celebrated indigenous style of the quest for consensus.

This *anthropotopia* may never come into existence, but, as an idea, can help us create a horizon of possibilities. For instance, in the past few years in Brazil and elsewhere in South America, it is evident that the indigenous move toward universities has prompted serious analyses about what the presence of indigenous intellectuals in academia means (Zapata Silva 2005, 2007, 2008, 2013). Eager to harness the tools of non-indigenous science, many apply them pragmatically for the benefit of their communities, whereas others use them to unveil the reasons and the unreasonability of the societies that dominate them. Yet others, displeased with the image that especially anthropologists and historians have made of them, challenge the academic status quo. In anthropology, for example, comments such as this by Jósimo Constant, a Puyunawa student at the University of Brasília are frequent: “Many of the things the professors thought they knew about us, indigenous people, were not quite so” (2017). Some reject anthropology they associate with colonialism, others adopt it as a device to correctly disclose knowledge about indigenous peoples, which may lead them to self-affirmation and the quest for

interethnic justice.

My bet is that the indigenous adhesion to anthropology will have the effect of transforming the discipline. Potentially it can dislodge it from its comfort zone, invite it to look at its own illusions, fallacies, and blind spots. Furthermore, it can reveal the inconvenience of confined academic life and the merits of the open field, the intellectual commons, in Mary Louise Pratt's felicitous expression (2011, 55).

On the way to the university

As far as anthropology is concerned, it is "as though, from the native point of view, ethnography was just too important an enterprise to be left to ethnographers" (Ramos 2008, 476). I made this provocation fourteen years ago. At that time, indigenous people in Brazil were just beginning to enroll in higher education programs. In other parts of the world, such as México, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, they had long entered universities. In Brazil, however, the scandalous deferral of indigenous formal education (which, by the way, is not limited to indigenous people) is the result of centuries of public neglect and contempt for good-quality education for all. Inexcusable delays and enormous difficulties have kept indigenous people away from schools. More recently, public elementary schools have hired indigenous teachers, especially in the villages, and, in what seems to be quite a short period, a growing number of indigenous students have enrolled in public universities.

The number of illiterate indigenous persons is triple that of Brazilian adults, estimated to be nearly nine percent. The indigenous population in the country is estimated to be between 750 hundred thousand and 900 hundred thousand or perhaps one million, but the exact number is yet to be established. They comprise more than 230 peoples speaking 180 different languages (Lima 2007, 1-2). They represent a mere .4 percent of the 207 million Brazilians (figures prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has killed 680 hundred thousand people between 2020 and 2022). Despite such disproportionate demography, indigenous peoples in Brazil occupy a vast space in the country's imagination. Images, stereotypes, fantasies, love and hate make up a kind of indigenism that deserves the epithet of Brazilian Orientalism (Ramos 1998). These "Indians," who some would like to confine to the jungle, and others want to assimilate into the so-called "national communion," rarely, if ever, had their voice heard in matters that directly affect them. Affecting indigenous and the mass of dispossessed Brazilians, lack of access to good education has been for centuries the most efficient stratagem by the powers-that-be to keep them all in a state of ignorance about their own rights.

Schools for indigenous people were not entirely lacking in the past. Since colonial times, Catholic missionaries brought formal education to the villages, where they taught Portuguese and subjects that were alien to indigenous life, besides prohibiting them to speak their own languages. This trend continued after Brazil's independence in 1822, when the Brazilian state intervened. Throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century, the country's official goal was to integrate

indigenous peoples into the nation under the guardianship of the state (Lima 1995, 2007; Ramos 2000; Baniwa 2012). This condition lasted until the end of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), and a new Constitution proclaimed in 1988. Only then did indigenous persons begin to have access to higher education. Demand for native teachers in the villages led many to enroll in education courses. The official requirement of a bachelor's degree made several universities open courses catered to an indigenous public. As expected, greater access to basic and high school institutions resulted in a greater demand for higher education (Baniwa 2006, 162).

In 2012, the Quota Law set a certain percentage at federal institutions of higher education for black and indigenous persons. From then on, the number of indigenous university students increased to approximately ten thousand that year (Baniwa 2012), reaching over seventy thousand in 2019 (Medaets, Arruti and Longo 2022). Undoubtedly, affirmative action policies contributed substantially to this increase. Prior to that law, the number of indigenous students in public universities was minute (Lima 2007a, 19; 2007b).

National Museum anthropologist Antônio Carlos de Souza Lima, who created the Project *Pathways to Knowledge: Higher education for indigenous people in Brazil*, observes that the Indigenous Tutorial Programs (known as PET-Indígena in Portuguese) was a late comer to state compensatory initiatives for the deficient education imposed upon indigenous people. Despite the increasing number of indigenous students across the country who have benefitted from the PETs, “the systematic and intentional omission by sectors of the Ministry of Education (...) and even by sectors of the universities” (Lima 2015, 8) is quite clear. Nevertheless, reports by the students themselves show that even such a small action by the state can have surprising results (Freitas 2015). The enthusiasm of indigenous students is evident.

The interest indigenous students show in their academic training is always much greater than the interest of non-indigenous students. They would like to stay [in school] for four or five years to absorb all they can, because they figure that everything will be useful to help their communities (Baniwa 2012, 140).

Enrolling in graduate school would be just a matter of time. The Federal University of Goiás was the first to adopt the quota system in its graduate programs as early as 2015, followed by several others, such as University of Brasília, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, of Minas Gerais, etc. Five years later, there were sixty thousand university students in the country (B. Baniwa et al 2020), not to mention more than twenty indigenous lawyers, among other professionals. These are still modest numbers, but for these thousands of indigenous people, national society is no longer an impenetrable mystery. Thus known, it can be, if not changeable, at least manageable. Anthropology will not shy away from this battle, and they know it.

Anthropology on the spot?

In the indigenous rush to universities, how does anthropology fare in the eyes of these students? Apparently, it does not come out totally unscathed, although, paradoxically, continues to attract many an indigenous student. At this point, I pass the baton to those who very gently agreed to talk to me about this and similar issues.

Felipe Sotto Maior Cruz, a member of the Tuxá indigenous nation in Northeast Brazil, holds a doctoral degree in anthropology from the University of Brasília and recently has joined the faculty at the Federal University of Bahia. In a published paper, he comments on the preferences of indigenous students.

Actually, anthropology has held an ambiguous place, because it is one of the disciplines most intimately related to the past, present, and future of the 'Indian issue.' (...) [I]n many contexts, anthropologists are criticized for going to the indigenous communities to do their doctoral or master's research, then leave without giving hardly any return for their hosts' hospitality and goodwill. (...) In fact, because of this ambiguity, anthropology doesn't seem to be the best way to get at the urgent goals typical of indigenous lives. Indigenous students favor careers in the areas of health, education, and law (Cruz 2017, 98).

These remarks reflect the preferences of the majority society for which anthropology is either utterly unknown or an esoteric field of idle erudition. Cruz himself expresses his objections to academic life in these terms: "The University environment divides and individualizes. It creates competition. Some of my worst experiences at the University were the selection processes in which, for example, I had to compete with my fellow-Indians for an opening (Interview June 30, 2017). The double-edged sword of anthropological knowledge, however, did not go unnoticed. On the one hand, Felipe appreciates "the wealth of human experience in the world." On the other, he deplores "the common denominator of these stories(...), the destructive, 'altericidal,' genocidal and ethnocidal potential of the Whiteman" (*ibid*). Born and raised in a context of exacerbated spoliation, Felipe lives intensely the ambivalence of anthropological knowledge and does not conceal his frustration and resentment. About learning anthropology, he says:

It can distance us from our traditions and make us reject what we learned at home. [At the same time, however], it can provide us with tools that empower and turn us into weapons in the constant fight against Whites. (...) I wish that, one day, my community will dispense with the Whites' services, that our relations with Whites will be an option rather than a necessity (*ibid*). When the Whites say their knowledge is the true knowledge, they are doing terrible things to us, violating our memories and rights. This is why I came to the University (Cruz, Interview June 30, 2017).

In short, to combat the enemy, there is nothing better than to use the enemy's weapons.

Four years after this interview with Felipe, I came across a table of theses and dissertations defended by indigenous students in several universities in the country. Of the fifteen fields recorded, anthropology comes first with twenty-eight degrees, followed by linguistics/ literature with twenty-one.¹ For those who hold the view that writing is a fatal barrier to indigenous interethnic communication, there is nothing like Statistics Cartesian logic to prove otherwise!

Francisco Sarmiento, a Tukanoan speaker, is an anthropology doctoral student at the University of Brasília. Thoughtful, Francisco carries the mark of his ancestors' knowledge and wisdom. Regarding the resistance indigenous students might have to anthropology as a possible university career, he told me in an interview on June 30, 2017.

In several places, [anthropologists] can still be seen as always ripping off, plundering, and robbing indigenous things, including their most cherished knowledge, which then they disclose to the world and enrich their sciences and cultures with no gain to the peoples they robbed.

Francisco, however, ponders:

Ethnology allows me know what Westerners think and look for when they study indigenous peoples. It tells me how they regard the Indians. (...) On the other hand, (...) we can also know our societies better and also know about other societies, such as the Euro-Western, among others. It seems that craving to know the Other is intrinsic to all societies. To me, ethnology is not just about indigenous peoples.

To Francisco anthropology's redeeming value would reside in its practitioners who

seem to be the most sensitive among humanists as they try to understand [especially] indigenous societies. When these societies were targeted to be wiped out, [anthropologists] were (...) among the few who sided with indigenous peoples and believed in their survival (Sarmiento 2018, 130).

Henceforth, the way interethnic relations have unfolded through history leads indigenous peoples "to look for academic anthropology. It is important to know about oneself, but it is also important to know about the other" (Interview June 30 2017). Francisco sees anthropology as capable of moving away from preying on indigenous realities toward redeeming itself, when the knowledge it produces passes on to the Indians themselves. Anthropology, as he says, "can enrich itself and go forward, for it (...) is capable of self-criticism" (Sarmiento 2018, 13).

Reinforcing this idea, Gersem Baniwa, a seasoned indigenous intellectual who embraced anthropology unconditionally, declares, "I see anthropology as a mul-

1 https://pt.wikibooks.org/wiki/Bibliografia_das_publica%C3%A7%C3%B5es_ind%C3%A-Dgenas_do_Brasil/Teses_e_disserta%C3%A7%C3%B5es (Access March 16, 2022).

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tifocal, multidimensional, and multicosmic lens (...) [it] can provide indigenous peoples with a precious and complex tool, which is knowledge about the world of Whites” (2015, 234). Years earlier, Baniwa had stated the following.

Anthropology has opened horizons to understand my own Baniwa world by deepening it, valuing it, and living it more intensely and reducing my own preconceptions, thus enlarging the possibilities of my contributing to a much-needed dialogue between cultures, between civilizations (Baniwa 2008, 3).

Anthropology in a garden of forking paths

In 2008, I defended what I called auto-ethnographies. I held that ethnographic work by indigenous anthropologists would be much deeper, subtler, and more complex than a non-indigenous anthropologist might aspire to achieve. My position was akin to Jósimo Constant’s mentioned above, when he said that many things his professors thought about indigenous peoples were not quite so. Perhaps now I would use a different word to refer to indigenous ethnographies about themselves, and would defend the importance of a distanced gaze to reveal aspects of indigenous lives, which often go unnoticed, like in the proverbial fish unable to perceive the sea. A most persuasive example of the analytical merit of a *regard éloigné* is the work of Alexis de Tocqueville ([1835] 2003), whose repercussions to North Americans’ self-knowledge still endure. This French aristocrat, driven by his curiosity regarding the workings of a democracy, brilliantly pointed out the pros and cons of collective life without the guidance of aristocracy, enlightened or not.

Now, as I witness the emergence of an indigenous critique of anthropological reason (Ramos 2018), I foresee further advantages an “indigenous anthropology” can bring to ethnography in terms of acumen and subtlety. Increasingly, we see mentions of the possible impact that indigenous intellectuals can have in remodeling anthropology, beginning with the very physical presence of indigenous students on a university campus. Maria Aparecida Bergamaschi, a doctor in Education, affirms that,

as this new student profile ‘circulates’ on campuses (...) since 2008, views and practices are timidly changing the academic scenario via interaction and the need to learn from the other, thus sensing other ways of thinking and living in academia (Bergamaschi 2014, 21).

In turn, Felipe Cruz (2017) stresses the importance of an indigenous space known as *Maloca*, built on the University of Brasília campus. In it, indigenous students forge ‘true bonds of companionship,’ using it to study, chat, dance and play music. These activities are not lost on the rest of the campus. The sheer cultural

presence of the indigenous students make the others think. There are, however, more transcendental dimensions in the encounter between indigenous and non-indigenous intellectuals than companionship, important as it is. We should examine the effects of these indigenous activities on fields of knowledge, particularly, anthropology.

Education for what?

Perhaps most indigenous student aspire to put the knowledge they acquire at the University to their people's service. Many are selected at home precisely for this purpose. We might see here a sort of organic intellectual, as Gramsci (1981) proposed. However, Chilean historian Claudia Zapata, whose extensive work focuses on the issue of indigenous intellectuals in Latin America, has perceived them as traditional, not in the Gramscian sense (the writer, the philosopher, the artist), but rather as those "who act toward their own community" (Zapata 2013, 71). Naturally, the character of indigenous reality escapes Gramscian analysis, which addresses the profoundly unequal European world. Nevertheless, as an analytical model, it helps us define and understand the making of indigenous intellectuals. Some indigenous students wish to build an academic career away from their people's expectations to reap the benefits of their young's formal education. However, what emerges in these students' statements is a clear common denominator, namely, study to defend themselves, appropriate anthropological tools to penetrate the Whiteman's mind, understand how the Whiteman reaches conclusions about "us," perceive the Whiteman as "Other" just as the Indians are perceived as the Whiteman's Other. What are the mental paths they tread when attempting to find the social nexus of their own Others? Some more skeptical than others, the indigenous students I know best seem to place great expectations in the power of intercultural communication, in the human capacity to cross cultural barriers, and in the will to go forward to grasp the essence of interethnic relations from cultural specificities outward. As Gersem Baniwa affirmed in an anthropology seminar at the University of Brasilia in December 2018, anthropology is fundamental to pursue these questions.

This is why I ask whether anthropology will remain the same as ever, clinging to the trifling and idle power games, which decades of theoretical and practical training do not seem to eradicate totally. Recalcitrant colleagues – faithful squires of a tradition that, if unchanged, is doomed – still refuse to engage in debates with indigenous students who challenge, for instance, the wisdom of a James Frazer when matched against their own millenarian traditions, which endure precisely because they were transformed. Or reject off-canon readings indigenous students suggest to provoke discussions both on stale received ideas and on the merits of multifocality. The force of self-preservation of academic habits seems to protect some anthropologists from these challenges. This does not mean that we should abandon the classics of anthropology, for they define anthropology as a discipline in its own right. Anthropology owes its vocation to study and understand cultural

diversity to the work, now classical, of its founding fathers more than a century ago. They opened for us an unlimited horizon of human experience.

It is rather ironic that the anthropological vocation to be open unreservedly to human diversity be stifled by practitioners who are too shortsighted, too conservative, and too shy, who admire Lévi-Strauss (1993), yet are unwilling to take seriously the implications of his famous adage about the indigenous opening toward the Other. (By the way, this ability to embrace the world has protected their millennial traditions from obsolescence, as *Pacificando o Branco* [Albert & Ramos 2000] makes quite clear). On the other hand, the other extreme reaction that rejects *tout court* the epistemological roots of anthropology, in the name of an elusive social justice, is bound to sink into an academic quagmire by throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

Without overexerting our mental capacity, we can imagine the enormous wealth an intellectual exercise in interscientificity would bring to our field. Anthropologists might begin, for instance, by questioning the academic habit of banning repetition in the name of a dubious set of linguistic rules, namely, elegance, parsimony, and economy, which have contaminated our proofreaders. Instead, we should pay attention to what North American indigenous historian Donald Fixico says about the merits of repetition to expand the act of understanding and, hence, to increase the chances of respecting what, in general, one ignores.

Recognizing that a message must go through the cerebral circuits several times to be understood, Fixico calls repetition a circular method and defends it as

a circular philosophy focusing on a single point and using familiar examples to illustrate or explain the point of discussion. The circular approach assures that everyone understands, and that all is considered, thereby increasing the chance for harmony and balance in the community and with everything else (Fixico 2003, 15-16).

Many hassles in anthropology come from misunderstandings due to hasty, distracted, and ungenerous readings (Ramos 2015). Living habits such as repetition, when transposed to professional practice, may correct distortions produced by wrong or misconceived choices. Space restrictions in written media due to rigid editorial rules (Ramos 2012) force us to produce the *abstract*, a minimal summary of ideas, in itself a reduced redundancy, which often maims the ideas shrunk like a bonsai. The indigenous option for repetition may not guarantee total understanding, but lessens the risk of misunderstandings considerably.

Something similar happens to hearing. The patience of indigenous listeners, which always enthralls me, is in stark contrast to our agitation when we hear a talk, a debate or an argument. We often listen impatiently to colleagues expose their ideas, waiting for the moment to intervene. Raucous interruptions may even be taken as a measure of success, but contribute little to the healthy comprehension of the theme in question. In contrast, sharing ideas adequately understood may be akin to a ceremony, as Cree intellectual Shawn Wilson (2008) proposes. To

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be ceremonious is not only to be formal, to follow a pomp and circumstance rite, but is also to be courteous, polite, and respectful to one's interlocutor anywhere and everywhere. If we always treated our intercommunications as ceremony, we would ensure that etiquette prevented some embarrassing gaffes. We would avoid involuntary or intentional misunderstanding, and disrespect generated by ignorance, which is often deliberately cultivated. Perhaps the shyness we perceive in many indigenous persons when speaking to non-indigenous audiences comes from fear of being run over by our eagerness to speak without listening, by our disregard for the quintessence of full communication, that is, repetition, a device much more compatible with brain rhythms than our hasty habits. To say that repetition is only necessary in oral communication, and that, as literate adults, we no longer need it, is a serious mistake, as shown in frequent complaints by authors about readers, such as "I didn't mean it, I was misunderstood!" or "I expressed myself badly!"

Huron historian from Canada, Georges Sioui, says this about communication barriers.

I have often been struck by the great difficulties peoples of Native cultures encounter when they try to sensitize outsiders to their traditional values. I have also wondered why there is such a lack of intercultural communication (...) and, most of all, how a collective and individual desire for such communication can be created (Sioui 1992, xxi).

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Cultivating the image of the hyperreal Indian (Ramos 1994) is an old habit that, certainly, will die hard. Indigenist (not indigenous) hyperrealism paints a suffering, abandoned, marginalized, humble, dirt-poor *Indian*, who will be grateful forever for the Christian goodwill of his Paleface "friends." A caricature? By all means! Popular? No doubt! Nevertheless, such stereotypes reveal less about the dispossessed *Indian* than about the empathetically ethical blindness of his *White* protector.

Sioui's wondering about intercultural (non)communication is most evident in indigenous education. Two educational systems, which ought to be mutually compatible – the national and the intercultural – are yet to be properly assimilated in projects of the so-called intercultural education, especially by non-indigenous educators, whether private or public. Without hiding his frustration, Gersem Baniwa points out that the

difficulty to define the role and function of an indigenous school – whether to professionally form a good Brazilian citizen or a good Indian – has fashioned management and pedagogical models that verge on a "make-believe" educational process and schools with ineffective and partial methodologies and epistemologies (Baniwa 2012, 254).

Baniwa also declares that the "idea of interculturality is confusing, vague, and

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hard to apply in pedagogical practice, and, consequently, in people's lives" (id., 259). Indeed, the term intercultural education as used in Brazil is almost a fetish concept that masks a squalid reality.

Anthropology, why do we want it?

Back to the still chimerical *Antropotopy*, I would like to revisit certain ideas I have contemplated for some time (Ramos 2008, 2014). I appreciate the verve with which Paul Feyerabend, the Anarchist philosopher, emulates anthropological work for its capacity to reveal alternative knowledge systems that are better to understand the world than the positive rationality of modern science. He regrets the way academia acrimoniously refuses to attribute scientific status to non-Western, especially indigenous, modes of knowledge. Ultimately, Feyerabend claimed, what remains of so much rationalization are neither methods nor theories, but

Aesthetic judgments, judgments of taste, metaphysical prejudices, religious desires, in short, *what remains are our subjective wishes*: science at its most advanced and general returns to the individual a freedom he seems to lose when entering its more pedestrian parts(...) (Feyerabend 1975, 285; emphasis in the original).

In short, low science represses, high science liberates.

However, Feyerabend's optimism about ethnology is only justified if the anthropological field expands its *intellectual commons* (Pratt 2011, 55), if it shares its intellectuality with those people who, with blood, sweat, and tears, have survived aggressions for one and a half millennia, and without whom anthropological analyses would not have seen the light of day. To adopt interscientificity is to build an anthropological ecumene. Keeping their own features, distinct but interacting, academic and indigenous knowledge together can spawn a fruitful exchange of ideas and outlooks that question each other continuously. Such dialogical exercise might inhibit the propagation of pretentious and generic "theories"² with little heuristic value. When put to the test of native critique, such theories will certainly undergo corrections and adjustments, if not sheer rejection. On the other hand, native interpretations are not immune to external critique, and indigenous scholars would be wise to heed and respond to them. To me, this procedure would greatly contribute to the advancement of our discipline.

So, I bring up again the question in the subtitle: will anthropology remain the same? Will it resist the many challenges from indigenous students? Is it not high time to confront the profession's old habits, such as academic power, political hegemony and theoretical arrogance? What would happen if we assumed the role of supporting actors when doing field research? If, instead of reducing complex systems of physics, ecology, cosmic periodicity, or universal stratification to mere "cosmologies," we began to stretch our tight lexicon by calling them, for lack of a better word, *SCIENCE*? A science, that is, built along the lines proposed by Gregory

2 The puzzling quotation mark around the word "theory" reflects my discomfort with its use and abuse in the human sciences. I regard it as too grandiose a term to designate the interpretations, hypotheses, hunches, and musings that move anthropology, which, in any case, does not need it to justify its magnificent existence.

Cajete, a Tewa member from the North American Southwest as follows. “Native science’ is used as a metaphor for Native knowledge and creative participation with the natural world in both theory and practice.” He explains: “Native science is not quantum physics or environmental science, but it has come to similar understandings about the workings of the natural laws through experience and participation with the natural world” (Cajete 2000, 14). In other words, for indigenous knowledge to be recognized as equivalent in the language the West understands, it may be worthwhile call it simply “science.” Such concession can bring about more gains than losses and may reduce Science’s big S to a pluralized science with a more modest s, as Paul Little (2010) proposes.

Let us return to the Borgean exercise of opening up forking paths. Let us ask, for example, how anthropology might react if narratives from the past, when humans and non-humans shared the same space, the same time, and the same destiny, were taken to be expressions of indigenous historical consciousness rather than as mystified “myths” (Ramos 2018, Sahlins 2022, 13). Would Quechua critic Ollantay Itzamná (2015) be delirious when he targets non-indigenous intellectuals with this shot, “What a paradox: They say they have philosophy and we, just cosmovision”³? In turn, the Aymara proudly shout, “Oppressed, but not vanquished!” (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984).

Indigenous critical conscience is growing fast and will peak with the very welcome possibility of, sooner or later, transforming such “theoretical” issues in dead letter, when indigenous students grasp anthropological knowledge thoroughly and embark on ethnographic projects about their own societies and/or those of their historical oppressors. When this occurs, what will happen to the traditional fieldworker?

In a rather ambiguous text, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) praises the defenders of salvage anthropology and imagines the possibility of indigenous intellectuals entering academia, but forecasts the destruction of anthropology when that happens.

When it is practiced by members of the culture which it endeavours to study, anthropology loses its specific nature and becomes rather akin to archaeology, history, and philology. For anthropology is the science of culture as seen from the outside and the first concern of people made aware of their independent existence and originality must be to claim the right to observe their culture themselves, from the inside. Anthropology will survive in a changing world by allowing itself to perish in order to be born again under a new guise (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 126).

That is, in mission-impossible fashion, anthropology will destroy itself after completing its task to salvage cultures from extinction, thus passing on the baton to their former research objects who will survive cultural holocaust.

Still, there is no need for panic! If ethnographic protagonism is no longer exclusive to non-indigenous anthropologists, there is still an entire universe of roles

3 In the original: “*Que paradoja: Ellos dicen tener filosofía, nosotros, únicamente cosmovisión*”.

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to be played within the profession. To begin with, anthropology has successfully resisted the forays of its practitioners into their own societies without losing an iota of its disciplinary identity. This means anthropology does not need a “distanced gaze” to maintain its disciplinary integrity.

The intellectual investment of a lifetime begins to yield results among native collaborators who made that investment possible in the first place. Like an evocative echo of a Melanesian cargo cult (Worsley 1987), this movement by our former research “objects” possibly aims at grasping ethnographic substance, but free of ethnographers and with new forms of erudition. The dialogic relationship between observer and observed, much tooted by post-modern authors, but kept in a social vacuum, may materialize as a joint venture where the main shareholder is no longer the conventional ethnographer.

Regarding indigenous intellectuals, we perceive a clear convergence of interests in their new attitude toward anthropology’s legacy. Self-defense and self-representation walk hand in hand when indigenous people, like anybody else, become aware that knowledge is power, and that writing is a potent tool to accumulate power. The growing number of books written by indigenous men and women that keep filling up my shelves could not be a better demonstration that peoples who are allegedly trapped in orality are increasing adopting writing as a powerful medium of interethnic expression. Why, then, leave the knowledge of their world entirely in foreign hands? Conversations, yes, monologues, no! Lévi-Strauss can rest assured that anthropology will not perish; it will simply become more diversified and attractive.

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