Introduction to the dossier

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This dossier brings together articles by anthropologists affiliated with universities in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Germany, Mexico, Norway and the United States who have devoted their efforts to conducting ethnographic engagements of otherness that generates discomfort within a tradition of citizen anthropology consolidated in Latin America (Peirano 1991; Jimeno & Arias 2011; Cardoso de Oliveira 2018; Jimeno 2018; Abadía et al. 2019). We are talking about military personnel, police officers, vigilantes, imprisoned criminals, as well as small shop owners, professionals, and politicians who are sympathetic to and militate for the right and far right, all of whom are the protagonists of the articles that compose this dossier. At an historic moment of global and local reorganisation of powerful political, economic and religious vectors that affirm solid arguments against human rights, criticise scientific and university production, and legitimise violent and authoritarian practices against minorities, we ask ourselves: what happens to the way of producing knowledge in anthropology when we interact with subjects who are associated with the violation of human rights? Is it possible to expand the description of ideologies and practices of people with whom we do not share an ethical horizon? What happens to ethnography when we take on these subjects? Does the ethnographer suffer any moral contamination? Can we problematise the legal system that forces us to classify and oppose victims and aggressors? Is it possible to go beyond this system to address the social nuances, ways of life, moral regimes, systems of thought, and political and economic practices of people who criticise the egalitarian, progressive social ideal? What ethical implications does such an expansion of the horizon of understanding entail for anthropology?

We recall that, since its institutionalisation in the 1940s, one of the most notable characteristics of citizen anthropology is its dual path: academic research and political commitment to the visibility of so-called sociological minorities—mainly groups whose class, racial, gender, sexual, and ethical differences are transformed into social inequalities within national hierarchies inherited from the colonial period. The objectives of this style of anthropology come together in research and participatory action proposals that seek the inclusion of vulnerable populations and victims of various forms of violence for the full exercise of their citizenship (Rorty 1989) within nation-building processes. Thus, 'citizen-researchers' promote social justice and the strengthening of liberal democracies inaugurated from the 1980s after painful years of social struggles to combat exceptional and dictatorial regimes, as well as authoritarian practices in numerous forms of social organisation. Citizen anthropology also accounts for and supports everyday practices of 'resistance', which

show the ethnographer the work of the moral elaboration of groups and individuals who seek recognition as victims and citizens in contemporary societies (Fassin & Rechtman 2009; Jimeno 2010; Losonczy 2016; Zenobi 2023). According to Alcida Ramos (1990), this is a critical agency of academics that makes anthropology practiced in the region a public science, one that is always attentive to the recognition of human rights.

The relationship between analytical attitudes and political commitment forms part of an economy of knowledge production in which it is possible to distinguish a morality and an ethics guided by ethical individualism (Dumont 1970). The latter presupposes a form of person with a 'secular-liberal architecture of the self' (Mahmood 2001), a locus where their rights and emotions reside, which enables their public recognition as a free and equal 'individual' in the public arena (Salem 1992; Keane 2007; Duarte 2012; Strathern 2016). This thinking entered into the theoretical history of global anthropology with force from the 1980s onwards, following criticisms of ethnographic authority and the complicity of anthropologists with colonial endeavours, which had the effect of relocating ethnographic endeavours in the society of the ethnographer. As Joel Robbins (2013) and Sherry Ortner (2016) mention, it is from this moment on that anthropologists dedicated themselves to characterising subjectivities, understood as an effect of power relations. Thus, these authors mention that it is important for ethnographers to document 'dark' aspects of social and individual life—particularly the forms that pain and suffering take, in addition to other emotions—a sign of true humanity.

Methodologically, ethnographic practices associated with citizen anthropology have resulted in forms of engagement that presuppose affective, political and identitary continuities between the ethnographer and their interlocutors. This is a way of understanding fieldwork that: validates an ethnographic representation that should ideally be produced in a symmetrical, collaborative manner; promotes the formation of subjects of knowledge, aware of the antagonisms between their ways of life and power structures (state, capitalist, patriarchal, racial, religious, traditional, among others); and establishes ethical criteria of responsibility for anthropologists whose practices threaten the integrity of their interlocutors—associated with a model of informed knowledge which approaches that of biomedical sciences (Duarte 2015). Perhaps, the most important thing regarding the terms of the discussion that we seek to propose in this dossier, is that such methodological innovations promoted and reinforced *empathy* as a founding value of the ethnographic relationship. Thus, through their oral and written skills, the anthropologist must transmit the affective intensity that they sustained with their interlocutors, showing the public that they entered in communion with the truth of the Other (Martínez-Moreno 2022a).

The effect of the contemporary naturalisation of this intersubjective device is the practice of a testimonial anthropology, both of the trauma and the human agency to get out of the situation of violence, capable of aggregating researchers and civil society into a moral and emotional community. Moreover, this is a job, we have to say, that demands an enormous effort of psychic elaboration on the part of ethnographers (Jimeno et al. 2022). In this anthropology, it is important to distinguish between oppressors and oppressed, between punishable subjects and subjects of reparation. In their work, the citizen researcher classifies in the role of 'perpetrator' those social agents that embody the structures of power and domination, objects of anthropological criticism and legal and psychosocial intervention. This is the 'uncomfortable other', called by some academics 'the counter to social processes' (Blair Trujillo 1993).

As the reader should already be aware, the authors of this volume are concerned with understanding subjects who do not correspond to the ideal of a person who offers the anthropologist signs of resistance to domination or seeks public recognition as an emancipated being (Dullo 2015). On the contrary, they generate deep discomfort and irritation within universities. Given the contemporary consensus to facilitate the formation of a political voice for sociological minorities, any attempt to characterise the agency of military personnel or right-wing sympathisers, for example, is understood by a part of the anthropological community as a threat of

moral contamination, which transforms the ethnographer into an accomplice to repugnant practices (Harding 1991; Borneman 2015; Shoshan 2016a; Pasieka 2017; Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco 2021; Martínez-Moreno 2024).

As the authors of this dossier show, going 'beyond empathy' (Shoshan 2016b) implies a permanent exercise of elaborating discomfort, which in addition to revealing the vulnerability of the researcher, can be transformed into a value that enhances ethnographic practice (Hoover & García-González 2022; Forero Angel 2022). In this manner, we consider it possible to generate new research questions that enable us to understand the nuances of the experience and ways of life of uncomfortable otherness. Moreover, these further complicate the characterisation of social plots that articulate and legitimise authoritarian practices and political manifestations of the right and far right, which until a few years ago were believed to have been surmounted, but which today enjoy considerable public legitimacy. And as Nitzan Shoshan shows us in his article *Bajo otro nombre: secretos, complicidades, etnografía* (Under a Different Name: Secrecy, Complicity, Ethnography), the elaboration of discomfort implies questioning the imperatives of 'transparency' and 'coherence' alongside other structural dimensions of the production of knowledge, which oblige us to create 'complicity' during fieldwork. As we can see, for Nitzan this was a task that raised a series of ethical questions based on his relationship with young, right-wing extremists in East Berlin.

Understanding empathy as a modern ideological practice (Lutz 1988) that generates interference for the purpose of understanding potentially unpleasant ethnographic situations, is it possible to broaden the meaning of empathy to integrate not only affective and political affinities but also discomfort and contamination? What do we get out of this unpleasant encounter with the Other? What do we do with the emerging knowledge of this relationship? There are various positions on these questions. In *La traducción y la empatía en la comprensión de las fuerzas militares colombianas: hacia una expansión de los horizontes antropológicos* (Translation and empathy in understanding the Colombian military: Towards an expansion of anthropological horizons), Ana María Forero Angel shows us the importance of understanding the depth of discomfort of the 'shock experience' with high-ranking military personnel of the Colombian Army, which resulted in the reconsideration of her beliefs, expectations, and prejudices during her fieldwork. This facilitated the formulation of new questions and ethical and conceptual relocations. It also led her to perform exercises in the 'translation' of moral references that were foreign to her, facilitating the realisation of textual experiments to transmit a sense of the 'history' and the 'pain' of her interlocutors (see Forero Angel 2017). This was one way of describing the strangeness of the Other and the difficulty of expressing it in our horizon: that of citizen-anthropology. Here is an important ethical question that Ana María highlights: answering these questions does not result in a 'conversion' to the moral system of uncomfortable otherness, but rather in the expansion of our 'images of the world' and the frontier of anthropological inquiry.

Following very similar lines of inquiry, Andrés Manuel González-Saíz, in *Entre «alteridades reprochables» y «otrodades irredeemibles»: violencia, moralidad, y los límites de la entiende etnográfica* (Between 'reprehensible alterities' and 'irredeemable othernesses': violence, morality, and the limits of ethnographic understanding), and Nahuel Blázquez, in *Un poco de cariño. Horror y sensualidad en relatos etnográficos* (A Little Affection. Horror and sensuality in ethnographic accounts), invite us to contemplate the bond created between researcher and interlocutor. Through different paths—Andrés analysing his relationship with an army private who participated in the murders of young Colombians (the so-called 'false positives') and Nahuel describing his work of social intervention in prisons in the city of Córdoba (Argentina)—both authors emphasise being attentive to the reciprocities and political wagers implicit in a relational game where our interlocutors seduce us, trying to produce compassion through their stories and confessing to us facts that generate immense repulsion (Devereux 1977; Robben 1996; Martínez-Moreno 2022b). What should we do when faced with reprehensible situations in which we hear about murders, lynchings or robberies? How should we manage our desire to judge? How should we proceed when faced with ethical-political imperatives that demand we report them?

In addition to the structural conditions of knowledge production presented by Nitzan, we consider that the legal dichotomy between victim and aggressor must be denaturalised with regard to Latin America. We should recall that these classification networks seek to capture social life in emotional, populational or sociological categories, which compose part of the processes of the formation of the modern colonial state (Stoler 2009; Silva & Simião 2012; Silva 2016). This classification network consolidates the antagonism between victim and aggressor, which is fundamental for the production of citizen anthropological knowledge and the recognition of the population defined as vulnerable by the judiciary as 'subjects of rights' (Rifiotis, 2014). This dichotomy also delegitimises certain subjects as worthy of anthropological problematisation, people who often carry an 'ambiguity' that may persuade academics to represent them as 'victims'. As Rosana Guber describes well in *La guerra anglo-argentina de 1982. Los incómodos límites auto-impuestos por una antropología conformista* (The Anglo-Argentine War of 1982. The uncomfortable self-imposed limits of a conformist anthropology), this dichotomy must be problematised and to achieve this, she deals with the young soldiers who participated in the Malvinas War, who found themselves in a limbo that made Argentine society uncomfortable. They were neither children nor adults. They were not high-ranking military personnel, but rather young men forced to participate in a war that momentarily united the Argentine nation. These were traits that allowed some academics in that country to rhetorically construct the young soldiers as yet more victims of the military dictatorship.

In her work *The ambiguous other. Engaging with far right and other uncomfortable subjectivities*, Katerina Hatzikidi highlights the interest in representing, as victims, subjects of redemption who constitute a new anthropological orthodoxy: those who combine a 'radical otherness' with the sympathy they produce in us. Thus, categories of subaltern populations or those who engage in identity politics become privileged interlocutors for anthropologists. Other people, ordinary citizens, possess an ambiguity that is more difficult to resolve: they are not exotic, powerful or despicable enough. Katarina describes her interlocutors as right-wing sympathisers and activists belonging to Brazilian popular segments who take a critical attitude towards manifestations of 'victimhood' by identity movements. She shows us that it is precisely the proximity of these actors that prevents us from understanding the meaning of their experiences and their demands for the recognition of 'injustices'.

Unlike the purpose of creating empathy and producing compassion, writing about processes and acts of violence imposes ethical and aesthetic challenges that force us to sanitise the violence and not succumb to the temptation of making it pornographic. This is what Nahuel reminds us, who during his work as a researcher and workshop facilitator promoted narrative creation exercises among prisoners. From this material, he asks us 'How can we be faithful to the voice of our interlocutors when they generate rejection in us?' A question of method then arises that we think is important to highlight: *describing* before classifying—an old lesson that, since the time of Bronislaw Malinowski (2001), brings us closer to literature, imposes on us the challenge of transporting the reader to unimaginable situations (Luhrmann 2023) and subsequently facilitates the task of making abstractions concerning ideologies, practices, social relations and particular points of view.

A good ethnographic narrative is always welcome and André Dumans Guedes' article seems to us an example of this task. In *These Men in Love with Mining Companies and Pickup Trucks: Moralities and Knowledge Practices of the Deserts and Movements of the Economy*, this author takes us out of the big urban centres and into the daily life of a small town in the State of Goiás, characterised by the power of agribusiness, which threatens the existence of traditional Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities. In this town, certain merchants, sympathetic to the Brazilian right, dream of the transformations and eventual riches that mining companies bring, undoubtedly one of the most disastrous manifestations of environmental depredation. Recreating conversations through which we recognise the moral dimension, anxieties and admiration of these men for the pickup trucks of some engineers, André describes modes of production of economic knowledge in a place always threatened with becoming a 'desert'. The above, thanks to an effort of socio-historical contextualisation regarding the movements, permanences, and 'fevers' of people who at some point formed the frontier of capitalist expansion.

Another form of description is the realisation of bibliographical panoramas, like that offered by Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte and Marco J. Martínez-Moreno in *The person in contemporary contexts of right-wing populism: an uncomfortable study*. The authors provide a historical compilation of the way in which classic authors of the social sciences and contemporary anthropologists have characterised, analysed and proposed hypotheses concerning the social configurations from which 'persons' emerge who identify and militate in favour of the right. One of these hypotheses refers to the way in which a relationship of 'dialectical agonism' has been established between left and right since the eighteenth century, which sets the tone for the most contemporary dynamic between progressive agents of moral reform and others who, faced with the demand for change, reposition themselves to preserve ways of life considered sacred at all costs. Described by Gregory Bateson (1936) as part of schismogenetic processes, dialectical agonism is a type of relationship in which the dual movement of change and the search for the status quo (of a specific social configuration) are distinguished between individuals or groups that engage in legal, moral or religious struggles. Depending on particular historical circumstances, such dynamics result in trajectories of behavioural radicalisation, that is, in polarisation processes that reinforce the symbolic dispositions of each party in the relationship (Salem 2006; Duarte 2009; Gregori, in press).

One of these circumstances is the widespread access to the internet, which has had an impact on the strong digital activism of the right—a phenomenon that, as we know, inaugurated the era of post-truth and led to the circulation of fake news and conspiracy theories that helped right-wing populist leaders in the United States, Latin America and Europe shoot to fame (Engesser et al. 2017; Cesarino 2020; Shoshan 2021). This phenomenon is addressed by three authors. In *The battle of the Zé Gotinhas: the schismogenesis of images and political audiences on Brazilian social media*, Kelly Silva and Fábio Martins describe episodes of a digital war between left- and right-wing designers over the definition of the image of Zé Gotinha. This character has been an icon of successful vaccination campaigns in Brazil since the 1980s. However, during the far right government of Jair Bolsonaro, it was used to affirm a denialist stance on science and the COVID-19 pandemic. Kelly and Fábio show how campaigns from one pole of the political spectrum fed back and strengthened the identity of the opposite pole. This text offers us analytical tools to document both the rise of cyber-activism denouncing sexual violence in the United States, known as #MeToo, which in 2017 coincided with the rise to power of Donald Trump, and the struggle of Brazilian left-wing women known as #EleNão (#NotHim), which arose in 2018 in reaction to Bolsonaro's candidacy for the presidency.

Conducting us to the terrain of the production of right-wing subjectivities during the pandemic, in *From 'Humiliation' to Radical Beliefs: Navigating subjectivities and ideological shifts in trajectories of radicalisation*, Wagner Alves da Silva tells us the story of Sonia, a woman of humble origins from the north of Brazil, who was researching alternative treatments for COVID-19 on the internet and ended up militating for the right, with a deep sense of empowerment. This is a story inseparable from the tense bond constructed with the ethnographer. Sônia saw in Wagner not only a representative of the academy aligned with the left, but an agent who hindered access to 'knowledge' by common citizens. The dialectic between university knowledge and conservative forces is the subject of reflection by Tomás Salem in *Grappling with Complexity in Research on the Military Police. The Far Right and Anthropology's Civilizing Mission*. He problematised his own position as an anthropologist committed to progressive policies, which enabled him to recognise a 'cosmology of war' among military police in Rio de Janeiro. Like other authors in this dossier, Tomás believes that understanding practices of racialised state violence does not mean accepting or tolerating them. His goal is to understand the moral dilemmas that his interlocutors navigate, the modes of reproduction of authoritarianism, and the criticisms that these subjects exercise on human rights training. Like André, Tomás wagers on the description of a perspective that is undoubtedly uncomfortable and, as the articles elaborate, neither author reduces their interlocutors to mere reproducers of sexist attitudes.

Rosana also highlights the antagonism between universities and the armed forces, which encourages the arduous work of recovering historical memory, not only in the dictatorships of the Southern Cone or Brazil, but also in the internal war that Colombia has been experiencing for decades. In the narratives of historical memory, the dichotomy between victim and aggressor is updated, which, as Andrés Manuel tells us, gains meaning in the light of a secular theodicy articulated to humanitarian reason. He highlights that in order to gain a deeper cultural understanding of the phenomena of violence that ravage the region, it is necessary to include 'reprehensible' and 'irredeemable' othernesses in research agendas. As we know, these alterities are subjects of psychosocial and legal intervention, a mission of transformation promoted by universities, as narrated in their articles by Sabina Fréderic, Leonardo Brama, Roberto Kant de Lima and Fábio Reis Mota.

In *Incomodidades e intervenciones antropológicas en escenarios de reformas democratizadoras de Fuerzas de Seguridad y Armadas, en Argentina* (Incommodities and anthropological interventions in scenarios of democratising reforms of Security Forces and Armed Forces, in Argentina), Sabina narrates her rich career as an anthropologist with one foot in the university and the other in government institutions, where she was in charge of 'democratising reforms' and the professionalisation of the Argentine Security Forces and Armed Forces during the government of Cristina Kirchner. The author mentions that the purpose of building sustainable education and welfare policies for police, gendarmes and military personnel involved addressing their point of view ethnographically, which generated resistance from both academics and high-ranking military officers. In her article, she problematises her work as a mediator between these two fields, showing us not only the difficulties of conducting research and public service work, but also the successful strategies of transforming public policy objects into knowledge-producing agents of their own institutional reality. A work of anthropological intervention in which building bridges was not concerned with reconciling or unifying antagonistic positions, nor privileging or cancelling one perspective over another, but rather with providing each of them a place.

Based on extensive experience combining ethnography within the judiciary and police training through post-graduate courses in the area of public safety, Leonardo, Roberto and Fábio show us the analytical productivity of conflicts and misunderstandings for anthropology. In *'Confusion of horizons' with unwanted Others: frustrations, results and effects of ethnographic practices in the realm of justice and public safety*, the authors formulate a fundamental question for this dossier: how to understand an Other who always thinks of themselves as the possessor of reason? An Other who constantly produces antitheses and incommensurabilities to delegitimise academic postulates and thus feeds the agonistic dynamic discussed here. The three authors propose that we pay attention to the 'confusion of horizons', a strategy that adds to those developed by the authors of this dossier to analytically elaborate discomfort.

As Rosana points out in her article, working with discomfort in ethnography aims to overcome a form of active and premeditated 'ignorance', which comforts us politically and limits our capacity for anthropological inquiry. She designates this a 'conformist anthropology' that abandoned its role as a 'serial discomforter' in its narrative concerning other forms of human experience. This anthropology considers researchers who are concerned with understanding and problematising a world, in which the growing legitimacy of right-wing agendas (that, in turn, view anthropologists as their enemies) is undeniable, as politically incorrect agents. To ignore these ways of life, political projects, systems of thought and values, as well as their claims of injustice and definitions of citizenship, would be to assume a denialist position regarding these images of the world, unbearable for our enlightened, egalitarian and progressive conscience. This leads us to weigh the challenges of the articulation between universalism and difference described by Chantal Mouffe (2013), cited by Luiz Fernando and Marco: we are required to adopt more complex modes of political representation, which question postulates of the rational and moral superiority of intellectuals, who also feed the agonistic dynamic between left and right. This is a reflection on the ethics and responsibility of anthropological work that we aim to promote in this dossier.

The dossier opens with articles by Luiz Fernando, Marco and Rosana, authors who assume a historical perspective to account for two paradigmatic subjects: the right-wing person and the military agent. Then, the papers by Ana María, Nahuel and Andrés Manuel address methodological and ethical issues. Next, the texts by Sabina, Leonardo, Roberto, Fábio and Tomás work on the interface between university knowledge and military and police forces. Following that, articles by Katerina, André and Wagner focus on right-wing subjectivities and perspectives, and by Kelly and Fábio introduce us to the world of the internet. Finally, in the section Déjà Lu, Nitzan invites us to reflect on the relationships between recent political developments of right-wing and far right ideologies and governments and the practice and ethics of ethnographic research.

We would like to express our gratitude to the editors of *Vibrant — Virtual Brazilian Anthropology*, Antônio Carlos de Souza Lima and Andréa de Souza Lobo, for hosting our dossier; to the work of Vinícius Venancio and Roberta Cerva during the editorial process; and to our peer reviewers during the double-blind process, for their critical reading and generosity. We also thank *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie/Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology* for allowing us to publish the Spanish translation of Nitzan's article, which was originally part of the Dark Ethnographies dossier, edited by Lene Faust and Simone Peiffer (2021). Finally, we are immensely grateful to the authors of this dossier, who dared to ask themselves: what kind of anthropological understanding emerges in the face of the theoretical, methodological, and ethical relocation imposed by the inevitable reconfiguration of contemporary right-wing and authoritarianism?

Translated by Philip Badiz

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