



Dossiers

**Neoextractivismo, crisis climática y desastres:  
Miradas desde Argentina, Brasil y Chile**

**Diálogos Antropológicos Globales - Dossier Antropologías del gestionar:  
formas y fórmulas de gobierno en nuestras latitudes**

**Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding:  
ethnographies with 'uncomfortable otherness'**

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# *vibrant*

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## Editor's Note

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### **Publishing Brazilian Anthropology for the Global Environment:**

Vibrant over the last eight years

*Andréa de Souza Lobo; Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima; Vinícius Venancio*

## Articles

---

### **Homogenizing machine:**

the agribusiness caucus's building of voting convergence in the Brazilian Congress

*Caio Pompeia*

### **Singularity and the dispute for a transhumanist ideology**

*Rafael Evangelista; Vitor Chiodi*

### **An examination of human rights, anti-racism, and affirmative action policies in Brazil**

*Luciana de Oliveira Dias*

### **Public policies in open scenes of crack use:**

The hotels in the *De Braços Abertos* programme as an experience of a consensual and participatory environment

*Ygor Diego Delgado Alves; Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira*

### **Categorisations and transformations of rooting for:**

Comparative analysis concerning the sportiveness of watching

*Luiz Henrique de Toledo; Carlos Eduardo Costa*

### **Louis-Joseph Janvier and “The Detractors of The Black Race”:**

An Anthropological Critique

*Frantz Rousseau Déus*

### **‘Transplanting Hope’:**

Experimental Stem Cell Therapy and the Political Economy of an HIV Cure

*Kris Herik de Oliveira*

### **What's in it for Maria?**

Brazilian migrant sex workers' (de)mobilization of the “trafficking victim” identity

*Mara Clemente; Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette*

### **Between revolution and human rights:**

the testimonies of Brazilian exiles at the Russell Tribunal II

*Felipe Magaldi; Cynthia Sarti*

### **Resisting Bolsonaro:**

The Mobilization of the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro to Defend Their Territory and Collective Projects

*Daniela Fernandes Alarcon; Glicéria Jesus da Silva; Jéssica Silva de Quadros; Sthefany Ferreira da Silva*

### **Filming Up:**

Brazilian Elites Through an Ethnographic Lens

*Alex Vailati; Walter Andrade*

## Audiovisual

---

**A Photographic Essay on Solid Waste Recycling:**

Street Ethnography and Innovative Experiences in the Netherlands

*Cornelia Eckert; Carmen Silvia de Moraes Rial*

**Más allá de los desechos:**

un ensayo fotográfico en el basural a cielo abierto de Oberá, Misiones

*Ana Goldemberg*

## Déjà Lu

---

**Ambientalismo y Desarrollo Sustentable:**

Nueva ideología/utopía del Desarrollo

*Gustavo Lins Ribeiro*

**Más allá del trabajo técnico:**

Conflictos, derecho y política entre los Tupiniquim  
y Guarani-Mbyá en Espirito Santo (Brasil)

*Felipe Berocan Veiga*

**Bajo otro nombre:**

Secretos, complicidades, etnografía

*Nitzan Shoshan*

## Dossier

---

Neoextractivismo, crisis climática y desastres:  
Miradas desde Argentina, Brasil y Chile

**Nota Introductoria para el Dossier**

**Neoextractivismo, crisis climática y desastres:**

Los nuevos imperialismos del “Antropoceno” desde Brasil, Argentina y Chile

*Andréa Zhouri*

**Las voces de las mujeres en el desastre de la Samarco:**

procesos de acuerpamiento y apoderamiento frente al neoextractivismo en Brasil

*Andréa Zhouri; Eduarda Binder Munaier Azevedo*

**Potosí y las nacientes del Agua Moderna.**

Sobre los orígenes del Capitaloceno hídrico

*Horacio Machado Aráoz*

**Una aproximación decolonial a las Zonas de Sacrificio en Chile**

*Paola Bolados; Luis Espinoza; Alexander Panez*

## Global Anthropological Dialogues

---

Dossier Anthropologies of management:  
forms and formulas of government in our latitudes

**Movimientos hacia una antropología del gestionar:**

Introducción al dossier

*María Gabriela Lugones; María Cecilia Díaz; María Lucía Tamagnini*

**“SUS is for everyone, for everyone who claims it”:**

managing health litigation in a time of crisis

*Lucas de Magalhaes Freire*

**Disaster management in mining:**

an analysis of mediation as a technology of social control

*Marcos Cristiano Zucarelli*

**The commonplace period of expulsions:**

Frameworks for Warao migrations during the COVID-19  
pandemic in Natal, RN, and João Pessoa, PB

*Angela Facundo Navia; Rita de Cássia Melo Santos*

**Keeping the “public machinery” running:**

notions of crisis and efficiency in the administration of waiting  
by the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE)

*Jullyane Carvalho Ribeiro*

**Localizar y documentar:**

Formas de gestión tutelar en dos instituciones estatales de Córdoba, Argentina

*Santiago Manuel Romero; Melisa Rodríguez Oviedo*

**“Una herramienta de inspiración”:**

el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas de la provincia de San Luis, Argentina, 2013-2023

*María Celina Chocobare*

**‘We have arrested one of the fundamental  
pieces of subversion in the country’:**

The construction of the figure of the *enemy* in police memos  
of 1975 following the arrest of Marcos Osatinsky

*Lucía Ríos*

**Concerning the artifices practiced in *documenting the documentation*:**

on writing, testifying and learning to file

*Larissa Nadai*

**La gestión legislativa estratégica de la Cámara de  
Representantes de Misiones, Argentina:**

entre dos modelos y múltiples tensiones

*Laura Andrea Ebenau*

**Expertos, trabajo relacional y la producción de evidencia en torno del Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia, Argentina (2015-2019)**

*Florencia Paz Landeira*

**From Creative Genius to Entrepreneurial Spirit:**

Architectural Mediations in the Formation of the Brazilian State

*Roberta Sampaio Guimarães; Paulo Vitor Ferreira da Silva*

**'I want to give myself the opportunity and be adopted':**

the production of subjects and meanings in adoption processes in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires (Argentina)

*Carolina Ciordia*

**Una nueva estética para luchar contra la desnutrición:**

miradas antropológicas sobre las intervenciones hacia el cuidado infantil en la provincia de Salta, Argentina

*Pía Leavy*

## Dossier

---

Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding: ethnographies with 'uncomfortable otherness'

**Introduction to the dossier**

*Marco Julián Martínez-Moreno; Ana María Forero Angel*

**The person in contemporary contexts of right-wing populism:**

An uncomfortable study

*Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte; Marco Julián Martínez-Moreno*

**La guerra anglo-argentina de 1982.**

Los incómodos límites auto-impuestos por una antropología conformista

*Rosana Guber*

**La traducción y la empatía en la comprensión de las fuerzas militares colombianas:**

Hacia una expansión de los horizontes antropológicos

*Ana María Forero Angel*

**Un poco de cariño.**

Horror y sensualidad en relatos etnográficos

*Nahuel Adrián Blázquez*

**Entre «alteridades reprochables» y «otredades irredimibles»:**

Violencia, moralidad, y los límites de la comprensión etnográfica

*Andrés M.F. González-Saiz*



**Incomodidades e intervenciones antropológicas en escenarios de reformas democratizadoras de Fuerzas de Seguridad y Armadas, en Argentina**

*Sabina A. Frederic*

**'Confusion of horizons' with unwanted Others:**

Frustrations, results and effects of ethnographic practices in the realm of justice and public safety

*Leonardo Brama; Roberto Kant de Lima; Fabio Reis Mota*

**Grappling with complexity in research with the Military Police:**

The far-right and anthropology's civilizing mission

*Tomás Salem*

**The ambiguous other.**

Engaging with far right and other uncomfortable subjectivities

*Katerina Hatzikidi*

**These men in love with mining companies and pickup trucks:**

Moralities and knowledge practices of the deserts and movements of the economy

*André Dumans Guedes*

**From 'Humiliation' to Radical Beliefs:**

Navigating political subjectivities and ideological shifts in trajectories of radicalization

*Wagner Guilherme Alves da Silva*

**The battle of the Zé Gotinhas:**

The schismogenesis of images and political audiences on Brazilian social media

*Kelly Cristiane da Silva; Fábio de Oliveira Martins*

# Publishing Brazilian Anthropology for the Global Environment: Vibrant over the last eight years

Publicando a Antropologia Brasileira no Ambiente Global:  
Vibrant ao longo dos últimos oito anos

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In our Editors' Note for issue 21 (2024) we present the contents of this edition and simultaneously provide a summary of the last eight years of *Vibrant*, a period during which Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima and Andréa Lobo have been the chief editors, a position from which they will now step down.

The years from 2017 to the present have been intense and hard work, involving diverse transformations to the journal, very often induced by SciELO, but implemented in line with *Vibrant's* editorial mission. Since 2017, the journal has followed a four-monthly publication schedule and the release of scientific articles under the continuous publication (rolling pass) model. In 2019, we transitioned to a yearly single-issue publication system, combining the number of articles equivalent to three issues into a single volume. This shift enabled better management of the volume publication and structuring within the scope of our limited operational capacity, which is only partially supported financially by the Brazilian Anthropological Association and primarily sustained by our efforts to secure resources through the national science and technology funding system. These conditions have fluctuated from 2015 to the present with funding interruptions having an especially pronounced impact in 2019 and 2020. The journal had to rely on international solidarity,

thanks to the mediation of Peter Fry, to ensure its continued existence. Here we express our gratitude to *Critique of Anthropology*, which provided invaluable support. We needed to be creative, seeking assistance from colleagues who organized special issues funded by research projects, whether through ABA itself, via its project financed at the time by the Ford Foundation (which enabled the publication of the dossier *Mining, Violence and Resistance* on the “Samarco disaster” in Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo: Zhouri, Oliveira, Zucarelli & Vasconcelos, 2017), or through personal initiatives, such as the funding that enabled publication of the dossier *Fighting for Indigenous Lands in Modern Brazil: The Reframing of Cultures and Identities*: Pacheco de Oliveira, 2018).

Along with these innovations, *Vibrant* has also adopted open science protocols, including the possibility of publishing preprints, among other enhancements, remaining up to date with its ethical commitments to the best editorial practices. One of the advances made during our administration was the journal’s inclusion in the Scopus database, a challenge we set for ourselves and successfully achieved. Following changes in the editorial landscape, we discontinued our participation in OpenEdition, since this French platform would have demanded tripling our efforts in text preparation and listed the journal in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) via SciELO.

Above all, we have pursued *Vibrant*’s mission to promote Brazilian anthropology globally in more contemporary terms, recognizing that any idea of internationalization is compelled to acknowledge the profound changes experienced by the anthropology produced in Brazil, including how Brazilian anthropologists are increasingly embedded in international networks and conduct research across multiple continents. Amplifying these networks of dialogue and collaboration led us to create and consolidate the *Global Anthropological Dialogues* section, which addresses the reality of the discipline’s internationalization in Brazil, recognizing the presence of the anthropology we produce within the Latin American context (Valladares & Igreja, 2021) and beyond, enabling a broader perspective regarding contemporary anthropological practice (Dominguez & Rial, 2022). Pursuing this aim, we have fostered increased dialogue with anthropologists situated in other parts of the world and working closely with Brazilian colleagues, multiplying the voices published in *Vibrant*. Dossiers such as *Caribbean Routes: Ethnographic Experiences, Theoretical Challenges and the Production of Knowledge* (Goyatá, Bulamah & Ramassote, 2021) and *Flows, Circulations and their Opposites: Ethnographic Perspectives and Theoretical-Methodological Challenges* (Lobo & Machado, 2020) demonstrate these connections with contexts beyond national borders, as well as the ethnographic commitment and methodological curiosity typical of the discipline, reinvigorating the field with new themes and questions. Alongside these international exchanges, *Vibrant* has embraced interdisciplinarity in dossiers that combine anthropological dialogues with other areas of knowledge and national contexts (Baynes & Miller, 2021). Over our eight years of editorship, the internationalization of dialogues has also reflected an increasing diversity of themes and directions, focusing on the excellence of the anthropology produced in the Global South, while maintaining strong connections with countries in the Global North (Villalón & Cabanillas, 2018; Cajé & Arisi, 2023).

At the same time, we have successfully ensured the journal’s primary objective of making the anthropology produced in Brazil accessible to new audiences – an achievement visible in the fact that half of the article citations in the H5 index have been made by anthropologists in publications abroad. We also strengthened our editorial policy for scientific popularization, disseminating our articles on social media, ensuring the regularity of volume publications and receiving a steady influx of dossier proposals. We are currently developing a new website for the journal, along with an updated visual identity and cover style, to mark our twenty years of existence. Looking forward, we hope that the new era will enable even greater integration of the journal into the global landscape of anthropological publications and a flourishing South-South cooperation.

In thematic terms, the wide range of topics explored by Brazilian anthropology has, much to our satisfaction, been reflected in dossiers and continuous-flow articles. These include indigenous issues and thematics like ritual (Castro & Gonçalves, 2017), the notion of personhood (Duarte & Aisengart, 2017;

Rezende, 2017) or questions examined through a variety of approaches from land claims to problems like the violence perpetuated by the justice system, gender and sexuality (Santos & Yssa, 2017; Pilão, 2021, among many others). These have been complemented by different perspectives concerning the impacts of race and racism in Brazil and beyond (Restrepo, 2017; Pinheiro, 2018), as well as diverse approaches to urban anthropology (Cunha, Freire & Silva, 2017), studies of legal and moral sensibilities and their epistemological implications (Cardoso de Oliveira, 2020), intangible heritage (Arantes, 2019), violence and the relationship between humans and non-humans (Oliveira, 2020, among many others) and innovative approaches such as technique-based analyses (Mura & Sautchuk, 2019).

These were just some of the many themes and topics explored in the issues we had the pleasure of editing, accompanied by the remarkable partnership and competence of Roberta Ceva and Tarcísio Ferreira, supported by an extensive network of reviewers and a growing number of dossier proponents and contributors. From analyses of social processes surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic to texts examining the history of our discipline, thematic plurality has been a hallmark of our editorial work. One distinctive feature of the volumes published in recent years has been the connection of authors with pressing national and international political issues and in response to challenging scenarios, including authoritarian governments (Machado, 2020; Souza Lima & Gonçalves Dias, 2020; O'Dwyer & Silva, 2020), the role of the “digital world” in the contemporary context (Ramos, 2019; Gomes, Alves, Throstensen & Soares, 2019), violence perpetrated against indigenous populations (Aларcon, 2018; Ferreira, 2018; Díaz & Freire, 2023) and pandemics (Sordi, Segatta & Lewgoy, 2022).

We should mention the close and supportive guidance provided by the SciELO team over these years, as well as the collaborative and creative involvement of our International Editors and, in particular, the *Vibrant* Editorial Board (especially, though not only, at some of the more difficult moments), as well as the International Board. Above all, none of our work would have been possible without the solid foundation established over Peter Fry's long tenure as general editor, supported by Carmen Rial.

Demonstrating a strong continuity with this brief history, issue 21 (2024) of *Vibrant* is composed of the sections *Articles*, *Audiovisuals* and *Déjà Lu* and three dossiers: *Neoextractivism, Climate Crisis, and Disasters: Perspectives from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile*; *Anthropologies of Management: Forms and Formulas of Government in Our Latitudes*; and *Towards the Expansion of Horizons of Anthropological Understanding: Ethnographies with “Uncomfortable Alterities.”*

In the articles – as well as the dossiers – the relations between Brazilian society and the state loom large. The thematic diversity of this section includes discussions of the “Bancada do Boi” or agribusiness lobby, affirmative action, public policies for people with substance dependencies, and therapeutic experiments aimed at curing HIV and human trafficking, along with more general reflections on the field of anthropology.

The first dossier in the issue, *Anthropologies of Management: Forms and Formulas of Government in Our Latitudes*, forms part of the third edition of the *Global Anthropological Dialogues* section. Coordinated by María Gabriela Lugones, María Cecilia Díaz and María Lucía Tamagnini (2024), the dossier continues the intellectual and analytical trajectory proposed by Teixeira, Crewe and Bernardes (2023) in Volume 20 (2023) of *Vibrant*. In *Anthropologies of Management*, the authors centre on the ways in which populations are managed and how institutions operate in the everyday lives of people in Latin America. The dossier includes articles discussing various aspects of childhood in Argentina, the role of architecture in the formation of the Brazilian state, intracontinental migratory flows and the relationship between migrants and different spheres of the state, as well as the workings of diverse police and cultural institutions in Latin America.

*Neoextractivism, Climate Crisis, and Disasters: Perspectives from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile* is the second dossier. Its first articles are published now in the current volume with new texts due to appear in *Vibrant's* next edition. Organized by Andréa Zhouri (2024), president of the Brazilian Anthropological Association (2023–2024),

the dossier also proposes taking Latin America as its primary locus of analysis, its contributions focused on exploring how climate change is, above all, a consequence of so-called “environmental disasters.” These, in turn, have deep institutional, economic and political roots, producing violence of diverse kinds (Zhou, 2017).

*Towards the Expansion of Horizons of Anthropological Understanding: Ethnographies with “Uncomfortable Alterities”* is the final dossier in Volume 21 (2024). Coordinated by Marco Julián Martínez Moreno and Ana María Forero Angel (2024), the dossier robustly examines the process of expanding the objects and subjects of anthropological inquiry to include groups less commonly considered within the more classical forums of our disciplinary field. The analytical exercises in this dossier highlight the nuances of the new – and not so new – moments through which we are living (Souza Lima & Facina, 2019; Feltran, 2020; Neiburg & Thomaz, 2020). Additionally, the proposal recalls debates presented by Machado and Motta (2019) in this same journal five years ago, when the challenges faced by anthropology in response to the conservative wave were already capturing the attention of our peers – a convergence that points to anthropology as a fertile ground for reflecting on the questions posed by the authors.

In the section *Déjà Lu*, a regular feature of *Vibrant*, we present texts by Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (2024), Felipe Berocan Veiga (2024) and Nitzan Shoshan (2024) which, published previously, have undergone revisions for the current edition and address fundamental issues within our disciplinary field. Finally, in the section *Audiovisuals*, we present two photographic essays in dialog with the dossier *Utopias of Recycling and Circularity* published in our last issue.

With over than forty texts, the current volume of *Vibrant* highlights, above all, the continuity of the dialogues initiated over the past eight years of the journal, not only strengthening its history and consolidating our editorial vision, but also enhancing the anthropological reflections on the themes in question through the longevity of the debates to which the journal has played host.

As this brief overview shows, much has happened in recent years, and much more is yet to come. Beyond the aforementioned changes to our website and *Vibrant*’s visual identity, multiplying the different voices present in our journal remains a key objective for the future. On this point, we have secured funding for the publication and translation of articles by young black and indigenous anthropologists with resources from the Wenner-Gren Foundation. These dossiers will be featured in the next volume. This project, largely enabled by the arrival of Vinícius Venancio, a young black anthropologist who is now part of our editorial team, sets out to meet the challenge of internationalizing the work of emerging black and indigenous scholars in Brazilian anthropology. With funding for the translation of selected articles, the project, supported by the WG Foundation, will allow us to publish the work of a section of our anthropological community that has found it difficult to access financial resources at national level. In so doing, we take another step towards achieving *Vibrant*’s mission.

While the articles making up this volume frequently discuss the conservative aspects of the social changes we currently face, it is also important to celebrate the positive transformations – both in *Vibrant* and in anthropology more generally – that allow us to expand our horizons in diverse ways.

These have been years of intense work – an endeavour that could only ever be realized collectively. In signing off, therefore, we extend our gratitude to each of the authors and reviewers who together enabled the publication of nearly three hundred articles over the past eight years, as well as to the various funding agencies and ABA for making the journal’s existence possible. Long live *Vibrant* and a warm welcome to the new editors who will take over from 2025 onwards.

Translated by David Rodgers

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# Homogenizing machine: the agribusiness caucus's building of voting convergence in the Brazilian Congress

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## Abstract

Dissensions among private leaders of agricultural commodity chains have drawn attention in Brazil, particularly concerning climate-related issues. However, these divisions have not manifested in the National Congress, where the agribusiness caucus usually builds a highly homogeneous voting base in matters connected with these issues. This article analyses this contrast by means of an ethnography of the complex movements involved in constructing this homogeneity. To do this, the work followed a legislative measure related to the Forest Code as it moved through Congress. The research triangulated data obtained from long-term participant observation in Congress and the *Instituto Pensar Agropecuária*, corporate and state documents and interviews with politicians and heads of business associations. The results evidence a political machine that produces voting convergence linked with agribusiness agendas in the Legislative branch.

**Keywords:** Ethnography; Congress; Agribusiness Caucus; Forest Code; Deforestation; Climate Change.

# Máquina homogeneizadora: a Frente Parlamentar da Agropecuária e sua construção de convergência de votos no Congresso Nacional

## Resumo

Divergências entre líderes privados das cadeias de *commodities* agropecuárias têm chamado atenção no Brasil, particularmente em questões relacionadas ao clima. No entanto, essas divisões não se manifestam no Congresso Nacional, onde a Frente Parlamentar da Agropecuária tem mobilizado um bloco de votação altamente homogêneo nas matérias relacionadas a tais questões. Este artigo analisa esse contraste por meio de uma etnografia dos complexos movimentos envolvidos na construção dessa homogeneidade. Para isso, o trabalho acompanhou a tramitação de uma medida provisória relacionada ao Código Florestal. A pesquisa triangulou dados obtidos a partir de observação participante de longo prazo no Congresso e no Instituto Pensar Agropecuária, documentos empresariais e estatais e entrevistas com parlamentares e dirigentes de associações do agronegócio. Os resultados evidenciam a existência de uma máquina política produzindo convergência de votos em agendas do agronegócio no Poder Legislativo.

**Palavras-chave:** Etnografia; Congresso; Frente Parlamentar da Agropecuária; Código Florestal; Desmatamento; Mudanças Climáticas.

# Homogenizing machine: the agribusiness caucus's building of voting convergence in the Brazilian Congress

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## Introduction

Actors linked with agribusiness in Brazil often have disagreements among themselves. Involving farmers, transnational corporations and state agents, these frictions are particularly amplified around discussions related to climate change. Indeed, concerning this issue, criticism from civil society organizations, changes in consumers' values, threats of disinvestment and obstacles to international trade deals force some leaders of agricultural commodity chains to express reservations in regard to what they classify as the “backward side of agribusiness” in the country. This discourse is used with special impetus to distance these leaders from anti-environmental bills in Congress.

However, these differences do not generally materialize in terms of significant divisions in the Brazilian Legislative branch. In fact, quite the opposite prevails, as can be seen in the activities of the agribusiness caucus. This caucus is the most organized and influential cross-party bloc in Congress and known for its high degree of political convergence. As pointed out by Carneiro da Cunha et al. (2017), most of the caucus's members tend to vote as a bloc when it comes to legislative processes connected with agribusiness interests, many of which concern the environment and traditional territorial rights. This article examines this contrast. It deals with the following questions: in cases of public disputes among private agribusiness actors, how does the process of building political homogeneity occur in Congress? What are the main actors involved in this process and what are their key practices?

There is a growing movement in anthropology to analyse the heterogeneity of positions and practices of agribusiness actors operating in Brazil. This expansion, it should be noted, follows the need for more ethnographies of elites, as suggested by authors such as Nader (1969), Marcus (1983), Pina-Cabral and Lima (2000) and Gomes et al. (2021). By proposing the notion of “agri-mineral export strategies”, Almeida (2019: 67) has encouraged readings of neo-extractivism that examine its diversity and dynamism. Carneiro da Cunha (2021) has likewise referred to the multiplicity of positions taken by agribusiness associations on social and environmental issues. Meanwhile, Pompeia (2021; 2023a) has placed heterogeneity and historical changes as central elements of his analyses concerning the private and state actors who have adopted the terms agribusiness (*agronegócio*) and *agro* as the foundation for their aggregation and legitimation.<sup>1</sup>

By encouraging perspectives on the diversity and changes regarding agribusiness actors, these works do not ignore the fact that these actors are skilled in constructing alliances with each other. Almeida (2010; 2019), for example, identified a coalition of political and economic interests that are closely linked with neo-extractivism in Brazil, while Pompeia (2020a: 2) used the notion of “political concertation” to name configurations managing conflicts and fostering convergences among predominant agribusiness actors. By the way, the dialectic between centrifugal and centripetal political dynamics in this field is consistent with Marcus's proposal (1983).

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the symbolic, political and economic mobilizations of the notions of agribusiness and *agro*, see Pompeia (2021).

If he supports the examination of diversity among elites, he does not suggest overlooking their coalitions. Quite the contrary: he encourages ethnographies of the strategies that distinct elites mobilize to build and manage alliances among themselves (Marcus 1983).

As regards these analytical focuses, the literature (in anthropology, in particular, and in the human sciences, in general) that addresses the dominant agribusiness actors in Brazil faces the challenge of understanding the practices that turn divergent public positions into convergent votes in Congress. After all, it is precisely this political convergence of the caucus that materializes its power to advance bills related to social and environmental issues, as analysed by authors such as Carneiro da Cunha et al. (2017), Moutinho, Guerra and Azevedo-Ramos (2016), Pereira and Viola (2019) and Rochedo et al. (2018).

In order to contribute to this challenge, the present article chooses a specific case: the processing of a provisional measure (*medida provisória*, or MP) in Congress. This is MP number 867, whose original focus was the extension of the period for adherence to the Environmental Regularization Programme (*Programa de Regularização Ambiental*, or PRA) – which consists of commitments taken on by holders of rural areas, within the scope of the Forest Code, to recover or recompose irregularly altered native vegetation. The MP received a set of amendments, however, that (among other things) allowed some properties that did not comply with the law to become regularized without engaging in effective recovery activities (see Chiavari and Lopes 2019; Rajão et al. 2019). In this regard, it is important to contextualize that the Forest Code had been markedly weakened in 2012 (Carneiro da Cunha 2021; Rajão et al. 2020; Sauer and Mészáros 2017; Veiga 2013), with a significant amnesty given to those who had conducted illegal conversions of vegetation (Soares-Filho et al. 2014). Therefore, the amendments to MP 867 meant that the Code would be subjected to a new round of debilitation.

In the months during which the abovementioned measure was passing through Congress, it was the object of divided public positions of associations funding the *Instituto Pensar Agropecuária* (IPA, or institute). Operating through three sets of actors – agribusiness associations, technical agents and members of Congress –, the IPA has become the main political forum for the negotiation and definition of the agendas that are advanced by the agribusiness caucus in the Legislative branch (Pompeia 2022a). Nonetheless, later on, when the MP was finally voted upon in the Chamber of Deputies, the divergent positions among the associations did not translate into significant differences within the caucus (Câmara dos Deputados 2019a).

Despite the specific characteristics of the MP, the votes on it presented noticeable similarities when compared to other legislative processes of interest to agribusiness during the government of Jair Bolsonaro.<sup>2</sup> An important example in this regard occurred with the movements in Congress related to so-called “land regularization”, when disagreements among business associations also ended in a largely convergent vote by the caucus (Câmara dos Deputados 2021a). As will be shown, these results are linked, *inter alia*, to the political culture that has been built within the caucus.

To reach its objective, this article emphasizes an aspect strongly defended in the anthropological literature on elites: the potential of ethnographic immersion “inside” the spaces in which they operate (see, for example, Shore 2002; Gomes et al. 2021). In accordance with this aspect, the research was centrally based on long-term participant observation in Congress and the IPA. Data and reflections from these immersions were triangulated with the analysis of 66 interviews with business leaders and members of Congress, as well as with the examination of corporate and state documents. The participant observation took place between February and July 2019, and the interviews took place between February 2019 and April 2023.

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<sup>2</sup> Bolsonaro was affiliated with the Social Liberal Party (*Partido Social Liberal*, or PSL) during the period analysed in this article.

## The measure, the amendments and the caucus's rings

At the end of his government, on 27 December 2018, President Michel Temer<sup>3</sup> had MP 867 published in the Brazilian Federal Register. Even though MPs are norms with the force of the law, producing immediate legal effects, they need to be passed by the Chamber of Deputies (lower House) and the Federal Senate (upper House) to be converted into ordinary law. If this does not occur, the MP loses its effectiveness. The period for reviewing MP 867 ended on 3 June 2019.

On 22 January 2019, the agribusiness associations that fund the IPA convened at the institute's headquarters in Brasília. On the occasion, they elected the IPA's board of directors (Cecafé 2019). The Mato Grosso Association of Cotton Producers (*Associação Brasileira dos Produtores de Algodão*, or AMPA), one of the founders of the IPA, took over the presidency. Other leading posts went to the Brazilian Association of Soybean Producers (*Associação Brasileira dos Produtores de Soja*, or APROSOJA BRASIL), the Mato Grosso State Federation of Agriculture (*Federação da Agricultura e Pecuária do Estado de Mato Grosso*, or FAMATO), the Brazilian Rural Society (*Sociedade Rural Brasileira*, or SRB) and the Brazilian Agribusiness Association (*Associação Brasileira do Agronegócio*, or ABAG) (Cecafé 2019). As of January 2019, the ABAG was under the new leadership of Marcello Brito, who would later stand out in public criticism of some of the positions taken by the caucus and the government (Pompeia 2021).

On the same day, the associations at the IPA also defined the main cross-cutting themes that were to be worked on by the institute during the year. The definition was followed by activities in the specialized commissions created in the IPA to deal with each of these themes (Pompeia 2022a; 2022b). One of them was the environment commission, which was then beginning to be coordinated by the Brazilian Tree Industry (*Indústria Brasileira de Árvores*, or IBÁ) and the SRB (IPA 2019). And MP 867 was not ignored by the environment commission on that occasion. Among the various initiatives planned and registered by the technical agents at the IPA, one finds the following decision by its business associations: "MP 867 of 2018 – Prepare amendments for the necessary corrections to the Forest Code" (IPA 2019: 3).

The associations at the IPA had, therefore, already reached a joint decision to insert amendments into the MP. By way of comparison, it should be noted that, during the same strategic planning of early 2019, there were disagreements in another commission of the institute, which were accordingly registered by the secretariat (IPA 2019: 6) – no such registrations occurred within the scope of the environment commission. It is important to consider the prior agreement to insert amendments to MP 867 in this light because, months later, some associations funding the IPA (including the IBÁ itself) would publicly present positions contrary to the changes in the original content of the measure sent by President Temer to Congress.

With the deadline for the presentation of proposed amendments to the MP set for between 4 and 11 February 2019, the associations and members of Congress working at the IPA had about three weeks to prepare, negotiate and officially present their amendments in Congress. At the end, 35 amendments were presented. Of these, 31 were advanced by Deputies Alceu Moreira,<sup>4</sup> Evair de Melo,<sup>5</sup> José Mário Schreiner,<sup>6</sup> Nelson Barbudo<sup>7</sup> and Pedro Lupion,<sup>8</sup> in addition to Senator Luis Carlos Heinze<sup>9</sup> (Congresso Nacional 2019a). These politicians were part of a collective of approximately a dozen members who politically led the agribusiness caucus. This hard core was commanded by the president and vice-presidents of the bloc in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, along with some other members of the caucus's board who were very active in the IPA (FPA 2019a; Pompeia 2022a).

3 Brazilian Democratic Movement (*Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*, or MDB).

4 MDB, state of Rio Grande do Sul.

5 Progressives (*Progressistas*, or PP), state of Espírito Santo.

6 Then in the Democrats (*Democratas*, or DEM), state of Goiás. In 2021, the DEM merged with the PSL to create the Brazil Union (*União Brasil*).

7 At that moment in the PSL, state of Mato Grosso.

8 PP, state of Paraná.

9 PP, state of Rio Grande do Sul.

It was these members who, on behalf of the caucus, conducted negotiations with the presidencies of the two Houses of Congress and the Executive branch, in addition to making the strategic public speeches regarding the caucus's objectives.

The abovementioned hard core is identified in this article as the first ring of the agribusiness caucus. In order to classify this and the next two rings of the cross-party bloc, the following main aspects were considered: the insertion of members in the formal hierarchy of the caucus and the degree of their articulations within the scope of the IPA (with its business associations and technical agents). When it comes to legislative processes related to agribusiness, the decisive factor behind the votes of the members of these three rings is the caucus's official position, as will be shown below.

The second ring was formed by the rest of the politicians of the caucus's board of directors. Its members had a relevant presence in the IPA, although they were less assiduous and decisive in their activities than the ones of the bloc's hard core. Furthermore, the members of the second ring were not normally part of the group that negotiated on behalf of the caucus with leaders in the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary branches. In a contrary manner, they acted and expressed themselves mainly on specialized themes or in relation to specific geographic regions, according to the attributions given to them by leaders of the caucus. It is worth contextualizing that this second ring was formed during the 2010s, following the growing complexity of the command structures of the caucus, a process that was driven mostly by the consolidation of the IPA. Between 2011 and 2019, the functions undertaken by the caucus's board of directors increased by 188.9% in terms of the number of formally designated positions, revealing a significant increase in internal subdivisions and their respective specializations (Pompeia 2022a). The third ring of the agribusiness caucus was composed of members of Congress who attended the IPA (albeit irregularly) but did not hold official positions on the board of directors (unlike politicians of the first and second rings). On the occasions when the members of the third ring are more directly involved in negotiations at the institute, they do so with regard to issues related to their direct preferences or to the interests of their electoral bases and donors.

Two additional rings, the fourth and fifth ones, complement the classification scheme put together in this article concerning the caucus. These consist of members of Congress who are officially linked with the cross-party bloc but are distant from the day-to-day work of its leaders and are thus not very often present at the IPA's headquarters (FPA 2019a). Party membership is essential in distinguishing between the fourth and fifth rings: members were sorted according to their belonging to parties whose leaders, during the Bolsonaro administration, tended (or not) to follow the voting guidance of the agribusiness caucus. To differentiate parties in this regard, three legislative measures were taken into consideration. These are bills (*projetos de lei*, or PL) 2633/2020 (related to "land regularization") and 3729/2004 (concerning environmental licensing), in addition to MP 867 itself (Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; 2021a; 2021b). All three of these measures implied public disagreements, major or minor, among agribusiness associations. Parties whose leaders tended to forward voting guidance following the caucus were defined in the article as those that incentivized favourable votes in at least two of the three measures mentioned in the paragraph and concomitantly presented an absence of unfavourable guiding in relation to any of them.<sup>10</sup> Following this differentiation, the fourth ring is made up of members of Congress whose respective party leaders tended, in legislative processes related to agribusiness, to guide votes in accordance with the official preferences of the caucus. By contrast, the fifth ring consisted

<sup>10</sup> The parties identified according to this criterion were the MDB, the PP, the DEM, the PSL, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (*Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira*, or PSDB), the Cidadania (*Cidadania*), the New Party (*Novo*), the Social Democratic Party (*Partido Social Democrático*, or PSD), the Solidarity (*Solidaridade*), the Brazilian Labour Party (*Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro*, or PTB) and the Social Christian Party (*Partido Social Cristão*, or PSC), besides the then-Party of the Republic (*Partido da República*, or PR), which in May 2019 changed its name to the Liberal Party (*Partido Liberal*, or PL), and the Brazilian Republican Party (*Partido Republicano Brasileiro*, or PRB), which in August 2019 was renamed the Republicans (*Republicanos*).

of the remaining members of the caucus, whose party leaders did not satisfy the conditions established for the fourth ring.<sup>11</sup> Table 1 shows the numbers identified in each of the agribusiness caucus's rings in 2019, in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate.

**Table 1** - Members of the agribusiness caucus, by ring

Ring	Chamber of Deputies	Senate	Total
First	12	1	13
Second	8	5	13
Third	19	4	23
Fourth	143	17	160
Fifth	43	5	48
Total	225	32	257

Sources: Author's calculations based on Congresso Nacional 2019b; FPA 2019a.

It should be added that in the first three rings taken together (and including both Houses), there was a considerable share of members of Congress with assets in agribusiness: 40.8%. This percentage was substantially reduced to 21.3% and 18.8% in the fourth and fifth rings, respectively (author's calculations based on TSE 2023). The article considered landowning as well as assets related to industrial and tertiary activities linked with agriculture (see Pompeia 2020b). The percentage difference between the first three rings and the next two suggests that these possessions may be one of the relevant factors encouraging a more active performance of some members of Congress in the caucus, although attention should also be paid to the presence of a significant number of politicians operating within the IPA's headquarters that did not have assets related to agribusiness.<sup>12</sup>

Returning to the amendments presented by the first ring of the caucus, one should draw attention to the identical phrases that some of its actors used.<sup>13</sup> Considering this and other factors – the systematic nature of these members' work in the IPA, in constant negotiations with private actors (Pompeia 2022a), and the decision recorded by the associations in the institute's environment commission to prepare amendments to MP 867 –, one can point out, with a reasonable degree of confidence, that a portion of these amendments came from an agreement in the IPA between some politicians and associations. However, there were also amendments proposed by members of the caucus that contained relevant differences when compared to each other, as happened in relation to the ones greatly affecting the regularization initiatives of the PRA. These differences indicate that there was probably some degree of disagreement in the IPA before all the amendments were finalized.

This disagreement would take on a more evident public form months later, as will be examined below. Leaders of the three groups that operate in the IPA – politicians, business associations and technical agents – made several observations regarding situations of conflict in the forum. A deputy from the board of directors of the caucus stated that, when there are differences among private actors in the institute, these are brought forward and each member of Congress decides on them (Federal Deputy 1, interview, 3 Jul. 2019). An influential businessperson linked with an association that funds the IPA corroborated this observation, saying that members of Congress tend to make the final choices in cases of unresolved frictions within the institute (Business leader 1, interview, 12 June 2022). But this is only part of the story. It was a technical leader, one that had been working in the IPA for nearly a decade, who provided information to give a more comprehensive understanding of how political disputes within the institute are dealt with. While he confirmed that when

<sup>11</sup> See Bruno (2021) for a detailed analysis of what is classified in this article as the fifth ring of the caucus.

<sup>12</sup> These percentages should be viewed with a certain caution, given the low level of details available in part of the asset declarations of candidates who were elected members of Congress, along with inaccuracies and other factors.

<sup>13</sup> The details of the amendments will not be discussed here. For analyses focused on them, see Chiavari and Lopes (2019) and Rajão et al. (2019).

an agreement is not reached among business associations in the institute, the differences are passed along to members of the caucus, he added that, in these situations, the associations continue to pressure the bloc's members on their own (Technical agent 1, interview, 29 Apr. 2019).

In this regard, the analysis based on interviews, as well as on multi-sited participant observation and documents indicates that what often happens is that business interests keep working to influence politicians of the caucus by means of subcoalitions. In the case of MP 867, one of the many associations that supported the insertion of the amendments was the SRB (see SRB 2019), which, it is worth remembering, was one of the coordinators of the IPA's environment commission.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the examination suggests that there is no defined moment concerning the legislative processes in which the political action of the IPA's business associations (whether more or less convergent) ceases, although, of course, these processes have their specific dimensions within Congress. Such absence of temporal (and also spatial) limits highlights the importance of a joint examination of economic and political factors in the representation of business interests.

Finally, it is necessary to note that there were amendments to the MP whose topics were dealt with by only a single member of Congress, as was the case of the one that defined new temporal criteria for the Forest Code's application concerning legal reserves.<sup>15</sup> According to experts, one of the consequences of these changes would be the legalization of some irregular deforestation practices (see Chiavari and Lopes 2019; Rajão et al. 2019).

### The congressional committee

Simultaneous to the preparation, negotiation and proposal of amendments, a second objective was being implemented by the main members of the caucus: to dominate the mixed congressional committee that would examine MP 867. This process had to take place quickly (although some adjustments were later made regarding the committee members). On 2 February 2019, the legislative session began and on 15 February, the committee was appointed. Obtaining a majority in the composition of the committee and its leadership posts were both fundamental to the homogenization process set forth by the caucus's leaders.

Congressional committees for analysing provisional measures are made up of twelve members of the Chamber of Deputies and an equal number from the Senate. Vacancies on the committees are distributed among parties or parliamentary blocs in proportion to the number of their respective members in each House of Congress. In the case of parties that do not reach the minimum quota to participate, there is a provision for an additional vacancy for each congressional House, which is filled on a rotating basis. The committees' deliberations are passed according to a majority vote, in the presence of an absolute majority of the members of each of the Houses. Additionally, there are substitute members for the committees that must be taken into consideration.

Members of Congress from the different rings of the caucus negotiated with their respective party leaders to be nominated as members of the committee – a movement that usually is supported by the caucus's leadership. In the end, 15 of the 26 (57.7%) full members of the committee were part of the caucus, 9 from the Chamber of Deputies and 6 from the Senate. Among the 23 alternates, 12 (52.2%) were linked with the caucus, with 7 from the Chamber of Deputies and 5 from the Senate (author's calculations based on Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a). Table 2 shows the numbers of each of the rings indicated by their parties to the committee.

<sup>14</sup> It should be added that these subcoalitions tend to be stronger when organically connected with influential regional bases of agricultural elites.

<sup>15</sup> The legal reserve is a concept within the Forest Code that refers to the percentages of native vegetation that rural properties and possessions must maintain in each biome.



**Table 2** - Members of the agribusiness caucus appointed as members and alternates of the mixed committee related to provisional measure 867, by ring

Ring	Members	Alternates
First	6	0
Second	2	1
Third	2	5
Fourth	3	6
Fifth	2	0
Total	15	12

Sources: Author's calculations based on Congresso Nacional (2019a; 2019b); FPA (2019a).

It is noteworthy that six members of Congress who were part of the first ring of the caucus were nominated as committee members by their respective party leaders. Although they represented only 5.1% of the caucus's total, the politicians of this ring constituted 40% of the caucus's members in the committee (author's calculations based on Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a).

The caucus's objective in relation to the committee was complemented on the day of the body's inauguration: 27 March 2019. On this occasion, Senator Judge Selma,<sup>16</sup> then the institutional coordinator of the agribusiness caucus and a member of its second ring, was elected president of the committee. She immediately designated Deputy Sérgio Souza<sup>17</sup> as the body's rapporteur. Souza was the vice-president of the caucus and a key player in its first ring (Congresso Nacional 2019a). Consequently, by the end of March 2019, a set of elements of the caucus's strategy for MP 867 had been implemented: amendments to modify the MP had been presented; a majority had been secured on the committee; and its presidency and reporting tasks were under the control of the caucus's leaders. At this stage, the caucus's homogenizing machine was clearly in full operation. From this point on, the processing of the measure started to receive emphasis during the morning meetings on Tuesdays at the IPA's headquarters, under the leadership of members of the caucus's first ring (FPA 2019b). According to one of them, these meetings are essential for a reduced group of politicians to debate and organize their political activities for the week (Federal Deputy 2, interview, 12 June 2019).

On 26 March, the day before the committee was inaugurated, one of the monthly general meetings had taken place at the IPA (Aprosoja Brasil 2019). During these occasions, the funding associations receive updated news about the advancement of their interests in Congress and engage in talks with the caucus's board of directors (see Pompeia 2022a). Therefore, while being aware of the caucus's amendments to MP 867, the associations that financed the IPA also had knowledge of its drive to establish dominance over the mixed committee related to the provisional measure. Thus, if there was the purpose of counteraction by some associations that disagreed with the directions that the MP was taking, the fact is that until that decisive moment, they had not mobilized effectively to influence the core members of the caucus. Likewise, they had not decided, at that time, to use their strong press connections to bring public attention to the MP, clearly explaining the existence of divergences in the IPA concerning the measure.

It is important to situate, considering the end of March 2019, the two agribusiness associations in the IPA that would later make public criticism of the amendments to MP 867: the ABAG and the IBÁ. The former had been under the leadership of Marcello Brito for three months (since January 2019); the latter, heading the institute's environmental commission, had a change of its presidency on 18 March 2019, when Paulo Hartung took office. In an interview, a senior executive linked with the pulp and paper industries pointed out that the

<sup>16</sup> Podemos, state of Mato Grosso.

<sup>17</sup> MDB, state of Paraná.

group that took over the IBÁ in 2019 had come with new agendas and had to be careful implementing them in the face of the association's previous positions (Business leader 2, interview, 21 June 2022). In fact, in the following years, the IBÁ would show a greater engagement in forums related to climate issues. However, one should also consider that approximately one month after Hartung's entry into the association's presidency, the IBÁ renewed the accreditation of the professional who had been working as its representative in the Chamber of Deputies before the entry of the new leadership group (Câmara dos Deputados 2019b).

On 1 April, during the meeting of the associations with the technical board of the IPA (witnessed by myself), some of those present were clearly uncomfortable with the public hearing that Deputy Nilto Tatto<sup>18</sup> (who was here considered a member of the fifth ring of the caucus) had proposed in order to debate MP 867. A representative of one business association claimed that it would be better to try to avoid this hearing, but a second, more pragmatic proposal prevailed. There would be two public hearings: one organized by the opposition (mostly left-wing parties), the other solely dominated by actors linked with agribusiness. At the meeting on 1 April, no association took the floor to expose criticism of the way that MP 867 was being conducted. And none of the associations that were later publicly critical of the amendments made a request to participate in the public hearings.

On 10 April 2019, the first hearing took place. Organized by those opposed to the amendments, it featured a researcher, a federal attorney, a state-level secretary for the environment and members of socio-environmental organizations. The second hearing came six days later, with members of the Bolsonaro government and representatives of two of Brazil's most important agribusiness associations: the Brazilian Cooperatives Organization (*Organização das Cooperativas Brasileiras*, or OCB)<sup>19</sup> and the Brazil's Agricultural Confederation (*Confederação da Agricultura e Pecuária do Brasil*, or CNA) (Senado Federal 2019a; 2019b). The OCB representative was a legal specialist and supported the way in which the procedures to modify MP 867 were being conducted. He also praised what he considered to be the public debate being held around the amendments. The CNA, chosen to speak because it was seen by the federal state branches as a fundamental voice of agricultural employers, slightly distanced itself from the OCB (Senado Federal 2019b). In fact, the confederation became the first prominent agribusiness association to publicly express a degree of discomfort regarding the changes to MP 867. To understand the CNA's position, one needs to consider that it was at that moment in time not funding the IPA but competing with the institute for leadership in Brasília (Pompeia 2020a). However, it is also important to note that, in his speech, the CNA's representative highlighted the aspects in which the confederation agreed with the dominant line of the IPA, only vaguely suggesting reservations about some of the amendments that moved further away from the original motive of the MP (which was the extension of the deadline for joining the PRA).

## The report

On 24 April 2019, Deputy Sérgio Souza delivered his report containing the bill of conversion (*projeto de lei de conversão*, or PLV) related to MP 867 (Congresso Nacional 2019a). Its content showed that the objections and reservations during the hearings did not have significant influence on the decisions of the rapporteur. He considered that amendments dealing with the Forest Code could be included in the MP, even if they were largely unrelated to the extension of the period for adherence to the PRA – the original reason for the measure published by President Temer. Thus, among other decisions, Deputy Souza introduced into MP 867 parts of

<sup>18</sup> Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, or PT), state of São Paulo.

<sup>19</sup> Although the OCB represents a wide range of cooperative activities in the country, it is led by interests linked with agribusiness. For an analysis of this association, see Mendonça (2010).

amendments with great potential to affect the Forest Code. According to specialists (see Rajão et al. 2019), the resulting PLC could impact legal reserves and permanent preservation areas<sup>20</sup> while promoting amnesties for some of the irregular deforestation practices.

On the same day that Souza's report was presented to the congressional committee, the Brazilian Coalition on Climate, Forests and Agriculture (*Coalizão Brasil Clima, Florestas e Agricultura*, or COALIZÃO) issued a statement on its website. Comprised mainly of agribusiness associations and certain environmental organizations, the COALIZÃO had the ABAG as its business leader. The statement claimed that it was "[...] imperative to enforce the law, we cannot waste time with further modifications to its provisions" (Coalizão 2019a). The IBÁ, which also played an important role in the COALIZÃO, reproduced the statement (Ibá 2019). It was a relevant criticism, but the decision to issue a public position at that time is noteworthy, given that there would have been much greater scope for effective changes within the Chamber of Deputies had these issues been aired earlier. Moreover, two days after presenting the COALIZÃO's position on its site, the IBÁ had the accreditation of its former representative renewed in the Chamber of Deputies, as noted above (Câmara dos Deputados 2019b).

During a meeting at the IPA's headquarters on 6 May 2019, it was announced that Deputy Souza would submit his report for approval in the congressional committee (as I wrote in my field diary). Note the confidence expressed in the idea of submitting the document not for consideration but for approval. Not unexpectedly, approval in the committee was secured two days later, on 8 May. There were 15 votes in favour and only 3 against the report.<sup>21</sup> Of the total number of favourable votes, 13 (86.7%) came from members of the agribusiness caucus (author's calculations based on Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a).

After being determinant in presenting the amendments to the MP, the first ring also proved key in the congressional committee, with six of the favourable votes for Souza's report. As a senator who belonged to the third ring of the caucus told me during a long interview in the Senate, the caucus's hard core had the highest degree of organization among the caucuses in Congress. This politician added that, prior to voting sessions, the caucus's leading actors held strategic planning sessions in which they elaborated clear instructions to members to enhance political efficacy (Senator 1, interview, 10 Jul. 2019). It should be added that there were, from the second, third, fourth and fifth rings, one, four, one and one votes for the approval of the report, respectively (in some cases through alternates) (author's calculations based on Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a).

The other two favourable votes were cast by politicians who were not members of the caucus at the time. These votes showed, however, the relevance of the caucus's alliances with other multi-party groups. Both votes came from prominent figures: one from a leader of the evangelical caucus and the other from an important actor of the so-called "*Centrão*" (a group of members of different parties in Congress that presents ideological malleability and tends to offer support to whatever government is in power in exchange for political posts and resources to strengthen its electoral machines in home constituencies). Of the three contrary votes, one was cast by a politician from the fifth ring of the caucus (author's calculations based on Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a).

<sup>20</sup> Permanent preservation areas are the ones that, according to the Forest Code, must be protected because of their fundamental roles for the preservation of essential ecosystem functions. Examples are springs, mangroves, banks of rivers, steep slopes and hilltops.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth considering that, of the 15 members of Congress who voted favourably in the committee, 6, or 40.0%, had agribusiness assets (author's calculations based on TSE 2023).

## Frictions

On 9 May 2019, the report of Deputy Souza was published in the Journal of the National Congress, and the PLV arising from MP 867 was presented to the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Rodrigo Maia.<sup>22</sup> But Bolsonaro's disputes with Maia (in particular) and with Congress (in general) were especially acute in the first half of 2019, and this situation hindered the heads of the caucus in moving forward the measures they were interested in. Additionally, unlike agribusiness corporations that were critical of the PLV, leaders of Brazil's indigenous peoples had gone to the Chamber of Deputies (on 25 April) to put pressure on Maia regarding measures that were contrary to socio-environmental values. And on 8 May, seven former environment ministers released a joint statement in which they criticized, among other actions, the new attempt to weaken the provisions of the Forest Code.

The difficulties for moving the PLV to final voting in the plenary hall of the Chamber of Deputies resulted in noticeable irritation being expressed during a meeting of business associations at the IPA on 13 May, the week following the publication of the report. The deadline (3 June) for processing the project in both Houses before it expired was closing in. For their part, leaders of the Chamber of Deputies' Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development (*Comissão de Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento Sustentável*, or CMADS) gave space to voices that criticized the way in which the MP had been modified. They held hearings on the Forest Code, specifically, and on other environmental issues, more generally. Levels of disagreement among the main agribusiness political representations then began to become clearer. In the hearings, the OCB, an important funder of the IPA, continued to support the PLV. The CNA's representative, on his turn, was more emphatic in his criticism than he had been in the previous hearing. He stated that matters that strayed far from the MP's original intent should not be part of the PLV but be dealt with by means of specific bills (*Câmara dos Deputados 2019c*). The CNA's concern was driven by the high possibility of lawsuits being brought by environmentalists in relation to the modifications that could be introduced in the Forest Code. The CNA thus differed from a significant number of associations in the IPA, which, feeling strengthened by the Bolsonaro administration and the ascending reactionarism in the country, chose to support a short-term view that required several new changes to the abovementioned Code.

During another hearing, the president of the Brazilian Association of Vegetable Oil Companies (*Associação Brasileira das Indústrias de Óleos Vegetais*, or ABIOVE) – which mainly represents grain traders – made a speech. Not distancing himself from one of the predominant arguments in the IPA (in which the ABIOVE was actively inserted), André Nassar argued that he did not see any relevant changes in the Forest Code stemming from the new criteria in the PLV concerning the application of the law over time for legal reserves. However, this opinion was not shared by experts (see Chiavari and Lopes 2019; Rajão et al. 2019), who stressed that the modification implied, among other consequences, the consolidation of some deforestation practices carried out irregularly. Simultaneously, the ABIOVE's representative complained about the withdrawal, in the PLV, of the deadline for the inclusion of properties in the Environmental Rural Registry (*Cadastro Ambiental Rural*, or CAR), a mandatory registry containing environmental information on rural properties and possessions. In this regard, the ABIOVE acted according to the needs of traders, which, faced with international pressure, see the CAR as one of the primary tools needed to monitor suppliers (*Câmara dos Deputados 2019d*). In any case, the statements by the CNA and the ABIOVE were non-detailed and highly selective, respectively. Neither came anywhere near to being effective public criticism of the caucus's strategies regarding MP 867.

The only speech by agribusiness actors in the hearings held at the CMADS that unequivocally contested the PLV came from the Brazilian Business Council for Sustainable Development (*Conselho Empresarial Brasileiro para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável*, or CEBDS). Using her space in the debates, Marina Grossi, the president of

<sup>22</sup> At that moment in the DEM, state of Rio de Janeiro.

the CEBDS, emphasized that she was against alterations to the Forest Code through the PLV. She claimed that such changes would increase strategic risks for actors in Brazil who were linked with the export of agricultural commodities (Câmara dos Deputados 2019e).

Acting mainly outside Congress, the ABAG's and the IBÁ's leaders participated in the publication of an article in the press on 21 May 2019 (Guimarães et al. 2019). In this article, they expressed strong disapproval as regards the amendments to MP 867, claiming that the changes were disconnected from the original purpose of the measure, compromised fundamental aspects of the Forest Code and could increase deforestation, among other problems. Moreover, the article pointed out that the alterations would be detrimental not only to commodity exports from the Brazil but also to obtaining foreign investments.

Following growing criticism (in the country and internationally) concerning anti-environmental initiatives in Brazil, the disagreements in the IPA reached a boiling point on 28 May 2019. During a lunch meeting on this date at the institute with the presence of politicians and private actors, I noticed that a leader linked with the ABAG was sitting by himself, gazing pensively. On that morning, as is customary on the last Tuesday of each month, the meeting between the business associations and the leaders of the caucus had taken place, and the occasion was marked by heated argument. As reported in the press (Racha... 2019), the main factor for friction was the announcement of the elaboration of a public note written at the IPA's headquarters to defend the approval of the PLV (FPA 2019c). This action had been taken without broader deliberation among the associations financing the institute, as was usually the case in such situations. Although there was, on the occasion, a relevant conflict inside the IPA, it is necessary to consider that its timing may suggest that the intention of the aggrieved associations was rather to publicly disassociate themselves from the modified MP (and the contestations that accompanied it) than to try to put effective obstacles in the way of its processing and approval.

On the same day, the COALIZÃO launched a video campaign on the internet, entitled "In defence of the Forest Code". In the campaign, the ABAG and the IBÁ stated that the amendments to MP 867 were disrespectful to businesspeople who complied with the Forest Code's rules. Furthermore, they reinforced that the changes would negatively affect the image of economic actors linked with commodities who operated more directly with investors and importers from other countries (Coalizão 2019b). Nonetheless, it is important to note that neither of them decided to stop financing the IPA. The fact that the ABIOVE did not participate in the campaign was revealing as well, since this association was influential not only in the IPA but also in the COALIZÃO. At the same time, the SRB's leader left an unclear impression in one of the videos of the campaign, defending the implementation of the Code but avoiding criticism of the amendments. There was a reason for this: although internally divided, the São Paulo-based association – led mostly by cattle ranchers – would go public a few days later to support the PLV's approval (SRB 2019).

One could also observe the associations that, despite being highly active in the IPA, remained silent in the public sphere during the debates concerning MP 867. This was the case, for example, of the Brazilian Beef Exporters Association (*Associação Brasileira das Indústrias Exportadoras de Carnes*, or ABIEC), which represents large meat processors. As stated in an interview that I conducted with a senior executive linked with meat processing companies (Business leader 3, interview, 4 Jul. 2022), the ABIEC preferred to avoid conflicts that could destabilize strategic agreements in the IPA. An example of such agreements concerns taxes.

### **The quorum challenge and the outer rings**

While the backstage conflicts and alliances were taking place, on the one hand, and some public demonstrations were unfolding, on the other hand, Deputy Souza undertook emergency initiatives with party leaders to take the PLV to final voting in the plenary hall of the Chamber of Deputies (as reported during

meetings I attended at the IPA). Souza was often accompanied in these efforts by other members of the first ring of the caucus. Following such initiatives, this leading group met with the President of the Chamber of Deputies and finally obtained a favourable indication for the measure to be voted on by the lower House of Congress.

After this indication, a meeting at the IPA between business associations and technical leaders was quite eventful. The institute's executive board confirmed that the plan agreed upon in the Chamber of Deputies was to carry out the voting related to the PLV very shortly. Subsequently, the technical director urged agribusiness leaders present at the meeting to put pressure (in person or virtually) upon federal deputies over whom they had direct influence.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the caucus's main actors were leading the final moves in Congress to bring the PLV to voting. First of all, they needed to guarantee that a minimum number of deputies would be present in the plenary hall. The lowest quorum for voting on provisional measures is an absolute majority, which is equivalent to 257 deputies. To achieve this number, it was essential for the agribusiness caucus to count on members of its different rings as well as on members of Congress who were not associated with it.<sup>24</sup>

In the plenary session of the Chamber of Deputies on 29 May, 25 members of the first three rings of the caucus were present (author's calculations based on *Câmara dos Deputados 2019a*; *Congresso Nacional 2019a*; *2019b*; *FPA 2019a*). Thus, in order to reach the required quorum, the caucus needed to efficaciously mobilize its enormous fourth ring of 143 deputies. These representatives formally belonged to the caucus but did not often participate in the activities at the IPA. To get them involved, a set of operations had been conducted. These operations will be dealt with in detail later in the article, when it analyses the movements that preceded the voting itself. However, it should be stressed that they were carried out both by members of the rings closest to the IPA and by some of the business associations that finance the institute.

The initiatives related to the fourth ring of the caucus were successful, resulting in the presence of 89 of its deputies. Nonetheless, it was only part of the challenge facing the cross-party bloc. Considering the 15 politicians from the fifth ring who were also present, the caucus could mobilize 129 of its members, or 50.2% of the number to meet the required quorum (author's calculations based on *Câmara dos Deputados 2019a*; *Congresso Nacional 2019a*; *2019b*; *FPA 2019a*). As a result, they still needed 128 more deputies. The need for members of Congress who were not part of the caucus meant a critical difference from the dynamics that occurred within the scope of the mixed committee that had evaluated Deputy Souza's report, in which the caucus's members provided not only a large part of the necessary presence but also 13 of the 15 votes in favour of the report's approval.

Consequently, at this point in the analysis, it is imperative to delimit two complementary rings that may be identified concerning issues related to agricultural commodity chains. They are related to the remaining members of Congress, i.e. those who were not officially part of the caucus. In the case of what this article classifies as the sixth ring, political actors were linked with parties whose leaders tended to forward voting guidance following the caucus's official preferences (as explained at the beginning of this article). In a distinct manner, the seventh ring was made up of members of Congress connected with parties that did not usually guide votes in the directions defended by the caucus's leadership (as also explained at the beginning of this work).

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<sup>23</sup> For this influence, donations at the 2018 election played a considerable supporting role. In this regard, it is relevant to note some of the effects of the Brazilian Supreme Court's 2015 decision to ban corporate donations to election campaigns. When one compares donations from actors linked with agricultural commodity chains to congressional candidates between the elections of 2014 and 2018, one can identify the rise (in 2018) of the relative importance of large landowners and seed producers as donors (TSE 2023).

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that, at the time, leaders of the opposition were concentrating efforts in postponing the voting – a central orientation was for deputies under their leadership not to have presences considered in the plenary hall.

To examine the sixth and seventh rings, this article focuses on the Chamber of Deputies, where the vast majority of initiatives related to MP 867 took place. If the 5 rings of the caucus encompassed 225 deputies, the sixth and seventh rings held 164 and 124 deputies, respectively (author's calculations based on Congresso Nacional 2019b; FPA 2019a). Additionally, it is important to recognize that these two rings, although programmatically distant in relation to each other when one considers agricultural commodity chains' interests, showed similar percentages of deputies holding agribusiness assets: 15.9% in case of the sixth ring and 16.1% in the case of the seventh ring (author's calculations based on TSE 2023).

Characterized by members of parties with voting positions that converged with those of the caucus's command, the sixth ring was unsurprisingly the centre of attention of the leaders of the cross-party bloc as regards reaching the required quorum for voting the PLV. And the adherence of the members of the sixth ring was significant: 119 of its deputies attended the plenary session. With 17 additional politicians from the seventh ring, the caucus was able to ensure that the necessary quorum was achieved, with a total of 265 deputies showing up in the voting session (author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a). The importance of members of the sixth ring in making the required quorum corroborates observations previously made by other works (Vigna 2001; 2007), which point out the simultaneous relevance of members and non-members of the caucus to some of the actions related to agribusiness interests in the Brazilian Congress.

In short, the caucus's strategy to meet the required quorum depended mainly on two fundamental rings: the fourth and sixth ones. Indeed, they represented 33.6% and 44.9% of the deputies who were present in the plenary session, respectively (author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a). Despite their differences as regards insertion (fourth ring) or not (sixth ring) in the caucus, all of their members belonged to parties whose leaders tended to follow the caucus's voting preferences concerning agribusiness-related themes. The crucial relation between the caucus and party leaders will be addressed in the next part of the article.

## The voting

With a sufficient quorum, the PLV was approved at 4:30 pm on 29 May. For its approval, a majority of the votes of the present members of the Chamber of Deputies was required. There were 264 deputies who voted: 243 of them for approval and 19 against it, besides 2 abstentions (Câmara dos Deputados 2019a).<sup>25</sup> In keeping with their importance for reaching the necessary quorum, the fourth and sixth rings proved to be the most decisive in the voting. In fact, these two rings delivered 87 and 111 "yes" votes related to the PLV, respectively, which were equivalent to 35.8% and 45.7% of the total votes cast for its approval. Added together, the favourable votes from the first three rings reached 25, or 10.3% of the "yes" votes. Furthermore, 13 and 7 votes for approval came from the fifth and seventh rings, respectively, comprising 5.3% and 2.9% of the "yes" votes (author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a). Table 3 shows these results.

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<sup>25</sup> As president of the Chamber of Deputies, Deputy Maia did not vote, in accordance with the House's rules.

**Table 3** - Favourable votes in the Chamber of Deputies for the approval of the bill of conversion related to provisional measure 867, by ring

Ring	Favourable votes	Participation in the total of favourable votes (%)
First	10	4.1
Second	5	2.1
Third	10	4.1
Fourth	87	35.8
Fifth	13	5.3
Sixth	111	45.7
Seventh	7	2.9
Total	243	100

Sources: Author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a.

It is necessary to examine the ways in which influence on the key rings is operated. Not intended to be exhaustive, the examination in this respect will highlight some of the fundamental procedures. The first of them is the unification of the positions among the members of Congress that make up the first and second rings of the caucus. This movement is mostly conducted inside the IPA and subsequently involves members of the third ring. The identification of this politically centripetal process has already been pointed out in other analyses (Bruno 2015; Carneiro da Cunha 2021).

As a leader of a business association that finances the IPA revealed in an interview (Business leader 2, interview, 21 June 2022), there are often strong moves to make sure that no one breaks ranks from the caucus's official decisions among the group of about 50 members of Congress that make up its first three rings. This group of politicians is diverse, some holding more and others holding less conservative positions. In this sense, one may cite two important procedures to guarantee the loyalty of politicians who frequently work at the IPA. Before voting dates, considerable pressure is put upon these politicians to ensure that there are no divisions in public speeches and in decisions in Congress. Over a longer timeframe, there is a continuous effort to modify the positions and political perspectives of new members, bringing them closer in line to what the leaders of the caucus want – as observed by a representative of the fifth ring (Federal Deputy 3, interview, 13 June 2019).

Convergence in the first three rings of the caucus was highly noticeable in the plenary votes related to the PLV. Out of the 25 votes cast by its members (10 in the first ring, 5 in the second and 10 in the third), all were for approval (author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a). Adherence to the official position of the caucus in the first three rings was also evident in the decisions of two of its members (considered in the numbers above in this paragraph) who, despite not having official party guidance to vote “yes” in relation to the PLV, decided to do so (one of them also went against the party's orientation not to have his presence considered in the plenary hall). Regarding this scenario, a member of the first ring stated in an interview I conducted that he had autonomy and the understanding of his party leader to disagree with party positions when it came to issues related to agribusiness (Federal Deputy 1, interview, 3 Jul. 2019). It should be noted that such an operation to ensure convergence within the first, second and third rings is reinforced in the IPA both by the decisive pressure of some business segments and the purposeful withdrawal of some others that prefer to avoid conflicts. It is also worth noting that the political structure functioning at the institute was financially supported by all the associations that were officially part of it, including the ABAG and the IBÁ.



Following the construction of political convergence in the rings of the caucus that operated inside the IPA, an “intense work of mobilization” takes place to involve members of Congress who are less close to the institute, as I was informed by a deputy from the first ring (Federal Deputy 2, interview, 12 June 2019). This work has as its essential axis a focus on party leaders, especially the ones of the conservative parties. In effect, as it is the parties (and not the caucuses) that have a greater capacity for disciplining members (see Figueiredo and Limongi 1999; Santos 2002), the command of the caucus does not aim to compete with party leaders but to influence their voting guidance. Concerning issues that are related to agribusiness, actions in this respect occur by means of two main (and mutually reinforcing) procedures.

The first of these consists of direct negotiations between the president and vice-presidents of the caucus and party leaders. The second procedure is pursued in a less centralized way. It is undertaken by the rest of the members of the first three rings of the caucus in relation to the leaders of their respective parties. In this sense, a deputy from the first ring told me that, in his party, it was customary for his opinion to be consulted on issues related to agribusiness and to play a major role in defining his party positions (Federal Deputy 2, interview, 12 June 2019). Members of the first three rings were present in all parties that defined voting position for the approval of the PLV (with the exception of the PSC). Moreover, both procedures are further supported by the official insertion of many of the party leaders in the caucus, often in its fourth ring (author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019b; FPA 2019a).

If, on the one hand, the “work of mobilization” needs to place emphasis on convincing party leaders, on the other hand, it involves taking actions focused on the bases of parties. When it comes to matters of interest to agribusiness, a fundamental objective of these actions is to increase loyalty to the preferences officially set by supporting party leaders. Aimed mainly at individual politicians from the fourth and sixth rings, these procedures occur through short- and long-term procedures. On the weeks before important voting sessions, efforts are made to bring members of Congress to the Tuesday lunches at the IPA (see Pompeia 2022a). Additionally, individual initiatives by some of the caucus's politicians are taken outside the institute to convince their colleagues. Supporting these initiatives, many business actors and associations that (indirectly or directly) finance the IPA exert pressure on the members of Congress over which they have greater influence (because of a set of factors, including donations during elections). Long-term processes include informal spaces for socializing among politicians (such as football matches) and the various protocols to engage new members in Congress (especially from urban areas) in the caucus's activities. Practices adopted to attract “newcomers” (*novatos*) (as new politicians elected for Congress are named in the IPA) include, for example, the attribution of reporting tasks. Besides all these actions, one should not ignore the caucus's negotiations with other robust caucuses, such as the evangelical one.<sup>26</sup>

Having considered some of the caucus's pivotal procedures for mobilizing congressional support, it is important to observe the voting in the Chamber of Deputies as regards the PLV with a complementary perspective. To this end, the analytical focus is specifically on the decisions of deputies who received directions from their respective parties to vote for the approval of the PLV. In this regard, one can identify that the closer these politicians were to the IPA, the higher the degree of their loyalty to party directions (and, consequently, to the caucus's official preference). In the first, second and third rings, adherence was 100% (author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a).

This percentage decreases slightly when observing the actors of the fourth ring with party positions to approve the amended MP. Formally inserted in the caucus but far from the IPA, these deputies followed their party directions to vote for the approval of the PLV in 98.8% of the cases. In the sixth ring, loyalty showed a greater decrease (although the percentage of adherence was still high). Not related to the caucus but

<sup>26</sup> On the relations between caucuses, see Bruno (2015), Carneiro da Cunha et al. (2017) and Macaulay (2017).

belonging to parties that were politically convergent with the cross-party bloc, the members of the sixth ring with directions from the parties to vote “yes” in relation to the amended measure did so in 94.0% of the votes (author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a).<sup>27</sup>

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge the caucus's work in relation to the fifth and seventh rings – which, as delimited above, are composed of members of Congress whose parties did not usually follow the bloc's official preferences. Concerning the PLV, this work included, among others, efforts to encourage defections in parties whose leaders pushed against the approval of the measure. In the voting session on 29 May, there were five and one members of the fifth and seventh rings, respectively, who, despite the party directions not to have their presences considered in the plenary hall, decided to do so (thus contributing to the quorum) and, besides that, voted for the approval of the PLV (author's calculations based on Câmara dos Deputados 2019a; Congresso Nacional 2019a; 2019b; FPA 2019a).

### Disarticulation in the Senate

On 29 May 2019, the approved PLV (9/2019) was forwarded to the Senate. However, the caucus's dominance in the Chamber of Deputies in relation to MP 867 did not carry over to the upper House. Objections during a session in the Senate on the afternoon of 29 May, which ran concurrently with the voting on the PLV in the Chamber of Deputies, were quite revealing in this respect. On the occasion, senators from both the government's base and the opposition were emphatic in their criticism of the amendments included in the measure. Confúcio Moura,<sup>28</sup> Randolfe Rodrigues,<sup>29</sup> Reguffe<sup>30</sup> and Espiridião Amin<sup>31</sup> are four senators who can be cited in this respect (Senado Federal 2019c). None of them had a formal connection with the caucus. At the same time, a public hearing in the Environment Committee of the Senate presented reasoned disapprovals of the PLV. In this context, it was also clear that public pressures had proved more effective in the upper House than in the lower one.

With the homogenizing machine's power in the Chamber of Deputies, many of the associations that made up the IPA's private subcoalition supporting the amendments inserted in MP 867 had preferred to refrain from publicly endorsing the changes. Upon experiencing difficulties in the Senate, however, some agribusiness actors decided to come forward to defend the approval of the PLV on the floor of that House. As indicated above, one of these was the SRB, which expressed “[...] unrestricted support for provisional measure (MP) 867/18, which ensures more predictability and strengthens the application of the Forest Code” (SRB 2019).

The objections from several senators to the amended MP 867 occurred alongside the dissatisfaction of the upper House with the leaders of the Chamber of Deputies. In fact, the Senate was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the little time it had available to examine legislative measures coming from the other House. All things considered, the President of the Senate, Davi Alcolumbre,<sup>32</sup> announced that the altered MP would not be voted upon by senators (Senado Federal 2019c). A deputy linked with the caucus commented to me that one of its leaders was furious with Alcolumbre's decision (Federal Deputy 3, interview, 13 June 2019). Nevertheless, there is no denying that the actors operating in the IPA had not managed to involve a reasonable number of senators in their negotiations concerning MP 867.

27 These results occurred despite the fact that the fourth and sixth rings were composed, respectively, of 81.1% and 84.1% of deputies who did not have assets related to agribusiness (author's calculations based on TSE 2023). The percentages reinforce the importance of other forms of mediation and influence operating in this homogenizing machine.

28 MDB, state of Rondônia.

29 Sustainability Network (*Rede Sustentabilidade*), state of Amapá.

30 Then without a party affiliation, Federal District.

31 PP, state of Santa Catarina.

32 DEM, state of Amapá.

In this regard, a senator inserted in the third ring of the caucus declared that, when compared to deputies, senators were less engaged in the political activities at the IPA (Senator 1, interview, 10 Jul. 2019).<sup>33</sup>

Provisional measure 867 lost its effectiveness on 3 June 2019, having expired without its processing through both Houses of Congress. If the present article ends here, it is worth considering that the political actions of the members of Congress who operated systematically at the IPA's headquarters were then acquiring momentum in relation to the Executive branch. Not fortuitously, on the same afternoon of 3 June, eight deputies from the first ring of the agribusiness bloc presently met with then-president Jair Bolsonaro. This was one of the key meetings taken to build a political pact that, between 2019 and 2022, was strategic for both the caucus and the government.<sup>34</sup>

## Final considerations

As climate-related issues force the differentiation of public positions among agribusiness actors operating in Brazil, by what means does the representation of their interests in Congress remain highly homogenous? This political ethnography analysed this question by following the complete processing of a legislative measure related to the Forest Code, which had been amended to include anti-environmental provisions. Particularly, it examined how public disagreements among dominant agribusiness associations regarding this measure ended up being translated into largely convergent voting results in the Chamber of Deputies (lower House of the Brazilian Congress).

Combining, on the one hand, political and economic dimensions as regards the representation of business interests and, on the other hand, public and backstage politics, the research was based on the triangulation of corporate and state documents, interviews with business leaders and politicians and long-term participant observation in Congress and the *Instituto Pensar Agropecuária* (IPA). Operating by means of three sets of actors – agribusiness associations, technical agents and members of Congress –, the IPA is the main political forum for defining the agendas that are subsequently advanced by the agribusiness caucus, the most powerful cross-party bloc in the Brazilian Legislative branch.

The work identified levels of disagreement at the IPA among agribusiness associations concerning the anti-environmental amendments to the abovementioned legislative measure. There were associations actively supporting the changes implemented by the caucus in the measure, some others expressing slight reservations about the alterations, and a few showing strong disapproval of the amendments. However, the article found that the different critical stances of some associations had a low level of effectiveness on the caucus's operation. Among several factors at play, the research highlighted ambiguous speeches by certain agribusiness actors that did not fully support the amended measure and called attention to contradictory actions or a lack of timeliness by some of the associations that declared opposition to the amendments.

The article also closely examined the relations among the members of the agribusiness caucus. In order to do so, it segmented the caucus into five rings, considering the members' positions in its hierarchy, their work within the IPA and their party affiliations – while also taking into account the influence of agribusiness assets by politicians and donations received during election processes. Beginning with a hard core systematically connected with business actors and moving outwards to the congressional segments most distant from the daily negotiations that take place at the IPA, this segmentation was used to analyse some of the pivotal ways by which the caucus gradually builds convergence in the Legislative branch.

<sup>33</sup> The caucus's mobilization of senators has received a greater emphasis since then. These efforts have produced some relevant changes in this direction, particularly after the 2022 congressional elections.

<sup>34</sup> For an analysis of the relationship between divergent agribusiness currents and Bolsonaro's government, see Pompeia (2023a; 2023b).

Some of the principal results of the article as regards this convergence were: strengthened by the absence of timely and clear contestation within the IPA, a subcoalition of private agribusiness actors worked in tandem with some politicians of the caucus to define and support the bloc's position to insert amendments into the legislative measure; the decisive element behind the votes of the members of Congress closer to the IPA was the caucus's official position, even when it meant going against party directions; a central factor concerning the supporting votes of the caucus's politicians that were not assiduous at the IPA was the influence on leaders of parties, especially of the conservative ones, to adopt the bloc's official position; the approval of the measure in the Chamber of Deputies required a significant mobilization of deputies who did not belong to the agribusiness caucus; with substantial support from business actors, the work of mobilization was aimed not only at party leaders but also at individual members of parties, by means of both short- and long-term procedures.

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# Singularity and the dispute for a transhumanist ideology

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## **Abstract**

We understand Singularism, a stream of transhumanist thought, to be an ideology associated with Silicon Valley and the political right-wing (Hughes 2002). Taking this as our object of study, the present article conducts an anthropological discussion around the concepts of culture, ideology, and cosmology as proposed by Eric Wolf (1999). Cosmology provides a basis for ideology so as to offer elements for criteria such as truth and the inevitability of a given project for power. We point out how cybernetics works as a cosmology for Singularism and we explore political and philosophical differences between exponents of Singularism, which -- to a large extent -- express different appropriations of cybernetics in their construction of the concept of Singularity.

**Keywords:** Cybernetics. Cyberculture. Cosmology. Ideology. Singularity. Silicon Valley.

# Singularidade e a disputa por uma ideologia transhumanista

## Resumo

Tomamos o Singularismo, uma das vertentes do transhumanismo, como ideologia associada ao Vale do Silício e ao espectro político de direita (Hughes 2002). É empreendida uma discussão antropológica em torno dos conceitos de cultura, ideologia e cosmologia tal como propõe Eric Wolf (1999). A cosmologia fundamenta a ideologia de modo a oferecer elementos para critérios de verdade e inevitabilidade de um projeto de poder. Apontamos aqui de que modo a cibernética funciona como cosmologia ao Singularismo e exploramos diferenças políticas e filosóficas entre expoentes do Singularismo, que em grande medida expõem diferentes apropriações da cibernética na construção do conceito de Singularidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Cibernética. Cibercultura. Cosmologia. Ideologia. Singularidade. Vale do Silício.

# Singularity and the dispute for a transhumanist ideology

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## Introduction

The notion of the *singularity* takes on specific contours in Silicon Valley, a region that hosts many transhumanists who build entire ideologies around it. The most popular version of this concept refers to the technological singularity as described by John von Neumann (Vinge, 1993), one of the principal exponents of cybernetics. The salvationist promise of exponential growth in technological development derives from different conceptualizations of the *singularity*, which separate *singularitarians* into different currents united around the belief that the singularity means the arrival of a desirable post-human existence. In this cosmology, the acceleration of technology make intelligence and human bodies obsolete, superseded by a far superior third thing, neither natural nor artificial, human nor machine.

In the present article, we take *Singularism* to designate the ideology of the group that calls itself *singularitarians* (Kurzweil, 2005; Yudkowsky, 2000b): group of futurist researchers and ideologues which differentiates itself from other futuristic and transhumanist groups. According to Yudkowsky, one of the main proponents of the term, the word *singularitarian* is the composition of Singularity + Libertarian, developed from “(...) transhumanist anarchocapitalism, which grew out of libertarian science fiction, which grew out of science and engineering, and we all tend to feel very strongly about attempts to suppress the development of technology” (Yudkowsky, 2000b).

Singularism as an ideology is a consistent power project, which strongly promotes its political ideals. Far from being a simple philosophical current, the movement is structured through diverse institutions that include think tanks, a “university” in the heart of Silicon Valley, and hundreds of *chapters* around the world, including Brazil. Highlights include the Singularity University and the Machine Intelligence Research Institute (MIRI), formerly the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence (SIAI). The bastard son of globalization and the prodigal son of the American new right, Singularism has created institutions that have the financial and political backing of companies and governments and which mask their political ambitions in an idyllic futurism, led by charismatic representatives such as Ray Kurzweil.

In the present article, we look at Singularism via the theoretical lens of anthropologist Eric Wolf, who offers an alternative explanation for the articulation of ideas and power. Wolf conceptualizes ideology differently from classic Marxists, differentiating notions of culture and cosmology, with the latter being much more specific. In this theoretical approach, cosmologies are understood be “structured imaginings” in which ideologies seek sources for propositions that are true and inevitable, giving their power project an emergent and irrefutable character. The present study aims to offer up a brief introduction to Singularist thinking and to closely examine the connections between Singularitarians and what we consider the most important cosmology of Singularism: cybernetics. We first explore Wolf’s concepts offer a theoretical basis from which to challenge Singularitarians. We then briefly describe the various schools of Singularism, and finish up by develop the hypothesis that cybernetics is a cosmology for Singularist ideology.

There are, of course, many possible theoretical approaches to Singularism. This text is the result of research aimed at reactivating central concepts of Eric Wolf’s anthropology in order to make new contributions to the research of cybernetics and its close ties to Singularitarian thought. We intend to do more than just present

the group as an object we seek to study the relation between cybernetics and Singularism through Wolf's understanding of the relation between ideology and cosmology. We believe this particular approach can offer an alternative perspective regarding the theme that is not usually contemplated by the most popular social theories studying digital culture and cybernetics. Singularism is a project of power and Wolf's anthropology can help us to understand the ways culture and ideology are mutually implicated in this case.

### **The relationship between ideology and cosmology according to Eric Wolf**

When we refer to the classical concept of *ideology*, we have something specific in mind. In 1999's *Envisioning Power*, Eric Wolf addressed a central question: how do ideas and power connect? The 20<sup>th</sup> century provided solid examples for the need to understand how projects of power are involved in very complex structures of ideas. It is in these structures that Wolf seeks the notion of *ideology*, albeit with an important deviation from the classic Marxist concept. As an anthropologist, the author is concerned with the ways in which ideologies are constituted and how they relate to culture and certain cosmologies. Wolf proposes an anthropology centered on the investigation of social and power relations. This situates him as a builder of bridges between various influences generally understood as in dispute. At the same time, Wolf raises anthropological questions with regards to Marxist theory while proposing an anthropology that centralizes power relations. It is from this relationship between culture and power that the concept of ideology emerges.

I believe that "ideology" needs to be used more restrictively, in that "ideologies" suggest unified schemes or configurations developed to underwrite or manifest power. Equating all ideation with ideology masks the ways in which ideas come to be linked to power (Wolf, 1999: 4, emphasis added).

This relationship puts nuances into a classically Marxist position, betting on a materialism that considers the regimentation of social work and the concrete expressions of communication, without adhering to an idealism, where power relations end up obfuscated if not altogether ignored. Wolf is critical of certain uses of the concept of culture. The author says that...

(...) the culture concept is no panacea—it is, if anything, but a starting point of inquiry. Its value is methodological: "look for connections!" But it still takes work and thought to discover what these connections may be and, indeed, if any connections exist (Wolf, 2001: 308).

For the purposes of this study, the way Wolf sees culture, as having methodological value, supports our understandings of networks of complex relationships. Searching for connections becomes the anthropological method *par excellence*, where culture ceases to be an aprioristic metaobject and becomes a methodological resource. According to Wolf, culture is constructed and transformed in such a way that its history and the power relations acting in this transformation process are a fundamental part of its composition. Ideologies, instrumental in power struggles, are responsible for part of the dynamics and for the breaking of boundaries in culture. That said, in this view of things, culture and cosmology, as well as their relationship with ideologies, deserve to be emphasized.

For Wolf, the idea of cosmology is more specific than that of culture: it only makes sense when understood from its relationship with ideology. It is from cosmologies that ideologies seek ideas that support their philosophy and corroborate their power projects. A culture without power relations is inert and does not change. It is in the context of cultural change, following power relations and the ways in which they transform culture, that the researcher can identify ideologies. Cosmologies, in turn, only gain prominence in relation to specific ideologies because they link the imagination to power projects.

At the same time, these functions anchor rulership in a **cultural structure of imaginings**, which is characterized by forms that are not directly explicable in functionalist terms. These imaginings postulate cosmologies; cosmologies, in turn, articulate with ideologies that assign to the wielders of power the role of mediators or executors on behalf of larger cosmic forces and grant them “natural” rights to dominate society as delegates of the cosmic order. Representing that order, these cosmic delegates also enact it in their own lives (Wolf, 1999: 283-284, emphasis added).

In this sense, cosmologies are not the entire material and ideal body of culture, but a type of “cultural structure of imaginings”. They are based on a specific interpretation of *structured ideas and imaginings* within which ideologies seek justification for its power projects.

These ideologies, carried forward by elites, were fashioned out of preexisting cultural materials, but they are not to be understood as disembodied cultural schemata. They addressed the very character of power in society, specifically the power that structured the differentiation, mobilization, and deployment of social labor, and they rooted that power in the nature of the cosmos (Wolf, 1999: 274).

Cosmology consists of connections made in specific cultural and historical arrangements. In Wolf’s theoretical narrative, it provides *imaginary material* for ideologies. “Aspects of cosmology are expanded and elaborated into ideologies that explain and justify the power aspirations of specific groups over society” (Wolf, 1999: 290). The cosmology-ideology relationship is the way in which Wolf tries to answer the question of how ideas and power are connected. In this sense, taking Singularism as an ideology requires searching for which cosmological and cultural ideas underlie its power project. Ideology looks for the justifications that will make elites bet on its politics. It finds this in cosmologies.

Singularism as an ideology is composed of multiple cosmologies, which seek structured imaginings that give strength to political projects. In the study presented below, we do not intend to reduce cybernetics to a cosmology of Singularism. Rather, we point out that Singularism seeks justifications for its power project in cybernetics. It is how Singularism uses cybernetics that makes it a cosmology particular to that ideology. Ideologies seek in cosmologies the justification for *truths and inevitabilities*. To understand how Singularism uses cybernetics as justification is to understand which aspects of cybernetics have been selected and/or reinterpreted to give Singularitarians their roles as cosmological delegates and spokespersons for *inevitable truths* which must be acted upon. It is in this process that cosmological delegation has a double effect. As Wolf says: *old ideas are reformulated to fit very different contexts, and new ideas are presented as historical truths* (Wolf, 1999).

### **Among the Singularitarians: The various ways of understanding the Singularity**

Yudkowsky is a prominent Singularitarian researcher. In addition to being the founder of organizations promoting Singularism, he has scientific and political production on singularity and its adjacent issues – especially artificial intelligence. This author started the effort to characterize the schools of thought of Singularitarians (Yudkowsky, 2007). Among them, there are divergences about what singularity is, and these differences are often important for the construction of the authors’ argument. We describe below how each of these schools sees singularity and how to get there. If they share optimism about this inevitable future, the way to arrive at that future and how the world should prepare for it are objects of constant dispute. From now on, we will be able to observe how the different schools of Singularism flirt with very particular interpretations of cybernetics to sell their ideas. Yudkowsky (2007) associates each of the three schools with Singularism leaders. Here, we will work with a prominent author for each of the schools. Vernor Vinge for *Event Horizon*, Yudkowsky for *Intelligence Explosion*, and Ray Kurzweil for *Accelerating Change*.

## Event Horizon – Vernor Vinge

Vernor Vinge's definition of the singularity is quite important to understanding Singularism. Although the author himself cites an earlier use by John Von Neumann – one of the leading scientists in cybernetics – and is probably metaphorically referring to a concept in physics, the concept of the singularity is often attributed to Vinge (1993). His 1993 article “The Coming of Technological Singularity” perhaps marks the beginning of a systematization of ideas that would culminate in Singularism. Vinge was the first to use “singularity” specifically enough for it to be considered a new concept. When John Von Neumann spoke of the *technological singularity*, he generally referred to the progress of technology (Vinge, 1993). The science fiction metaphor appropriated from physics, on the other hand, comes from both the concept of the singularity and the “event horizon” that gives its name to the singularist school which employs Vinge as a reference. In a black hole, the event horizon is the boundary beyond which there is no return. In other words, beyond that point, everything becomes part of the singularity. A singularity is thus a region of null volume and infinite density, and everything that crosses its event horizon becomes part of it.

Vinge (2008) says that the Singularity will come about due to as-yet undetermined combination of one or more of five scenarios:

1. The creation of superhuman artificial intelligences (AI);
2. The improvement of human intelligence through human-computer interfaces in which amplified intelligence can be achieved;
3. Increased intelligence through improved neurological brain operations;
4. Humanity, computers, and databases becoming powerful enough to be considered a superhuman beings;
5. A network of embedded microprocessors that becomes powerful enough to be considered a superhuman being.

According to Vinge, all these scenarios will culminate in a point of no return, beyond which a singularity will exist.

I think it's fair to call this event a singularity (“the Singularity” for the purposes of this paper). It is a point where our old models must be discarded and a new reality rules. As we move closer to this point, it will loom vaster and vaster over human affairs till the notion becomes a commonplace (Vinge, 1993: 6).

Vinge's (1993) reflections make an association between the theory of evolution and “Moore's Law”. His central argument for the potential existence of the posthuman lies in his belief that, just as men in the past have become the “smartest inhabitants of the planet,” the time when humans will be evolutionarily surpassed is at hand. Moore's Law refers to technological progress. As early as 1965, author Gordon E. Moore argued that the number of transistors on chips would double every eighteen months while their price would remain stable (Vinge, 1993). This, in practice, meant that the processing power of microchips would double every eighteen months while their price would remain the same. Over the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this prediction came true and this has become a central argument almost all Singularitarians employ in justifying their belief of the proximity of the singularity. Vinge sees Moore's Law as supported by evolution. In his view, post-human intelligence will be a natural advance of technology as a means of improving human intelligence. Later, the author gave the internet a decisive role in this process of accelerating intelligence (Vinge, 2006).

As this school of thought's title indicates, following the metaphor of a black hole, one cannot ascertain what will occur once the event horizon is crossed. Yudkowsky (2007) argues Vinge feels that one cannot know what will come after the singularity, because to understand that, we would need to be as intelligent as a post-singularity intelligence. In the 1990s – and again, a decade and a half later -- Vinge affirmed (1993, 2008) that he would be surprised if singularity did not occur before 2030. He also opines, however, that this event may not occur. “Well, maybe it won't happen at all (...) But if the technological Singularity can happen, it will” (Vinge, 1993: 10-11).

## Intelligence Explosion

Let an ultraintelligent machine be defined as a machine that can far surpass all the intellectual activities of any man however clever. Since the design of machines is one of these intellectual activities, an ultraintelligent machine could design even better machines; there would then unquestionably be an “intelligence explosion,” and the intelligence of man would be left far behind. Thus the first ultraintelligent machine is the last invention that man need ever make, provided that the machine is docile enough to tell us how to keep it under control (...) It is more probable than not that, within the twentieth century, an ultraintelligent machine will be built and that it will be the last invention that man need make (I. J. Good apud Vinge, 1993: 7).

Yudkowsky (2007) situates both himself and I.J. Good in the Intelligence Explosion school. Good was a British mathematician who worked with Alan Turing and, later, in the USA. Good was also a consultant for Stanley Kubrick on the production of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Vat, 2009). He is often credited with creating the concept of the “intelligence explosion”. Yudkowsky’s idea of the singularity approximates Good’s predictions and takes them further. According to Yudkowsky (2007), intelligence has always been the source of technology. For the author, given the possibility of technologies that significantly improve human intelligence, a positive feedback loop will be created. That is, if there is any intelligence that is more capable than the human, this new intelligence will create new technologies that are even more capable in a never-ending cycle. Each “generation” will be fully aware that improvement of intelligence is possible, which leads the author to characterize this positive feedback loop. Yudkowsky compares this cycle to the chain reaction of an atomic explosion. This process does not necessarily increase exponentially, however, as Kurzweil (2005) argues. For Yudkowsky, the singularity is thus defined by this cycle towards a “greater-than-human” intelligence. Unlike Vinge, the author does not see the singularity as a one-off event, but simply as the possible future of the world based upon scientific evidence. Therefore, the author offers neither dates nor descriptions of the post-singularity future. Unlike many of his fellow Singularitarians, Yudkowsky behaves more like a researcher engaged in accelerating the process of the intelligence explosion rather than as a futurist. Because he believes that the singularity is desirable, and, on the other hand, based upon a positive feedback cycle, he also believes that the singularity will only occur through the efforts of human intelligence to improve technologies and intelligence itself, both human and artificial.

## Accelerating Change

This is perhaps the best-known version of the singularity, in large part because of the work of Ray Kurzweil. The author of best-selling books and films that promote him as something of a spiritual leader for an entire techno-utopian media network, Kurzweil is the guru of Singularism. Accelerating change is also conceptually linked to a specific reading of the theory of evolution associated with an adaptation of Moore’s Law. Yudkowsky and Vinge discuss the singularity in a much more restrained way than Kurzweil. The first two place it within the scope of possibility and, although they believe that it is more likely to happen than not, they try to consider the concept’s limitations and what technological developments have to be made before the event horizon is crossed. Kurzweil, on the other hand, does not hesitate to offer lengthy descriptions of what the post-singularity future will be like, nor does he hesitate to give an exact date for this event: 2045 (Kurzweil, 2005).

For Kurzweil, the notion of the singularity takes on almost mystical contours. Transcendence goes much deeper, with a radicalization of the hybridization process between human and machine; biology, and technology. In the so-called *Kurzweilian merger* (Miller, 2012):

Just as a black hole in space dramatically alters the patterns of matter and energy accelerating toward its event horizon, this impending Singularity in our future is increasingly transforming every institution and aspect of human life, from sexuality to spirituality. What, then, is the Singularity? It's a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed. Although neither utopian nor dystopian, this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give meaning to our lives, from our business models to the cycle of human life, including death itself. Understanding the Singularity will alter our perspective on the significance of our past and the ramifications for our future. To truly understand it inherently changes one's view of life in general and one's own particular life (apud Kurzweil, 2005: 22).

The author speaks explicitly about spiritual transformation, conceptual modification, and, mainly, of overcoming death. Although he is saying that the singularity is not in itself utopian or dystopian, even a shallow perusal of his writings or interviews shows that Kurzweil considers the singularity to be the solution to almost all the world's problems. The author says that with it, we will transcend the limitations of the body and the brain.

Yudkowsky (2007) says that Kurzweil's school refutes the way we normally think about change. According to this view, humans tend to think of change in a linear way, taking into account the changes that have occurred in their own lifetimes. Supported by an extrapolation of Moore's Law, supporters of this school will argue that technological change is accelerated and that it occurs today faster than it has in the past. Our own pasts are therefore a poor guide to understanding the dynamics of technological change. "The key idea underlying the impending Singularity is that the pace of change of our human-created technology is accelerating and its powers are expanding at an exponential pace" (Kurzweil, 2005: 23).

With the exponential growth of technology, one can describe and prescribe one's future, so that, following this model, one will be able to tell precisely when the singularity will occur. It is by believing in and tracing this exponential acceleration pattern, inspired both by Moore's Law and by von Neumann's writings, that the accelerating change school differs from the others. The intelligence explosion school does not believe that one can establish an exact date for the singularity, nor does it even believe that one can establish that the progress of technology is exponentially growing. The event horizon school, in turn, is incisive in saying that one cannot know what will happen after the singularity, so that descriptions of the post-singularity future can only be merely speculative.

The Singularity will represent the culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but that transcends our biological roots. There will be no distinction, post-Singularity, between human and machine or between physical and virtual reality. If you wonder what will remain unequivocally human in such a world, it's simply this quality: ours is the species that inherently seeks to extend its physical and mental reach beyond current limitations (Kurzweil, 2005: 23).

### **After all, what is the singularity?**

Yudkowsky's three schools of Singularism do not exhaust the question of what the singularity would be. All these definitions' similarities and differences demonstrate a political dispute over the term and an attempt to circumscribe which concepts of the singularity are compatible with a more general version of Singularism as an ideology.

I've heard (many) other definitions of the Singularity attempted, but I usually find them to lack separate premises and conclusions. For example, the old Extropian FAQ used to define the "Singularity" as the Inflection Point, "the time when technological development will be at its fastest" and just before it starts slowing down. But what makes this an interesting point in history apart from its definition? What are the consequences of this assumption? To qualify as a school of thought or even a thesis, one needs an internal structure of argument, not just a definition (Yudkowsky, 2007: no page).



Some of the other definitions of the singularity touch on different points, but end up being related to the schools described above. This seems to be the case with Miller's (2012) proposal in his book "Singularity Rising". Here, the author speaks of the Singularity as a chain of mutual influence between economic prosperity, technologies, and intelligence: intelligence is necessary for the creation of technologies; technologies are necessary for economic prosperity. In this scenario, utopian bets on cybernetics are extrapolated to give a basis for a system of economic prosperity that is inseparable from technological progress. For Miller (2012), the Singularity is "a threshold of time over which AIs that are at least as smart as humans, and/or augmented human intelligences, radically remake civilization" (Miller, 2012: x).

In short, we assume that Yudkowsky had published his text with explicit political intentions, using his leadership position in Singularism to emphasize which ideas regarding the singularity can coexist well together with the goal of promoting a singularist ideology. A small cultural review of the history of cybernetics will show us what principles and ideas Singularitarians have sought in cybernetics to justify the alleged indisputability of their power project. Supported by predictions of cybernetics that were partially true, Singularism promotes an inductive leap in which the inspiration found in these predictions corroborates the inevitability of the belief system's own propositions. To use Wolf's terms, we see Singularitarians turning to cybernetics, among other cosmologies, in order to promote themselves as delegates of the cosmos.

### **The communicational utopia of Norbert Wiener's cybernetics**

Cybernetics is a field that influenced many areas of knowledge. Its development was the target of political disputes that must be understood in order to comprehend the advent of computing and of the information society. In cybernetics, Singularism seeks structured imaginings that provide philosophical and scientific principles for a power project. This is evident when we observe the importance of cybernetic ideals in the constitution of Silicon Valley, but it is also present much more directly, as in Singularitarians' constant citation of authors such as Norbert Wiener and John von Neumann (two of the authors more strongly associated with the creation of cybernetics).

The beginnings of cybernetics can be found in the Macy Conferences, held in New York between 1941 and 1960. At these conferences, intellectuals from both the natural and social sciences met with the aim of creating interdisciplinary bridges. These researchers were "dedicated to breaking down barriers between the various academic disciplines" and "looking for a meta-theory which could be applied within both the natural sciences and the social sciences" (Barbrook, 2007: 44). A common language that would break the disciplinary barriers would renew human ways of apprehending the world.

Cybernetics became simultaneously "popular" in two directions: as an interdisciplinary branch of scientific knowledge, with a decisive influence on both the natural sciences and the humanities; and as the main source of nourishment of a new utopia, that of communication, which guided the imagining of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of the still nascent 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Evangelista & Kanashiro, 2013: 58).

One of the intellectuals at the Macy Conferences became a great exponent of cybernetics by proposing this interdisciplinary language necessarily involved the equation of man and machine in such as to unify the social and natural sciences. Norbert Wiener was responsible for the elaboration of this first communications utopia, which would later have its meaning expanded by McLuhanism as applied to the internet and computer networks. Together with the Silicon Valley electronics industry, cybernetics grew up during Cold War, in an environment in which military and state funding was a fundamental for research in science and technology. Wiener, at the time a mathematician at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), was very much involved in this context and worked on a project to improve the accuracy of anti-aircraft weapons for the US government. It was in this research that the mathematician took his first steps towards the notion of *feedback*, which would become a landmark in

cybernetics studies. By showing the importance of anticipating the movement of an aircraft, Wiener supported the comparison (and symbiosis) between man and machine that gave the latter the same ontological status as the former (Le Breton, 2007). The mechanical, computerized gunsight predicts the position of the enemy plane and joins the pilot in a symbiosis that makes him more prepared and more effective (Barbrook, 2007).

Thus the nervous system and the automatic machine are fundamentally alike in that they are devices which make decisions on the basis of decisions they have made in the past. (...). The machine, like the living organism, is, as I have said, a device which locally and temporarily seems to resist the general tendency for the increase of entropy. By its ability to make decisions it can produce around it a local zone of organization in a world whose general tendency is to run down (Wiener, 1954: 33-34).

We have already seen in the previous section that the notion of feedback is fundamental to the Intelligence Explosion school. Yudkowsky does not use Wiener's concept accidentally. Among all the Singularitarians mentioned here, he is the figure most directly linked to scientific research in artificial intelligence (AI), a field of research whose history is rooted in cybernetics. The idea of artificial intelligence, characterized by its artificiality, is thus given by a comparison between the natural and the artificial. Placed side by side with human intelligence, AI is therefore an idea dependent on the typically cybernetic hybridization process. This perspective equating man and machine found support in the studies carried out by Alan Turing. Turing is often credited with being the inventor of the first computer, but the importance of his studies goes well beyond that. It was with Turing that the notion of artificial intelligence began to take shape, as well as the idea that a computer could be as capable of thinking and making decisions as human beings do. Turing's "imitation made the typical stimulus-response behavior into a foundation for rationalization and decision-making, both in humans and machines.

For Wiener, cybernetics showed there was a continuous interaction between information and action, which was the basis of machinic and human behavior, and worked according to the mathematical equation (Barbrook, 2007). Norbert Wiener made this comparison between humans, animals, and machines as equally informational beings into one of the bases of his writings. In one of his most famous popular works, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, when talking about how the functioning of the body is also governed by informational rules, Wiener postulated that "the physical identity of an individual does not consist in the matter of which it is made" (Wiener, 1954: 101). He joked that it would be...

amusing as well as instructive to consider what would happen if we were to transmit the whole pattern of the human body, of the human brain with its memories and cross connections, so that a hypothetical receiving instrument could re-embodiment these messages in appropriate matter, capable of continuing the processes already in the body and the mind, and of maintaining the integrity needed for this continuation by a process of homeostasis (Wiener, 1954: 96).

The influence of Wiener and cybernetics should not be measured solely in terms of their scientific contributions. Theories about the role of information in defining an ontology of nature (including human nature), combined with Wiener's imagination regarding the implications of these discoveries, relate to a whole range of topics that continued to be explored, whether in popular science fiction (see TV series like *Westworld* and *Battlestar Galactica*<sup>1</sup>), or in Singularitarian philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> In *Westworld* (*Westworld*. 2016. Bad Robot, Jerry Weintraub Productions, Kilter Films.), one of the central characters, Robert Ford (co-creator of *Westworld*), has managed to create a form of imperfect mind transfer. He is able to transfer his consciousness into the park's system after his death, continuing to exist as a digital entity. Another character, James Delos, is the subject of numerous attempts to transfer his consciousness to a host body after his death. *Battlestar Galactica* (*Battlestar Galactica*. 2005. British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB), David Eick Productions, NBC Universal Television) is set in a distant star system, where a civilization created a race of robots known as Cylons who eventually rebelled and went into hiding. The Cylons evolved themselves into human-like forms and returned to destroy the humans. One of the key aspects of the series is the concept of resurrection, a form of mind transfer employed by the Cylons. The humanoid Cylons possess the ability to "download" their consciousness into a new body upon death. This is facilitated by Resurrection Ships, which hold many empty bodies for the Cylons' consciousness to inhabit. When a Cylon dies, their memories and consciousness are transmitted to the nearest Resurrection Ship, where they are implanted into a new body. This makes the Cylons effectively immortal, unless they are killed too far from a Resurrection Ship or all such ships are destroyed.

The documentary *Transcendent Man* (2009), directed by singularity enthusiast Barry Ptolemy, centers its narrative around Kurzweil's obsession with life after death and his attempts to evade the death of the physical body. In this regard, two situations portrayed in the film stand out. The most dramatically effective for the work depicts Kurzweil's quest to resolve the trauma caused by his father's death when Kurzweil was a boy. The resolution does not come through a process of acceptance, but through his pursuit to bring his father "back to life" by trying to build a computerized version of his mind from a vast collection of outputs and communication traces he produced in his lifetime. From this information, it would be possible to produce a model of how Kurzweil's father communicated, which would simulate the "consciousness" of the father. In the same documentary, we also see Kurzweil take approximately 200 pills a day, including vitamin complexes and drugs to combat heart problems, the ailment from which his father died at 58. Kurzweil's approach to diseases is also informational. Diseases are treated as communication problems between parts of the body, and medications are seen as informational corrective adjustments. For the singularity, information is not just a means of managing the physical and biological world. Its proper manipulation leads to transcendence, to a hitherto superhuman capacity. At the end of the documentary, Kurzweil states "if I were asked if god exists, I would say not yet." Moreover, he responds this way when the matter of his father is brought up by a viewer during a public screening of the documentary:

...I have this desire and inclination to preserve the knowledge and skill he represented. How do you present that? You could present it as a big database of information – that's not how we interact with people. The best way to interact with that would be an avatar that represented his personality and skills. That's something I would find personally gratifying. I've discussed it with many people and surprisingly people who aren't into the Singularity find this idea appealing. Especially if they are struggling with dealing with the loss of someone they care about. The way I would know if I had succeeded would be if it passes a Frederick Kurzweil Turing Test. That's getting to be an easier test as time goes by because my memories are fading. I would argue that this avatar would be more like my father than he would be if he had lived. That's not impossible: he would be 98 now. If he were 98 he'd be much less like he was when I remember him at 58 (Saenz, 2011).

This man-machine approach (which culminates in an ontological change for machines) is just one of the principles of cybernetics. If we take a deep look at its development, especially its formation in the technology industry in Silicon Valley, we will reach other conclusions. If the basis of behavior is the interaction between information and action, as Wiener says, we have grounds for supposing that the contemporary importance of information in postmodernity (considered a historical period by Jameson [1984]) is due, to some extent, to the extended influence of cybernetics. Through these lenses, we could argue -- as does Kurzweil (2005) -- that information is the common basis that allows the equalization of human and machine. The author says that "Information is a sequence of data that is meaningful in a process, such as the DNA code of an organism or the bits in a computer program" (Kurzweil 2005, 44). With some inductive leaps, Kurzweil (2005) concludes that, if DNA is information, the brain is a type of biological computer. There would be no reason, therefore, to doubt that a fusion of biological and machinic methods of interacting with information would be possible. It is this hybrid that marks the arrival of the singularity for the author – what Miller (2012) called *Kurzweilian merger*.

### **The arms dystopia of John von Neumann's cybernetics**

As the Cold War and the arms race progressed, Wiener became averse to the military use of cybernetics, and refused to continue his research for military purposes. According to Barbrook (2007), the political dissent that separated the defense of cybernetics from its military use inspired a type of socialist cybernetics. This interpretation of cybernetics conducted an ethical review in which the status of ontological equity between

human and machine ceases to make sense, since the evolution of machines should be controlled by humans. That is, Wiener was beginning to express as a scientist one of the most recurrent tropes of science fiction: run-away AI. This fear stretches from the very beginnings of the genre, with Frankenstein's monster, and continues to be very present in contemporary science fiction: "The world of the future will be an increasingly demanding struggle against the limitations of our own intelligence, not a comfortable hammock in which we can lie down to be waited upon by our robot slaves." (Wiener apud Barbrook, 2007: 46).

In striking contrast, there was another important mathematician very much inspired by the field of cybernetics and Turing's studies. John Von Neumann, a Hungarian-American scientist and Jew, is often named as the father of game theory. It is not difficult to imagine the connections that the creator of game theory would find with cybernetics, but it was his political stance that highlighted the dispute that his version of cybernetics had with Wiener's. Von Neumann had no qualms about using cybernetics for military purposes and personally, openly defended the intensifying of the arms race. He even declared himself to be in favor of a preemptive nuclear attack on the Soviet Union (Barbrook, 2007).

By the early 1950s, von Neumann had successfully created cybernetics without Wiener. The feedback metaphor now proved that computers operated like humans. Like the rational players in his game theory books, both living and mechanical beings responded to stimuli from their surrounding environment (Barbrook, 2007: 48-49).

This warmongering impetus, which makes more sense if considered in the context of the Cold War, was never entirely abandoned. Miller (2012), for example, raises the possibility of superintelligence recreating an arms race scenario when applied to military technologies. The enemy of the United States now would not be the Soviet Union, but China.

Successfully creating an obedient ultra-intelligence would give a country control of everything, making an ultra-AI far more military useful than mere atomic weapons. The first nation to create an obedient ultra-AI would also instantly acquire the capacity to terminate its rivals' AI development projects. Knowing the stakes, rival nations might go full throttle to win an ultra-AI race, even if they understood that haste could cause them to create an ultra-AI destroying ultra-intelligence. These rivals might realize the danger and desperately wish to come to an agreement to reduce the peril, but they might find that the logic of the widely used game theory paradox of the Prisoners' Dilemma thwarts all cooperation efforts (Miller, 2012: 47, emphasis added).

This bellicose evocation of artificial intelligence coupled with the prisoner's dilemma is an accurate demonstration of a von Neumannesque interpretation that justifies a Singularist turn in military technology. Detached from the context of the Cold War, the passage cited above demonstrates a prospective and ideological impetus. Analyzing hypothetical scenarios in which both Chinese pioneerism and an explosion of intelligence beyond the army's control become catastrophic, Miller (2012) suggests as a solution that the US military prepares its soldiers: "The best chance of avoiding this danger might be for the American military to create a Kurzweilian merger by constantly upgrading its human soldiers" (Miller, 2012: 53). It seems clear, then, at least since the Cold War and the beginnings of cybernetics, that it is difficult to separate the private sector from military investment in artificial intelligence, robotics, and other related fields. Even before the advent of cybernetics, Sturgeon (2000) stated that the Silicon Valley area was built upon a particular fusion of military investment, local university research poles from, and private sector.

An emblematic contemporary example shows that this key to development still has everything to do with Silicon Valley, with cybernetics, and with military investment. The data giant Google has a company called Google[x] which is located a few meters from the company's headquarters in Mountain View, in the heart of Silicon Valley (Rowan, 2013). In 2013, Google[x] bought Boston Dynamics, an applied robotics company. One of its most famous projects, the "Bigdog," is a dog-shaped robot, attentive to reflexes and able to recover its

balance even after being kicked. The “Bigdog” test videos can easily be found with a simple internet search. The main aspect here is that this is a project that was funded by with investments from the US military (Hambling, 2006). Although Miller’s (2012) predictions seem to be of date and therefore lack credibility, there is in these Singularitarian predictions both a specific reading about what cultural changes Singularism aims for and what reinterpretation of cybernetics they are willing to make.

Beginning with the comparison between human and machine, this bellicose version of cybernetics expanded its metaphor so that social institutions could be studied as cybernetic organisms. For this reason, and for von Neumann’s frank adherence to Cold War militarism, Barbrook (2007) considers von Neumann’s cybernetics to be conservative and right-wing, heavily publicized and inspirational for various disciplines, eventually becoming the main version of cybernetics.

For military-sponsored researchers at US universities, von Neumann’s interpretation of cybernetics provided a self-congratulatory story to cover up their dubious activities. Programming computers to guide missiles, control bombs, direct armies, and play war games was no longer the way to plan the nuclear holocaust. Rather, as Turing and von Neumann proved, these military applications were an essential step towards the ultimate goal of artificial intelligence. Technological fetishism had absolved computer scientists of any responsibility for the consequences of their actions (Barbrook, 2007: 50).

Barbrook (2007) comes to the conclusion that, by selling the utopian imagining of artificial intelligence, such as space travel to the moon and other typically American techno-determinist utopias, Cold War cybernetics sold one thing and offered another. What moved the endless research and funding of the military was not artificial intelligence, but the efficiency of the war machine, whose goal was to create artifacts capable of killing as many people as possible. This bellicose feature, however, seems to have been swept under the rug with the fall of the Berlin Wall. What remained for cybernetics were the utopian imaginings which, without a doubt, Silicon Valley used as a springboard for its vertiginous growth.

In his book *Singularity is Near*, Kurzweil (2005) seeks in cybernetics more than just a justification for the inevitable equivalence of humans and machines via information. The very notion of accelerating change, in addition to Moore’s Law, explicitly mentions von Neumann:

In the 1950s John von Neumann, the legendary information theorist, was quoted as saying that “the ever-accelerating progress of technology... gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue. Von Neumann makes two important observations here: acceleration and singularity. The first idea is that human progress is exponential (...) rather than linear (...). The second is that exponential growth is seductive, starting out slowly and virtually unnoticeably, but beyond the knee of the curve it turns explosive and profoundly transformative (Kurzweil, 2005: 24).

Kurzweil (2005) acknowledges that the term “singularity” was first explored by von Neumann. He also attributes to von Neumann the notion of exponential progress in technology. Another mathematician cited here, I.J. Good, who also did research with von Neumann, was the creator of the concept of intelligence explosion, which inspired Yudkowsky to name the school of Singularism with which Good identifies. In short, by taking out of context and reusing fragments of cybernetics history and theory, Singularitarians hope to not only support their power project, but also catapult themselves into the position of futuristic geniuses who foresaw the advent of the singularity.

## Structured imaginings for a power project

Barbrook's (2007) arguments in opposition to the cybernetics of von Neumann and Wiener seem quite important here. Both versions of cybernetics produced different imaginings. On the one hand, Wiener's "socialist" cybernetics sees an artificial superintelligence as possibly dystopian, that is, as a danger to all humans. On the other, von Neumann's conservative cybernetics goes the other way. Its utopianism resides in the idea that this artificial superintelligence is desirable and its potential harm to humans is a positive factor in the context of the Cold War. If the cybernetics of Wiener and von Neumann seem incompatible, as cosmology of Singularism these conflicting ideas seem to coexist well in their various fragments. Wiener's McLuhanist communicational utopia combines with von Neumann's utopia of slave robots and an artificial intelligence explosion without any major problems in Singularist ideology. The advent of the internet and new information technologies adds to the nostalgia for slavery that dreams of zeroing the cost of labor in order to formulate a futurism that, like the "California ideology," is hippie and yuppie at one and the same time (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996).

In an article published in *Nature* in 2006, Vinge (2006) calls the internet "the creativity machine". Vinge (2008) takes for granted two scenarios that rely on the internet to reach the singularity. The first of these, called the "Internet Scenario," speculates as to whether human beings connected to their machines in a network, with infinite databases, could be considered to be a type of super-human. The second scenario, named by Vinge "The Digital Gaia Scenario," speculates whether the network itself could become a super-intelligence. Both scenarios, combined with the descriptions in the aforementioned *Nature* article, highlight a version of Vernor Vinge's thoughts. Vinge is deeply enchanted with the possibilities of the internet and, indirectly, with the cybernetics of communication:

We humans have built a creativity machine. It's the sum of three things: a few hundred million computers, a communication system connecting those computers, and some millions of human beings using those computers and communications. This creativity machine is the Internet. (...) In the end, computers plus networks plus people add up to something significantly greater than the parts. The ensemble eventually grows beyond human creativity. To become what? We can't know until we get there (Vinge, 2006: 411).

Vinge's theoretical and journalistic writings show much evidence of a partial adherence to a McLuhanist communicational utopia. Although it seems more coherent to associate Singularism with von Neumann's idea of cybernetics, we cannot help but notice that the contradiction between von Neumann's bellicism and Wiener's global village are able to coexist – even more so when they are fragmented, dehistoricized, and removed from the contexts of their original formulations.

In Wolf's concept of ideologies, these are forged in structured imaginings. Knowing the primary sources of truth for Singularism is a fundamental part of understanding it. The fragments that make up Singularist arguments can be historically contradictory as long as they fulfill their role of making the argument irrefutable. This is not merely a political issue: the self-proclaimed delegates of the cosmos defend the idea that an inevitable and urgent change will occur and that only they will be able to guide us in the tortuous path that opens on the horizon.

To understand the singularity, Singularism, and the Singularitarians, one must go through analyses that involve culture, cosmology, and ideology. Looking at Singularism through the lens of these concepts, we will be able to understand how this transhumanist current operates in one of its most relevant aspects: the predictive and productive preparation of a future that announces itself as a business opportunity for certain groups (and not for others). The main goal here is for the argument to be convincing enough to eventually operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is certainly in relation to the process of development of capitalism, of directing productive forces, that the ideological disputes of Singularism find their greatest source of power. In the cultural context of informational capitalism and globalization, the scientific and philosophical imaginings of cybernetics emerge as a primordial source of truth for the Singularist power project. It is with contradictory fragments of

cybernetics and a very particular interpretation of that field that Singularitarians justify both the inevitability of the Singularity and why it is desirable. As Wolf wagered, *old ideas are reformulated to fit very different contexts, and new ideas are presented as historical truths* (Wolf, 1999). Obviously, this direction, as well as the ideological disputes that are both internal and external to the field, are not processes that occur without resistance. Wolf's ethnographies (1999) are rich demonstrations of conflictual processes, which relate to influences on productive arrangements, while at the same time impacting the broader field of constantly changing culture. It is not the purpose of this work to develop ontological discussions regarding Singularitarian transhumanism, but rather to take this as a case for analysis in which manifestations about possible technological transformations help us understand contemporary Western cosmologies.

In this regard, the Singularity Group can be cited as an empirical example of an initiative that brings together leading Silicon Valley companies in a mix of forecasting, formulation, and preparation for a proclaimed future. Founded in 2008 as the Singularity University, the institution began its activities at NASA's facilities in Silicon Valley, California, where it began to offer short multidisciplinary courses (one nine days long and another of ten weeks) aiming to "gather, educate, and inspire a group of leaders who strive to understand and facilitate the development of exponentially advancing technologies to address humanity's grand challenges". In addition to NASA and Google, other initial funders of the Singularity Group were Autodesk, LinkedIn, Nokia, and the biotechnology company Genentech. Among the teachers/speakers are Kurzweil and other professionals linked to network technologies and internet enthusiasts, many boasting stints at companies like Google, Meta, and Tesla. Vint Cerf, one of the internet pioneers and now working for Google as Chief Internet Evangelist, and Robert Metcalfe, also an internet technology pioneer, have been among its faculty. Google, especially in the figure of one of its founders, Larry Page, is one of the companies that is enthusiastic about the singularity. It partnered with Kurzweil and aerospace entrepreneur and engineer Peter H. Diamandis in founding the Institution.

At the university and in meetings, Singularitarians mingle with figures from renowned academic institutions such as Stanford and MIT, venture capitalists specializing in high-risk investments, and top executives from today's leading technology companies. The interest in transhumanism in its Singularitarian strand comes from this interconnection that seems productive – in the sense of an intersection where ideas and investments articulate to produce a certain future. Kurzweil's speeches have this quality, blending diagnosis and a vision of a future that presents itself as inevitable with the mobilization of materially productive forces and knowledge producers towards a transformation of the human with consequent impacts on all of society. There is to be no escape from the singularity: it is to be the next evolutionary step for humanity. It is thus necessary to prepare for it and, in doing so, shape it.

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# An examination of human rights, anti-racism, and affirmative action policies in Brazil

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## **Abstract**

This article sets out to provide an analysis of the relationship between human rights, public policies and ethnic-racial inequality in Brazil from a contemporary perspective. Public policies have emerged as an effective means of achieving human rights and citizenship for historically discriminated social groupings in a society like Brazil's marked by enduring structural and structuring inequalities. The article specifically addresses the racial violence perpetrated against the black population in the country, who still endure the legacy of a colonial past. A central point highlighted is that the agency and interactions of the black population have had a positive impact by destabilizing social relations characterized by racism. In this sense, anti-racist actions are central factors in the promotion of Afro-reparatory policies, one of the motivating reasons for the interest in studying affirmative actions for black people.

**Keywords:** human rights, anti-racism, inequalities, affirmative actions

# Direitos Humanos, Antirracismo e Ações Afirmativas no Brasil: Algumas reflexões

## Resumo

A proposta deste manuscrito é apresentar uma análise atualizada da relação entre direitos humanos, políticas públicas e desigualdades étnico-raciais no Brasil. Em uma sociedade caracterizada por desigualdades estruturais e estruturantes, as políticas públicas elevam-se como uma possibilidade efetiva de realização de direitos humanos e de cidadania a segmentos sócio historicamente discriminados. Neste artigo o interesse mais específico está focado no racismo que violenta cotidianamente a população negra brasileira, herdeira de prejuízos vinculados a um passado de domínio colonial. Importa enfatizar que indivíduos pertencentes à população negra têm assegurado agência e interação que podem ser lidas como desestabilizadoras de relações sociais caracterizadas pelo racismo. Neste sentido, ações antirracistas impulsionam uma mobilização em prol das políticas afro-reparatórias, vem daí o interesse pelo estudo das ações afirmativas para pessoas negras.

**Palavras-chave:** direitos humanos, antirracismo, desigualdades, ações afirmativas

# An examination of human rights, anti-racism, and affirmative action policies in Brazil

*Luciana de Oliveira Dias*

## **Presentation**

One of the questions running through this article is determining the extent to which basic human rights, such as those contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) remain completely or partially denied to discriminated groups, considered as minorities. From the outset, it should be noted that minorities are not defined solely in terms of demographic percentages, but also in terms of their under-representation in sociocultural and political settings, their lack of access to power or decision-making, and the barriers preventing them from making a positive impact in more general cultural contexts. On December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was proclaimed by Resolution 217 A (III) of the General Assembly of the United Nations. However, it has yet to be fully implemented in Brazil. When we consider the black population, this fact becomes even more significant.

The purpose of this article is to discuss some aspects of the promotion of universal rights and freedoms as outlined in the UDHR, as well as examine the inequities experienced by members of the black community. It is crucial to emphasize that these universal principles should provide the grounds for a legal-political system that defines specific rights and duties, which in turn enables the effective implementation of citizenship to be determined. In order to develop a more detailed and specific analysis, the text highlights two articles from the UDHR that textually express the need for security, whether personal or social. The first, Article 3 (UN, 1948), states that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” In the same vein, Article 22 (UN, 1948) emphasizes:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Citizen rights encompass a universe of rights and responsibilities won over the course of history and require a position from individual nation states regarding the provision of basic services to its citizens and their protection from arbitrary measures (Ramayana, 2005). Security, both personal and social, is achieved through the adoption of a set of social policies designed to assist citizens living in situations of social vulnerability. When engaging in these discussions, it is imperative that we reflect on the relationship between ethnic-racial interactions and public policies for promoting citizenship, in particular the actions needed for the development of more solidary, equitable and just sociocultural relations – that is, the promotion of human rights.

In order to understand the social interactions between black and white individuals who make up 99.5% of Brazil’s national population as a whole (Waiselfisz, 2006), we also need to examine the diverse conflicts, controversies, inequalities and alterities that imbue these interactions with meaning. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) reports that the black population constitutes 54% of the Brazilian population, which represents a numerical majority that is nonetheless marginalized and discriminated against. In addition to exposing how various forms of racism are still deep-rooted, the historical and statistical data

demonstrate just how far black people frequently are from being considered full citizens in Brazil. Analyzing the reality experienced in a societal context, the reflexive challenge is to understand how the nation state, when implementing its public policies for citizens' rights, works to create a sense of security for its citizens, irrespective of their ethnic-racial identity.

A number of conceptual points need to be clarified if the subsequent discussions are to avoid becoming lost in generalizations or intangible abstractions. It is essential to recognize that ethnic-racial prejudice is an indisposition, a preconceived and negative judgment that reflects intolerant attitudes based on stereotypes that are combined with discrimination. Ethnic-racial discrimination, which is tantamount to racism, concerns the acting out of prejudice through actions, or omissions, against a person or a group of people (see, for example, Hasenbalg & Silva, 1992; Guimarães, 1999; Munanga, 2004).

In Brazil, the elements that drive prejudice and racial discrimination, of which black people have been primary targets, are justified by their perpetrators on the basis of phenotypic traits (Nogueira, 1985) that contribute to the consolidation of a morality strongly correlated with the subalternized group (Fanon, 2008). Based on these initial considerations, ethnic-racial relations can be seen as an expression of sociocultural interactions representative of individuals who construct themselves and, in turn, construct others in the process. A more in-depth investigation is required to determine the extent to which these alterities are viewed as bearers of universal rights or citizenship.

A clear understanding of race relations in Brazil depends on recognizing that racism and racial discrimination are a reality in the country and that black populations and individuals are subject to racially hostile and discriminatory practices. A second observation to make is that neither miscegenation nor miscegenation-syncretism or any other sociocultural phenomenon indicative of "cultural hybridization" (Canclini, 2003) impaired the capacity to identify and label black people or prevent racism against them. This makes it possible to determine who is black and who is not black in the dissimulated "racial paradise" that is Brazil. Third, racism favored the institutionalization of vulnerability among black populations and individuals, depriving them of rights and excluding them from decision-making spaces, which highlights the need for intervention in this context of subalternization and the need to repair historical losses.

As part of the process of building a society free from racism and imbued with ideals and actions that are less prejudiced and discriminatory towards the black population, one collective actor in particular has become increasingly important due to the diversity of its resistance strategies (Ortner, 1995) and the struggle for a less subalternized form of inclusion: the black movement. The black movement regards race – a sociocultural construct with no biological basis – and racial identity as crucial elements of political mobilization. Historiographical accounts of the organized black movement, such as those made by Petrônio Domingues (2007), have stressed the need to deconstruct the harmonious view of race relations within the collective imaginary, an idea based on the belief that a "racial democracy" prevails in Brazil. The myth of racial democracy must be dispelled so that individual, institutional and collective measures can be taken to reduce inequalities in rights and opportunities.

Notably, the focus here is on actors and actions identified as eminently political and thus capable of characterizing citizenship in a given society. It should be stressed that actions as important as those undertaken by the black movement can also be carried out by society in general, civil society and public authorities. The implementation of affirmative actions, whether public or private, individual or collective, emerges as a public policy for promoting citizen rights that is essential to successful intervention in processes marked by discriminatory practices. There is, however, a fundamental debate regarding the legality of affirmative actions, as well as the impossibility of violating the principle of merit, since it is not merit that is at stake but inequality.

When it comes to meritocracy, it is worth emphasizing that a society like Brazil, where sociocultural relations are founded on privileges and discriminatory practices, does not support the idea of merit as an exclusive

explanation for the entry and permanence of specific individuals into power and decision-making spaces. Furthermore, on the point of legality, affirmative actions are lawful and do not contradict the constitutional principle of equality, which requires that equal treatment be applied to equal situations and, conversely, that cases of inequality should be treated unequally to the extent that they are unequal. In addition, Brazil has been a signatory to international agreements for decades and is committed to implementing anti-racist measures to counter racism in the country.

### **Race relations in Brazil: historical assumptions and contemporary debates**

Studying race relations in Brazil demands that we reflect on alterities that allow sociocultural interactions to be more clearly expressed. Throughout its history, the black population in Brazil has experienced all kinds of exclusions and discriminatory practices indicative of the strong rejection to which they are subjected. Nelson Rodrigues<sup>1</sup> noted that “in Brazil, white people don’t like black people, nor do black people like white people” (Rodrigues, 1993, p. 50). Reflecting on the stark observation of this author, known as “the pornographic angel,” incites us to explore race relations within an often abstruse cultural complex in which the individual is portrayed as “an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (Geertz, 1989, p. 15).

Understanding race relations entails recognizing that alterities are often constructed as radical since they emphasize an absolute distance between the “I” and the “other.” Elisabeth Fernandes Souza explores the intrinsic relationship between racial discrimination and the characterization of powerlessness. Analyzing the school environment, she observes that “in the school selection process, it still seems difficult for people to believe a priori that a black child is capable of significant cognitive achievements. Children with lighter skin are encouraged to achieve these goals, and although exceptions exist, this is what occurs, even in the peripheries” (Souza, 2001, p. 61). A radical distance is constructed as a barrier separating two alterities. Yet this radical perspective that polarizes Brazil’s black and white populations does not exclude an understanding of blackness that is diluted, for example, in processes of miscegenation, which allows a more proximate alterity to be effected. Adopting a comprehensive and explanatory approach to ethnic-racial relations thus allows us to perceive the combination of the two coexisting perspectives in the understanding of alterities that can be either proximate or radically distinct (Peirano, 1999).

### **Does racism exist in Brazil?**

To better understand the specificities of race relations in Brazil, three questions, or assumptions, can help us better understand interracial experiences. The first assumption is that racial discrimination exists in the country. Clearly, racial bias plays a significant role in the perception of black people as inferior, impoverished and marginalized. The black population in Brazil has been living in a situation of subalternity since colonial times, where they were positioned at the bottom of a society dependent on slave labor. After slavery was officially abolished in the later nineteenth century, these individuals, in addition to having few or no professional qualifications and little social standing, did not encounter a socioeconomic and political environment capable of absorbing them on an equitable basis.

According to historians Flávio Gomes and Carlos Eduardo Moreira de Araújo (2008), after the Lei Áurea (Golden Law) was issued on May 13, 1888, the descendants of enslaved Africans “won their freedom, but not civil rights” since the elites replaced the slave quarters with the institutionalization of racial discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> Nelson Rodrigues (1912-1980) was a Brazilian writer, journalist and influential playwright. He was born in the state of Pernambuco, moving to the state of Rio de Janeiro while still a child. In Rio de Janeiro, he established himself as a police reporter and writer. Politically, he called himself a reactionary and even supported the military regime in Brazil (1964-1985).

Although the black population was indeed absorbed into national society, no actions, policies or initiatives of any kind were implemented to free these individuals from stigmatizing stereotypes. The abolition of slavery did not result in the advancement of civil rights for the population concerned. With regard to stigma, we can observe that this is “a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype” (Goffman, 1988, p.13) with the potential to extend beyond the limits of the individual and apply to an entire group.

One inference that should not be ignored is that black individuals suffered from marginalization as a result of a system – slavery – that refused to recognize any equity in the sociocultural and labor relationships between the enslaved population and slaveholders. Black Africans and their descendants were inextricably linked to the stigmatization and inferiority associated with the slave labor imposed on them by the Portuguese. Beyond the generation of stigmas in relation to black people, the panorama that emerged indicates the reaffirmation of an understanding in which biological factors were cited to explain phenomena of a strictly sociocultural, political, historical and ideological order.

In the collective imagination even today, the legacy of sociocultural representations rooted in slavery means that stereotypes linked to black people are justified based on their blackness rather than their marginalization. Derogatory expressions such as “black people who don’t screw up immediately will screw up eventually” (Gonzalez, 1984) or “a black man who stands still is a suspect and who runs is a thief” (Castro & Abramovay, 2006, p. 332) are examples of the persistent belief that black people are inherently degenerate.

Illustrating this point, statistics show that black people (meaning here black and brown) represent 42.8% of the working-age population and 50% of the unemployed contingent in the country. The *Atlas da Violência 2020* (Cerqueira, 2020) reports that the number of homicides committed against black people has increased by 11.5% in eleven years, whereas the number of homicides committed against other racial groups has fallen by 13% over the same period. According to a recent survey conducted by the Rio de Janeiro Public Security Institute (ISP-RJ), the number of deaths resulting from police intervention has risen in Rio de Janeiro over the past 20 years with 78% of the deaths resulting from police intervention occurring among the black and brown population. Even when considering more positive indicators, it is important to take racial inequalities into account. Again according to *Atlas da Violência 2020*, for example, the overall number of homicides committed against women decreased by 8.4% from 2017 to 2018, but these figures mask a strong racialized difference. For non-black women, the homicide rate decreased 11.7%, while for black women it actually increased 12.4%. Examining the intersection of diverse indicators enables a more sophisticated analysis of discrimination: black people are the most affected by violence among the LGBTQIA+ community according to SINAN (Information System for Notifiable Diseases); 49.4% of the LGBT+ population affected by violence is black or brown, while 44.7% is white. We can observe, then, that the lives of women, the poor and LGBTQIA+ people are even less likely to matter if they are black.

## Who is black in Brazil?

A second assumption relevant to understanding interracial relations is the idea that it is difficult to identify who is black in Brazil. It has been repeatedly argued that miscegenation contributed to making racial identification problematic. These claims are primarily based on an ill-informed reading of genetic studies, which show that many Brazilians classified as white have black African genetic markers. From this viewpoint, the argument goes, any Brazilian could claim to be an Afro-descendant. Afro-descendants, however, are descendants of Africans who came to Brazil during the course of the diaspora in contexts of cultural and political approximation: hence Afro-descendants are considered black.

Kabengele Munanga (2004, p. 52) argues that being black is more than just a matter of melanin or phenotype. It is also a political question involving a “painful process” of self-identification and identification by others.

Brazil effectively developed the concept of whitening as an ideal. Consequently, black identity, in addition to ethnicity and race, also encompasses semantics, politics and ideology, leading to an inextricable combination of physiological, sociological and psychological aspects that can be seen from a “triple point of view, that of the ‘total man’” (Mauss, 1974, p. 405).

Apropos the sociocultural and political processes through which miscegenation has been expressed in Brazil, we can turn to the ideas of João Pacheco de Oliveira (1999, p. 126) and his analysis of ethnic presences in demographic terms. The author highlights the need to acknowledge that “the indigenous presence has a great importance in the formation of the Brazilian State and in the process of building a national identity.” Moreover, Oliveira argues, national censuses from 1872 to 1970, whether specific, regional or global, tended to dilute the particularities of ethnic-raciality in the theme of miscegenation, projecting the idea of a modern and integrated country. It should be noted that these kind of homogenizing mechanisms tend to exacerbate the invisibility of socially discriminated segments of the human population, as well as making it difficult to assert identities. In a counter-hegemonic direction, the black movement in Brazil has led avant-garde actions since the 1990s that have valorized self-declaration and a moral reordering of the social world (Szwako & Gurza Lavallo, 2019). These actions had repercussions on the 2010 Census, such as the campaign entitled *Não deixe sua cor passar em branco* (Don’t leave your color blank/white).<sup>2</sup> This campaign promoted the recognition of an African past and encouraged black people to declare themselves black or brown.

The constitution of a mixed society does not eliminate inequalities rooted in the relationship between oppressors and oppressed, discriminators and discriminated, or based on social models that assert the superiority of white people over black. Although reactions that imprison black people in a web of prejudice and discrimination are often moderated in the name of amicable social coexistence, they are manifested in actions, whether conscious or not, that repel black individuals – that is, those without the bodily marks that determine the limits between the acceptable and the unacceptable. As Milton Santos (2000) asserts, the victims of racism are black, since being black involves being labeled and imprisoned by a biased view of the world.

Brazil is a country where black people are quickly identified in conflict situations, especially when conflicts escalate into aggression. The recourse to verbal abuse that emphasizes racial inscription is a constant occurrence when the offended individual is black (Castro & Abramovay, 2006, pp. 194, 209). In Brazil, the widespread use of verbal abuse highlighting racial markers such as “monkey,” “roasted peanuts,” “asphalt popsicle,” “voodoo candle” and “steel wool hair” can be interpreted as an indication of the possibility of knowing who black people are in Brazil.

As well as the above – and with the exception of a gaze informed by hypocrisy or a desire to create a radical otherness that acknowledges a spectrum of colors and traits – we can assume that the population identified in IBGE surveys as brown (*pardo*) and black (*preto*) in color terms are also black (*negro*) in an ethnic-racial sense. There is no denying the fact that black identities are also used as tools of political mobilization. Even in situations of subalternity, black people with affirmed identities perceive themselves as having citizenship rights, which foster a whole contemporary struggle (Dias, 2006). The purpose of political mobilization is to reduce or annul the effectiveness of a specifically “Brazilian” racism, which, even when undeclared, naturalizes the superiority of white people and, via the same logic, inculcates the inferiority of black people.

The black movement is analyzed by Petrônio Domingues (2007, p. 101) as a struggle of black people to solve their problems within the surrounding society, in particular those arising from racial prejudice and discrimination, which marginalize this population in educational, political, social and cultural contexts. As the author stresses, racial identity has historically served as an element of mobilization and mediation of political claims. Clearly, this is a fundamental point in demonstrating that self-identification cannot be compromised

<sup>2</sup> A play on the fact that the Portuguese term branco can mean “blank” or “white.”



in the service of a dilution of sense of belonging based on a universalism that weakens the ability to claim citizen rights for oneself. The struggle of black people, through involvement in the black movement, provides a point of convergence with the UDHR, which recognizes dignity as inherent to all human beings and as a foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world.

### *Are public policies that benefit black people necessary?*

Last but not least, affirmative actions and Afro-reparatory policies are important to ensure a less subalternized inclusion of the black population in our educational, political, social and cultural systems. The university presents itself as a legitimate and obligatory path towards professional qualification and social advancement. Hence, it is vital to understand that the emancipation of black people in a racist society requires their entrance and continuation in formal educational institutions, including higher education. It is through public policies such as affirmative actions that equality, social justice and the redistribution of material and symbolic goods can be provided to racially discriminated individuals.

When no specific actions are taken to target historically marginalized and discriminated groups, social justice and the advancement of equal participation in political and sociocultural affairs tend to progress extremely slowly. Without racial reparations, in other words, social justice cannot be achieved. Programs need to be developed to combat racist institutional practices, therefore, as well as correcting and providing reparation for acute and secular discrimination. Those who benefit from public policies designed to promote democratic citizenship experience a process of identity empowerment that enables them to claim rights and freedoms such as those proclaimed in the UDHR, without distinction of race, color, sex, language, religion or political beliefs.

Antônio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães (1999) discusses affirmative actions and encourages reflection on what constitutes differentiated treatment for those who are, in practice, not considered equal but deemed instead to belong to an inferior “estate of the realm.” Affirmative actions are intended to counteract the cumulative effects of discrimination practiced over time and the resulting economic, educational, political and sociocultural inequalities. Quotas, for instance, are affirmative actions designed to achieve equality by placing black individuals in specific positions. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group (GTI) for the Valorization of the Black Population developed a concept of affirmative action in 1997 that has been used since as a reference point for the implementation of public policies. According to this concept:

Affirmative actions are special and temporary measures, taken or determined by the State, spontaneously or compulsorily, aimed at eliminating historically accumulated inequalities, ensuring equal opportunities and treatment, and compensating for losses resulting from discrimination and marginalization, regardless of racial, ethnic, religious, gender or other factors. In other words, affirmative action is meant to counteract the accumulated effects of discrimination that occurred in the past. (GTI, 1997, quoted in Santos, 1999, p. 42)

Several Brazilian institutions have adopted affirmative actions and quota systems that have shown positive results. In 2010, the Department of Economics at the University of Brasilia (UnB), in collaboration with Emory University in the United States, conducted a study to assess the performance of quota students at UnB,<sup>3</sup> which has adopted the quota system since 2004. According to research, the performance of quota students is only 0.14 points lower than that of students who joined through the universal system. This result indicates that, in terms of performance, there is no statistically significant difference between the groups of quota students and non-quota students. Given conditions of equal opportunity and treatment – though this is not always the

<sup>3</sup> Research on racial quota policies at the University of Brasilia. Realization: UnB and Emory University. Source: <http://www.fac.unb.br/campusonline/sociedade/item/87-estudo-avalia-rendimento-dos-cotistas-da-unb>

case since black quota students have also been the targets of violence in academic settings (Dias, 2006) – white and black students achieve very similar academic outcomes. Furthermore, if differences in race or ethnicity cannot be linked to differences in cognitive, academic or intellectual abilities, then nothing is more urgent than ensuring that students from all ethnic and racial backgrounds are admitted to Brazil’s educational institutions.

### **Brazil’s black movement and human rights: actions and relevant social actors**

Petrônio Domingues (2007) has studied the republican period (from 1889 to 2000) analyzing the trajectory of the black movement, the actors involved, the different stages and their proposals for overcoming racism in Brazilian society. The author provides a historical overview of the movement, highlighting the fact that race is a sociocultural construct, with no biological basis, that still nonetheless influences individual and collective behavior today. His discussions draw from the intellectual production of black leaders such as José Correia Leite, Francisco Lucrecio, Abdias do Nascimento, Hamilton Cardoso and Lélia Gonzalez, among others. The historian has described the Brazilian black movement as a combination of political organizations, intellectuals, black brotherhoods, *candomblé* schools, capoeira schools and samba schools. Over the course of history, movements of black political mobilization have acquired extreme sociocultural dimensions.

Petrônio Domingues (2007) divides the organized black movement into three phases, presented in a comparative table that illustrates the trajectory of the movement during the Brazilian Republic. Additionally, the author discusses the black movement after the 2000s, which he refers to as the “Fourth Phase,” and presents an interpretative hypothesis concerning hip-hop and its social character, notwithstanding hip-hop’s tendency to modify the profile of black movement activists. A First Phase of the organized black movement (1889-1937) spans the period between the First Republic, characterized by marginalization of freedmen, former slaves and their descendants, and the *Estado Novo* (New State). The author describes the proliferation of entities such as the *Clube Negro da Cultura Social* (The Black Club for Social Culture, 1932) and the *Frente Negra Socialista* (Socialist Black Front, 1932) in São Paulo, the *Sociedade Flor do Abacate* (Avocado Flower Society, 1932) in Rio de Janeiro, the *Legião Negra* (Black Legion, 1934) in Uberlândia, Minas Gerais, and the *Sociedade Henrique Dias* (Henrique Dias Society, 1937) in Salvador.

During the First Phase of the organized black movement in São Paulo, a number of organizations were founded, among them the *Clube 13 de Maio dos Homens Pretos* (13 May Black Men’s Club, 1902), the *Centro Literário dos Homens de Cor* (Literary Center for Men of Color, 1903), the *Sociedade Propugnadora 13 de Maio* (13 May Proponent Society, 1906), the *Centro Cultural Henrique Dias* (Henrique Dias Cultural Center, 1908), the *Sociedade União Cívica dos Homens de Cor* (Men of Color Civic Union Society, 1915) and the *Associação Protetora dos Brasileiros Pretos* (Black Brazilian Protective Association, 1917). In Rio de Janeiro, there was the *Centro da Federação dos Homens de Cor* (The Federation of Men of Color Center); in Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul, the *Sociedade Progresso da Raça Africana* (Progress of the African Race Society, 1891); and in Lages, Santa Catarina, the *Centro Cívico Cruz e Souza* (Cruz e Souza Civic Center, 1918). Various black organizations united a considerable number of “men of color,” some based on the formation of classes of black workers, such as dockers and railroad workers. There were already black women-only associations at that time, including the *Sociedade Brinco das Princesas* (Princess Earring Society, 1925) in São Paulo and the *Sociedade de Socorros Mútuos Princesa do Sul* (Princess of the Southern Mutual Aid Society, 1908) in Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul.

It was also during this period that the “black press” emerged with newspapers published by black people and addressing issues relevant to the black population at the time, including employment, housing, education and health. Among them were the newspapers *A Pátria* (1899) and *Clarim da Alvorada* (1924), which provided a space for thinking about and proposing concrete solutions to the problem of racism in Brazil. The *Frente Negra Brasileira* (Brazilian Black Front) or FNB was founded in São Paulo in 1931, which represented a qualitative

leap for the black movement insofar as FNB presented political demands, while also running schools, a legal department, soccer teams and artistic groups, and offering medical, dental and several other courses. The FNB was the most important black entity in the country with “delegations” and homonymous groups in several states (Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Sul and Bahia), adding thousands of “people of color” (estimates indicate around 20,000 members). Through the FNB, the Brazilian black movement was transformed into a mass movement. There was a strong presence of black women in the FNB, and its “Cruzada Feminina” (Female Crusade) mobilized black women to perform welfare work with the same intensity as its “Rosas Negras” (Black Roses) commission organized cultural activities.

The Second Phase (1945-1964) of the black movement covers the period between the Second Republic and the military dictatorship. During the Estado Novo (1937-1945), violent political repression prevented protest movements from demonstrating publicly, but with the fall of the “Vargist” dictatorship, the organized black movement revived. One of the main groups was the União dos Homens de Cor (Men of Color Union), also known as the Uagacê or UHC. Founded in 1943 in Porto Alegre, it expanded to include the states of Minas Gerais, Santa Catarina, Bahia, Maranhão, Ceará, Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo, Espírito Santo, Piauí and Paraná throughout the 1940s. The purpose of the organization, as stated in its charter, was to increase the economic and intellectual development of people of color throughout the country, so that they could participate fully in the social and administrative life of the country, in all aspects of its activities. This purpose was accomplished by promoting debates in the local press, publishing their own newspapers, providing legal and medical assistance and literacy classes, voluntary actions, and participating in political campaigns. In 1964, UHC was subdued by the military dictatorship.

A second important organization was the Teatro Experimental do Negro (Black Experimental Theatre) or TEN, which was founded by Abdias do Nascimento in Rio de Janeiro in 1944. Although the intention had been to form a theatrical group composed solely of black actors, TEN gradually acquired a broader profile. In pursuit of these aims, the group published the newspaper *Quilombo*, started to offer literacy, cutting and sewing courses, established the Instituto Nacional do Negro (Black National Institute), the Museu do Negro (The Black Museum), organized the First Congress of the Brazilian Negro, promoted a beauty pageant to choose the Rainha Mulata and the Boneca de Pixe (referring to a fable from Brazilian folklore), and held an art competition with the Black Christ as its theme. Defending the civil rights of blacks as human rights, the TEN advocated the creation of anti-discrimination legislation for the country. The organization was one of the pioneers in bringing the proposals of the French *Négritude* Movement to Brazil, which attracted the attention of the international black movement at the time and later served as the ideological foundation for national liberation struggles in Africa. After the establishment of the military dictatorship in 1964, TEN weakened, practically disappearing in 1968 when its main leader, Abdias do Nascimento, went into self-imposed exile in the United States.

In addition to TEN and UHC, the Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Negras (Black Women’s National Council, 1950) was established around the same time. In Minas Gerais, the Grêmio Literário Cruz e Souza (Cruz e Souza Literary Guild, 1943) and the Associação José do Patrocínio (José do Patrocínio Association, 1951) were both created. In São Paulo, the Associação do Negro Brasileiro (Black Brazilian Association, 1945), the Frente Negra Trabalhista (Black Labor Front) and the Associação Cultural do Negro (Cultural Association of the Black, 1954) all emerged, integrated into the more traditional black environment. In Rio de Janeiro, in 1944, the Comitê Democrático Afro-Brasileiro (Afro-Brazilian Democratic Committee) defended the convening of the Constituent Assembly, amnesty and the end of racial prejudice. The “black press” acquired a new rhythm and published several protest newspapers throughout the country. Among the publications that emerged were *Alvorada* (1945), *O Novo Horizonte* (1946), *Notícias de Ébano* (1957), *O Mutirão* (1958) and *Níger* (1960) in São Paulo, *Union* (1947) in Curitiba, and *Redenção* (1950) and *A Voz da Négritude* (1952) in Rio de Janeiro. There was

an important political moment in 1946, when Senator Hamilton Nogueira (National Democratic Union party: NDU) presented an anti-discrimination bill to the National Constituent Assembly, which had originally been formulated in the National Black Convention in 1945. When the bill was put to a vote, the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) opposed it, claiming that it would “restrict the broad concept of democracy.” As a result, the black movement was practically abandoned for decades, even by the most progressive political sectors. The Afonso Arinos Law was the country’s first anti-discriminatory legislation and was passed by the National Congress in 1951, following a scandal involving the black American dancer Katherine Dunham, who was prevented from staying in a hotel in São Paulo.

Petrônio Domingues (2007) describes the Third Phase (1978-2000) as the period following the beginning of the redemocratization process. A military coup in 1964 dismantled the black movement and demobilized black leaders, accused by the military of creating what they claimed to be a nonexistent problem: racism in Brazil. It was not until the late 1970s that black militancy was revived in conjunction with the popular, trade union and student movements. The Center for Black Culture and Art (CECAN) was founded in 1972 in São Paulo by a group of students and artists; the “black press” timidly resurfaced with the newspapers *Árvore das Palavras* (1974) and *O Quadro* (1974) in São Paulo city, *Biluga* (1974) in São Caetano/SP and *Nagô* (1975) in São Carlos/SP. The Palmares Group was founded in Porto Alegre in 1971, the first group to support the change the day of commemoration of Brazil’s African-descendant population from May 13 to November 20 (date of the death of Zumbi, leader of the Palmares Quilombo in 1695). In Rio de Janeiro, the Soul movement, later named Black Rio, was inaugurated by the black youth. The Instituto de Pesquisa das Culturas Negras (IPCN: Black Cultures Research Institute) was also founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1976. Although these fragmented initiatives did not openly confront the military regime, in 1978, with the formation of the Movimento Negro Unificado or MNU (Unified Black Movement), an organized black movement returned to the political scene.

The MNU was both inspired by the African American civil rights movement, with its prominent leaders such as Martin Luther King, Malcom X and black Marxist organizations like the Black Panthers, and by the liberation movements of African nations, particularly in Portuguese-speaking countries, such as Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Angola. A strong inspiration within Brazil, which became a political and ideological training school for several MNU leaders, was a Marxist organization with a Trotskyist orientation, the Socialist Convergence. Black militants within the Socialist Convergence argued that anti-racist struggles had to be coupled with anti-capitalist revolutions. Activists attracted by the principles of racial justice and class equality played an important role in founding the MNU. These included Flávio Carrança, Hamilton Cardoso, Vanderlei José Maria, Milton Barbosa, Rafael Pinto, Jamu Minka and Neuza Pereira. In 1978, the Movimento Unificado Contra a Discriminação Racial or MUCDR (Unified Movement Against Racial Discrimination) was founded in São Paulo. It was during its first National Assembly of Organization and Structuring held the same year that the word Negro was added to the movement’s name, changing it to Movimento Negro Unificado Contra a Discriminação Racial or MNUCDR (Unified Black Movement Against Racial Discrimination). Since the movement was primarily focused on combating racial discrimination, its name was simplified to Movimento Negro Unificado or MNU.

In its 1982 Action Program, the MNU advocated the following “minimal” demands: demystification of the idea of a Brazilian racial democracy; political organization of the black population; transformation of the black movement into a mass movement; establishment of an array of alliances against racism and worker exploitation; organization to combat police violence; organization of trade unions and political parties; promotion of the inclusion of African and black history in school curricula; and the procurement of international support against racism in the country. In accordance with the UDHR, the MNU sought to invoke rights and freedoms without distinction, which would result in the actual acquisition of these rights on a practical level. Additionally, in 1988, the Geledés – Instituto da Mulher Negra (Geledés Black Women’s Institute) was created, a political

organization of black women dedicated to fighting racism and sexism, recognizing and promoting black women and the black community as a whole.

During this period, along with the reorganization of black entities, there was the reemergence of the “black press.” Some of the main newspapers were: *SINBA* (1977), *Africus* (1982) and *Nizinga* (1984) in Rio de Janeiro; *Jornegro* (1978), *O Saci* (1978), *Abertura* (1978) and *Vissungo* (1979) in São Paulo; *Pixaim* (1979) in São José dos Campos/SP; *Quilombo* (1980) in Salvador/BA; *Tiçãõ* (1977) in Rio Grande do Sul; and the magazine *Ébano* (1980) in São Paulo. In this new phase, the black movement used the slogan “black people in power!” May 13, the anniversary of the abolition of slavery, was declared National Day of Denunciation Against Racism. As mentioned earlier, this date of commemoration was later altered to November 20 (the probable day on which Zumbi dos Palmares died) and became National Black Awareness Day. Zumbi was chosen as a symbol of resistance to racial oppression. In order to encourage black people to assume their racial status, the MNU resolved to divest the term *negro* (black) of its pejorative connotations, adopting it officially to designate all descendants of enslaved Africans in the country.

The black movement began to intervene in the educational field, proposing to revise prejudiced content in textbooks, train teachers for inter-racial pedagogy, reconsider the role of black people in Brazil’s history, and finally to include African history in school curricula. Concomitantly, they demanded the emergence of a “black literature” to counteract the dominant Eurocentric literature. African aesthetics of beauty and apparel, as well as African cuisine, were incorporated. Petrônio Domingues (2007) notes that many black infants were registered with African names, especially those of Yoruba origin. Beyond its own self-image, the adoption of this African heritage should incorporate elements of “African culture” such as music, dance, games and food, translated in newspapers into recipes attributed to the descendants of former slaves.

In terms of religiosity, while the black movement in its earlier stages was predominantly Christian, a moral obligation was placed on the new generation of activists to adopt religions of African origin, particularly Candomblé. The Third Phase was also marked by a campaign against miscegenation, presenting it as an ideological trap that would dilute the identity of black people. For this generation, miscegenation was historically associated with whitening, which is why they condemned the official pro-miscegenation discourse, interpreted as a strategy to cause the “genocide” of black people in the country. As a group, they advocated for endogamous marriages and the building of black families. In this conception, interracial marriage would result in miscegenation, eventually leading to ethnocide.

The notion that a racial democracy prevailed in Brazil, with individuals of the most diverse racial and cultural backgrounds coexisting peacefully, was shaken. The new scenario was characterized by the conquest of a place of speech that would represent the beginning of a struggle undertaken by the contemporary black movement. A fundamental aspect of the trajectory and intervention strategies of the black movement was, and still is, the deconstruction of a harmonious view of ethnic-racial relations within Brazil’s social imaginary. By promoting debates and denunciations, the black movement exposed the existence of endemic racism in Brazil, as well as its harmful effects on black people.

The concept of Brazil as a racial democracy has yet to be erased from the collective unconscious, although it has been problematized. Notwithstanding the lack of consensus, this view of the nation widely persists and provides a blueprint for actions that prevent a more equitable participation between the white and non-white populations. In the contemporary era, the subalternization of black people is perceived as a sociocultural problem of political participation and neglected rights. In this sense, the “problem of the black person” must be understood as a racial issue that impacts all aspects of Brazilian society. Today, entities and institutions, both public and private, are being pressed to adopt a political stance in the search for effective solutions to differentiated problems for which everyone is responsible.

The disparity between rights and opportunities perturbs activists and intellectuals who propose compensatory measures for the injustices faced by the black community in Brazil. Here it is important to emphasize the importance of public policies in facilitating the formation of educational, political, communicative and citizen rights. The Human Rights Secretariat of the Ministry of Justice convened an international seminar at UnB in 1995 to discuss racial relations in Brazil and propose solutions to eliminate the racism that victimizes non-whites and keeps them in the lowest social stratum. Scholars and activists from all over the country presented a variety of proposals with an emphasis on affirmative actions, particularly quotas for black students in universities (Carvalho & Segato, 2002). Affirmative action programs are currently adopted by the vast majority of higher education institutions in Brazil. Law 12,711, of 2012, known as the quota law, requires these institutions to progressively allocate a portion of the student places available in universities and federal institutes. This law was amended in 2022 and further efforts should be made to improve its necessary application.

It is important to point out that Law 12,711 provides for admission to federal universities and federal technical education institutions (high schools), urging them to reserve, in each selection competition for admission to undergraduate courses, per course and year group, at least 50% (fifty percent) of their places for students who have completed high school in public schools. In a sole paragraph of Article 1, this legislation also emphasizes that when filling places, 50% (fifty percent) must be reserved for students from families with an income equal to or less than 1.5 minimum wages per capita. The law also provides for sub-quotas of places for students who have completed high school in public schools, for self-declared black, brown and indigenous candidates, and for people with disabilities. Racial quotas are thus a type of sub-quota (Deus, 2020) within the scope of Law 12,711. In this article, the analysis focuses on racial quotas.

### **Affirmative action policies: merit and legality**

It is important to make clear that, in the Brazilian experience, affirmative action policies are not limited to entry into higher education. Law 12,990 has been in force since 2014, which reserves 20% of the places offered in public competitions for black people to fill permanent job positions in the federal public administration, as well as in autonomous government agencies, foundations and public companies and mixed-capital companies controlled by the federal government. In 2023, the Ministries of Justice, Racial Equality, and Management and Innovation forwarded a proposal to the National Congress to expand the allocation of vacancies for black people in the Executive Branch to at least 30%. The new draft Law on Quotas in the public service should replace Law 12,990/2014, which expires in 2024. Considering the specificity of affirmative action policies in Brazil, it should be stressed again that the specific interest in this text is in affirmative actions implemented in Brazilian universities.

An article co-authored by José Jorge de Carvalho and Rita Laura Segato (2002) discusses proposals for the implementation of a quota system for black students at UnB, a measure approved in 2004. The authors stress the importance of establishing and implementing policies in higher education institutions to provide reparation for the injustices committed against black people throughout Brazil's history. Racial discrimination is characterized by a tendency to be repeated and reproduced in society over time. Mechanisms must be developed, therefore, that modify the behaviors leading to such discrimination. According to Carvalho & Segato (2002, p. 4), the quota system adopted by UnB constitutes “[...] a concrete intervention program against racial discrimination in Brazil.”

According to the authors, who provide numerical data on the presence of black professors in higher education institutions in the country, “academic life” retains an “implicit racial segregation” (Carvalho & Segato 2002, p.5) which leads to the absence or under-representation of black educators in higher education institutions, thus transforming the Brazilian university into “[...] a shelter only for the white elite that created it”

(Carvalho & Segato, 2002, p. 6). Based on this perspective, only specific interventions, such as affirmative action policies, can transform a reality characterized by the exclusion or under-representation of black individuals from positions of power, education, training and decision-making.

As of today and following the approval of Law 12,711/2012 on quotas, most affirmative action measures adopted by higher education institutions take the form of quotas (Munanga, 2022): a system of allocating a certain number of places at a university to guarantee admission to a certain group of students. The bonus system, which offers more points to a specific group in entrance exams without allocating a percentage of places, has been virtually abandoned. Additionally, there is a prevalence of quotas for black students. In this case, universities opt to favor both black and brown students in their affirmative action policies. It seems that, despite more than ten years of the quota law and the decision to amend it, the representation of black students in higher education is not yet equal to that of the black national population. This demonstrates the impact of structural racism across institutions and bodies, which causes these to impose a sequence of barriers difficult to overcome without a coordinated effort to combat racism.

Discussions of affirmative action policies for black people, particularly in universities, often result in arguments that lead to confusion and render actual debate impossible. Developing a more critical reflection that highlights the full implementation of racial quotas and supports the ability to counter opposing arguments is imperative (Munanga, 2022). One of the arguments to be addressed is the idea that affirmative action disregards merit. By examining the sociocultural reality experienced by people of diverse affiliations, it can be shown that meritocracy is only possible if and when cultural capital, family capital and intellectual endowments are equal. This implies an unambiguous understanding that competing individuals can only reach a position of prestige, appealing to their own merit, if they start out from the same position. The question is: when considering entrance exams at Brazilian public universities, for example, are we taking into consideration all the historical, political, cultural and economic factors that influence admissions? Or do we continue to insist on explaining approvals for admission as a reflection solely of individual merit – which is nonexistent when detached from the set of highly significant everyday phenomena observable in the reality of sociocultural interactions? To overcome “niches of meritocratic privileges” (Guimarães, 1999), which occur when applying for a place at Brazil’s public universities, it is crucial to consider the relationship between privileges and the reproduction of accumulated discrimination.

These privileges and discriminations provide a clearer insight into the ethnic-racial interactions in Brazil and the cruelty of exclusion resulting from them, requiring in turn a serious discussion, problematization and deconstruction of racial inequalities of the kind experienced in Brazil. In this respect, specific policies that guarantee citizen rights become problematizing tools for addressing issues that remain unchanged by the implementation of universalistic social policies. In analyses of ethnic-racial inequalities, racial differences persist in explanations that consider income, education, housing and health inequalities. The understanding, therefore, is that universalizing rights policies are ineffective, or insufficient, when it comes to alleviating the racial discrimination that affects black people, even though they do contribute to overcoming social inequalities and ethnic-racial inequalities to a smaller degree. In a society dominated by one color, there is an urgent need to adopt policies aimed at ensuring the inclusion of subalternized sectors of the population. Again it should be emphasized that dominant groups in Brazil rely on sensitive topics, such as individual merit, to justify their privileges.

Secondly, the argument against the adoption of reparatory measures for racial inequalities contends that affirmative action contradicts the principle of equality enshrined in the 1988 Federal Constitution. When this principle is interpreted in a biased or naive manner, it is read simplistically as affirming that “all persons are equal before the law.” There is a disregard for what the text of the Constitution actually asserts, a point echoed by Ives Gandra da Silva Martins (1992) when he argues that every citizen has a right to equal treatment before

the law, in accordance with the criteria established in the legal system. In other words, what is forbidden are arbitrary distinctions and absurd discrimination, because unequal treatment of unequal cases, insofar as they are unequal, is a traditional requirement of justice.

Social equality entails material freedoms. This equality, which is a reflection of equity, cannot be achieved solely through legislation, but also requires state-driven policies and programs, as Fábio Konder Comparato (1996) cogently argued. It is also important to emphasize that inequality in the law occurs when the norm unreasonably or arbitrarily differs in treatment between individuals. What can be inferred, therefore, is that differentiated normative treatments are compatible with those outlined in the Federal Constitution when they are shown to the legislator or the executive power (the interpreter, that is the public authority and the private individual) to be reasonably proportionate to their intended purposes.

Extrapolating from the constitutional dimension and turning to global issues, it is vital that we remember that Brazil has signed various international commitments since 1968, whereby the country undertakes to create and apply compensatory policies to compensate black Brazilians for the losses suffered by them during the slavery era. One important commitment signed by the country dates back to 2001, agreed at the World Conference against Racism, held in Durban, South Africa. During the Durban Conference, the impacts of which still reverberate today (Geledés, 2021), the signatory states were also encouraged to establish national affirmative action programs to promote access to basic social services such as education, health and adequate housing for groups suffering racial discrimination. Paragraph 100, in addition to acknowledging that the fight against racism is primarily the responsibility of national states, advocates the establishment of such programs. It is important to note that Article 1, paragraph 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which was adopted prior to Durban, specifies that special measures taken to benefit groups subject to racial discrimination are not considered racially discriminatory measures.

These observations indicate the need for an intervention that generates citizen rights in the context of the chronic disadvantages faced by black Brazilians as a result of discriminatory practices. As Paulo Freire (1996) reminds us, education presents itself as an emblematic sector for such interventions due to its potential to enable individuals to emancipate themselves through the acquisition of knowledge. As Carvalho & Segato (2002, p. 15) note, the Brazilian population improved in terms of education throughout the entire twentieth century. They emphasize the fact that black children attend school for 2.2 fewer years than white children. In the data compiled by the authors, white pupils attended school for an average of 6.6 years, while black pupils attended school for an average of 4.4 years. In their conclusion, the authors estimate that it will take 20 years to achieve equal schooling levels among white and black children if public policies continue to prioritize their universalistic nature. According to this hypothesis, the black population would require “two decades of stable and uninterrupted growth of current education policies to complete their basic education” (Carvalho & Segato, 2002, p. 15).

The application of affirmative actions for black people in Brazilian universities is not limited to undergraduate courses. Anna Carolina Venturini (2021) reports that postgraduate programs at Brazilian public universities have adopted affirmative actions in their admission processes since 2002. Postgraduate courses (at both master’s and doctoral levels) at public universities with a diverse range of students, including in terms of their racial affiliation, are more likely to achieve a higher quality of research, in addition to enhancing the science produced. This is because, in assuming social responsibility, the movement towards institutional change (Venturini, 2021) also involves assuming procedural responsibility for affirmative action managers. One example of such procedural responsibility is the establishment of hetero-identification commissions to verify the self-declarations of black candidates.

The application of affirmative action policies in Brazilian universities has resulted in diverse successful experiences that present substantial and qualitative increases in representation, with the notable presence of



black and indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, trans people and transvestites in university environments. In this sense, the university is becoming a more pluralistic institution with a more diverse student body that is more representative of society as a whole. It is still possible to observe historically concealed instances of racism, but when these manifestations are exposed, they are more effectively confronted, indicating that the conflict should not be covered up but openly challenged as part of an empowered anti-racist agency. Following affirmative actions, universities have shown the practical possibility of tackling niches of privilege, including meritocratic privileges, and establishing an academic environment that is thematically challenging, encouraging a confrontation of epistemic racism. Finally, affirmative actions in universities have made it possible to problematize the idea of a single tradition of scientific knowledge and have provided insights into the plurality of knowledge.

## Final considerations

Policies promoting citizen rights, such as affirmative actions, are legal and legitimate, but their effectiveness requires auxiliary measures and complementary actions. The historical and political threads that bind what we experience today, tying together the most diverse experiences and interactions, cannot be overlooked. Various historical, sociocultural, economic and political factors enable and authenticate belongings, positions and affiliations. The emergence of social actors such as the black movement in the process of implementing affirmative actions strengthens the possibility of reparation for the historical experiences of racial discrimination and injustice suffered by black Brazilians. In addition, it should not be overlooked that public policies offer pedagogical value by supporting the diversity of affiliations and belongings among individuals who assume a proactive role in determining their own lives.

The political advocacy carried out by black people in Brazil who had direct experience of the Durban Conference (Geledés, 2021), including Jurema Werneck, Lúcia Xavier, Sueli Carneiro, Zélia Amador, Ivanir dos Santos, Wania Sant'Anna and many others referenced in the book *Brazil and Durban: 20 years later*, published by Geledés, still reverberates as a legacy today. A legacy that mobilizes and drives an anti-racist struggle in defense of affirmative actions for black people. In other words – and as Sueli Carneiro argues (Geledés, 2021, p.278) – the challenge now is to “enforce the Durban Action Program,” which recognizes the leading role of Afro-descendants in the Americas in recognizing: (a) the existence of populations of African origin in the Americas; (b) prevalent, systemic and inequalities-generating racial discrimination; and (c) the cultural, economic, political and scientific contributions made by these populations. It is important to remember that the Durban action plan urges nation states to adopt public policies in the various social areas aimed at the social promotion of people of African descent.

As for affirmative action policies in Brazil, some projections can be made based on the applied experiences, the subsequent evaluation processes and the amendment to the quota law introduced in 2022. In the short term, there was evidence that the implementation of affirmative action for the black population resulted in institutional spaces that were numerically significantly more representative of the national ethnic-racial composition. Since there is an emergency dimension to this type of policy intervention, policies such as racial quotas, for example, should not be considered as a substitute for other longer-term measures and policies that need to be adopted concurrently. Furthermore, affirmative action policies may act as a catalyst for black people to “dare” to participate in selection processes and, upon approval, enter a space in which knowledge operates more effectively and professionals are better qualified.

In the medium term, it was possible to observe a public exposure of racism that, in many cases, had been perceived to be invisible, “camouflaged” or “veiled” but never completely absent. By raising awareness of racist practices, it is easier to adopt punitive actions against racist acts and to promote educational initiatives for those

involved in or close to such acts. Following the implementation of racial quotas, universities began registering hostile reactions towards quota students. Further, they stressed the need to mediate certain conflict situations, demonstrating the importance of complementary measures to ensure the retention of quota students and foster a sense of belonging. Hostile here refers to instances such as aggressive messages in social networks; verbal abuse in university hallways and even in classrooms; direct or indirect physical or verbal offenses in restricted spaces, such as bathrooms and elevators; and superficial and often angry statements made by writers, journalists, politicians, and professionals. These and many other examples have been covered in the media, showing the opposition to affirmative action with a racial focus. The revelation or open emergence of something that already exists, racism, renders the search for the eradication of racist behavior more effective, since the fight against what has been declared becomes more direct and specific and hence more effective.

When public policies for citizen rights are implemented, any sociocultural environment tends to experience transformations, making historically discriminated and subalternized individuals more inclined to consider occupying positions of power and competing for prestigious positions as something “normal.” The establishment of positive references, such as black professors, doctors, engineers and lawyers, among others, is imperative for new black generations to feel inspired and aim for a future with more independent political and cultural participation, as well as possess a stronger sense of citizenship, ensuring solidarity and equality within society. Lastly, experience has shown that all individuals, institutions and groups can and should become active participants in their own history as part of the consolidation of an antiracist and thus more just and inclusive society.

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# Public policies in open scenes of crack use: The hotels in the *De Braços Abertos* programme as an experience of a consensual and participatory environment

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## Abstract

The *Programa 'De Braços Abertos' (PBA)* [Open Arms Programme] was planned and implemented by authorities of the city of São Paulo, between 2014 and 2016, and provided for the accommodation of its beneficiaries in hotels. We perceived a lack of specific research on the ways this programme was operated. Through an ethnography and the construction of close relationships with the teams of professionals working in these hotels, we were able to verify: (1) the constant attempts by the programme's agents to develop bonds with the beneficiaries, (2) the skilful, attentive listening to the demands and daily stories lived by the beneficiaries, and (3) the problem-solving efforts in a consensual and participatory environment. In contrast to life on the streets, along with the professional intervention, the new context provided by PBA hotels has, in many cases, paved the way for changes in the drug users' relationship with crack consumption to a more controlled pattern.

**Key words:** Crack cocaine; Open Arms Programme; ethnography; hotels

# Políticas públicas em cenas abertas de uso de crack: Os hotéis do programa *De Braços Abertos* como experiência de ambiente consensual e participativo

## Resumo

O Programa “De Braços Abertos” (PBA) foi planejado e implementado pelas autoridades do município de São Paulo, entre 2014 e 2016, e previa a hospedagem de seus beneficiários em hotéis. Percebemos a falta de pesquisas específicas sobre as formas de funcionamento desse programa. Por meio de uma etnografia e da construção de relações próximas com as equipes de profissionais que atuam nesses hotéis, pudemos constatar: (1) a constante tentativa dos agentes do programa em desenvolver vínculos com os beneficiários, (2) a escuta qualificada e aguçada das demandas e histórias cotidianas vividas pelos beneficiários e (3) os esforços de resolução de problemas em um ambiente consensual e participativo. Em contraste com a vida nas ruas, acompanhado da intervenção profissional, o novo contexto proporcionado pelos hotéis PBA abriu caminho para a mudança na relação dos usuários de drogas com o consumo de crack para um padrão mais controlado.

**Palavras-chave:** Crack; Programa Braços Abertos; etnografia; hotéis

# Public policies in open scenes of crack use: The hotels in the *De Braços Abertos* programme as an experience of a consensual and participatory environment

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## Introduction

The *III Levantamento Nacional sobre o uso de drogas pela população Brasileira* [III National Survey on Drug Use by the Brazilian Population] (Bastos et al., 2017) revealed that approximately 1.4 million people between 12 and 65 years of age reported having used crack and similar drugs at least once in their lifetime, corresponding to 0.9% of the survey population, with pronounced differences between men (1.4%) and women (0.4%). In the 12 months prior to the survey, use of this drug was reported by 0.3% of the population. A paper by Alves and Pereira (2019) showed that the first reports of crack use in the city of São Paulo date back to the late 1980s, and that the appearance of Cracolândia, a large area characterised by the presence of thousands of drug users and other visitors every day, located in the central region of the city, took place in the mid-1990s. At the time, the *Programa 'De Braços Abertos'* (PBA) [Open Arms Programme] – the 2014 public policy addressed in this article –, crack consumption in Cracolândia had spread over a dozen blocks and reached 3000 users.

The use of crack did not begin in Brazil, but in the US in the mid-1980s. This drug was a market innovation, creating jobs for unemployed youth, with better pay and working conditions than they could achieve through formal jobs. Crack changed the mode of consumption of cocaine to smoking, which intensified and shortened its effect (Reinarman and Levine, 1997). Despite the aggravation of the effects promoted by crack in relation to snorted cocaine, the majority of those who experiment with the drug do not become regular users, nor do they evolve towards heavy or self-destructive consumption (Reinarman, Waldorf and Murphy, 1997). Brazilian data do not support the idea of an inevitable escalation in crack use among people who experiment with the drug (Nappo, Sanchez and Ribeiro, 2012). In this impoverished region of downtown São Paulo, where Cracolândia is located, heavy use of addictive substances seems to be more closely linked to what Bourgois (2006) observed concerning crack use in certain North American inner cities. Drug addiction, together with criminality and violence, is related to a life full of stress owing to the impossibility of earning an income that guarantees a minimum of dignity, such as a lack of housing for the individual and their family.

Before we explore the subject of this article, a brief explanation of the context in which our topic develops is in order. Cracolândia is an open scene of crack consumption, which has persisted in the central region of São Paulo for almost three decades (Alves and Pereira, 2023), creating its own territoriality as a dangerous, degraded place that people should avoid. Despite this, the use of crack in these circumstances can provide a community-type life, with fraternal relationships between the dispossessed (Alves, 2014), materialised in constant and multiple exchanges (Adorno et al., 2013). The people who frequent or live there end up becoming the object of attempts of state control, which combines repression and surveillance with assistance and care (Rui, 2012). The institutional scenario that seeks to extinguish Cracolândia ends up encouraging the movement of individuals through the different programmes implemented in the region, while at the same time helping them to remain on the streets (Fromm, 2017). Cracolândia is constituted as an itinerant

territoriality amid other territorialities that dispute the region, mainly through large urban interventions (Frúgoli Jr and Cavalcanti, 2013).

This article addresses the topic of the hotels included in the PBA, intended to house people who used to use crack in the central region of the city of São Paulo. These hotels are facilities that sometimes form part of the drug use scene and that have become socially relevant as lodging for this public, as explained below. However, for a proper understanding of the innovative character of these hotels, it is important to contextualise the reality in the area known as Cracolândia, or Craco as it is known by many of its regulars, both the crack users and professionals assisting them. Even though not all the people using crack at Cracolândia sleep there, a few hundred drug users lived in shacks near the *'fluxo'* [flow], the name given to the densest concentration of users, and these people, around 300 individuals, were the first beneficiaries of the PBA. Following their acceptance to join the programme, they were allocated to hotel rooms in Cracolândia, receiving three meals a day, and were also able to participate in the *Programa Operação Trabalho* (POT) [Operation Work Programme] which required cleaning squares and sidewalks in the morning and receiving 15 reais (roughly US\$ 5 at the time) per day of work. In the afternoon many attended professional training courses.

The new mayor, right-wing politician João Doria Jr., who replaced Fernando Haddad of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* [Workers Party], governed the city from 2016 to 2018, abolished the PBA in 2017, and was then elected governor of the state of São Paulo. At that time, it had 500 beneficiaries and there were plans by Haddad to extend the programme to 1000 people. The biggest issue highlighted by Doria as a reason to extinguish the PBA was the intense drug trade that had formed in the 'flow', with dozens of kilos of crack being traded simultaneously.

The PBA seems to have had a positive impact in reducing drug use among the people who participated in it. In a survey of 80 participants, over 65% beneficiaries 'claimed to have reduced crack use after joining the PBA' (Rui, Fiore & Toffoli, 2016: 26). In the same study, many of them reported that they had unsuccessfully tried to reduce their drug use through hospitalisation in therapeutic communities. Despite this, in 2017, after a large police operation that removed drug users from the Cracolândia region, the new mayor of the city of São Paulo announced the end of the PBA by initiating a new programme called *Redenção* [Redemption]. The programme installed adapted containers for people to stay in overnight, eat meals, and use the bathroom. One of the focuses of the programme was to convince crack users to voluntarily admit themselves to therapeutic communities for treatment. After this announcement, some hotels, which housed the programme's beneficiaries, received termination notices regarding their city government contracts. At the time of writing this article, more than three years after the PBA was closed down, among the seven hotels that existed at the end of the programme, only three remain active, and are now linked to the Redemption programme. Two of them were transformed into the *Serviço Integrado de Acolhida Terapêutica* (SIAT) [Integrated Service for Therapeutic Housing]. This shift also implied the dismissal of most of the technical staff that worked in the hotels.

It is not the aim of this paper to present a more detailed comparison between the PBA and SIAT services; however, to give the reader an idea of the evolution of services available for the population that lives on the streets and uses crack in downtown São Paulo, it is worth noting that this service is now provided in three types of facilities, called SIAT I, II and III. SIAT I is suitable for the reception of people who are in situations of greater vulnerability, usually those who have been living on the streets. When these people begin to show what the professional jargon commonly denominates 'better organisation', they are referred to SIAT II.

In these centres, together with the hotel staff, they begin to elaborate their treatment plan to enable them to move onto the following stage, SIAT III, a service focused on the search for work and the possible disengagement of these residents from the Redemption programme. Two hotels of the former PBA, located in neighbourhoods further from Cracolândia, were transformed into SIAT III.

In all the SIATs, people can live in the facility; however, there are some distinctions with the old PBA hotels, related initially to drug consumption. In the hotels, as in the SIATs, people were not allowed to use illicit drugs inside



the room, however, if someone was seen using, the technical staff's attitude was to talk and understand the reason for the consumption in the hotel, while in the SIATs, if this occurs, the person is expelled from the programme.

The PBA was a programme implemented in the city of São Paulo designed to meet the demands raised during 2013 among homeless people who used crack in Cracolândia, located at the downtown neighbourhood of Luz. With an inter-departmental character, it primarily involved the municipal departments of Health, Social Work, Labour, Human Rights, and Urban Safety. It was designed to provide shelter, health care, food, occupational activity, professional training, and financial assistance to beneficiaries who worked in cleaning and janitorial positions, and it started on January 14, 2014. Three hundred people enlisted in the programme and they were hired by the POT of the *Secretaria Municipal de Desenvolvimento, Trabalho e Empreendedorismo* (SMDTE) [Municipal Secretariat of Development, Labour and Entrepreneurship] to work in cleaning activities in the region.

After waking up and leaving the hotel, their routine involved going to the Bom Prato restaurant (a restaurant subsidised by the government) for breakfast, where they were supervised by an agent from the SMDTE, in charge of a group of up to 20 beneficiaries. The team was hardly ever complete, and the absentees were actively searched for in the programme hotels by the 44 social educators of the *Secretaria Municipal de Assistência e Desenvolvimento Social* (SMADS) [Municipal Secretariat of Assistance and Social Development] and health agents of the *Secretaria Municipal de Saúde* (SMS) [Municipal Health Secretariat]. As the basis for active searches, information on the beneficiaries absent from work was obtained by these professionals after breakfast, at the place where the team started their shift. Next, SMADS social workers and community health workers, who were also responsible for groups of 20 beneficiaries each, went to these hotels to meet the beneficiaries who were absent and verify the reasons for their absence. Between 1 and 2pm, a group composed of SMADS, SMDTE and SMS professionals would meet to discuss the various demands of that day. Community health workers were the only professionals not available at the rate of one per group of 20 beneficiaries, since only one of them was stationed in each of the hotels in the programme.

Former residents of Cracolândia shacks and 'malocas' (improvised huts), in turn, tried to adapt their hotel rooms to the typical life they previously led on the streets, while at the same time changing the regular occupation style of the hotels to better adjust it to their transitional way of life. For example, they occupied corridors and stairways to have conversations and engage in leisure activities and roamed around rooms and buildings and sub-located their rooms to third parties on weekends when the SMADS social workers were usually off. They were present on workdays at the entrance hall and tried to establish some control over the occupancy of the rooms. Occupation was not freely decided, it was defined through requests posed to the professional teams and in particular to a specific social worker with extensive experience in the region. At the beginning of the PBA, this social worker knew most of the beneficiaries who were former residents or habitués of Cracolândia by first name or surname.

It is important to emphasise that the places where crack is used, including Cracolândia, are perceived as spaces that are linked exclusively to the use of this specific drug, and the drug is represented by stigmatising images associated with physical dependence (Romanini & Roso, 2012). This does not seem to occur by chance, given that the area provides a great opportunity for large enterprises in the future, which can only be achieved through the eviction of the current residents, the drug users.

When they want to revitalise, they call an area Cracolândia. This is a way of getting their hands on it, getting the support of the ruling class: this is Cracolândia. Thus, those who are there are expelled, [and] the area depreciates [...]. (Wisnik and Corullon, 2006)

Particular cases can reveal how gentrification processes in certain neighbourhoods can clash with the presence of open scenes of drug use, similar to Cracolândia. Collins (2019) shows how in the case of the Pelourinho region in the Brazilian city of Salvador, gentrification was more than a market-driven exclusionary relationship, it was ultimately to promote often highly unequal property relations to influence how humans perceive the world and

themselves. Another case, outside Brazil, in which real estate interests clashed with assistance to drug users, was that of a small needle exchange programme in Asheville, North Carolina, that operated three hours a week at the back of a bookstore. It was forced to close for operating an illegal homeless shelter. Castillo (2019) realised that the city's concern was how the programme attracted the 'wrong kind' of people to a rapidly gentrifying part of the city; the monstrosity of people who may look homeless gathered on a street that is struggling to look modern.

Drug users are not the only concern that may arouse revulsion in certain areas of cities, they still have to deal with the possibility that harm reduction initiatives themselves will abandon their real interests. Smith (2016), for example, argues that the colonisation of harm reduction by people he terms 'harm reduction hipsters' has entailed the spatial displacement of users through processes of gentrification and social exclusion. The recent prestige of harm reduction among hipsters and the corresponding increase in their involvement in institutionalised public health indirectly works to displace drug users as the central driver of the development of harm reduction policies, service delivery, research and evaluation programmes, relegating people who use drugs to passive research subjects and other stigmatising and symbolic positions.

Cases in which people who use drugs (PWUD) do not have their rights respected and are exposed to police repression can have a deleterious impact on their health. Research conducted with municipal police officers who participated in the crackdown on open drug trafficking in Tijuana revealed that these officers perceived that the intent of the operation was to displace and detain homeless PWUD, not to help or rehabilitate them (Morales et. al., 2020).

The nearly two-decade-long struggle for the rights of drug users in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside led to a favourable municipal response, with the establishment of Insite, North America's first legal supervised injection programme. By 1993, the Portland Hotel Society (PHS), a Canadian non-profit society focused on providing advocacy, housing, services and opportunities for drug users, had been founded. The PHS was instrumental in getting city hall to recognise the humanity of deeply marginalised addicts and demanded respect for them as problematic citizens (Lupick, 2018).

With the ongoing opioid crisis in Canada, supervised consumption sites (SCSs), where people can use drugs in a safe environment and access health services, are becoming permanent facilities in many cities. This causes many community members to oppose the placement of SCSs in their neighbourhoods, since they link them to increased social disorder, leading to more crime (Wallace, Chamberlain and Fahmy, 2019; Sampson and Raudenbush, 2004). However, when exploring the relationships between SCSs and their surrounding communities, it has been shown that they do not directly contribute to social disorder, since this usually predates the implementation of SCSs.

A cross-sectional study of people who inject drugs (PWID) in 19 major US cities found that PWID living in neighbourhoods with higher levels of gentrification were more likely to be homeless in the previous year (Linton et al., 2017). Stigmatising, depreciating and expelling are all processes linked to gentrification phenomena (Bidou-Zachariassen, 2003). However, this does not fit entirely within this model (Frugoli Jr and Sklai, 2009), because a clear banning procedure for people residing in their real estate is not implemented in such spaces. Eviction practices will not always be adopted. Over time, some municipal authorities will oppose it, while others will not. The article shows how the PBA hotels became a possibility to remain living in that part of the city centre, for the people who smoked crack on those streets, but in qualitatively different conditions.

Among the options aimed at the so-called homeless population – understood as a 'heterogeneous population group, composed of people with different realities, who have in common living conditions of absolute poverty and a lack of belonging to formal society' (Motta, 2005: 3) – is the 'social hotel', provided for 'independent and socially active users through a contract with hotels' (Prefeitura de São Paulo, 2009: 116). In addition to these facilities, there are the 'living centres', 'reception centres', and 'dormitories'.

Following Pichon-Rivière's (1998) 'theory of the link', we analyse the type of coexistence provided by the hotel environment, among the PBA beneficiaries and professional staff, which seems to be related to the construction of relationships of certain types of trust and bond.

We were unable to find bibliography on how the hotels were operated, their impact on former PBA beneficiaries and on the people who work there. The documentary that carries the name of one of the hotels in the PBA programme, Hotel Laide, directed by Debora Diniz, shows how care lies at the centre of these hotels' priorities, rather than abstention from crack. It is no wonder that three years after the PBA was closed, some of the hotels remain busy and working. This fact raises some questions, the first of which is to determine the factors leading to the resilience of this new type of practice. Another is that even though the PBA is not a programme aimed at abstaining from crack use, the persistence of the beneficiaries in the hotels requires answers regarding the main consequences that the new environment brought about in the pattern of drug consumption. To answer such questions some objectives were set for this article. First, since there is no available bibliography, we describe some aspects of the functioning of the hotels that we consider important in understanding the resilience of these facilities. Second, we seek to characterise the type of relationship that is established between the professional staff and PBA beneficiaries. Finally, we verify how the change of environment and daily routine impacts the person's relationship with crack consumption, in comparison with life on the streets. Because they recovered part of what the city had already learned from the social hotels, a lot has been added as a facility aimed to serve the homeless population who smoke crack. To understand this context, it is important to understand a little about how the programme works.

## Materials and methods

This article originated from research undertaken in the São Paulo region known as Cracolândia. We conducted an ethnographic study, seeking to understand the existing public policies related to crack consumption, that was developed, from February 2016 to July 2018, through participant observation, interviews and monitoring of the daily life of health professionals and care providers, and of people who use crack. This scenario has offered us, as authors, the opportunity of discussing ideas for nearly four years and enabled us to participate in the writing, conception and final revision of the article – as use of 'we' throughout the text indicates.

In this article, we decided to present an overview with regard to the operation of the PBA hotels, together with the work developed by the professionals who worked in them, from their point of view. We believe that the experience of the workers hired at the end of the programme described through their own narratives and our field reports are sufficiently relevant to justify our analysis.

This ethnographic study consisted of a field study, conducted by the use of two or more data collection techniques, in our case, interviews and field notebook writing. It might be a helpful way to address a detailed, descriptive accumulation of behaviours, attitudes and feelings that produce the fullest possible picture of the lived environment of the PBA hotels. During the study, we were able to get close to the subjects of this research, which led us to the experiences lived by contemporary authors researching drug use, such as Bourgois (2006) with crack sellers, and Bourgois and Schonberg's (2009) work conducted among heroin users, which were conducted within the best tradition of anthropological practice that proposes the creation of a narrative concerning the other and starts from the relationships built in the field.

The active search was carried out in the hotels in trios formed by the type of professionals described above, who would go door to door in search of the missing beneficiaries. At the beginning of the PBA, the members of these technical teams worked exclusively in the same hotel. However, due to the life changes that affected some of the beneficiaries, there was a considerably high turnover rate among apartments and even among hotels. This happened for different reasons, such as couples breaking up, the desire for better accommodation, or the curiosity of getting to know and stay in different rooms or hotels. Thus, the trios had to account for 20 beneficiaries distributed in different hotels. This marked one of the strong points of the programme: integrated,

individualised and comprehensive care provided through the work of professionals from the fields of social work, health and labour, constantly in touch with the beneficiaries.

All the PWUD consented, by signing an authorisation form for the use of their image and to have their photos taken. Our recruitment was by convenience sampling, using the classification of Mainardes (2009), where information collection is performed according to the disposition that the interlocutors have in relation to the researcher. The interlocutors were included according to the criterion of homogeneity (Turato, 2003), the sample was closed and limited to workers in the hotels. The recruitment strategy of asking workers in the hotels for referrals to other colleagues proved to be successful in terms of achieving the required sample, as well as enriching the quality of the research. The research sites were accessed after contact and a brief conversation via mobile phone with a hotel employee. A meeting was scheduled and it was left to our interlocutors to invite other people to the conversations. In order to gain people's trust, we used to bring with us a copy of our book *Jamais fomos zumbis: contexto social e craqueiros na cidade de São Paulo* [We were never zombies: social context and crackheads in the city of São Paulo], which was usually known to our interlocutors because they had read or heard about it. Once contact had been initiated, it was common for the people with whom we talked to show interest in the progress of our work and to provide ask suggestions and ask questions. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of São Paulo and all interlocutors signed a term of free and informed consent. The data obtained were organised by cross-referencing two criteria: the units of analysis (episode and interaction), and the importance of the interlocutor for the research. The findings were returned to the community through two meetings with the interlocutors, at different times and on different days, in order to facilitate access to the largest number of interested parties.

## Results

In this section, we present the results obtained by examining the following themes: 1) the main difficulties imposed on the PBA by the end of Mayor Haddad's administration; 2) the importance of the formation of bonds between members of the professional team and the beneficiaries; and 3) the creation of collective, political, and contractual subjects in the hotels.

At the onset of the PBA, the hotels had to work according to the 'flow', as the crack scene is called. For the second round of contracts, the beneficiaries were provided better quality and slightly more distant hotels. Foreseeing the possibility of expanding the programme and searching for better quality service, in 2016, the last year of the programme, teams were hired to improve their management. The contracts were then governed by the SMS instead of the SMDTE.

The change in the management of the hotels and the arrival of new professionals, like Rodriguinho<sup>1</sup>, a social worker assigned to one of the hotels in the programme, who was hired by the *Instituto de Atenção Básica e Avançada à Saúde* (IABAS) [Institute of Primary and Advanced Health Care], was not all that distant from the expected setbacks imposed by such an unfortunate moment: the end of 2016, the conclusion of Haddad's term as mayor of São Paulo. In early 2017, the PBA began to be discontinued in the hotels which led to the reassignment of members of the *Guarda Civil metropolitana* (MCG) [Metropolitan Police Force], which was under the command of city hall, who had been trained in conflict mediation and became part of the hotel management teams. At the time, Rodriguinho explained the initial idea behind the work of the MCG within the programme.

They worked in a civil manner, checking the residents in and out and performing one or two interventions. And it was actually really cool over time, right? We exchanged ideas and they lost that brainwashing that militarism does to people's heads and understood that the hotels residents are people like us, right? Only with other issues.

<sup>1</sup> The names of all the interlocutors involved in the research have been changed to protect the identity and privacy of those concerned.

And now, with the dismantling of the PBA, the Department of Public Safety left the programme and took away the management of the hotels precisely to put an end to the programme.

The MCG officers were trained in conflict mediation and harm reduction to work in these hotels. There had been continuous attempts to articulate the Department of Health with the MCG's *Programa de Proteção a Pessoas em Situação de Risco* [Programme for the Protection of People at Risk]. Therefore, the work performed by the MCG caused such a profound change that it was able to reverse the most entrenched expectations and resistance among professionals in the programme. It is frequently the case that these professionals are also activists who mobilise in favour of the rights of Cracolândia's regulars. During our ethnography, we witnessed how the services rendered in the entrance halls of the hotels were a constant challenge for the PBA, who tried to prevent people outside the programme from endangering the welfare of beneficiaries within the hotels. From 2017 onwards, when the new mayor began his term, which led to the end of the PBA, the meetings to supervise the teams ceased to be organised. The most different everyday occurrences in this public service, characterised by transient accommodation, ceased to be supported by city hall. Indeed, there was an obvious boycott against the beneficiaries of the programme, while the professionals who previously provided them with all kinds of assistance had to start organising autonomously. Below we show a painting made on the wall of one of the hotels studied. The image depicts the hotel's façade collapsing when hit by a steel ball with the inscription 'Cidade Linda' [Beautiful City], Mayor Doria's motto for the city government.

Figure 1



Elisângela Silva (2011), Do "De Braços Abertos" ao "Redenção": um caminho percorrido e uma história a contar, p. 62

We talked to some of these new professionals. We also spoke to the people who had worked in the hotels before the organisation of specific teams. They acknowledged the difficulties of the newly hired IABAS team. Mariana, 35, a social worker in a hotel located some distance from Cracolândia reported even more severe problems.

It's like this: it went wrong because these guys aren't (...) they're crack users, you can't talk to them anyway you feel like, you have to know how to talk to this population. Otherwise, they turn against you!

They assaulted the team. The team stays inside the hotels. There were a lot of aggressions. You know? The users didn't accept the teams. The staff at the hotels, right? And it was turbulent at first, but now it seems to be going well.

In a short time, there was an improvement in the relations between the social workers, the Department of Health and POT, who were responsible for following up the events and dealing with all kinds of demands presented by the beneficiaries, as well as the people residing in different housing services. However, the lack of supervision and support could lead to situations in which a social worker might withdraw from their daily responsibilities, a behaviour consistent with the new administration, from the many complaints we heard in this regard. Jonas, 38, who also worked in one of the hotels and was hired in 2016 by the IABAS, told us about the opportunities made possible by the presence of a professional team at the beneficiaries' place of residence.

We're able to get much closer [to the beneficiaries], right? We can strengthen the bonds, the trust much more, anyway, and I think this kind of work is much closer to the beneficiaries, to their lives, understanding them as whole human beings, you know, their peculiarities. Thus, you can better understand the reasons why they're there.

In his theory of the link, Pichon-Rivière (1998) considers it to be the dynamic structure established in the subject-object relationship. Coherence and bonds in a group rest on the game between assuming and adjudicating several roles. Thus, communication is established in the bond from the moment both subjects take on the respective role assigned by the other. Compared to Jonas's previous activity as a POT janitorial team supervisor, working at the hotel enables greater trust and bonding with the beneficiaries. We can also understand him better by recognising in Jonas, and in many other professionals and agents, a deeply empathic, motivated social worker who is in constant relationship with the beneficiaries. Work is better, and seemingly more rewarding and motivating, to the extent that more opportunities are offered for the professional to reach the people who originate the subjects of their own daily tasks.

Listening has a very therapeutic role, right? And this listening transforms into a reflection, not just one (...) but a twofold reflection for the beneficiary, right? There's a much more effective exchange, there's a much deeper exchange, right? You're talking to him today, tomorrow he's sorry, then we talk about the same issue, and we continue the previous line of thought, right? I think there's a more powerful reflection, in this case. At least from the beneficiary's point of view and from the professional's point of view, anyway.

Getting rid of the residents and their problems does not relieve Jonas. As he confided, if there is something he does not appreciate, it seems to be linked more to the lack of time to reap 'life's questions'. To this end, and in contrast to the case of telephone operators, a closer approach is needed, since life seems to be told in whispers, murmured, blown through lips that respond and seek the most critical possibility opened up by 'trust': the bond. This is a ubiquitous term in the discourse of professionals working at Cracolândia, which seems to result from the strength of an exchange established through quality, interested, competent listening, that is, the type of listening that is able to respond to the always urgent demands of those who live on the edge, because impatience also has its reasons.

The approach in which understanding through listening, within the set of particularities that can only be revealed over time, conditions our grasp of the individual: the completeness of the human being. Only in

this way can beneficiaries be transmuted into a 'case', becoming the object of teamwork, dialogue, debate, the search for alternative solutions to the most diverse 'issues', as Jonas came to describe. These cases were formulated after approaching, listening to, and bonding with the subjects, and only after that can they have some resonance within the group of professionals who will review and reflect on them. It is a reflection that begins with and lingers through daily empathic contact. We do not trust just anyone to talk about our family and love dramas, or, at least, not everyone has such resourcefulness. Thus, listening is an exchange, a daily reflexive act regarding attitudes taken within and outside the hotel, which enable us to grasp and formulate a certain point of view. Jonas briefly describes the reflective process mediated by practice.

(...) you can share this reflection with them, right? You can do [that], for example, when it comes to health issues.

The guy has tuberculosis, or he's HIV positive, anyway, he's here with a lot of problems, right? And we address them, and together we reflect on the guy's quality of life.

This goes on twenty-four hours a day here, there's a doctor, there are health issues.

So, these reflections (...) they are constant reflections, from which we can provide practical guidelines.

Getting a new ID document is the first step towards a kind of reintegration into legality, going to the doctor, and starting treatment are actions preceded by processes with ups and downs, regrets and falls. The next shift, the new technical team, is informed of these facts, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in the rhythm dictated by the 'flow', always there, available, prolonging the hours, days and nights. Think and smoke, smoke and think.

I feel this is how it is when you're up like twenty-four hours straight, right? You change shift, you change professionals, but the care continues because the team converses a lot. We have a logbook, right? (...) we talk for at least half an hour about everything.

Figure 2



Elisângela Silva (2011), "De Braços Abertos" ao "Redenção": um caminho percorrido e uma história a contar, p.52

Health care and social services professionals go to the hotels in response to demands made by the teams, and at other times they may go to the 'flow' or work on the streets performing the same care and assistance, such that the service covers the hotel, the streets, and the drug use scenario.

Yes! This is how it is: These people who live in the hotels and work in the streets roam around a lot, right? There, in the 'flow', and in this territory in general. These people also have a connection, right?

These are the words of Lumena Almeida Castro Furtado who worked as the PBA coordinator in the final phase of the programme when the new hotel teams were hired. You assist those with whom you form bonds, and you form bonds with those who you assist. Every day, there is a search for comprehensive assistance in the formulation of an 'individual treatment plan' by the Department of Health and an 'individual care plan' by the Department of Social Services, which could form the ingredients of what Lumena Almeida Castro Furtado, among others, calls a 'life project' (Anthropology of Drugs, 2017).

Next, we consider how political, collective, and contractual subjects are created in the hotels. When Garcia, Tykanori, and Maximiniano (2014: 154), analysed the PBA, they emphasised its potential to create political, collective, and contractual subjects. Freed from what we call the dictatorship of the 'corre' [alert!] (Alves 2017), PBA beneficiaries now live in another 'daily temporality' and enjoy a new perspective. The contracts established on how routine takes place in these rooms and in other hotel facilities demonstrate the importance of these PBA characteristics very keenly perceived by Ivana, 26, a trained psychologist, who works in one of the programme hotels. She explains why sending people from hotels to the assistance homes (SIATs) is not productive.

I don't believe that people will go there! I think people would rather be on the streets; you know? Many of them have already been to shelters, to 'assistance homes', right? Not many, almost all of them, right? I don't know, but maybe ninety per cent or more. (...) but they adapted to the hotel; it's a different thing, right? There's greater freedom, you feel more at home, more comfortable, their possessions are there, they have their bed, and they arrange it how they want to. But, for example, there are visiting hours, room cleaning, you know? Which we have already agreed upon, and then we agree things with them during our meetings (...).

In the assistance homes in São Paulo, democratic management should be the rule, but it is not. Meetings, when they take place, have limited deliberative power and rules can thus be imposed from top to bottom by the management team. The room for negotiation is usually small, and the hours are strict. In the hotels, the technical staff is usually open to dialogue and they also present a different way to accommodate people in rooms. Having a room of your own, as occurs in the hotels, differs significantly from having a bed to sleep on, the situation experienced in the assistance homes. Space and permission to keep their pets also matter a lot. The image below shows Dedé, a pet belonging to a couple of residents, just outside the steps of the hotel entrance.

Figure 3



Elisângela Silva (2011), "De Braços Abertos" ao "Redenção": um caminho percorrido e uma história a contar, p. 45



Rodolfo, a social worker hired by the Department of Health to work at some PBA hotels, explains the new situation that was created by the programme.

This is also a success in the *De Braços Abertos* programme, where doors are open, and people can come and go as they please, it is like they are in their home, they have no curfew. This seems very important to me.

Having a roof over your head is not the same thing as having the same roof, in the same room and with the same 'buddies'. There is greater freedom and, at the same time, greater stability, a benefit in terms of what J.P. Grund (1993) calls the structure of life: a larger number of affective bonds, commitments, obligations, and responsibilities. Grund considers these aspects to be key for improved relations with drug use and influences the pattern of crack and alcohol use that can change from constant use, say 15 rocks a day, to occasional use. The continuation of our conversation with social worker Rodolfo exposes the way the structure of life operates.

In the hotel I'm at now, for example, I see this a lot, even though there are people who arrive at four in the morning, which is the case of Miguel, aka Zebrinha. He turned sixty last week and he doesn't miss a single day at work.

He sleeps during the day, but not so much. When it's about six o'clock he goes to Bom Prato to eat, which is where we offer food for them to eat (...). He comes back, takes a shower, and goes to the 'flow'.

He returns every day, without question, between half-past three and four in the morning. He arrives, takes a shower, we talk a little, he goes to sleep, and he wakes up at seven for work. Everyday. He was able to get into a routine, which is something a user normally can't do, right?

Zebrinha's case clearly shows how commitments and a place to sleep can have a major impact on a person's life structure, composed of an important set of variables that guided Grund's study and which refer to regular patterns of work, recreation and activity that shape and constrain the daily lives of drug users. It also emphasises the importance of a routine (both conventional and drug-related) that structures daily patterns as keys to a life structure. It seems logical to Grund to include personal relationships, commitments, goals, obligations, responsibilities and expectations that are demanding and simultaneously have social (affective) or economic (salary) value as equally important determinants. Regular contact with users whose addiction is under control and with non-users, such as the professionals who work in the hotels, is also very important. For Grund, it is also essential to take part in structures and activities that are not primarily motivated by drug-related incentives.

The proper political and contractual achievement that Garcia, Tykanori, and Maximiliano (2014: 154) discuss comes from the organisation of genuinely deliberative meetings, in which the team does not relinquish its share of responsibility, as per Ivana, a social worker allocated in a hotel some distance from the downtown scene.

We leave some of our stuff here, but it is not a total mess, you know?

Music. We allowed music, the use of radio and such.

Well, on weekends we can have loud music until a little later, until midnight, right? During the week we can have it on until ten.

When they arrive at the hotel, and it is like ten, eleven o'clock, people are already sleeping, so the volume needs to be lower, something that can only be heard inside their rooms, right?

PBA beneficiaries living in hotels, even after the official end of the programme, could not be burdened with bureaucratic obligations in the name of democracy, with responsibilities and decisions that could displease one

another. Therefore, the programme's team of professionals must take decisions on some issues, otherwise the residents could be at risk. In the example raised by Ivana, it is clear that intimate visits could disturb occupants of the same room. Any misinterpreted act, something that might be seen as disrespect, for example, had the potential to cause hostility. In an interview given at his office, Benedito Mariano, the Secretary of Public Safety, compared the 'flow' to a 'jail yard', where the rules of an organised crime group called the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* [First Capital Command] resembled those described by Biondi (2018).

Therefore, returning to the considerations made by Ivana, the social worker, the sexual habits and modes of the penitentiary system are not necessarily adaptable to life in a hotel. This does not mean, in any way, that they wanted to prevent the formation of lasting bonds between couples. In this situation, however, other rules like the right to have their own place to sleep, came into play. In Ivana's words:

So, let's put it like this, it's the team that makes decisions, right? There will be no conjugal visits, for example, right? Because, firstly, the rooms are shared, right? So, you can't turn the hotel into this prison logic (...) It's like this: if the person has a partner, there are double rooms, right?

Ivana explains that the beneficiaries of the programme live in shared rooms and couples are guaranteed their own room. At the beginning of the PBA, deliberation on changing room occupation was the responsibility of a specific social worker with a few years of experience in Cracolândia issues due to the work she developed at the *Serviço de Atenção Especializada Campos Eliseos* [Campos Eliseos Specialised Care Service]. Something previously analysed by Alves (2017), which is also present to some extent in Garcia, Tykanori, and Maximimiano (2014), is the importance not only of horizontal care with each other, but also of the various sanctions employed to constrain crack use.

## Discussion

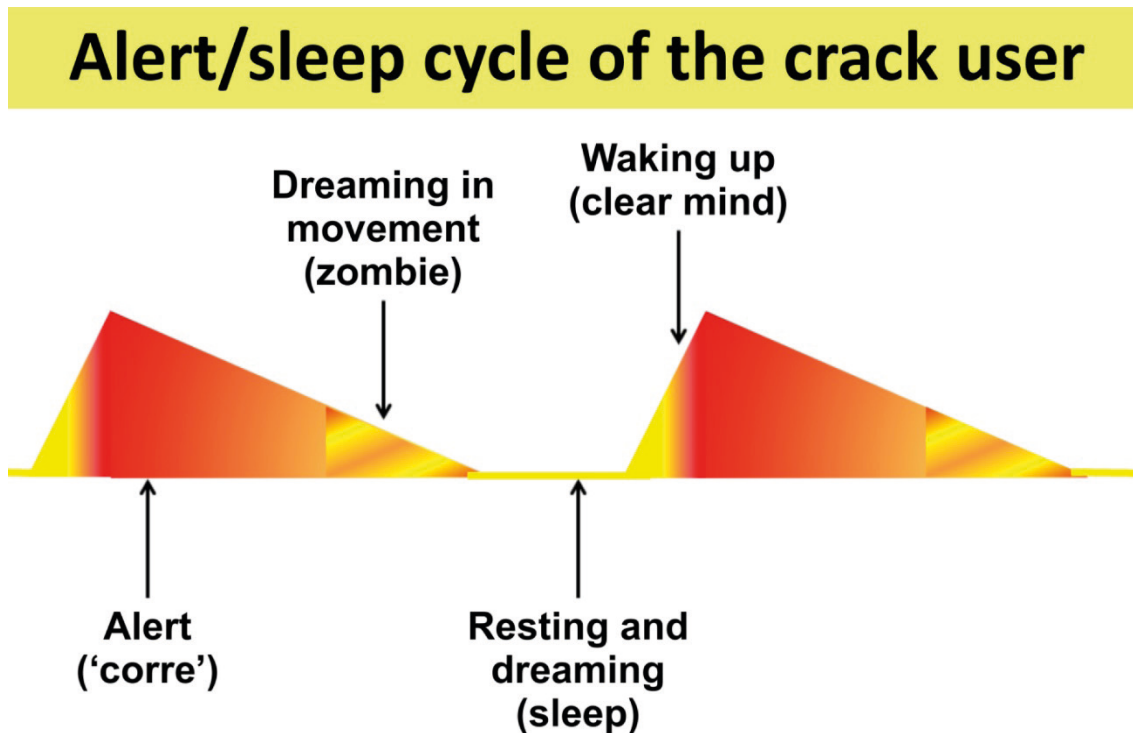
The hotel enables different possibilities of a daily routine lived under the imperatives of the drugs. An everyday life marked by wandering around and by a fatigued, hungry, thirsty body corresponds to a mind conducive to daydreaming and waking up, and then dreaming again until finally shutting down on the sidewalk. Therefore, their state is comparable to that of a zombie, a pejorative term used by the media (Farina Zanotto and Büchele Assis, 2017: 777) to refer to people who use drugs in Cracolândia, that is, a state in which an individual daydreams. It does not refer to the totality of what we called, on another occasion (Alves, 2017), the crack user's sleep/alert cycle, but only one part of it. It refers more specifically to the part corresponding to the state of movement of the body during rest caused by days and days of drug use without sleeping. To assign the crack user the nickname 'zombie' is to take a particular state of their daily existence and consider it as something that happens all day long, every day. This state is followed by proper sleeping, when the body rests, and then waking up with a 'clear mind', that is, ready for a more pleasant 'drag'<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, bodies and minds are seen as one.

The alert mind corresponds to a body in motion, and the fatigued body corresponds to a mind that daydreams. This mind can sometimes be more awake or more involved in dreaming. The shuffled perception experiences the dream in reality, and reality in the dream. It can wake up and dream again and again, and the body will keep moving, following the crack users on their 'walk'. When finally falling into a deep sleep, objectively lying on a sidewalk or poorly accommodated in a shack, the user will be in position to rest a little deeper, but in order to do so, they have first paid the price of gradually fainting, in a long process of fighting to remain a little more semi-awake at the expense of crack rocks. Thus, what is commonly referred to as a

<sup>2</sup> As the former drug user Antonio told us, the wake-up drag, that is, the one taken while their mind was still clear, was the most pleasant one compared with the drags meant to keep them awake.

*binge*, drug use until complete exhaustion, can be better conceptualised by taking into account the user, her/his mind/body in an environment that provides crack rocks. These rocks are obtained through the action of searching for funds and are collected during the '*corre*', which is necessary to maintain their bodies and minds alert until their dreams merge with reality. If drug use generally enables a new perception of reality, crack use blends it with our dreams in an environment where everything seems to conspire to make it rest a challenge.

Figure 4



Having a place to sleep is critical in order to cause a break in the crack user's alert/sleep cycle. Their rhythm begins to be governed by the three daily meals, the working hours of their morning cleaning job, and by nocturnal sleep provided by the accommodation of beneficiaries in hotels in the area. For some, this daily load of activities was increased by participating in vocational training courses, such as gardening, computer skills, hairdressing and others. This corresponds to a range of obligations that structure the lives of crack users and provide them with a daily routine. Several responsibilities were established concerning time, appearance, dress, hygiene, and the maintenance and handling of their learning and work materials. The change in the activities that structure everyday life and the environment in which they live corresponds to a change in that person's relationship with the drug.

Considering that there is no available bibliography on this unprecedented experience regarding the PBA hotels, we set ourselves the challenge to describe them and determine the reasons for their resilience. This article has sought to bridge this gap through the analysis of ethnographic reports, and interviews with healthcare professionals, and social services staff within the hotels. The type and depth of information that emerged depended much on the quality of the relationships established with our interlocutors. It was a movement that emerged from the relationship with them, in order to know more about the relationship between them.

The PBA was a programme run by the city of São Paulo designed to meet the demands raised during 2013 among people who lived in the streets and used crack in the São Paulo region known as Cracolândia, located in the downtown neighbourhood of Luz. It had an inter-departmental character involving the municipal

departments of Health, Social Services, Labour, Human Rights and Public Safety. Implemented in hotels, initially close to the 'flow', over time they improved in quality and were transferred slightly further away. The teams of professionals, hired in the final year of the PBA, could be characterised by their constant search for greater trust, empathy, and the formation of bonds with the beneficiaries.

Lastly, without disregarding the importance of decriminalisation, safe consumption sites, safe supply, and based on that presented in this article, we suggest that: the zombie-like state, unfairly attributed to crack users, can be overcome by creating an environment with responsibilities regarding time, appearance, clothing, hygiene, and the maintenance and handling of learning and work materials, where a person can sleep instead of being forced to stay on the streets. By changing their environment and their daily routines, their relationship with the drug shifts to a more favourable one.

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# Categorisations and transformations of rooting for: Comparative analysis concerning the sportiveness of watching

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## Abstract

Our proposal is to conduct an ethnographic, conceptual, comparative debate concerning the sportiveness of watching, beginning with sociological and emic categories that describe the performance of supporters' clubs in a specific sport, professional football. We will focus on the 'games' between categories that define the spheres of 'rooting for' (a team) in a Brazilian urban context and then contrast these with performances of 'rooting for' (a fighter) in another sports landscape, an Amerindian form of ritual combat that takes place during the interethnic rituals of *egitsü* (*Quarup*) in Upper Xingu, Brazil. The dialectical relationship between playing and rooting for, mediated by watching, constitutes what we define as a 'model of relationships', an analytical and ethnographic construct used to problematise analyses that assume rooting for as a subsidiary and/or epiphenomenal condition of playing.

**Keywords:** rooting for; football; the sportiveness of watching; ritual combat; Xinguan interethnic rituals



# Categorizações e transformações do torcer: Análise comparativa em torno da esportividade do olhar

## Resumo

Nossa proposta é realizar um debate etnográfico, conceitual e comparativo em torno da esportividade do olhar, partindo de categorias sociológicas e êmicas que descrevem a atuação de coletivos torcedores numa modalidade específica, o futebol profissional. Focaremos os “jogos” entre categorias que definem as esferas do torcer num contexto urbano brasileiro para em seguida contrastar às performances do torcer em outra paisagem esportificada, uma luta corporal ameríndia que ocorre durante os rituais interétnicos do *egitsü* (Quarup) no Alto-Xingu/BR. A relação dialética entre jogar e torcer, mediada pelo olhar, compõe aquilo que definimos por “modelo das relações”, constructo analítico e etnográfico utilizado para problematizar análises que tomam o torcer como condição subsidiária e ou epifenomênica do jogar.

**Palavras-chave:** torcer; futebol; esportividade do olhar, lutas corporais; rituais interétnicos xinguanos

# Categorisations and transformations of rooting for: Comparative analysis concerning the sportiveness of watching

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## **Background**

In their multiple manifestations, playful and sportive practices harbour an expressive set of phenomena that take the form of universalised, mass spectacles. Regarding football specifically, a phenomenon with an intense global presence, it is revealing how this sport and related themes, including the fan experience that surrounds it, were not embraced without reservations in academic studies, both by modern historiography and the human sciences. It is evident today that football is an interdisciplinary subject, recognised in a vast, dense and highly diverse bibliography. With regard to European social sciences, sociological thinking was tasked with placing itself at the forefront of sports studies through wide-ranging analytical models<sup>1</sup>.

In this sense, football is imposed as a participant in the historical processes in the transformation of playful bodily activities inserted in a broad westernising process condensed in play practices, which promoted social interactions and urban sociability interlaced with other domains of social life. One canonical example we consider worth citing is the inevitable contributions to historical sociology that thrived around Norbert Elias, an author who advanced sports and football as social facts of relevance on a scale of political and historical importance equal to other phenomena revealed in their sociogenetic interdependencies (Elias and Dunning, 1985; Garrigou and Lacroix, 1997).

While regarding the diverse empirical landscape revealed by this sociological movement to embrace the phenomenon, in Brazil, a large part of the most crucial studies on football originated in another academic field, social anthropology (DaMatta et al., 1982), which has informed investigative paths and provided further impetus for the theme in the social sciences. The methodological and theoretical itineraries of the discipline inflected approaches that stressed the same phenomena of European and American games and sports within the field, in which various meanings of the notion of culture were imposed on that of society.

Thus, football as ritual, as a participant in processes of the symbolisation of identity, or as an expression of classificatory regimes of otherness, took the lead in anthropological approaches. Tributary to this initial movement, known for the rupture it established with various historicist and sociological theses on such themes as ideology, power and stratification (Volpicelli, 1967; Vinnai, 1970), this inaugural culturalist anthropology of football facilitated the transposition of football to the centre of debates on symbolic aspects of nationality.

Later, approaches of a more ethnographic nature were imposed on academic literature as methodological requirements, while football as ritual, which advocated the perspective of the performances of playing, began to embrace other expressive domains within it, enunciating the point of view of watching and imposing an epistemological tension on sociological studies based on playing as a determining instance of practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Assessments of analytical models and theoretical approaches to sports themes by social sciences, in Europe and Latin America, have been detailed in recent works (Toledo, 2019; Costa and Toledo, 2022, 2023).

In addition to the aforementioned pioneering essays in anthropology (DaMatta et al., 1982), research from other contiguous disciplinary areas focused their analyses on notions that include nation, identity, power and ideology, violence, media and mass culture, modernity and globalisation (Meihy and Witter, 1982; Pimenta, 1997; Helal, 1997; Pereira, 2000; Gastaldo, 2002; Morais, Ratton and Barreto, 2008; Florenzano, 2009; Mascarenhas, 2009; Maricato, 2014; Buarque de Hollanda and Burlamarqui, 2014; Simões, 2023).

From an ethnographic perspective, and as a methodological reference, numerous themes related to football have become evident, including approaches to working classes, youth, urban sociability, body and person (Araújo, 1980; Leite Lopes and Maresca, 1992; Toledo, 1996; Guedes, 1997; Teixeira, 2003), which combined with other aspects, particularly after the so-called *década esportiva* [sporting decade]<sup>2</sup>, such as professionalisation, race, gender and sexuality, and social markers of difference (Damo, 2007; Rial, 2008; Silva, 2008; Toledo and Costa, 2009; Spaggiari, 2016; Pisani, 2018; Toledo and Camargo, 2018). Given this multiplicity in the understanding of football: ‘an “instrument of meaning” emptied of its own aspects and filled with other meanings’ (Guedes, 2023 [1977]: 80), it has become increasingly imperative to approach it in its expressive multiplicity as ‘footballs’ (Damo, 2018).

More recently, the comparative enterprise, another proposition raised by this article that has almost always been at the mercy of a broad spectrum of factual views and sociological assumptions, gained the refinement of emic and ethnographic comparisons from another anthropological perspective. Contributing to the discussion of ontological regimes, another epistemological schism was advanced in studies of ludic phenomena, including football itself, which, as is well known, also expanded into non-Western landscapes, above all ethnological.

By developing the description and analysis of bodily disputes that are part of countless ethnographic landscapes, with rich empirical diversity, ‘Amerindian sports’ were approached based on their own categories, mythologies, rituals, and relationalities. Although maintaining different perspectives and interests, authors like Blanchard (1981); Fassheber (2006); Vianna (2008); Course (2008); Delgado (2010); Avelar (2010); Walker (2013), followed similar paths by suggesting similarities between cosmologies, native body disputes, and Western sports. Football, in particular, is a sport that is increasingly consolidating itself as a model of interethnic relationships, ‘the others of our others’, and a principle of spatial/temporal ordering, whether in the daily life of the village or when inserted into the ritual calendar (Costa 2021a).

The itinerary of this article begins with the scenario briefly outlined above, to embrace sportive practices from the perspective of watching, in a categorical movement concerning the notion of rooting for (someone or something) and its prevalent classifications that provide dynamism to an enhanced sociability based on football. Another aspect we focus on here are observations from the perspective of rooting for in other landscapes concerning Amerindian ritual and play practices, specifically their examination in the Indigenous context of a region called the Upper Xingu interethnic complex.

We seek to provide a comparative effort of apparently discontinuous ethnographic landscapes, but which, considered from a categorical point of view, enable us to observe symbolic extensions of categories resulting from both the uniqueness and expansion of playful and sportive practices. The uniqueness is due to the place of ‘rooting for’ in a ritual combat, *kindene*, an ethnography of which was developed with interlocutors of the Kalapalo people, speakers of the Karib language.

This expansion will be verified based on the play of categories of rooting for in the context of Brazilian urban sociability, conveyed to alternative regimes of otherness, as a practice contiguous to Amerindian ritual expressions, as verified in the case of the *kindene* ritual combat and its relationships with the practices of playing and of rooting for.

<sup>2</sup> The ‘*década esportiva*’ is how the period during which Brazil held some of the world’s main sporting events became known: the Pan American Games (2007), Military World Games (2011), FIFA Confederations Cup (2013), FIFA World Cup (2014), World Indigenous Games (2015) and the Rio Olympics and Paralympics (2016). For further reading, see: Damo and Oliven (2013) and Spaggiari, Machado and Giglio (2016).

## The model of relationships

The most general assumption of the model of relationships (Toledo, 2019) is to consider the condition of whoever participates as that of spectator, a universal position in every play and sports system, in the generic category of supporter, that is, those whose representational condition is to root for others who play. It is intuitive to think that in the practice of football, nobody is born a player, a football club manager or a sports journalist, and of course, nobody is born a supporter, but as a stage of possible trajectories, this is probably the most ubiquitous condition and as important as the practice of playing in the definition of the sportive *person*.

Rooting for (someone or something) is a collectively socialised personal pursuit that situates the person in a subjective, emotional turmoil often inherited from family circles and close relationships. However, rooting for is also a reversible condition, after all, at the end of their professional careers, former players or former sports managers can recognise themselves as supporters. Thus, it also imposes itself as a fluctuating condition, pivoting and superimposed on other categories in every sporting culture.

The model of relationships seeks to place under dialectical examination that established as developments of a socio-historical sharing between two sensorial constitutive instances of any sports practice, namely, playing and watching, successively expressed metaphorically in the specialisations and knowledge around two defining nuclei of a social sports organisation, roughly subdivided between those who play or promote the game and those who watch it.

This key, which seeks to criticise the models that presume to or epistemologically depart from this dissociation or dichotomy between playing and watching, we propose that such sensorial qualities operate better through syntheses in which playing is watching and watching is playing, inferring in each of them other dialectical relationships, denominated *play watching* and *watch playing*. In other words, every act of *playing* is also an experience of *watching*, just as every act of *watching* presupposes some form of *playing* in the political distribution of the sensible within play experiences. *Rooting for*, which is one of the expressions of *watching* within sports culture, expands into movements of bodily surrender and expressive techniques, assuming an existential, political and tactical space within the institutional spheres of football.

First, we discuss rooting for and its expansions in sports culture and the Brazilian socio-anthropological context of category appropriations, after which we focus on the uniqueness of an Amerindian playful phenomenon – *kindene* ritual combat. In this combat, rooting for both singularises and exposes the socio-cosmological relationship between ritual and play (Lévi-Strauss, 1962), while providing dynamism to relational alterities.

## Rooting for in Brazilian football and categorical multiplicity

*Rooting for* is not seldom defined as either another functional sociological role or stylisation of fun, leisure, play, or subsumed to subjective functions and, in such cases, conditions a regressive psychologising interpretation that shifts it within an alienable essentialist mass meaning (Vinnai, 1970; Sebreli, 1981). In general, the idea of *rooting for* is also based on the notion of indivisibility from the person as supporter, the result of an order conceived as an intimate personal choice.

The ethnographic view seeks to avoid the generic and instrumental uses of *rooting for* subsumed by sociological totalisations, in which the individual who experiences sport from the functional perspective of *playing* is, more accurately, a citizen, a parent, a sibling, a worker, etc., and from the perspective of *rooting for*, an epiphenomenon with emotional compensatory purposes for other denser, more fundamental relational properties. The universe of the fanatical supporter and the production of native categories that define it re-establish aesthetic and expressive political experiences that put such notions in critical perspective.

In Brazil, fans were historically designated by the collective category *assistência* [audience] (Toledo, 2014), which clearly showed the role of distancing in relation to the sensorial attributes of those who played. Another

category used at the same time was *sócio* [member, partner], and together they formed the first repertoire of terms that were most continually used in journalistic narratives since the first decades of sports activity at the turn of the twentieth century.

*Sócio* designated the most engaged and committed figure within the clubs (associations that offered sports practices), someone who was linked to numerous tasks that condensed various experiences, from *playing* to *rooting for*. The figure of the *sócio* largely remains in football clubs today, occupying recreational, administrative and/or political positions, since *playing* has gained substantial autonomy in the regimes of professionalisation among high-performance athletes.

The formation of communities increasingly interested in the expressive embodied activity of rooting for linked the vicarious gaze to the commodification of the practice supported by political and economic rationalism, conferring a reciprocal but hierarchical commitment to the relationship between *playing* and *rooting for* in the form of sporting spectacles.

*Assistência* (audience) came to express greater emotional engagement with the *watching* transfigured into *rooting for* (supporters), although obviously such designations likely have overlapping origins. Currently, little or nothing about rooting for refers to the category of audience, which in the process of the metaphorisation of its original meaning fell into disuse and unfolded into numerous semantic functions, pressuring the perceptions between *playing* and *watching*.

Subsumed in another category beyond *rooting for*, *audience* was diluted into a more ubiquitous political category: *the public*. It should be noted that spectator is a term oriented by the perspective of the institutionalisation of *playing*, which remains common and instrumental up to the present to designate gregarious dynamics and phenomena or political rhetoric. Based on contractual rationality, the notion of *the public* is aggregated to long-term processes that relate to pacts of mutual responsibility between legally equal individuals supported in the relationships between rights and duties, an appanage of Western societies.

*Watching*, and above all *rooting for*, in principle an action verb (Malaia, 2012), when encompassed by the more generic notion of *the public*, came to mean choices guided by rationalised conceptions within an expanding sports sphere, ceasing to be manifestations determined solely by individual will and local wilful bodily expressivities.

Categories like *the public* and *sports public* began to confer a normative vector to the sporting practices of *rooting for*, a process controlled or symbolically motivated by the conventions present in football towards institutionalised forms of spectacularisation.

However, this process of the convention and extension of metaphors (Wagner, 1981) of *rooting for* in the notion of *the public* or *the supporter public*, which further promoted the distancing effects between *playing* (an increasingly monetised activity) and *rooting for* (a recreational activity), did not deter the emergence of more ambiguous categories in which, over decades and from the perspective of *watching*, some games of definition in the supporters' struggle for existential and political spaces began to compete with the universality and seriousness of the expression *supporter public* in the institutional arrangement of football.

Thus, *massa* [crowd], *povo* [peeps], *galera* [posse], *nação* [nation], etc., and other much more contemporary, dialectal and local groups present in popular fan speech, such as *facção*, *falange*, *consulado*, *bonde*, *pista*,<sup>3</sup> continuously re-semanticise and reinvent rooting for, which from the point of view of the sportiveness of watching seeks to question the universality present in the generic, distanced and aseptic category of *spectators*.

After critical events dating back to the mid-1980s in European stadiums (Roversi, 1990; Bromberger et al., 1995) and then attested to in the 1990s throughout Brazil (Toledo 1996) and in other Latin American countries

<sup>3</sup> These terms are indicative of elements of a team's fan base, with an implicit sense of confrontation: *facção* means faction; *falange* relates to battle lines; *consulado* refers to consulate, a subdivision of a 'nation' of supporters; *bonde* is similar to *galera*, meaning posse or crew; while *pista* is a reference to motorways, though in a more allegorical sense: *pista* refers to fans who accompany their teams to away games, who are prone to violence and commit transgressions during the trip.

(Alabarces et al., 2005), the propensity of ‘supporters’ (fans, supporters, hooligans, ultras, *kurves*, *barra bravas*, *hinchadas*, *torcidas organizadas*)<sup>4</sup> was contained by a broad agenda of state reforms focused on the theme of public security in several countries, with England as the epicentre, through a recomposition of professional spectacle football, for many defined by neoliberal directives aimed at popular exclusion and the elitisation of spectacle football (Giulianotti, 2002).

In the Brazilian context, the category of *the public* was subject to re-semanticisation within categorical games seen from the perspective of those who control the conventions of *playing*. The compound term *sócio-torcedor* [partner-fan], also identified in the terms *consumer fan* and *customer fan*, composed the list of new categories that began to constitute the repertoire of restructuring spectacle football in Brazil from the year 2000 onwards (Simões, 2017).

Public policies induced numerous demands, including consumer rights, the judicialisation of fan transgressions and issues related to stadium safety and leisure in sports venues, generally called for the use of these ‘neutral’ functional categories of the public, consumer and customer. The scope and heuristic character of these categories participate in political and legal decision-making within a process that turned sports into a serious economic phenomenon aimed at maximising rooting for as belonging to the spheres of consumption.

It is clear that the idea of consumption is polysemic and also subject to metaphorisation from the perspective of *watching*, and therefore subject to appropriations in categories based on the perspective of rooting for, given that the very dynamics of transgressions between fan collectives are often considered to be agonistic games of consumption.

Nevertheless, separated from *playing* by the assumption of the category of sports fans, in yet another expansion of the categorical set in which the supporter is also defined as consumer, *rooting for* is separated from ‘sportive’ and even from the original political semantic function associated with *the public*, promoting the economic sphere of consumption as a central referent in its definition, at least from the more hegemonic point of view of the current perspective of *playing* in which the supporter is restricted to the condition of customer.

If, from the point of view of *playing*, the categories of *audience*, *sports audience*, *sports fan*, *sports consumer*, *partner-fan* and *customer* lead to generic transformations within the production process of the spectacle of football, others, such as *crowd*, *nation*, *faction*, *posse*, *crew*, etc., compose the set of native categories attentive to the demands coming from supporters, forming new domains within the logic of metaphorisations that affect the same unfolding historical process in dialectically confronted relationships between the perspectives of *playing* and *rooting for*.

## Mixing categories

These sets of categories more or less established by *playing* and *rooting for* are eventually subjected to appropriations, mixtures, juxtapositions and exchanges among themselves, promoting an anarchy or metaphorical abuse (Almeida, 1999:10) in which categories from the perspective of *rooting for* are tested against the sets of categories that have been consecrated from the perspective of *playing* and vice versa.

Within these two sets that dispute the meanings of *rooting for*, at least two belong to both, they are the generic categories supporters and supporters’ clubs. Centred both on the notion of the ‘individual’ (supporter/fan) and on its collective extension (supporters’ club), these categories blur the line that places institutional experiences and demands around *playing* on one side and on the other, the mass of anonymous individuals involved in political projects that are sensitive to the more collectivised demands of *rooting for*, which strain the spheres of a consumptive sportive individualism.

<sup>4</sup> The native European categories fans, supporters, hooligans, ultras, have relative equivalents throughout Latin America. *Kurves* seems to be very similar to ultras; *barra bravas* are considered dangerous, shout endless chants and use fireworks; *hinchadas* are characterized by chants, flags, supporting dancers and choreographies; while the most popular supporters’ clubs in Brazil are known as *torcidas organizadas*. In addition to their performative and transgressive character, these supporters’ groups show similar features as popular, cultural and political institutions.

Beginning with the generic category *supporters* (and beyond the popular allegorical appropriations *rabble*, *crowd*, *nation*, *posse*, etc.), the culture of football in Brazil has encountered alternative popular collectivist phenomena since the advent of *torcidas uniformizadas*, uniformed fan collectives that from the 1940s onwards gained visibility and political participation on the premises of the first large stadiums built in the country; the inauguration of Maracanã in 1950 is the most emblematic edifice that re-dimensioned football as a spectacle of mass presence.

However, it is the generic category of *supporters* that can be defined as promoting greater transversality and that glides between the categorical games. From the perspective of those who mobilise around *playing*, the supporter appears to be explicitly named and contemplated in the legal system through the *Estatuto do Torcedor* [The Statute of the Supporter], enacted in 2003 (Law n°. 10.671)<sup>5</sup>, which established rules for fan behaviour by formalising a set of rights and duties subject to the consumerist perspective (the right to consume).

Therefore, supporters and supporters' clubs are maintained as interchangeable terms and dispute meanings in contiguous and distinct contexts, feeding notions that refer to rooting for both in popular spheres of sociability (*crowd*, *crew*, *nation*, *posse*) and in support of the legal categories of *consumer public*, *consumer supporter*, *customer*.

### Importing categories, maintaining the playing/watching dialectic

There are categories outside the context of Brazilian supporters that have transposed and come to accommodate sports culture. These categories have even edged into socio-anthropological analyses, suggesting exchanges and importations of both ethnographic and conceptual experiences. Thus, here we focus on the descriptor with the most important semantic and metaphorical extension, the political designation of *hooligan*.

*Hooligan* was a category that became popular in several European sporting contexts due to critical events that have taken place in England since at least the 1960s, but which gained enormous and dramatic visibility in the 1980s, re-dimensioning the production relations of spectacle football in neoliberal moulds and, beginning in the United Kingdom (Giulianotti, 2002), a football management model that assumed the designation of 'modernisation' and was related to issues of fan safety (Tsoukala, 2009), above all, oriented towards the management of spectacles in stadiums. In subsequent decades, its metaphorical uses and expansions would acquire other landscapes, affecting fan behaviour in Latin America.

The specific political phenomenon of hooliganism ended up stimulating a set of concrete actions that began to define a new institutional rationality, gaining autonomy as a diffuse synonym of fan transgression and soon appeared as an inclusive category coupled with numerous other behaviours, while equally serving as political rhetoric to combat violence in sports in distinct landscapes.

Although *hooligan* was not the only category associated with fan transgressions – *barras bravas* used by fans in South America is a contiguous example and partly imported by Brazilian supporters; *ultras* is another European category that appears in the supporter imaginary of the South American continent –,<sup>6</sup> the uses of this expression soon assumed a generic designation of groups of contending supporters in Brazil and gained vocative primacy, especially from the 1990s onwards.

Substituting while also contrasting with the supporters' clubs created in the 1940s, the emergence of the so-called *torcidas organizadas* in the 1970s (Toledo, 1996) were strongly associated with the category of *hooligans* due to their contentiousness and autonomy regarding the way they conducted themselves within the spheres of rooting for, often in open confrontation with the sports institutions that legislate playing. Complex in their social composition, they were systematically blamed for all 'fan violence', a known stigmatising expression

<sup>5</sup> The *Estatuto do Torcedor* [Statute of the Supporter] (2003) is a conceptual development of another normative piece dating from 1990, the Statute of the Consumer (Law n°. 8.078).

<sup>6</sup> As noted by some authors, like Bolaños (2016) in Colombia, and Argentine researchers assembled in a collection organised by Alabarces et al. (2005).

that promoted the dispersion of conflicts and spread a convenient fear so that projects for the elitisation of football would gain moral support and that of public opinion.

At present, hooligan behaviour has been retrieved in fan conduct associated with other categories, such as *bonde*, *facção* and *pista*. From the supporters' point of view, the use of these categories, forged in the context of more transgressive youth groups, tend to enhance the visibility of more forceful forms of horizontal (among supporters) and vertical confrontations (with police) when compared with the sociability present in current *torcidas organizadas*.

After numerous attempts to criminalise the more transgressive *torcidas organizadas* throughout the country, these supporters' associations became politicised in the sense of affirming other demands and collective projects of insertion in the institutional context of football and popular sports culture. In any case, they were protagonists in a scenario fuelled by decades of deliberate promotion of conceptual extension that subsumed the category of organised supporters into that of hooliganism.

In contemporary times, the presence of a myriad of more autonomous demands regarding rooting for, contenders for and adjacent to *hooliganism*, like those observed in associations designated *bonde* and *torcidas de pista* in Brazil, *barra bravas* in Argentina, as well as the presence of collectives on the right (ultras) and left (antifas) of the ideological spectrum, is due to the diverse responses of supporters in the face of overpowering processes of modernisation that redefined the vectors of consumerist exclusion in countless projects concerning the symbolic reframing of the presence of supporters at football spectacles.

In short, the sportiveness of watching understood through the model of relationships allows for disputes over the categories of rooting for to be situated at the epicentre of political phenomena bound to playing, a movement commonly characterised ethnocentrically as civilisational, urban and modern. However, the sportiveness of watching is not necessarily a prerogative of Western historical societies.

We now subject the model of relationships, which recommends that the instances between watching and playing are taken to be dialectic, to an examination of another ethnographic landscape. Here, the ontological exteriority of *rooting for* is taken into account, radicalised by explicitly establishing other approximations between watching and playing, which comparatively open up to new terminological and performative adventures of rooting for.

### Supporter transformations: *watching/playing/rooting for* in Upper Xinguan ritual combat

One of the main conceptual concerns regarding the diverse ethnic and linguistic group that inhabits the region known as Upper Xingu, in the southern portion of the Xingu Indigenous Territory,<sup>7</sup> is considering the 'limits' that differentiate them from neighbouring peoples, an alleged idea of 'totality', or even 'Upper Xinguan specificity' (Hugh-Jones et al., 2015). The peoples traditionally described as forming this regional complex are: the Kalapalo, Kuikuro, Matipu and Nahukua (*karib*); the Yawalapiti, Wauja, Mehinaku (*arawak*); and the Aweti and Kamayurá (*tupi*). They live according to a regime of matrimonial, commercial and ceremonial exchanges, wherein the ritual universe is the presumed 'lingua franca' in this communication system<sup>8</sup>.

The region has been the focus of an extensive literature over a wide range of topics,<sup>9</sup> and a form of wrestling has been described since pioneering authors Von den Steinen (1894), Murphy and Quain (1955) and Schaden

7 The *Território Indígena do Xingu* [Xingu Indigenous Territory] is located in Mato Grosso, Brazil. Within its extension there are numerous indigenous groups located among the sources of the Xingu River. For details on Law no. 50.455 of April 14, 1961, which demarcated the area, see Lea (1997).

8 An intense debate concerning what the 'upper Xingu system' is gave rise to the dossier: '*Antropologia, arqueologia e linguística no Alto Xingu*' [Anthropology, archaeology and linguistics in the Upper Xingu], recently published in volume 18, number 1 of the *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi - Série Humanas Ciências* (Barcelos Neto and Valentini, 2023). War and ritual, chieftaincy and sorcery, commercial and marriage exchange networks, food, genealogy, were all themes raised that indicate the relevance of the notion in the integration between peoples. The most general idea defended here is that *kindene* is one of the ethnographic aspects that configure this notion, one of the differential markings that consolidated the interethnic group around what is known as Upper Xingu.

9 Within our objectives, we highlight the so-called 'language of corporeality' and the processes of building of the body and construction of the person that provided new impetus to the ethnology of the South American lowlands (Overing, 1977; Viveiros de Castro, 1979) directly linked to the universe of ritual combat.



(1965). Following the demarcation of the Xingu Indigenous Territory, authors began to more fully consider the relational universe that was encompassed the regimes of exchange that were formed and the gradual abandonment of the practice of warfare (Menget, 1978; Menezes Bastos, 1989; Gregor, 1990), consolidating what became known as the *pax xinguana* [Xinguan peace]. This transformations between war and ritual (Costa, 2022), metaphorised in the transformation of the enemy into an adversary, situated both in native discourses and in theoretical references, is discussed here according to the variable positions taken by fighters and supporters during interethnic confrontations. Despite the diversity of this ceremonial complex, we specifically focus on the post-funerary ritual *egitsü*, better known as *Quarup*, as the central theme, since it is in *Quarup* that the *kindene hekugu* [real fight] takes place.

*Kindene*, also known as *huka-huka*, is a form of grappling combat between two opponents in which the objective is to reach the back of the opponent's leg, hold him from behind or apply some type of throw. It is a very technical combat, with many different movements and tactics, in which competitors move around in circles before colliding with the aim of grabbing the opponent's hands and neck. The intention is to disrupt and unbalance the opposing fighter so that you can reach the back of their leg, a result that, due to the distance between the fighters and their supporters, can generate doubts and contradictions concerning the results, triggering ambiguous celebrations.

Currently, as a way of dealing with this ambiguity, each *sinhongo* [supporter's group] sends a representative who remains close to the fighters precisely to 'watch' the matches. They are known as *nginiko* (lit. 'watchers'), and are former champions who get close to the fighters and incite the participation of the supporters every time a grab leaves room for doubt. Sometimes each of them calls different results, which are accompanied by the respective supporters, transferring emotions between the effective competitors and their collective supporters (Costa, 2021b).

The fights are fast and intense, with a large predominance of draws – not losing is one of the main qualities of great champions. It is worth noting that fights between champions take place separately, one fight at a time, the purpose of which is to grant visibility to the best fighters. These champions, who go through differential processes of constructing their bodies and their formation as people (Costa, 2020), are presented at the regional level as potential future caciques and, at this stage in life, being a champion is fundamental in the construction of their biographies. The other combats take place at the same time, following the same rules and developments, with more than 20 simultaneous fights.

Another organisational division is that established between competing teams: the hosts confront the guests separately, competing in many more combats than their opponents. The relational dynamic, anchored in kinship, means that a regime of alliances and oppositions begin with the relationships between the caciques and the deceased being honoured. Relatives of the dead form part of the same combat team, allied with the hosts, and face off against the other guests.<sup>10</sup> These dynamics are situational, with teams changing at each new ritual in honour of the deceased of each occasion, which highlights the idea of *tetsualü*, the 'mixture', the 'colour' among the peoples of the region (Mehinaku, 2010).

This ethnic and linguistic multiplicity, experienced during a period of the abandonment of warlike practices in the name of matrimonial, commercial and ceremonial exchanges, ended up reshaping interethnic relationships between the different peoples that live in the region. Here we consider, through the model of relationships, the way in which the ritual combat is a typical example of this transformation. Initially, when instability in the relationships and the possibility of warfare was a constant, there was a certain inseparability between war and ritual, in the sense that both were conducted at the same time and among the same peoples,

<sup>10</sup> For a better appreciation of ritual positions in *egitsü*, Guerreiro (2015), Fausto (2017). Here we specifically discuss the combat teams that reverberate among the supporters: hosts plus allies versus guests, with interchangeable positions at each event.

depending on a set of factors. This is common in the literature more specifically on the theme of war in the region, and in the many stories that are told about warrior incursions and the extermination of peoples.

It is evident in the works of earlier authors, such as the aforementioned Steinen and Schaden, who indicate how the relationship between the supporters was such that their participation was almost nil, abstaining from celebration or provocation, due to the ambiguity of being face to face with potential enemies, even though they were competing in a fighting modality. However, due to the transformation processes that the region has gone through, the *pax xinguana*, this group of peoples, sometimes uniting alterities under the same name in the same village despite their internal differences, eventually consolidated this regional system. Gradually other peoples stopped being invited, owing to the absence of fighters. As this occurred, the performances of the supporters became more active and it is in this sense that we highlight the transformations in rooting for, since their participation in the combats continues to increase, which also makes the fight a function of rooting for.

If commemoration was previously subdued, today it is roused to action by the figure of the *nginiko*, the ‘watcher’, hence the emphasis on these transformations, despite the consolidation of the *pax xinguana*, because like in any other sporting or disputed environment, rivalries can arise and fights occur, and the performance of the *caciques* is essential to calm people’s tempers.

## Relational multiplicities

For the Kalapalo,<sup>11</sup> *kuge hekugu* [real people] is a kind of self-reference, coming out of the *otomo*, meaning ‘the people of’, denoting familiar surroundings commonly related to some territory. *Kuge* (people) are those with whom interethnic relationships are established, whether through rituals, commercial trades, matrimonial exchanges, in short, the nine peoples who share the same way of life: a fish-based diet, pacifism, circular villages, the avoidance among affines. *Ngikogo* are ‘different others’, Indigenous populations with whom they have sporadic contacts, ‘ugly, angry’ peoples, the image of distant, dangerous otherness. Lastly, there are the *kagaiha*, ‘whites’. Knowing how to fight is an essential condition to be considered *kuge*, that is, the fight, among other aspects, assumes the condition of mediator of relationships of otherness.

Following this relational dynamic, which associates and differentiates through distance gradients, Patrick Menget (1977) highlights that the idea of ‘totality’ in the Upper Xinguan system is concentrated in two institutions: the kinship system and war, principally through processes of name capture. Although we will not discuss these fundamental issues here, especially given the transformations between war and ritual experienced through combat, we emphasise the notions that Menget develops concerning the so-called ‘morphological levels’ in an attempt to identify the elements of identity and otherness present in intra and interethnic relationships: the domestic fire, the most intrafamilial level; the village, intermediate level; and the regional level, marked mainly by the set of interethnic ceremonies.

Beginning with the most intra-sociability, kinship in the domestic nucleus and its spatial expansion, first to the patio of the village, the public, the place of late afternoon conversations, the model attains the regional system, markedly ritualised interethnic relationships, the place of sociality, expanding even more when going beyond the confines of those considered to be *kuge* (people).

Observing this intricate system of alliances and oppositions that compose the ritual universe allows us to glimpse the background relationship that interests us here, that is, between fighters at the peak of their performances – *egitsü* – and the supporters’ groups that change according to kinship relationships between the chiefs and the honoured deceased.

<sup>11</sup> The people with whom one of the authors of this text conducted 14 months of field research to complete his doctoral thesis (Costa, 2013).

In the case of Upper Xingu, and the entire discussion concerning the biographical character of champion fighters, of their individuality (Barcelos Neto, 2012), what happens is that the constructing their bodies and their formation as people are connected to their results in the fights during *egitsü*. When demonstrating this biographical character, it overlaps with others that modulate a whole relational set of 'supporters' that moves beyond a more restricted, familial level, and expands until it achieves what we might call a higher level, which is precisely the final showdown in *egitsü*. A unique moment in the set of interethnic relationships in which all the peoples are present in the same space/time. The expectations and frustrations that associate fighters and supporters, and the ways in which these emotions are transferred during ritual combat, construct this path from the individual to the collective, and from the collective to the individual.

Thus, we have the family nucleus that produces champions (the idea of a house), and the associations surrounding a cacique that promote a village, which through kinship relationships form the fight teams that, in turn, form contextual supporter associations between a set of houses and a set of other villages related through kinship between the deceased and those honoured. These champions and their respective supporters face off against other groups formed from the same relationships, or even through the previously mentioned overlaps that inform these levels.

Therefore, what happens with the relationships that involve the supporter universe in Upper Xinguan ritual combat is directly linked to the context of producing alliances for the fight and rooting for within the regional complex. Choosing opposing fighters is, to a certain extent, choosing supporters, which brings them closer to our perspective of played watching and or watched playing, given the imbrication of both processes: the formation of fighters from the *otomo* and the formation of supporters from the alliances. Thus, rooting for is revealed less by the supposed instance of a fleeting subjectivity (rooting for as a merely personal recreational form) and alienated from fighting (playing), and assumes an act of deciding within more fluid political agreements given the possibilities of disputes revealed in expressive interethnic relationships.

The peculiar outcomes with these Indigenous supporters' groups are that rivals in one *egitsü* may root for their former opponent in the following event, and the supporters act the same, shouting out the victory or calling a draw. Despite this variety, those who form part of the same crowd in a specific event will root for their fighter, even when he is not from the same town or village as the supporter. This symbiosis between fighter and supporters promotes immediate identifications, marked by ritual time/space, that breaks through the boundaries of villages, ethnicities, linguistics. In other words, it is as if this process establishes the necessary connection between *playing* and *rooting for*, anchored in a system marked by ethnic and linguistic variation, whose components sustain associations or rivalries through kinship relationships.

We return to the transformations highlighted in the literature on rooting for and the way in which regional pacification changed supporters' performances, even ratifying the central position of the *nginiko* (Costa, 2023). If in the past, supporters were supposed to abstain from any manifestations due to the inherent risks that placed them face to face with potential enemies, today their participation is incited. In other words, there is an appeal to the sportisation of this participation that confers some homology to that which occurs in the sphere of football. Here, the dispute between the fighters is transferred/transformed into a dispute between supporters through the *nginiko*, promoting a situational variability, a *played watching* that transfers the emotions of the fight to the performances of the 'watchers' themselves who define who the winner is.

Beyond this performative transformation of supporters, who connect with the played practice through the eyes of these *nginiko*, it is important to emphasise that the variability in the collectives formed is the distinguishing mark of the universe of rooting for in relation to the combat. In contrast to that discussed in relation to the universe of football, here it is not a question of expanding and mixing games of categorisation, which presupposes the historical and epistemological separation engendered between playing and rooting for, but rather emphasising the volatility and the way in which such dynamics are directly linked to the sociological

precepts in their ethnographic context. Thus, once again we emphasise the importance of kinship and the contextual relationships of alliances formed in this organisation of the teams, since it is through them that the supporters are also consolidated.

We have then a relational set that begins with involvement at the most familial, domestic sociability, and evolves through consanguinity as a mark of kinship and the construction of bodies and the formation of people, specifically in the figure of the fighter. This is projected in interethnic relationships, in the domain of sociality, when facing other champions in ritual moments sustained by new extensions of rooting for.

### **Final considerations: the sportiveness of watching**

We began with the example of the sportiveness of watching established in the category of *audience*, in a still tenuous urban context of the emergence of football in Brazil at the onset of the twentieth century, to homologously observe the presence of Xinguan *nginiko*, the ‘watchers’, who induce incisive forms of supporter competitiveness in *kindene* combat within a traditional funeral ritual. Our efforts sought to clarify that the perspective adopted here is not intended to establish immediate comparisons, but rather to articulate ethnographic and conceptual expansions within what we define as a model of relationships.

Football, a reference modality in sports studies, and *kindene* combat, originating from ethnological research, both spheres of *play*, were considered from the same perspective, that of *rooting for*. It was possible to observe the different ways that these modalities of *playing* enter into a dialectical regime with *rooting for*, with the supporters and with the categories that define them in each case.

The universalist historical vocation that imposes a sociological separation between playing and watching football allowed for the establishment of the incessant production of political categories of rooting for, in the same movement that it does not conceal the games and tensions that concern the manner in which supporters accommodate, experience or question the historical transformations within the institutionalization of this sporting modality.

Whereas with regard to supporters in the ritual combat, the issue lies in the interethnic complexity marked by kinship and the language of corporeality, which are defined and concern the apogee of the cacique-fighter. Far from the stylisation or complete autonomy of the fighter, competitiveness in current times establishes the sportiveness of watching the combat as an indicator of interethnic pacification, revealed in the supporters who amplify the forms of the results forged in the supporter relationships, approximating the fighting (*playing*) and the rooting for.

The categories of rooting for in football have tended towards speculative movement between two sets that reveal distances, proximities and mixtures, accommodating the expansions of *rooting for* that surround a *playing* that is intended to be increasingly circumscribed by the commoditisation of rooting for. This movement was never spontaneous, but articulated to the forms of playing that re-dimensioned football into a globalised, mass, mega spectacle within expanded production policies, as advocated by the concept of the ‘FIFA standard’, aimed at establishing or domesticating both the organisational forms of playing and the expressive, not infrequently political and insurgent, forms of rooting for.

In the Xinguan context of ritual combat, due to the ceremonial organisation, the kinship between the caciques and the deceased to be honoured, the caciques gather around them their peoples and their allies, building teams and situational supporters’ groups. If certain people are participating together with others, they root for fighters in common. However, if they are in antagonistic positions in the next event, opponents in the fights, they will root against that same fighter.

The profusion of alliances, intimately linked to kinship, is experienced in different ways at each new ritual, as each of them honours the deceased with whom they had their own relationships. Ethnographically,

it is like rooting for a fighter who is now an ally, due to the fact that he is part of the same fighting team as the supporter, while in the next event it could be that they are rooting against the same fighter. The supporters are formed at each new ritual and are internally differentiated based on the language of kinship, but with the decisive idea of *tetsualü* [mixture], which begins at the more restricted, familiar level and expands to the formation of an ethnic identity, marked by pluralism.

Thus, the transformations of rooting for are considered from the imminent risks of animosities, to the consolidation of the *pax xinguana*, while also marked by variations in kinship among the caciques and those honoured, which change with each new ritual. Thus, if we sought to classify the supporters' groups of Upper Xingu fighters, who actively participate in the developments of the combats through their own performances, it would be like fusing several layers, one top of the other, based on the diverse ethnic mixture.

It should be emphasising that, in this case, unlike the terminological disputes present in rooting for in football, the practice of rooting for is the same, since singing and shouting about the victory of your competitor or calling a tie to end the fight and start the next one characterises the only condition for or category of rooting for. What changes is the composition of the supporters, not the very category that defines the sociological place of the supporter. Adhesions to teams of specific fighters are altered in different ways to account for these dynamic relationships of otherness.

However, both football and *kindene* ritual combat do not encourage the existence of their supporters solely for reasons that sociologically justify the former as mere consumers of a spectacle and the latter as formers of alliances aimed at strengthen the victory of fighters. Indeed, the forms of rooting for in each specific context dialectically connect the sportiveness of watching the bodily forms of playing and fighting, where one transforms the other in reciprocal speculative movements.

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# Louis-Joseph Janvier and “The Detractors of The Black Race”: An Anthropological Critique

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## **Abstract**

Ideas of hierarchy, inferiority and racial inequality predominated in the work of certain European intellectuals of the 18th and 19th centuries on the idea of ‘races’. The Société d’Ethnologie de Paris (SEP) and the Société d’Anthropologie de Paris (SAP) are two French institutions that had intellectuals who participated in the consolidation of these conceptions. Since the 18th century there have been criticism by black intellectuals; however, with the emergence of the First Black Republic of the modern era in Haiti, these criticisms gained new contours. Many Haitian intellectuals in the first and second half of the 19th century dedicated themselves to combating hierarchical ways of thinking, demonstrating their inconsistencies. In this article, based on bibliographical research, we consider the anthropological work of the Haitian Louis-Joseph Janvier (1855-1911), highlighting his contribution to struggles toward deconstructing the imaginary of racial inferiority attributed to black people and used to legitimize their domination and exploitation. Discussing the racial issue in Janvier’s thinking is relevant as it continues to be a dilemma and a challenge in the contemporary world.

**Keywords:** Race; Racism; Louis-Joseph Janvier; Anthropological thought; Haitian social thought

# Louis-Joseph Janvier & “Os detratores da raça negra”: Crítica antropológica

## Resumo

No pensamento de certos intelectuais europeus do século XVIII e XIX sobre raças, predominaram ideias de hierarquia, inferioridade e desigualdade racial. A *Société d’Ethnologie de Paris (SEP)* e a *Société d’Anthropologie de Paris (SAP)* são duas instituições francesas que tiveram intelectuais que participaram da consolidação dessas concepções. Desde o século XVIII existiam críticas realizadas por intelectuais negros; contudo, com o surgimento da Primeira República Negra da era moderna no Haiti, essas críticas ganharam novos contornos. Muitos intelectuais haitianos da primeira e segunda metade do século XIX se dedicaram a combater as formas hierárquicas de pensamento, demonstrando suas inconsistências. Neste artigo, por meio de uma pesquisa bibliográfica, apresentamos algumas considerações sobre as obras antropológicas do haitiano Louis-Joseph Janvier (1855-1911), destacando a sua contribuição nas lutas para desconstruir o imaginário de inferioridade racial atribuído às pessoas negras e utilizado para legitimar sua dominação e sua exploração. Discutir a questão racial no pensamento de Janvier assume relevância na medida em que este continua sendo um dilema e um desafio no mundo contemporâneo.

**Palavras-chave:** raça; racismo; Louis-Joseph Janvier; pensamento antropológico; pensamento social haitiano

# Louis-Joseph Janvier and “The Detractors of The Black Race”: An Anthropological Critique

Frantz Rousseau Déus

## Introduction

At the height of the slavery of African peoples, the idea of race was used to explain what led a group of men to appropriate themselves of a group of women and men, indenturing them into forced labour. Thus, race, as an idea anchored in biology<sup>1</sup>, was employed during the period of Transatlantic slavery as a tool of classification, hierarchization and domination. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, African intellectuals<sup>2</sup> had, in an isolated manner, assumed positions against the enslavement of Africans, but it was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in the wake of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), that matters of race, enslavement, inferiority, superiority, and freedom came to be more systematically questioned by Black intellectuals.

An unprecedented event in Western modernity began in August of 1791<sup>3</sup>. This year was the springboard for the largest revolution carried forth by enslaved Black peoples, transgressing the socio-political and economic orders of the time. People who had been conceived as objects or merchandise, who had been pushed to the margins of history, became the authors of a successful revolution, overthrowing slavery and the French colonial order at once. From the very first uprising of enslaved peoples in 1791, the revolution saw thirteen years of intense fighting before the Independence of the Haitian Republic was proclaimed in January of 1804 (James, 2000 [1938]; Trouillot, 2016 [1995]; Fischer, 2003).

Following the armed struggle which resulted in the Revolution, the ‘consolidation of an organicity of Haitian intellectuals’ sought to give sequence to the struggle in their writings. The launched at debate which was, at the same time, political, philosophical, historiographical, and anthropological, rethinking ideas which were central for European intellectuals, such as freedom and equality. These Haitian intellectuals desired not only to resignify these concepts, but also to widen them so as to include those people whose humanity had been denied. They presented themselves as defenders of the Black race. It is not by accident that René Depestre wrote that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Haiti was the only place in the Western Hemisphere with an *organic intelligentsia* compose of Black people who fought for the “rehabilitation of the Black race” (Depestre, 1980: 23). This does

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1 During its drawn-out elaboration, the idea of ‘race’ was inflected in different ways, and its meanings changed according to historical circumstances. In light of this fact, the British anthropologist Peter Wade offers a chronology of ‘race’ which suggests that it is more readily understood when seen as a process. During different times, ‘race’ was related to culture, the environment, biology, and culture again (Wade 2017). Wade’s chronology addresses the work of another British sociologist, Michael Banton, who also discusses the “racialization of the world”, which is the title of the third chapter of his book *The Idea of Race* (2010 [1977]), in which he analyses the historical construction of ‘race’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, confronting the different arguments presented at the time. Stressing the controversies surrounding the idea of ‘race’, Banton reveals the different ways Western scientists have elaborated racial typologies: i) biblical-religious; ii) anatomic and physiological; iii) geographical locale; iv) physical format; v) culture (Banton, 2010 [1977]).

2 We can, as an example, take Ottobah Cugoano (1757-1791), also known as John Stuart, who was born in Axim, in modern-day Ghana. He was kidnapped and sold as a slave, taken to work in Granada. He later travelled to England where he learned to read and write in English, and became a renown abolitionist (Winter, 2013, p. 260). He was already critical of slavery and the slave trade in his 1787 work *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*. His critiques stressed the relation between economy and slavery. In his words, “[...] slave owners have no other intention than that they [the slaves] serve them like machines or beasts of burden; that their own tranquillity and profit advance by means of a ragged and poor bunch of men and women, that the despise and treat like animals, maintaining them and their children in perpetual slavery, with a merciful death the only way to rid themselves of their labour” (Cugoano, 2013 [1787], p. 273).

3 The slave uprising occurred on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1791 (Rossignol, 1992, p. 154). On the Haitian Revolution, see C. R. L. James (2000 [1938]); Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2016 [1995]).

not mean that there were no other Black peoples, in other countries, who defended the Black race; only that, in the young Haitian nation, this defence was part of the ‘political programme’ of intellectuals.

The critique of the idea of race pursued by Haitian intellectuals did not amount to a complete rejection of ‘race’, such that it would no longer be necessary to speak of it at all; on the contrary, their aim was to demystify race, to deconstruct it. These activist intellectuals realized that, having been constructed, it was no longer enough to just pretend that ‘race’ did not exist, nor could it simply be ignored. They chose instead to discuss its principles and consequences in the everyday practices of racialized societies. In this way, the equality of the human races is not only a founding idea of the Haitian nation, but also the basis of its social thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

There are many names that make up the list of intellectuals of Haitian social thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, some of them have been and are the subjects of various recent studies, including, for example, Joseph Anténor Firmin (1850-1911) and Philippe Hannibal Price (1843-1893)<sup>4</sup>. This article focuses on the writings of Louis-Joseph Janvier (1855-1911), a contemporary of Firmin and Price.

Through a review of the literature, this article considers the anthropological dimension of much of Louis-Joseph Janvier’s work. It first briefly considers the idea of ‘race’ through two *savant* European societies: the Société d’Ethnologie de Paris (SEP) and the Société d’Anthropologie de Paris (SAP). It then turns to Janvier’s critiques of how some 19<sup>th</sup>-Century European intellectuals presented the idea of ‘race’. Finally, it reviews some of the critiques of Janvier’s ideas.

## Race in French intellectual thought in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Racial theories have occupied an important place in the scientific and philosophical thought of various European intellectuals<sup>5</sup>, particularly during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Many of the naturalists and philosophers who have dedicated themselves to the issue presented an idea of ‘race’ that followed a hierarchical classificatory logic of inferior race, superior race, unequal race.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in light of the struggle against slavery that irrupted throughout the Americas, and particularly after the success of the Haitian Revolution, many European intellectuals began an ardent defence of the inequality of the human races, striving to uphold slavery. Many scientific societies – the *Sociétés Savantes* – were created during this period, and such ideas were prevalent in their intellectual output

In 1839, William Frederic Edwards (1777-1842) founded the *Société d’Ethnologie de Paris* (SEP)<sup>6</sup>, one of the first French *Sociétés Savantes*, which contributed to the creation of the *Science de l’homme* in Europe. Through the

4 On Joseph Anténor Firmin and Hannibal Price, see: Déus (2020); for more information on Firmin, see the work of Fluehr-Lobban (2000); Marques & Kosby (2020); Silva (2020), Troitinho (2021), among others.

5 Among the European intellectuals who wrote on race is the Swedish botanist Carl Von Linné, who, in his *Systema naturae* (1793 [1735]), provided a classification which placed African Blacks at the lowest rank of the hierarchy (Linné, 1793: 33); the Frenchman Georges-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon, who published his *Histoires Naturelles* in two volumes: the first is dedicated to the *Histoire Naturelle des animaux* and the second to the *Histoire Naturelle de l’Homme* and they concern, respectively, races of animals and the human species. Although he held a more or less positive view of Blacks, they nonetheless occupy the lowest rank of his classification (Buffon, 1749). In his *Treatise on Metaphysics*, the French Enlightenment philosopher François-Marie Arouet, known as Voltaire, argued that the Black man is not a human being like others, but a type of man with a degree of superiority in relation to other animals (Voltaire, 1978 [1735]: 62). In 1795, the German zoologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, like other naturalists of his time, was concerned with explaining skin colour variation in human beings. He concluded that climate and way of life caused black skin in the inhabitants of warm region, which the customs of people of the north, on the contrary, contributed to their whiteness (Blumenbach, 1804: 18). Even though the author concluded that the varieties of humanity composed a single species, he was in agreement with the idea that the Black man’s appearance made him closer to the other apes than other men. He wrote, “it has been alleged that Ethiopians have more to do with monkeys than other men, *I agree with this*” (Blumenbach, 1804: 304). On more detailed panorama on the idea of race, see Banton (2010 [1977]); Wade (2017).

6 Williams Frederic Edwards (1841) sought to diversify the members of the SEP, bringing together seven geographers, seven naturalists or zoologists, six doctors, six historians, five explorers, five politicians, and three men of letters. In 1840, Auguste Le Duc, hailing from the Indian Ocean, became the first member from the colonial world. SEP succeeded in enrolling not only people from the colonial world – military men, diplomats, colonial doctors, travellers – but also people from the financial and economic sectors. Gustave d’Eichthal came from this field, bringing with him his brother, the banker Adolphe, in 1843, and his father-in-law Édouard Rodrigues in 1844. During its existence, SEP helped to rethink the colonial issue in England after the Revolution of 1833. It inspired the creation of the Aborigines Protection Society (APS), in London in 1837. In 1842 the Ethnological Society of London was created, dedicated to studying colonial subjects (Bernon, 2018: 3-4).

*Société*, Edwards proposed to reconstitute the *Science des Races*. The aim of his investigations was to demonstrate the existence of races via their physiological characteristics. He defined his programme as “studies of human races”, taking ethnology to be synonymous with “raciology” (Mucchielli, 1997: 77).

In 1842, Edwards left the board of the SEP for health reasons. His exit resulted in an intensification of the articulation between SEP and colonial matters, since “colonial interlocutors began to participate more fully in the materials analysed, [and] the colonial matter gradually penetrated the definition of the objects of study and the specification of methodologies” (Bernon, 2018: 8). Discussion surrounding the *race nègre* – the Black race – came increasingly to the fore in light of the abolitionist debate.

With the participation of scientists, members of parliament, and colonial agents, political and scientific arguments were enmeshed in the SEP. Confrontations were common between abolitionists and anti-abolitionists, the latter also compliant with ideas regarding the inequality of races. Two names had a fundamental impact on these debates: Victor Schoelcher (1804-1893) and Gustave d’Eichthal (1804-1886), the secretary of the SEP. The former was an abolitionist member of parliament who defended the equality of all races (Tomich, 2009), and the latter was a naturalist who divided humanity into two racial groups – Black and White – taking skin colour as a determining criterion.

In a SEP assembly in 1847, Eichthal, through an analysis of “the past”, spoke of the elements that justify white domination, making a natural racial dependence of Blacks on Whites explicit. Thomas Bernon (2018: 13, my translation) paraphrases Eichthal:

The “development of science” is proper to the white race, while the black race is destitute of it. Or, more precisely, without the “initiation of the whites”, the black race has “no civilizational initiative”. Thus, even if the black race is presented as being theoretically capable of scientific development, his opinion is that tutelage will be necessary.

According to these ideas, the Black man is unable to enter civilization without the mediation of the white man. Thus, in every situation, blacks depend on whites to become civilized. For Eichthal, “much like women, blacks are not equal to men in ‘an absolute sense’, but his function, the ‘role’ of the black man is also important in the ‘human couple’ (Bernon, 2018: 13).

The debates at SEP anticipated the work of authors such as the French diplomat Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), one of the most prominent defenders of ideas of racial inferiority and superiority in his *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853-1855) [An Essay on the Inequality of Human Races]. His writings have earned him the title of the true father of modern racism, particularly for sustaining the idea that there are three races – black, yellow, and white – and upholding the thesis that human races are gifted with unequal aptitudes. According to Gobineau, one race is superior to another, and their inter-breeding results in an inevitable process of degeneration.

Joseph Gobineau was not linked to anthropological schools, but, like all bulwarks of inequality and the inferiority of human races, he argued that the white race was the only one gifted with perfectibility. For Gobineau (2004 [1855]: 67), racial inequalities are not social constructs, nor do they stem from institutions, because “the idea of a natural, original, clear and permanent inequality between the various races, is, throughout the world, one of the oldest and most widespread opinions to be had [...]”. However, the Haitian author Anténor Firmin, a critic of the idea of ‘race’, refuted Gobineau’s opinion, stressing that “the division of people into distinct races, classified according to the principles of the natural sciences, began to emerge only with the birth of the ethnographic science” (Firmin, 1885: 204).

The Société d’Anthropologie de Paris (SAP), created by the French surgeon Paul Broca (1824-1880) in 1859, was another scientific society that played an important role in the scientification and legitimation of ideas of inequality among the human races. Scientists linked to the SAP saw ethnology as a potent methodological tool that could establish the “truth” about racial differences, since ethnology enabled:

The particular description and determination of these races, the study of their similarities and differences, the relationship between physical constitution and intellectual and social state, seeking out contemporary affinities, their distribution in the present or the past, their historical role, their more-or-less likely and more-or-less dubious kinship, their respective positions in the human series; this is the object of that part of anthropology called ethnology (Broca, 1871 in Mucchielli, 1997: 77) (my translation).

Paul Broca was moved by the same curiosities that moved monogeneticists and polygeneticists in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, to wit, the origin of the human species and its varieties. The medic rejected both the views of the monogeneticists and the polygeneticists which rested on Biblical theses<sup>7</sup>, as well as the view of those who based themselves on climatic premises. Relying on a “scientific argument”, Broca (1860; 1861) defends polygenism, postulating different origins for the human species. He writes:

It has been well-established that the colour of men is always the same within the same or similar climates, that his skin, black below the equator and in the inter-tropical zone, gets progressively lighter as we move to one or the other pole, and that, in the two hemispheres, it presents the same tonality in each point of the various isothermic lines; in a word, if we could find a constant, or near-constant, relation between climate and colour, the opinion of unitarianists on the matter of pigment would take on a serious appearance, even if it is not fully proved. [...] let us say that sun tanning produces a skin colour that has no analogy with that of blacks (Broca, 1860: 460-461) (my translation).

Skin colouring, physical constitution and the measurement of the skull are some of the elements that the author studies to sustain his thesis. To write about the foundation of racial differences, Broca (1860: 459) underscores that “among the anatomical characteristics that distinguish the Ethiopian from the Caucasian, I take skin colour as primary, and if not the most serious then the most apparent”. For the surgeon, this is the primary natural datum that reveals that the human species does not share a common origin. For him, the transformation of a White man into a Black man or vice-versa is impossible. Broca’s argument is situated within a logic that delegitimizes the unitarian view of human species. Contrary to the monogenetic view, Biblical damnation and climate cannot explain why Ethiopians have black skin. He continues to stress that each species’ skin colour is immutable; a change can only occur in exceptional cases, such as albinism, a pathology present in all races (Broca, 1860: 478).

The demonstration of the divergent origins of Blacks and Caucasians and the inferiority of the former – whom, according to Broca (1860: 503), possess a physical constitution midway between European man and the ape<sup>8</sup> – is not limited to colour alone, but also includes the measurement of the skull, face, trunk, and members (Broca 1860: 501).

To sustain his theses, he spent many years measuring cadavers through two methods that he himself developed. The first involved filling the cranium with lead and then weighing it to obtain an indirect estimate of cranial volume. The second involved the removal of the cadavers’ brains for weighing (Vidal, 2004: 146-147).

Broca wanted to show not only that races were “inferior” one in relation to the other, but also that women were less intelligent than men. He argued that craniology and the study of the constitution of the head provide valuable criteria for establishing anatomical parallels between the races, since it made possible the measurement their intellectual and moral worth. Moreover, the analysis of crania captures the degree of perfectibility of races because the shape of the cranium relates to intelligence (Broca, 1861: 2-3). These arguments were evidently

7 Broca asked the following question: “Must science be forced to remind theology of the Holy Scripture?”. To which he replies: “The editor of Genesis did not write anything that could be directly or indirectly related to the distinction of races after the Flood. Far from claiming that Noah’s curse had the singular consequence of changing the form and colour of the descendants of Ham, it indicates precisely the contrary, and nothing less than the need to destroy a belief opposed to orthodox faith to decide to tell here this old story that everyone tells without knowing it. [...] Thus far it is about damnation and slavery, and not about a change of colour (Broca, 1860: 456) (My translation).

8 “[...] it is clear that the foot of the negro recalls somewhat the posterior hand of quadrumanes. In Caucasians, the length of the thoracic member is shorter, when compared to the abdominal member, than it is in Ethiopians; when the length of the forearm is compared in both races to the arm, we find an analogous, and even sharper, difference. These two zoological figures still place the negro between the European and the ape” (Broca, 1868: 504).



challenged by many 19<sup>th</sup>-Century intellectuals. Anténor Firmin was one such intellectual whose important studies were the basis for a severe criticism of these ideas of the Black race.

Firmin was a lawyer. During his time in Paris as an emissary for Haiti, Louis-Joseph Janvier introduced him to the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* (SAP). He became familiar with the arguments that eminent naturalists, anthropologists, doctors and surgeons were developing regarding the idea of ‘race’. Realizing that the thesis of the inequality of races was almost unanimously accepted in the scientific community, Firmin felt obliged to look into the matter (Déus, 2020a). As a result, in 1885 he published the monumental *De L'égalité des races humaines: Anthropologie positive*<sup>9</sup> (On the Equality of Human Races: Positive Anthropology). The Brazilian anthropologist Omar Ribeiro Thomaz stresses that, with this book, Firmin can be claimed as one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology (Thomaz, 2011: 280). Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, in turn, notes that Firmin provided important contributions to Anthropology, anticipating what would later be called *Cultural Anthropology* (Fluehr-Lobban, 2000).

Let us turn to some of Firmin’s rebuttals of Broca’s scientific claims.

In criticizing the outlook of a thinker such as Broca, Anténor Firmin acknowledges that, during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when a first-rate scientist has set himself the task of revealing his scientific “truth” in the heart of the academy, no one in the scientific world could challenge him. For Firmin, Broca was the greatest representative of polygenism in his time. As a *libre penseur*, he was against the religious dogmas used by many monogenists to speak of the unity of the human species. Yet, when establishing his own dogma, Broca behaved like all dogmatists. Firmin (1885: 56) writes: “An intellectual order such as Broca’s would not easily bear the yoke of any dogma more scientific than religious. But, sadly, having become one of science’s princes, he dogmatized himself”. Firmin points to the dogmatism of SAP’s founder:

If, during the best period of his scientific career, he was presented with a black cranium weighing over 1600 grammes, with a facial angle of some 80 degrees, he, and any of his former colleagues at the Société de Biologie, would have probably indicated an error of measurement, since it would not be possible for this cranium to be black, because the phenomenon contradicts the laws of anthropology (Firmin, 1885: 57) (my translation).

The inferiority of the Black man that Broca set out to prove was proven as he expected; that is, it was confirmed, even though the facts disproved it. Through Firmin’s work it becomes evident that Broca depicted Blacks as ugly as possible, because ugliness was another sign of inferiority. Broca presented the Black man’s physiognomy with the following characteristics: narrow and receding forehead; a nose compressed at the base and flattened at the nostrils; eyes wide open with hazel irises and yellowish sclera; extremely thick lips, protruding outward and forward; prominent jaws, shaped like a muzzle, with long and oblique teeth (Broca in Firmin, 1885: 58).

It should be noted that, unlike Broca, Firmin’s arguments in defence of the Black race were aimed at backing and/or “correcting” those of his friend and compatriot, Louis-Joseph Janvier, to whom I now turn.

## **Louis-Joseph Janvier: a defence of the Black race in the Republic of Haiti**

### Short biography of Louis-Joseph Janvier

Hailing from a protestant family, Louis-Joseph Janvier was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1855 in Port-au-Prince. His grandfather was close to Alexandre Pétion (1770-1818), who governed the western part of Haiti from 1807 to 1818.

9 It is symptomatic that Firmin’s work was published in the same year in which the Conference of Berlin (1885) took place, in which colonial European powers war partitioning Africa, giving birth to a new phase of European colonialism and imperialism. It is symptomatic for having been held in a context in which African and diasporic thinkers were questioning the very kernel of the idea of the superiority of the Europeans.

His father had relations with Faustin Soulouque (1782-1867) and Nicolas Geffrad (1806-1878), who respectively governed Haiti from 1847 to 1849 and from 1859 to 1867<sup>10</sup>.

Janvier’s primary and secondary studies were in a Wesleyan Protestant school in Port-au-Prince, and he began his medical studies in the Medicine Faculty in Port-au-Prince. With a scholarship from the Haitian state, he left Haiti in 1877 to pursue the remainder of his medical degree in Paris. In 1888 he completed his degree with the highest grade of his class (a *lauréat*). He continued to live in France and began to study political science, economics, administration and diplomacy at the *École libre des sciences politiques* (today known as Science Po – Paris), and Law in Lille.

Aware of the anthropological and political debates of his time on the notion of ‘race’, Janvier became a member of the *Société d’Anthropologie de Paris* (SAP) in 1882 (Chemla, 2005: 9; Silva, 2020: 153). During this period, he regularly published articles and essays in magazines and newspapers, seeking to defy the current negative representations on the Black race. He also became a member of the *Société de Législation comparée* (SLC) (Comparative Legislation Society) and the *Société Littéraire Internationale* (International Literature Society) (Silva, 2020: 153).

In Europe, Louis-Joseph Janvier established contacts with many progressive French intellectuals, such as the poet Charles Marie René Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894), the poet and novelist François Édouard Joachim Coppée (1842-1908), the poet and literary critic Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), the Cuba-born French poet José-Maria de Heredia (1842-1905), the geographer and anarchist Jean Jacques Élisée Reclus (1830-1905), the French poet Judith Gautier (1845-1917), among others (Chemla, 2005: 9). Janvier was furthermore friends with the French abolitionist senator Victor Schoelcher (1804-1893). It was Schoelcher who wrote the letter which became the introduction to the volume *Les détracteurs de la race noire...* (1882) edited Louis-Joseph Janvier. In this letter, Schoelcher wrote: “My heart will always be with you in support of the cause of the black race, which produced the great Toussaint-L’Ouverture and many other men notable by their intelligence, virtues, dignity and desire for enlightenment” (Schoelcher, 1882: 2). Since the primary aim of this work is not his biography, I merely note some of the intellectual figures with whom Louis-Joseph Janvier kept in touch to stress that he was not an unknown character in French intellectual circles.

From 1884, onwards, Janvier was charged with various diplomatic missions by the Haitian government. From 1889 to 1904 he was sent to London, first as a delegation secretary, later as business chargé d’affaires, before being nominated resident minister at the Court of St James’s. He returned to Haiti in 1905 after 28 years abroad. He attempted to unsuccessfully follow a political career, favouring a civil government, after which he went into exile. Despite being nominated minister-council in London, he moved to Paris after a disagreement with Duraciné Vaval, who was the nominated minister (Chemla, 2005).

In 1902, he married Jeane-Maria Windsor, a British woman who died on the birth of their only child (Chemla, 2005: 28). Louis-Joseph Janvier died on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1911, the same year in which Anténor Firmin died (Chemla, 2005: 9). He left behind a large body of work, some of which is analysed in this article.

## Louis-Joseph Janvier and the “detractors of the black race”

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, few Haitians knew how to read and write, and few joined the intellectual and philosophical debate against the racist ideas disseminated by some European thinkers regarding the

10 Janvier was Black, but was part of a Haitian elite. His father’s proximity to the *mulâtres* (mulatto) politicians mentioned above sheds light on the matter of race (skin colour) in Haiti’s post-Revolution history. After the Haitian Revolution, skin colour started to be a factor in political arenas, whether by Black politicians to disparage mulattoes as the natural allies of white colonizers, or by some mulattoes to affirm their purported natural superiority (Étienne, 2007). Nonetheless, there is not a historically rigid separation between Blacks and Mulattoes in the political arena. For example, in reference to the two largest Haitian political parties in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Parti Nacional and the Part Liberal, despite the fact that the former is generally described as being a Black party and the latter a Mulatto party, certain authors have convincingly shown that this duality is simplistic and false. Anténor Firmin and Edmond Paul, for instance, are two Black intellectuals linked to the Parti Liberal. Demesvar Delorme and Frédéric are two renown Mulatto intellectuals associated with the Parti Nacional (Hurbon, 1987: 92). In what pertains to Janvier, we do not know if he ever supported a political party.

Black race. Among the authors of the first half of that century, we can include: Louis Félix Mathurin Boisrond-Tonnerre or Boisrond Tonnerre (1776-1806), secretary to Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1758-1806). In 1804, soon after the Revolution, he published *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire d'Haïti* (Memoires in the Service of Haitian History). An even more prominent intellectual was Jean Valentin Pompé de Vastey or Baron Vastey (1781-1820), secretary to King Henri Christophe (1767-1820). Vastey published a number of works, the most well-known of which is *Le Système Colonial dévoilé* (The Colonial System Unveiled), in 1814.

Boisrond Tonnerre focuses his writings on a defence of his young nation, as well as on the description of the main events, happenings and battles that took place during the revolutionary process, denouncing the cruelty of colonization, particularly of the French. Baron Vastey went further. He engaged in a scientific, philosophical and historiographical debate aimed not only at (re)thinking colonial issues, but also at deconstructing the restricted humanism of Europeans. *Le Système Colonial* was translated into various tongues, and was widely read in the north of the United States of America, influencing US abolitionists. The relevance of Vastey's thought led him to be called the “Alpha and Omega of Haitian literary intellect” (*Review of New Books in Daut*, 2012: 36).

Indeed, the issue of the integration of Africans and their descendants in Western universalist humanism-enlightenment, and the acceptance of the first Black republic in the modern era as an independent country, was likewise a concern of Haitian writers in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The consolidation of scientific racism at the start of the century afforded greater consistency to debates concerning racial matters. As we have seen, the historical relegation of Black people gained legitimacy in the writings of many natural scientists, doctors and in the thought of certain European philosophers. Faced with this scenario, Louis-Joseph Janvier wrote a number of works in defence of the Black race, seeking to refute those European writers whom he called “*detractors of the Black race*”.

Louis-Joseph Janvier never hid his discomfort, and even his rage, at the works on Haiti and the Black race:

There are those who, when they hear an insult, have the habit of using white gloves to respond to the slanderer. Not me. I feel my blood boil and become feverish with rage whenever someone or something dear to me is attacked. And I have the custom of defending the object of my love with a fury that my age and temperament easily explain (Janvier, 1882a: 43) (my translation).

For Louis-Joseph Janvier, representing Haiti in such a grotesque and rude manner was not only a slander against the Haitian people, but an attack on all Blacks. For him, Haiti emerged as the starting point for the emancipation<sup>11</sup> of all Black peoples on the face of the earth:

It was the independence of Haiti that determined the emancipation of Blacks in the English colonies, the founding of Liberia, the emancipation of Blacks in Martinique, and, later, in the United States. It is she, this independence, that, by a splendour that you do not know, which petty spirits that slander your country, pessimists whose excuse rests on their egotism, men of little faith – it is this independence and this autonomy of Haiti which has exerted a commendable pressure on some governments and determined the emancipation of Blacks in Puerto Rico and Brazil (Janvier, 1882a: 56) (My translation).

Such a consideration becomes more explicit in Janvier's writings when he stresses that “*Pour la race noire, Haïti c'est le soleil se levant à l'horizon*” (For the Black race, Haiti is the sun rising on the horizon) (Janvier, 1882b: 57). The writings of Louis-Joseph Janvier and his collaborators were presented as retorts to various European writers, particularly French writers who disseminated negative ideas about the Black race and the Republic of Haiti. For instance, in his book *Un peuple noir devant les peuples blancs, étude de politique et de sociologie comparées* (A Black People Before White Peoples, a study in comparative politics and sociology) (1882a), Janvier critically responded to those he called ‘detractors of the Black race and of the Republic of Haiti’. This work continues

<sup>11</sup> The idea that Haiti emerges as the springboard for the Black race is present in the writings of all Haitians thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Anténor Firmin (1885) and Hannibal Price (1898) speak of the rehabilitation of the Black race by Haiti.

in *Les Détracteurs de la race noire et de la République d’Haïti* (The Detractors of the Black Race and the Republic of Haiti) (1882), which gathers articles by various Haitian intellectuals, such as Louis-Joseph Janvier, Jules Auguste, Clément Denis, Arthur Bowler, Justin Dévost, etc. All of these intellectuals were enraged by how the Black race and Haiti were treated by various European journalists and intellectuals.

The main theses which were read in scientific and journalistic circles celebrated the incapacity of the Black man to enjoy his freedom, his incapacity for civilization. It is such theses that these writers sought to discredit. As Clément Denis (1882: 11) stresses, “for too long they have insulted the Black race and the only country in the world where she constitutes an independent State. We justify and correct this error that we live in semi-barbarism”. For Denis as well as other defenders of the Black race who were his contemporaries, the Black race is perfectible, but, because of the dehumanization of slavery, needs time to (re)manifest this perfectibility. In response to the charge that Blacks are incapable of betterment, he writes:

I will not commit to scientifically observing the claim that the Black race is incapable of betterment. The solution to this great problem of the perfectibility of the Black race will come from us, free Blacks; but it may be the task of many generations successively inheriting the acquired development (Denis, 1882: 11) (My translation).

What is at play in this struggle of ideas is the argument that the races are morally and intellectually unequal. Louis-Joseph Janvier criticizes the author Léo Quesnel, who had written:

If the theory of racial inequality needed confirmation, it would be confirmed by the futility of the efforts of Haitian Blacks for over a century in constituting a society. And he adds – with the scholastics, he says – “what happens in time happens in eternity; in other words, the law of nature is immutable” (Quesnel in Janvier, 1882b: 17) (My translation).

To refute Léo Quesnel’s opinion, Janvier had recourse to the arguments of some naturalists. Despite presenting a favourable opinion of Blacks, by dabbling with the craniology of the polygenist school he seems to momentarily agree with the methodologies used to place human beings in a hierarchy. He quotes the founder of the Anthropological Society of Paris, pointing out that:

As my first evidence, I will refer to the betterment of the Black type in this island, an advancement that the eminent Broca, the most enlightened of French anthropologists, only two years ago told his students, at the Necker Hospital, that he recognized a Haitian at first sight, by his frank and proud eyes, full of flashes, as well as by his wide and rounded forehead and his secure demeanour, unmistakable signs, he proceeded, of a great capacity of the braincase and of a spirit at once firm and intelligent (Janvier, 1882b: 18) (My translation).

When he approaches this incapacity from the intellectual vantage point of Africans and their descendants, Janvier refutes this position through the examples of the children of enslaved people who went to great universities the world over: “In the United States we find parsimonious, active, organized Blacks who think about their own future; they are members of Congress, their sons go to the schools and universities of West Point, where they study science, mathematics, disciplines which were previously inaccessible to them, along with their white brethren” (Janvier, 1882b: 18). He continues to stress that Haitians have proved the same in the universities of Paris. They can be found in the benches of the Collège de France. In the School of Medicine, the School of Law, the Central School, the Sorbonne, they pass their exams with brilliant results and surprise their professors with their various abilities and hard work (Janvier, 1882b: 19).

Louis-Joseph Janvier did not realise that for racist scientists with colonialist aspirations, Black participation in intellectual activities that had previously been restricted to whites was not enough for the former to be considered human. In other words, although Blacks who went to Euro-American universities performed excellently in various scientific and intellectual fields, coming from a race which “western science and philosophy” considered inferior, their results were insufficient to prove their humanity.

Léo Quesnel claimed that “the African race, left to its own devices, would spiral in a vicious circle, and the only way it may be elevated is through contact and fusion with the white race: fusions of ideas, fusion of heart, fusion of blood” (Quesnel in Janvier, 1882b: 33). Louis-Joseph Janvier (1882b: 34) agrees that there should be an exchange between these peoples: “certainly, there should be a fusion of ideas between the two peoples, one can feed of the literature of the other”. It is clear from Janvier’s writing that, although he followed a path in which he sought to defend the Black race and the Republic of Haiti, he tried to prove to Europeans that Black Haitians were on the road to “civilization”, thereby conforming, in some measure, to that which Europeans believed was necessary for the Black race to be viewed as civilized. For instance: “Science in Haiti is entirely European; and the ideas of the Paris school are prevalent in jurisprudence and medicine, as well as in natural and philosophical sciences” (Janvier, 1882b: 33). Janvier also argues that the fusion of blood had taken place, that is, that all Haitians of both sexes had some drop of white European blood.

What left Janvier perplexed was Quesnel’s idea that Haitian Blacks should be “absorbed” by the whites through the fusion of blood. Louis-Joseph Janvier did not disagree with a spontaneous miscegenation between Whites and Blacks, but he was against the idea that migratory policies which sought to take European whites to Haiti to “absorb” Blacks, so that the latter would disappear, should be encouraged – as in fact had happened in many Latin American countries<sup>12</sup>.

Contemporary Haitians have every reason to believe – and rightly so – that the mass immigration of whites would be fatal to their autonomy, to their very existence as a nation. They very well admit sporadic, individual, and gradual immigration of whites; in this way, the white element has time to fuse with the Black element and to defend the interests of Haitian nationality, in a word the absorption occurs to the benefit of the native race of Haiti. But we reject the idea of a selection by absorption which would occur to the benefit of the immigrants, for two main reasons: 1) for a philosophical, physiological and historical reason; 2) for a political reason (Janvier, 1882b: 36) (My translation).

The realization of a new anthropological experiment in Haiti is the reason why Louis-Joseph Janvier opposes mass white immigration to absorb the native population. Furthermore, he disagreed with the idea that Blacks should be absorbed, eliminating the African element so as to ascend to civilization. Despite his adherence to western civilization, Janvier was struggling against that idea that only the white man is synonymous with the human, the civilized, the intellectualized, the beautiful, etc.

If these naturalists theorized and “proved” the intellectual capacity of Black peoples, Janvier (1882b: 37), in considering that this argument lacks merit, underscored that, “from the intellectual point of view I will refer, in support of my thesis, to the great faculty of understanding that Haitians have acquired: no science, no art, is beyond them. No sooner do they put their heads to study and assimilate something, than we are surprised to see how easily and rapidly they achieve success”. Ironically, Janvier notes that “all of these brains that armchair anthropologists such as M. Dailly believe to be stupid, are moulded to be filled without bursting, and are kept in skulls that can very well become capacitated” (Janvier, 1882b: 38). He criticizes the following idea held by Léo Quesnel:

12 Louis Henry Gates Jr, a historian and specialist in African and Afro-American cultures, stresses, in a study of the conditions of Black people in Latin America and the Caribbean, stresses that after the abolition of slavery almost every Latin American and Caribbean country started on a project of bringing Europeans over to promote inter-mixing in order to whiten the population, and, consequently, to reduce the number of Black people in these countries (Gates, 2011). This project was inspired by European eugenics, and aimed at “improving” race; this practice became a mechanism of social and racial control. Eugenics left its mark in Europe, North and South America, and Asia, in countries such as England, Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland, Sweden, Belgium, the USA, Cuba, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil and Japan (Góes, 2015: 43). In what pertains to Brazil, Lilia Moritz Schwarcz has shown how the idea of whitening the population penetrated deep into Brazilian society. With its project of whitening, Brazil was considered a country in transition: miscegenation was but a stage in a wider process which sought to make Brazilian society whiter by accelerated inter-breeding of races through a “natural selection” (Schwarcz, 2005: 12). Nonetheless, the author makes it clear that there was a great theoretical debate surrounding the notion of race. Social Darwinism and Evolutionism influenced the many interpretations of racial inter-breeding. Concerning miscegenation, Giralda Seyferth stresses that “it became a privileged topic of the Brazilian national discourse after 1850 – seen as mechanism for forming a nation since colonial times and the basis for a future Brazilian race, a national *type*, resulting from a selective process aimed at whitening the population” (Seyferth, 1996: 43).

Nothing can be done with a society composed entirely of blacks. Sending young blacks to study in Europe is hardly a remedy, since they accumulate more resentment against the whites than obtain knowledge from them, and the mistrust of whites is the permanent misfortune of Haiti (Quesnel apud Janvier, 1882b: 46) (My translation).

For Janvier, Quesnel’s claim is riddled with prejudice and he can see nothing positive in Blacks. The allegations against Haitians who were studying in foreign universities are baseless, and indicative of how these authors do not accept seeing free Blacks take charge of their own destiny.

Physical beauty is also a theme mentioned by Louis-Joseph Janvier:

Beauty is a sign of freedom and intelligence. I add that this natural selection occurred by the intrinsic transformation of the Haitian type, by mixing African blood with the European blood on the island after Haitians proclaimed their independence in 1804 (Janvier, 1882 b: 47).

It is well-known that prejudice of colour and racism played a fundamental role in the structuration of colonial societies (Tolentino, 2014; Sala-Molins, 1987). Louis-Joseph Janvier admits this, but, when writing of the progress of the Haitian population, he claims that this evil imposed by the slaveholding system is almost disappearing and is not very visible in Haitian society. Nonetheless, he allows that, during certain specific times – such as political crises, legislative or presidential elections – this problem can become manifest. He also states the prejudice of colour “can be observed in some rare, narrow, superficial, ignorant, or monstrously perverse minds, however enlightened, or even in some weak souls, full of visions or chimeras and in a panic of imaginary fears” (Janvier, 1882b: 50).

We can see that his desire to defend not only Haiti, but also to correspond to an idea of civilization, leads Janvier to occasionally ignore the profundity of the legacy of the slaveholding-colonial system, particularly in the form of racism. Louis-Joseph Janvier was completely mistaken by his understanding that racism was on the verge of disappearing in Haitian society, or that Haiti was a country practically devoid of racism.

Justin Devost also criticized Léo Quesnel for “believing that the Black race is affected by a cerebral incapacity that will prevent it from ascending by its own efforts to the level of European civilization” (Devost, 1882: 83). Devost argues that Haiti’s condition stems from a very complex historical process<sup>13</sup>, but that it is not a matter of race. He claims that many writers who criticized Haiti were nostalgic of slavery. Another criticism that Devost refuted was the idea that Haitians in general hated France, and that Haitian students who went to France returned to their country not with the intellectual knowledge they acquired, but with hatred of the whites. Haitians would furthermore be against inter-racial relations, and they hated Europeans. In consonance, Devost (1882: 99) points out that:

[..] Unions between Haitians and Europeans are very frequent. And, had our opponent obtained information from reliable sources, he would know that Haiti is by no means a closed-off land. Many foreigners live there. They are welcomed with the warmest hospitality [...] (My translation).

Jules Auguste, much like Devost and Janvier, shows himself to be outraged with the views of French writers such as Quesnel, Lasselve and Renan. His criticisms, however, were directed at the *Revue politique et littéraire* (Political and Literary Journal), which published any text on Black peoples without considering their academic rigour or the precision of the information propagated. He wrote: “And now, without any control, the *Revue politique et littéraire* accepts works of fantasy that can distort the minds of readers who are avid for precise scientific novelties. This is not how history is told” (Auguste, 1882: 103-104).

13 “The heroic struggle of 1803 and the ensuing ruins; the large and crushing indemnization of 1825 – 129 million Francs paid in cash to France; the oscillations of internal politics, and internal struggle for a truly democratic government..., these are the causes which prevented us from developing with the facility and speed we had hoped for” (1882: 81).

Augusten proceeds to criticize the following claim made by Lasselve: “The Black man is radically incapable of any elevation. His natural inferiority is quickly revealed... The brain has hardly expanded. He hates the white man” (Lasselve, 1882, in Auguste, 1882: 119). Looking at the development of Haiti, Quesnel and Lasselve claim that Blacks are incapable of building a society. In reply, Auguste stresses that “our society, like all other in every country, has its imperfections and its positive aspects” (Auguste, 1882: 122).

Arthur Bowler is another Haitian writer who challenges the prejudice of some French writers who insist that Black Haitians do not like white Europeans. According to Bowler (1882: 147), these writers should admit that it is they who do not like Black people. He addresses the eminent Léo Quesnel, claiming:

Thus, admit it, Mr. Quesnel, that you do not like Blacks! Above all, admit it that, were it not for the generous hearts in France who know how to place themselves above petty matters of skin-colour prejudice, and if all of your compatriots had as little affection for us as you do, that we would be right not to like them! (Bowler: 147) (My translation).

Belief in the innate inequality of human beings and the innate inferiority of Black people constituted a field of political, literary, and scientific debate in which various authors faced off against each other throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. *Les Détracteurs de la race noire et de la république d’Haïti* (The Detractors of the Black Race and of the Republic of Haiti) is a book edited by Louis-Joseph Janvier which contains articles from various Haitian intellectuals, and it seeks to strike at the heart of the arguments of authors considered to be *enemies of the black race*.

The refutation of the prejudiced argument of these authors set the groundwork for the idea of the unity of the human species and to claims of racial equality, as well as to challenge the idea of racial inferiority. His work *L’égalité des races* (The equality of races), starts from the presupposition that “every people needs a great ideal to live, to go forth, to prosper and to shine. And to speak of a great ideal is also to speak of a programme”. Janvier states that:

*The programme of young Haiti, cognizant of the importance of the dignity of a nation of the Black race, is: to speak for a race entirely, to present its aspirations, proclaim its ideas, doctrines, reclaim its moral hegemony until such time as it can act for itself* (1884: 12) (Our emphasis).

By considering the relations established by peoples in a process of domination and advancement, through which people considered barbarous strive to approximate to civilization, Janvier claims that the French philosopher and historian Ernest Renan was mistaken for defending, in the preface of his *Dialogue Philosophique* (Philosophical Dialogues), that “men are not equal and races are not equal” (Renan, in Janvier, 1884: 19). Ernest Renan claims that “the negro, for example, is born to serve the great things desired and projected by the white man [...]” (Renan in Janvier, 1884: 20). For Janvier, it was this pseudoscientific doctrine that allowed “the abominable traffic in human flesh which lasted for so long, and it is behind this traffic that authors continue to seek refuge to confer an appearance of reason to their stupid prejudice of colour” (1884: 20). Janvier criticizes E. Renan for failing in his engagement with one of the towering intellectual figures of his time, and for dissimulating prejudice against Black people (Chemla, 2005: 19).

Louis-Joseph Janvier laments the fact the contact between white Europeans and Africans occurred only in a logic of exploitation. It is this exploitation that explains so many depreciative opinions that relegate Black peoples to the nonhuman level. Even if, in the post-slavery period, humanity produced political men such as Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743-1803) in Haiti and Frederick Douglas (1818-1895) in the USA, western thinkers continued to insist on the idea of the moral inferiority of the Black intellect.

After the abolition of slavery in Haiti and after abolition and emancipation in the USA, the progress obtained by Blacks in the field of politics, journalism, and science, Janvier stresses, are evident proof of the perfectibility of the Black race.

The Black race has shown the philosophical speculation is familiar to it, and the study of mathematics is not above its understanding. The contemporary philosophical movement, under the stimulation of Schopenhauer and Herbert Spencer, is not strange to Pierre Laffitte or André Lefevre, and thus, just as we see many young Blacks going to West Point, in the United States, and leaving it with the epaulette of an officer in the federal army, much as we can count Blacks in the French colonial forces among members of the *École Militaire de Saint-Cyr* and the *École Polytechnique*. In the same way, the Republic of Haiti is very well represented in the scientific colleges of Paris (Janvier, 1884: 26) (My translation).

As initially stressed, the idea of the equality among human race is the basis of both the Haitian nation and Haitian social thought. This conception is present in Haiti's first constitutions. It is in the constitution of Toussaint L'Ouverture from 1801 and in the constitution of de Jean-Jacques Dessalines from 1805. For both revolutionaries, “before the Supreme Being all mortals are equals” (Fischer, 2003). Equality is also feverously upheld by the first Haitian thinkers. While this equality was argued mostly in the political sphere, the publication of Louis-Joseph Janvier *L'égalité des races*, in 1884 anticipated Joseph Anténor Firmin (1885) by providing a more explicit formulation of the idea of the equality of races (Déus, 2020a).

According to Yves Chemla, in *L'égalité des races*, Janvier attacks the main personage of the French intelligentsia of the time, Ernest Renan, in the three prongs of morality, history and scientific reason. First, Janvier admonishes Renan for a completely gratuitous claim and for failing in his own commitments as a *homme de culture* [man of letters] (Chemla, 2005: 19). Louis-Joseph Janvier also criticizes the eminent French intellectual for not taking into consideration the true condition of enslaved Blacks and for considering social inequality to be an “inequality of nature”. Thus, for Renan, the enslavement of Black people was an attempt to save them from their inhuman state (Janvier, 1884). It should be recalled that these debates occurred while Janvier was in the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* (SAP), one of the most adequate places to carry out these debates at the time. Without neglecting the relevance and importance of Janvier's work, Firmin provided important critiques of it.

### Certain critiques of the thought of Louis-Joseph Janvier

Louis-Joseph Janvier is part of a set of intellectuals whose mission was to deconstruct ideas of racial inequality and to prove that intelligence does not depend on race. Concerning Janvier, Firmin observes: “As for Monsieur Janvier, he alone would suffice to prove to what heights the intelligence of the Black man can rise in the superior regions of the mind [...]” (Firmin, 1885: 464).

Although Firmin agreed with many of the writings and the struggles of Janvier, he did not hold back when it came to criticizing him, particularly when Janvier allowed himself to be flattered by the preposterous compliments of certain European thinkers, and when he agreed with the scientific opinions of Paul Broca – which proposed that the size of an individual's cranium determined his intelligence. Paul Broca claimed that he could distinguish, at first site, a Haitian from other Blacks by the size of their cranium and their wide and vaulted forehead, by their frank stare, etc. Firmin was severely critical of his compatriot who, based on a “biologism”, suggests that he is in agreement with the relation established between the size of the braincase and intelligence. According to Firmin, intelligence and intellectuality do not depend on the size of the individual: whether he is small or big he can display great intellectual aptitude (Firmin, 1885: 260-1). The rehabilitation of the Black race, as proposed by Firmin, cannot occur on the basis of scientific arguments anchored on racism and prejudice.

Other critiques of Louis-Joseph Janvier relate to his attitude toward the cultural legacy of Africans, particularly the Vodou religion<sup>14</sup> which, soon after the Revolution, became the object of state-sanctioned repression and prohibition. It was seen to be symbol of backwardness, incivility, and, therefore, its continuing existence had a negative impact on the image of the young Haitian nation. In attempting to present Haiti as

<sup>14</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the negative representations of Vodou were severely criticized by intellectuals such as Jean Price-Mars (1928), who sought to combat Haitian collective bovarism, and Stephen Alexis (1933) who also struck at the alienation of the Haitian people. On this matter, see Déus (2020a).



a civilized country in the manner of Europe, Louis-Joseph Janvier argued that Vodou had all but disappeared and that all Haitians were Christians and spoke French. In Janvier’s racist argument, the moral development of the Haitian people should occur under the auspices of Christianity.

Janvier’s position on religion is intimately linked to his critique of the role of the Roman Catholic religion in the enslavement and alienation of Black people and also their Christian faith as a civilizational religion. He calls Catholicism an “European fetishism” which he places in the same rank as “African fetishism” (Janvier in Chemla, 2005: 22). For Janvier:

Catholicism, having enslaved the Blacks, continues to be an accomplice: it is responsible for the abjection in which the Black race has been stagnated for centuries; it helped to develop the prejudice of whites against Blacks; centralized in Rome, it can never become a religion of national politics; in brief, at some point, it may challenge the success of 1804: Independence. For pure patriotism, and not for any sort of proselytism, everyone should repeat that the Protestant religion can become a powerful factor in the social development of Haiti because it is superior from the point of view of economic results and it can be national; we must repeat that all solutions are better than the current one: a concordatory Catholicism without a Haitian clergy (Janvier, 1886: 286) (My translation).

Recall that Louis-Joseph Janvier was not only from a Protestant family, he was also a strict Protestant convinced that Protestantism should be the religion of the country. However, he wrongly assumed that the religion he adored could not also be used for maintaining colour prejudice. His favourable consideration of Christianity as a civilizational religion would feature in the work of racist Protestants, such as Spencer Saint-John who, in an 1886 publication, attacked the Vodou religion and Haitian culture. Spencer Saint-John describes the Vodou religion as an orgiastic and demonical manifestation which should be violently and rigorously combated (Saint-John, 1886). The arguments of Saint-John and other European authors who spread these same prejudices were rebutted by the Haitian intellectual Hannibal Price (Déus, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). The latter, on seeing the effects of these ideas on Black people, on their beliefs, culture and values, calls the racist writings of pro-slavery intellectuals a ‘filthy literature’, aimed at relegating Black people (Price, 1898 [1891]). In this sense, it is clear that Louis-Joseph Janvier did not help to clarify religious issues in Haiti.

A further criticism of Janvier is that he had considered colour prejudice to be incompatible with civilization. It should be noted that a negligence of this type of prejudice is intimately linked to his conception of what it means to be Haitian. Mulatto and Black are considered “authentic” Haitians. For this reason, he says, it was made no sense to take racial division seriously. And, according to Janvier, racial prejudice was decreasing in Haiti because the Haitian people were joining western civilization (Janvier, 1883). However, Janvier’s great mistake was to have set aside the fact that western civilization is racist and, as paradoxical as it may seem, racial prejudice is by no means inimical to this civilization. There is no way that a civilization based on racial, cultural, etc. differences, one that treats others as nonhuman, can cease to be prejudiced in the blink of an eye. Although Janvier wanted the intellectual and moral progress of society to put an end to colour prejudice in Haitian society, this colonial-slaveholding secular invention remains – which would contribute to the multidimensional crises faced by Haiti until this day.

## Final Thoughts

This article considered some aspects of the thought of Louis-Joseph Janvier on anthropological ideas related to the racial question in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. These considerations have not sought to be exhaustive, nor could they be. Many of the questions that his writings and his professional biography might raise were not dealt with here.

We have seen that, upon completing the medicine course in Paris, the author went on to do a number of other courses. He did not work as a doctor during his stay in France, the country in which he spent most of his

time. He chose to pursue further studies, proving, through his own experience, that no scientific discipline was beyond the reach of Blacks (Firmin, 1885). Alongside the courses he took, Janvier was involved in political and intellectual militancy, publishing in newspapers and magazines, leaving behind a vast output that can be of interest to various fields of research – literature, anthropology, history, sociology, political science, etc. *Phtisie pulmonaire* is the first important work he published in the field of medicine in 1881 (Chemla, 2005). Later, he dedicated himself to more anthropological writings, such as: *L'égalité des races* (1884) and *Détracteur de la race noire et de la république d'Haïti* (1882a). He also published political essays, such as: *Les Constitutions d'Haïti* (1886); *Du Gouvernement civil en Haïti* (1905); *Les Affaires d'Haïti* (1883-1884) (1885). Finally he published novels: *Le Vieux Piquet* (1884); *Une Chercheuse* (1888).

Although Janvier vehemently criticized the “European detractors of the Black race” and the Republic of Haiti, he kept in touch with many progressive European intellectuals, particularly in France; he also relied on the work of many European philosophers and scientists. For him, science in Haiti is European. It is the ideas of the Paris school that have prevailed in Haitian jurisprudence, medicine, and natural and philosophical sciences (Janvier, 1882b: 33). We thus see that we are not simply faced with a Haitian thinker who is *counterposed* to “European thinkers” or “European thought”, but an author who established various orders of relation with the hegemonic thought of his time. This observation is valid for many other Haitian intellectuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, since Baron Vastey (1814, 1816) – although less so – through Anténor Firmin (1885), Hannibal Price (1898), and others.

The critical posture of these authors was never a complete rejection of French and/or European thought. For they themselves made it clear that, just as there were “detractors of the Black race”, so were there philanthropists (to use a term preferred by Vastey (1814)) who took a stand against racist and pro-slavery ideals; moreover, the Haitian Revolution itself contained principles dear to Europeans, such as freedom and equality. It is these principles that Haitian intellectuals sought to resignify as values shared by all human beings on the face of the earth. We can thus see that any attempt to study the thought of these authors requires that we take care to avoid any strict dualism that establishes a radical opposition between “European thought” and “Haitian thought”, a centre and a periphery. This is important, lest we leave aside the complex relational dynamics that existed in these thoughts, since the production and circulation of knowledge in formerly colonized countries – were people were victims to enslavement – follow a plural path that constantly appeals to the colonial West.

In revisiting the anthropological work of Janvier, it is notable that he sought to dismantle the arguments of those he called “detractors of the Black race and the Republic of Haiti”. His anthropology was thus strictly tied to a defence of the Black race which necessarily passes through a defence of the Republic of Haiti. Haiti which, since the revolution was not only managing and suffering imperialist and colonialist policies, but also suffered the paths followed by their governors, a fact which left Janvier perplexed. Two considerations here become relevant: i) for anyone interested in understanding the basis of the idea of race and its social impacts; ii) for anyone who wishes to understand the basis of the political, economic, social and cultural problems of the Haitian nation, Louis-Joseph Janvier has become an unavoidable thinker, since he is a pioneer of anti-racism and his writings remain timeless and instigating.

In sum, in a context of heated anthropological and sociological debates which seek to rethink the production of knowledge and relations of power that cut across both the production and dissemination of this knowledge, a return to these intellectuals can be an important way of adding density to these processes. In the final instance, these thinkers help us to investigate ways of overcoming the colonial or neo-colonial dimension that persists in the human sciences.

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# ‘Transplanting Hope’: Experimental Stem Cell Therapy and the Political Economy of an HIV Cure

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## Abstract

In this article, I use a socio-anthropological perspective to analyze the configurations and developments of the first five cases of an HIV “cure” or “long-term remission”. These unprecedented results in the history of medicine were achieved through experimental stem cell transplants, whose donors had a rare genetic mutation called CCR5 $\Delta$ 32/ $\Delta$ 32, which confers a “natural resistance” to HIV infection. More specifically, I seek to explore the role of hope in these assemblages, that is, how it is manifest in narratives and composes situated practices. To do so, I collected and analyzed the content of scientific, journalistic, and biographical documents in a cartographic exercise (2008-2023). I observed that the first “success stories” in curative therapies for HIV can be seen as events in the trajectory of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that promoted short-circuits in the status quo and sparked new techno-scientific controversies. In this context, hope reveals complex and fluid connections, mobilizes desires, creates possibilities, attracts investments, and fosters discourses about the supposed “end” of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Finally, I suggest that this reflection is situated within a broader technobiopolitical network, which I call the “political economy of the HIV cure”.

**Keywords:** HIV cure; Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation; Biomedical Technology; Hope; Biopolitics

# “Transplantando esperança”: Experimentações terapêuticas com células- tronco e a economia política da cura do HIV

## Resumo

Neste artigo, analiso as configurações e desdobramentos dos primeiros cinco casos de “cura” ou “remissão de longo prazo” do HIV, a partir de uma perspectiva socioantropológica. Esses resultados inéditos na história da medicina foram alcançados por meio de transplantes experimentais de células-tronco, cujos doadores apresentavam uma mutação genética rara denominada CCR5 $\Delta$ 32/ $\Delta$ 32, a qual confere uma “resistência natural” à infecção pelo HIV. De modo mais específico, busco explorar o papel da esperança nesses agenciamentos, isto é, de que modo se manifesta em narrativas e compõe práticas situadas. Para este propósito, coletei e analisei o conteúdo de diferentes documentos científicos, jornalísticos e biográficos em um exercício cartográfico (2008-2023). Observo que os primeiros “casos de sucesso” em terapias curativas para HIV podem ser apreendidos como acontecimentos na trajetória da pandemia de HIV/aids, promovendo curtos-circuitos em estados de coisas e suscitando o despertar de novas controvérsias tecnobiocientíficas. Nesse cenário, a esperança revela conexões complexas e fluidas, mobiliza desejos, cria possibilidades, atrai investimentos e fomenta discursos sobre o suposto “fim” da pandemia de HIV/aids. Por fim, sugiro que esta reflexão esteja situada dentro de uma rede tecnobiopolítica mais ampla, a qual denomino de “economia política da cura do HIV”.

**Palavras-chave:** Cura do HIV; Transplante de células-tronco hematopoiéticas; Tecnologia Biomédica; Esperança; Biopolítica

# ‘Transplanting Hope’: Experimental Stem Cell Therapy and the Political Economy of an HIV Cure

*Kris Herik de Oliveira*

## **Introduction: A social analysis of curing HIV**

Over the last fifteen years, doctors and scientists have announced the first five cases of “cure” or “long-term remission” from HIV infection. I am referring here to the cases of Timothy Brown, the “Berlin Patient” (Allers et al., 2011; Brown, 2015), Adam Castillejo, the “London Patient” (Gupta et al., 2020; Mandavilli, 2020), Marc Franke, “the Düsseldorf Patient” (Jensen et al., 2023; Highleyman, 2023), and the “New York Patient”, who has still not been identified upon his request (Jingmei Hsu et al., 2023), and Paul Edmonds, the “City of Hope - California Patient” (Johnson, 2023; Dickter et al., 2022).

These unprecedented results in medical history were achieved through experimental stem cell transplants, whose donors had a rare genetic mutation called  $CCR5\Delta32/\Delta32$ , which confers a “natural resistance” to HIV infection. Thus, by receiving the stem cells from the donors, the patients also became resistant to the virus they had been living with for years. Although these are unique cases, as they involve highly risky biomedical procedures that are difficult to reproduce on a wider scale, such practices and their developments offer significant aspects for socio-anthropological reflection.

In dialog with Haraway’s (1991) critical analysis, it is worth noting that the cases of cure draw attention to the multiple dimensions that compose a “regime of technobiopolitics”. For the author, the connected dimensions of information technology, biology, and economics, with their promises of a better world through technological innovations, introduce new complexities into technological interventions in everyday life and their ethical-aesthetic-political assemblages. In this way, through narratives, imaginaries and practices emerging in the medical-scientific field, the limits of societies and even of the body itself are redrawn, destabilizing the borders between the “self” and the “other”.

For more than four decades, biomedical science has been engaged in the development of preventive and therapeutic approaches to HIV. The development of an effective and scalable curative therapy could lead to significant transformations in the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, offering relief to the 39 million people living with the virus (UNAIDS, 2023) and generating billions of dollars in a globalized capitalist regime. However, these efforts have come up against numerous challenges, which encompass both the complexity of how HIV acts in the human body and the predominant nature of scientific governance, which is mostly centered on the development of antiretroviral therapies (Deeks et al., 2021; Dybul et al., 2021).

In relation to HIV/AIDS studies, the social sciences have prioritized the analysis of public policies related to the governance and governmentality of the disease, and have focused on activist movements (Davis and Squire, 2010; Bastos, 1998; Epstein, 2007; Parker, 2011). Notably, less attention has been paid to biomedical practices, or to the emergence of new therapeutic interventions and biotechnologies (Davis & Squire, 2010; Oliveira, 2020). This gap is even more pronounced when it comes to research that directly addresses cases of cure related to experimental stem cell transplants (Oliveira, 2023).

Among the few contributions from the social sciences to the subject of an HIV cure, are studies especially interested in the ethical implications and lived experiences of therapeutic experiments and clinical trials, and include discussions on consent and risk-benefit analysis (e.g. Dubé et al., 2017, 2021). Even less research



addresses the conceptions and perspectives of various actors (participants, doctors, activists) regarding biomedical research for cure (Sylla et al., 2022), the inclusion of social analysis in this context (Grossman et al., 2016; Miall et al., 2022), diversity policies in clinical trials for cure (Dubé et al., 2022), beliefs and other healing approaches on the African continent (Moodley et al., 2019), modes of expression and uses of military metaphors in this context (Nie et al., 2016; Rennie et al., 2015), and analysis of discourses on the “end” of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Kenworthy et al., 2018).

The absence of studies on HIV cures in the social sciences can be understood by the emphasis placed on the paradigms of the “biomedicalization of bodies” (Aggleton and Parker 2015; Rosengarten 2009) and of the “pharmaceuticalization of public health” (Biehl 2011) in the pandemic debate. In addition, we still face substantial challenges related to the dynamics of infections and associated stigmas, as well as inequalities in access to antiretroviral treatment and public policies that face crises, especially in the face of conservative governments.

In the biomedical sciences, on the other hand, there is intense debate about the development of potentially curative methods and techniques (such as stem cell transplantation, gene and cell therapy, new drugs and combined strategies), the challenges of accessing so-called “viral reservoirs”, the use of animal models, organizational resources and funding, scientific controversies, ethical procedures in clinical trials and the very notion of a cure (Barré-Sinoussi, Ross, and Delfraissy 2013; Deeks et al. 2016; Pitman et al. 2018; Kalidasan and Theva Das 2020).

According to Davis and Squire (2010), the social sciences have lacked a sustained engagement with the HIV/AIDS pandemic by focusing on technological changes in its governance and governability. There is also a lack of research that considers the global effects of biotechnologies. The authors affirm that the global and technologically advanced HIV pandemic offers valuable contributions to discussions on health and technology, addressing both empirical and theoretical aspects, and considering the complexity that marks the situation at both local and global levels.

Situating experimental stem cell therapies for curing HIV in the debate therefore represents an opportunity to explore new perspectives and contribute to the field of social studies related to techno-sciences. Incorporating these therapeutic approaches into the research agenda, however, does not mean diverting attention away from canonical discussions. On the contrary, it means simultaneously including and broadening reflections on somatic effects (Rose 2013) associated to technobioscientific practices (Fischer 2003; Franklin 2005).

Considering this still incipient discussion, the main aim of this article, the result of my doctoral research (Oliveira, 2023), is to analyze the configurations and developments of the first five cases of HIV “cure” or “long-term remission” from a socio-anthropological perspective. Inspired by various studies that highlight the implications of hope in therapeutic practices (Franklin 2013; DelVecchio Good et al. 1990; Rose 2013; N. Brown 2005, 2003; Novas 2006; Moreira and Palladino 2005), I explore how hope manifests itself in narratives and composes situated practices. After all, how have the first cases of HIV cures emerged on the technobioscientific scene? What challenges and controversies have they aroused? How does hope manifest itself and how does it promote different assemblages?

In the next section I will present the research methodology, which was developed using a cartographic approach over the course of four years. I will then explore the narratives and practices of different agents that shape the evidence of the first cases of HIV cures, highlighting the different techniques developed and their relationship with the technobiopolitical regime. I then discuss the role of hope in the context of experimental stem cell therapies for curing HIV. I discuss how hope mobilizes desires, creates possibilities, attracts investments, and fosters discourses about the supposed “end” of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. I then suggest that this reflection be situated within a broader technobiopolitical network, which I call the “political economy of the HIV cure”. Finally, I present some concluding remarks on the entanglements between life, science, and politics.

## Cartographing biotechnological landscapes

The way that I conducted the research that led to this article (Oliveira, 2023) is aligned to the proposal to conduct a "mapping of the present" (Rose 2013), to explore the devices that conform to "emerging life forms" (Fischer 2003; Franklin 2005) in the context of experimental stem cell therapies for curing HIV. To this end, I approached cartography as a concept (Deleuze and Guattari 2011) and research-intervention method (Passos and Barros 2015). In this way, the research was guided by a set of clues, with a willingness to think about and with the effects of the process on the investigated object itself, on the researcher and on the results obtained.

In this sense, and inspired by different approaches in science and technology studies (Haraway 2018; Latour 2000; Rose 2013; Stengers 2002), more precisely, I carried out what I characterized as a "cartography of biotechnological landscapes" (Oliveira, 2023). In other words, I seek to account for both the continuities and the changes that have shaped the development of curative interventions and biotechnologies for HIV on different scales, traversing institutions, experiences, political projects, and scientific practices. Although this cartography is attentive to the contingencies of the present, its objective lies precisely in recognizing the openings and instabilities of the futures that are thought of and practiced, with the management of life, bodies, and subjectivities as the horizon.

To make this cartographic undertaking operational, I adopted the construction of an "archive-laboratory" as my methodological strategy. The archive-laboratory combines an effort to rethink the role of the archive beyond the exercises of power (Foucault, 2008a). Thus, I support the decolonial, anti-racist, and queer initiatives that seek to carry out "de-archiving" projects. De-archiving is, above all, a practice of resistance against the politics of silencing and erasing histories.

Unearthing cases of HIV cure allows exploring other possibilities of contact with multiple medical, scientific and personal realities (Mol 2002). This archive goes beyond simply conducting an inventory of stories, people or objects that supposedly lie in time and space. It is a living form in constant movement that reveals openings, unites dispersed elements, and promotes relationships that are often unpredictable. The laboratory is precisely the place where collective agency takes place, driven by experimentation and invention, and where new technologies are being gestated (Latour 2000).

The idea and practice of the archive-laboratory allows both locating the effort to build an agency of heteroclit materials and to highlight the existence of interventions in these materials. To curate the materials that compose this archive, I conducted processes of collection, triage, analysis, and translation. These expressions, in turn, were inspired by common activities in the techno-scientific context. Corresponding procedures were adopted by Thompson (2013) in her research in the field of reproductive technologies and stem cells.

The processes of collection and triage are related. While collecting allows gathering a wide range of materials, triage involves selecting these materials based on their relevance to the research purposes. The collection involved searching for, surveying, collecting and gathering bibliographic and empirical materials that, at first glance, demonstrated relevance to the research. The triage stage involved pre-analysis, selection and organization of the material collected.

To locate material on cases of HIV cure or long-term remission, I conducted searches in consolidated scientific databases (Scopus, Web of Science and Scielo), consultations without charge on the internet and automated mapping of key terms on Google. In this search process, I used the following key terms: "hiv AND cure", "woman AND hiv AND cure", "cura AND hiv". As I came into contact with the different stories, I began to add alerts with the names of the doctors and patients involved in the procedures. These alerts allowed including new material and continuous updating over the course of the four years of research.

The survey included materials in Portuguese, English, Spanish, German and Dutch, which were organized in spreadsheets. The main criteria for the triage of the materials were correspondence with the theme, originality (being more than a replication) and the extent of the content (containing interviews with researchers and/or patients, photographs and videos). As a result, 136 articles were collected relating to 5 cases of HIV cure or

long-term remission. The complete database is available at the Unicamp Research Data Repository (REDU) (<https://doi.org/10.25824/redu/YAI83E>).

Most of the material comes from journalistic sources (58.8%), including texts (n = 41; 30.1%) and interviews given by doctors, scientists, and patients involved in the cases (n = 39; 28.7%). This is followed by newsletters published by medical and scientific institutions (n = 13; 9.6%) and materials presented and published at scientific congresses (n = 12; 8.8%). Scientific articles published by the scientists involved in the cases amounted to 9 documents (6.6%), as did personal accounts, letters, and published comments (n = 9; 6.6%). Social networks directly related to the cases were also located (n = 6; 4.4%). Finally, there are 2 documentaries, 2 memorials and 2 scientific meeting reports (1.5% of the total each), and 1 published book (0.7%).

To analyze the materials, I used the thematic content analysis technique (Bardin, 1977) with the support of the *ATLAS.ti 9* software. In other words, my procedure involved disassembling the materials to make new assemblies in thematic categories, to then conduct a comparative analysis of the data. However, instead of considering the analysis by software to be complete, I used it to produce clues to be followed in the labyrinth of the archive-laboratory. The research was thus open to experimentation that could contribute to the development of creative analytical approaches. This allowed exploring unconventional paths and seeking out new perspectives, broadening the possibilities for reading and understanding the data.

Finally, I think it is important to highlight a movement that permeated both the composition process and the analysis of the materials in the archive-laboratory: translation. The notion of translation has been used by some authors in the social studies of science and technology (e.g. Callon, 2008; Latour, 2000) to refer not just to a change of vocabulary or transposition from one language to another, but to a process of becoming. This process concerns the creation of connections between different agents, seeking to reveal a situated reading of the world and modifying it to some extent, according to different degrees of interest.

Throughout the research, I was able to engage in different translation processes to cartograph "in action" (Latour 2000) the experimental medical science dedicated to curing HIV. First, I had to translate the medical grammar itself, to re-present its content in different terms. I then undertook the task of translating materials from different languages into Portuguese (mother tongue), either completely or in excerpts considered relevant to the analysis and writing process. Finally, it was necessary to translate the practices and experiences lived by different agents, which required an effort to create a cohesive narrative capable of uniting elements that were both unique and dispersed.

## Five cases among forty million

### The first cure

In 2008, hematologist Dr. Gero Hütter and other collaborating doctors from the Charité University Hospital in Berlin presented the first case of "long-term HIV remission" after an experimental therapeutic intervention involving hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (via bone marrow) at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI). (Hütter et al. 2008). This is a procedure that has already been established in medical practice for the treatment of advanced cancers, the state of health in which the patient found himself. However, there was one aspect that made the case unique: the donor's stem cells had a homozygous genetic mutation, called  $CCR5\Delta32/\Delta32$ , which confers a form of "natural resistance" to HIV infection.

The patient was Timothy Ray Brown, a gay man in his 40s, a US citizen living in Berlin. Brown, or the "Berlin Patient", as he became known to the media and the medical-scientific community, had been living with HIV for more than a decade and was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia in 2006, a type of cancer that if left untreated can quickly lead to death (T. R. Brown 2015). Hütter, although not an HIV specialist at

the time, identified in Brown's clinical status the opportunity to test the hypothesis of CCR5 $\Delta$ 32/ $\Delta$ 32 stem cell transplantation to induce remission of both the cancer and HIV (Engel 2015).

After two years, including a second transplant, Brown had the CD4+ T-cell count of a healthy adult of his age and HIV remained undetectable in viral load tests (Allers et al. 2011; Hütter et al. 2009). However, between enthusiasm and skepticism, HIV experts urged caution with expectations. Further tests would be needed before the word "cure" could finally be used without raising doubts. In the years that followed, Brown was submit to extremely precise tests in search of signs of HIV in his body (T. R. Brown 2015, 2018). The results, published in internationally recognized scientific journals (Hütter et al. 2009; Allers et al. 2011; Yukl et al. 2013), made it clear to the medical and scientific community that this was indeed the first case of an HIV cure.

Another element, as central as the publication of articles in scientific journals and presentations at conferences, is related to Timothy Brown's testimony and active participation throughout the process. At the end of 2010, he decided to give up his anonymity, and began to grant interviews, sharing accounts of his experience and taking part in medical and scientific events. He thus began a long journey in HIV cure activism. He became an activist not only by donating his cells for clinical research, but also by dedicating himself to helping groups of patients living with HIV and people who had lost loved ones to AIDS (T. R. Brown 2015, 2018).

Dr. Hütter's life also changed in the years following the publication of his results on Timothy Brown. Initially ignored, then celebrated and later adapted, the influence of his research oscillated. Surprisingly, the Charité Hospital's transplant program was shut down after budget cuts. The pioneering program, which was the first of its kind to cure a person of HIV infection, was discontinued and Hütter dismissed from the institution (Holt 2014). He is currently Medical Director at the DKMS Collection Center, the hematopoietic stem cell donor bank he had sought to locate potential donors for Timothy Brown.

For experts in the field, Timothy Brown's case has highlighted a "proof of concept" about the cure for HIV, that is the practical confirmation of a conceptual formulation hitherto considered unattainable (Hütter et al. 2009; Cohen 2011; Hütter 2016). In addition, the case "raised hopes" that gene and cell therapy strategies could one day cure the disease (Schoofs 2008). However, it should be noted that the therapeutic procedure carried out on Brown was aggressive and risky, leading to long-term side effects. Stem cell transplantation requires a technologically sophisticated hospital infrastructure and a highly qualified medical team. Moreover, the procedure is extremely expensive, making the search for a cure inaccessible to the vast majority of people living with HIV.

Timothy Brown's HIV cure illustrates the "struggle for credibility" (Epstein 1996) in the context of HIV/AIDS. Since the publication of the first article on the case the legitimization of the results met resistance, both as a scientific fact and as a pragmatic reality. The hegemonic conception of the incurability of the disease contributed to the controversy surrounding the cure. While some fought to turn the claim into fact, others remained suspicious and questioned the discovery. This controversy reflects the unstable nature of experimental biotechnology and the uncertainties regarding its efficacy.

Brown's voice in the HIV cure debate suggests a unique place to understand how arguments are structured, how scientific information is disseminated, how experiences are constructed and how supporters are gathered. His form of activism, although individualized, required a powerful means for participating in science. In the context of "evidence-based medicine", he showed us that other evidence, produced by those who have experienced science in practice, is also relevant (Fleischer 2022). Timothy Brown passed away on September 29, 2020, at the age of 54, due to the return of his leukemia. He remained cured of HIV until the last days of his life.

## Reproducing the experiment

In the years that followed, at least 12 other new experimental therapeutic interventions were conducted in an effort to reproduce the Berlin case (Hütter, 2018; Oliveira, 2023). But it wasn't until March 2019, during CROI, that

a new wave of enthusiasm was raised about what could be the second case of an HIV cure. A group of researchers, led by microbiologist Ravindra K. Gupta from the University of Cambridge, carried out a therapeutic procedure similar to that of Timothy Brown. The aim was to achieve remission of stage 4 Hodgkin's lymphoma, a type of cancer of the lymphatic system, and of HIV in the patient. Some sixteen months after stopping antiretroviral therapy, laboratory tests were unable to identify the presence of HIV in his body (Gupta et al. 2019).

In 2020, the "London Patient" introduced himself to newspapers as Adam Castillejo, a 40-year-old gay man from Venezuela living in London. As he said in an interview, his desire was to follow in Timothy Brown's footsteps in activism for a cure and become an "ambassador of hope" (Mandavilli 2020). In the same year, after further sensitive tests and examinations, the doctors and scientists involved in the case presented the "evidence for an HIV cure" in scientific journals (Gupta, Peppas, Hill, et al. 2020). This second case confirmed that a cure for HIV was possible, although still considered difficult to achieve, according to experts.

Also at CROI 2019, a medical-scientific team presented another case of HIV remission in a man after transplanting stem cells from a donor with the CCR5 $\Delta$ 32/ $\Delta$ 32 mutation, at the University of Düsseldorf, Germany (Jensen et al., 2019). The first results of the procedure had been presented at the 2016 CROI in Boston, USA (Kobbe et al., 2016). Like Timothy Brown, the patient underwent a bone marrow transplant at the age of 43 to treat his acute myeloid leukemia. His antiretroviral therapy for HIV was discontinued in November 2018.

The "Düsseldorf Patient" gave his first interview only three years after the 2019 CROI to a Dutch newspaper (Sedee 2021). At the time, he introduced himself as Marc, a gay, married man living in a small town in Germany. In February 2023, the first scientific article on the case was published, detailing the evidence of a cure (Jensen et al. 2023). After the article was published, Marc Franke decided to "come out as cured" for good, as POZ Magazine reported. One of the reasons for sharing his story, he told the magazine, was "to support HIV science and get more people to become donors" (Highleyman 2023).

In February 2022, a presentation by scientists from the United States at CROI once again stirred up the media and the medical community. According to the report (Hsu et al. 2022), a black woman (who requested to not be identified) received a stem cell transplant to treat her acute myeloid leukemia and HIV infection. In March 2023, more details about the case were published in an important scientific journal (Hsu et al. 2023). Seeking remission of her leukemia and HIV, the "New York Patient" underwent the transplant in August 2017. But unlike previous cases, the stem cells for the so-called "haplo-cord transplant" came from two sources: from the peripheral blood of a healthy adult relative, with the role of rapidly restoring her blood cell population to reduce infectious complications; and from the umbilical cord blood of an unrelated CCR5 $\Delta$ 32/ $\Delta$ 32 newborn, to provide long-term blood replenishment (Hsu et al. 2023).

Since then, after stopping her antiretroviral treatment and sensitive tests found no virus with replication potential, the scientists and doctors involved in the case affirmed that this is a case of "remission and possible cure of HIV" (Hsu et al., 2023). Now, "she basically had a new HIV-resistant immune system," said Dr. Yvonne J. Bryson, a specialist in pediatric infectious diseases at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California and one of the study's collaborators (Highleyman 2022a).

For the medical-scientific community, the case was considered emblematic because both the therapeutic technique used and the sex and racial origin of the participant mark a significant step in the development of a more extensive HIV cure. The CCR5 $\Delta$ 32/ $\Delta$ 32 mutation is rare, but umbilical cord blood banks may provide a previously untapped resource. In addition, studies suggest that HIV infection progresses differently in women than in men. But although women account for more than half of the world's HIV cases, they are only 11% of the participants in experimental research and clinical cure trials (Mandavilli 2022).

The fifth and final case of which I became aware during the course of my research was announced in August 2022 during the 24<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference (Dickter et al. 2022). The "City of Hope patient", identified in this way in reference to the hematological cancer research and health center where the procedure

was carried out in the United States, was described as a 66-year-old white man from Southern California. As well as being older than the others, he had been living with HIV the longest, since 1988.

In early 2019, at the age of 63, the patient underwent a stem cell transplant through bone marrow, using cells from a donor with the CCR5 $\Delta$ 32/ $\Delta$ 32 mutation, as part of his treatment for acute myeloid leukemia. More than three years after the transplant and more than 17 months after stopping antiretroviral therapy, no evidence of the HIV virus with ability to replicate was found in his body. The leukemia also remained in remission.

In March 2023, Paul Edmonds, the person behind the codename "City of Hope Patient", decided to share his journey in a first interview with a news channel (ABC News 2023), alongside his partner. He then gave further interviews to major newspapers. In these accounts, Paul emphasized that he had seen many of his friends die of AIDS and was highly stigmatized after being diagnosed with HIV. He reaffirmed that his motivations for sharing his story publicly were "to bring hope", "to be an inspiration" and "to honor those who didn't survive" (Corrêa 2023; Marquez 2023).

As in the case of the "New York Patient", the doctors responsible for Paul Edmonds' treatment do not yet use the term "cure" to describe his case. For now, he is considered to be in "long-term remission" from HIV. To consider them "officially" cured, more time would be needed. From the scientists' perspective, both cases are also considered opportunities to provide clues to help researchers develop more widely applicable approaches to curing HIV (Highleyman 2022b).

The new cases of "cure" or "long-term remission from HIV" point to continuities and discontinuities in experimental therapies since the case of Timothy Brown. The procedures have become less aggressive and use more diversified technologies, expanding the sources of stem cells beyond bone marrow – to the use of peripheral blood and umbilical cord blood. To a certain extent, diversification has also occurred in the patient profile. HIV cure, however, remains an unstable concept, despite the results achieved with the reproducibility of the Berlin case.

A very small proportion of people living with HIV could undergo a hematopoietic stem cell transplant. This procedure is only prescribed for patients with hematological cancers and when alternative therapies have failed. As mentioned, the technique is very risky. Experts therefore consider it unethical to subject patients to these aggressive treatments to remove the virus, since there are effective and less dangerous antiretroviral drugs that keep HIV under control. But the fact that this method cannot be applied directly at the moment does not mean that the strategy is not achievable in the long term, as some scientists argue (Mouzo 2023).

These first "success stories", although isolated and difficult to reproduce on a wider scale due to the high risks involved in the procedure, can be seen as events in the trajectory of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This is because they have disrupted the status quo and sparked new controversies on the technobioscientific scene. As a result, there has been a renewal of hope regarding the development of curative therapeutic approaches and new lines of research have emerged. Although stem cell therapies often require personalization, thus limiting their availability as a resource and their reproducibility, they have become increasingly explored. The idea of a cure for HIV has become a real and achievable possibility, challenging previously established scientific discourses.

## **The political economy of the HIV cure**

### "Transplanting hope"

The expression "transplanting hope" was used in the title of the first journalistic text that covered the case of Timothy Brown, written by journalist and activist David Evans (2008). This expression sought to address both the biotechnological dimension of stem cell transplantation, as well as the importance of cultivating hope and acting with caution in the face of enthusiasm in the search for a cure for HIV. In this sense, and in

view of the prominent place of hope in the context of experimental stem cell therapies for the cure of HIV, I believe that the topic requires more careful attention.

Various authors in the social sciences have drawn attention to the presence, meanings and effects of hope in therapeutic contexts, especially in the last three decades with the advances of increasingly molecular and personalized biotechnologies (Franklin 2013; DelVecchio Good et al. 1990; Rose 2013; N. Brown 2005, 2003; Novas 2006; Moreira and Palladino 2005). For these authors, hope is not a purely "natural", "predefined" and "static" affection, but is produced through different discourses, with narratives and actions (repeated and ritualized) that are always contingent in the context of contemporary technobiopolitics.

In a study of oncologists at Harvard University teaching hospitals in the United States, DelVecchio Good et al. (1990) examined the role of hope in cancer treatment and research. The authors noted that the emphasis on the "message of hope" in the "war on cancer" has driven the development of oncology and generated debates about the efficacy and meaning of hope in clinical practice. The very funding of cancer research has also been shown to be dependent on this perspective, since it is based on a view of the disease as potentially curable. For patients, hope is a force that can affect their quality of life, as well as their social and psychological responses to cancer.

As DelVecchio Good et al. (1990) suggest, these micro-political processes require a broader look. In reality, they encompass an extensive network composed of medical institutions, clinical practices, patients and their families, narratives, therapeutic practices, imaginaries, norms for disclosure and expectations of a cure. The authors called this diffuse and difficult-to-capture network the "political economy of hope", precisely because it is hope that connects these multiple agents and assemblages.

Novas (2006) sought to broaden and deepen the concept of the political economy of hope. To do so, he analyzed the various types of collaborative links established between pharmaceutical companies and organizations that defend people with genetic conditions or diseases. According to him, in the contemporary experience of illness, the trust and hope placed in scientific progress stands out especially in situations of despair or near hopelessness. Hope, in this context, relates to a grammar of survival.

The language of hope, according to Novas (2006), uses a vocabulary similar to that of scientific discovery, expressing a desire to overcome obstacles, transcend limitations and explore new horizons. "Having" or "living" in hope means taking an active stance towards the future so that the possibilities and potential inherent in the present can be realized. Hope can thus structure the lives of people and families affected by illness. Moreover, hope is both individual and collective, since it connects biographies, shared aspirations for a better future and broader social, economic, and political processes.

Hope, by involving interaction between the present and the future, and requiring both individual and collective action to be realized, is aligned with the formulation of strategies. To make hope a reality, it is necessary to coordinate and manage the actions of individuals and groups to make a desired future a reality. In this political economy, scientific knowledge, activism, fundraising and raising awareness about a particular disease play a significant role in the quest to achieve goals (Novas 2006).

Novas (2006) points out that a central aspect of this process is how collectively shared ideals try to "shape" the field of biomedical research. In this context, the political economy of hope marks a significant transformation in contemporary technobiopolitics. This is because people affected by illness have become important authorities, engaged in promoting the health and well-being of individuals and communities. These people contribute directly to the production of biomedical knowledge and its economic valorization, while simultaneously developing new norms concerning the conduct of medical research. In this way, personal experiences become broader political issues.

In this context, in an article that discusses the debates triggered by the clinical trial of a new therapeutic approach with stem cells to treat Parkinson's disease, Moreira and Palladino (2005) argue that contemporary biomedicine is shaped by two apparently irreconcilable organizational logics: the "regime of truth" and the

“regime of hope”. However, these logics are not mutually exclusive, as they feed off each other and influence each other’s composition and meanings.

The “regime of hope” can be characterized as the optimistic view that new and more effective medical treatments are always emerging and being tested, they are always in the pipeline. More specifically, research and development processes are justified by the promise of finding new curative approaches to serious diseases. This promise implies constant postponements to stabilize the “identity of the therapy”, its components and effects. Agents often conceive of the patient as someone who is trying to free themselves from their physical condition, yearning for innovative solutions. The main foundation of this regime is based on capital, the reproduction of which requires a belief in the future, rather than resignation or investment in the present (Moreira and Palladino 2005).

The “regime of truth” implies a commitment to what is known, as opposed to what could be. In this context, we find technicians who ensure the quality of therapies, institutions that evaluate costs (such as funding agencies), pharmaceutical companies, and others. These agents are considered healthcare consumers, interested in evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of pharmacological and surgical approaches, considering criteria such as efficacy, risks and costs associated with each available option. This regime implies a constant critical review of new approaches, in an effort to understand their initial claims, clinical failures and ethical issues (Moreira and Palladino 2005).

The “point of reference” common to these opposing and interchanging regimes is subjectivity, according to Moreira & Palladino (2005). This same centralized dichotomy is even more evident in the reflections of Giorgio Agamben, Nikolas Rose and Paul Rabinow on the processes of embodiment and biopolitical subjectivation. For the latter, the current embodiment of the “I” must be understood as constantly undergoing a process of erasure, becoming increasingly indistinguishable from life itself (Rose 2013; Rabinow and Rose 2006). Agamben (2002), for his part, sees this equation, which he calls “naked life”, as deeply disturbing, but also, paradoxically, as the key to “countering the grip of power” (Foucault 1999).

N. Brown (2005) also draws attention to the regimes of hope and truth in the context of biomedicine, especially in the debate on genetics. According to him, at the end of the twentieth century, it was possible to observe a significant strategic transformation, in which the debate on biotechnology moved from a discourse of authority anchored in facts and evidence (regimes of truth), to debates conducted through grammars and abstractions focused on hope, expectations and the future (regimes of hope). The author characterizes this process as a shift from “authority to authenticity”.

In this new context, biotechnological hopes are located in mutual tension with the despair of patients with serious illnesses facing the imminent crisis of a threatened personal future. Hope in this place presents the possibility of some potential future resolution. This resolution, in turn, functions as a narrative bottleneck, an essential temporal transition point through which bodies travel narratively from the present towards the future. And, of course, the definition of this obligatory passage is influenced by powerful competitive dynamics between various networks, each presenting parallel aspirational hopes, although they are often mutually exclusive (N. Brown 2005).

This approach is similar to Latour’s (2004) discussion concerning “matters of fact” and “matters of concern”. The purpose of criticism is not simply to dismantle current facts and question their veracity, reducing them to nothing; instead, criticism aims to transform facts into issues of interest that have a latent potential, a future possibility that requires careful understanding. Thus, regimes of hope are always intertwined with facts (N. Brown 2005).

The first case of an HIV cure rekindled hopes in the medical and scientific community and became a matter of fact and interest. Achieving a cure for HIV, in a context where antiretroviral treatment is used as standard therapy, has shown that it is possible to achieve the result that has been so coveted for decades. As well as being perceived as a “proof of concept” by scientists, Timothy Brown was also described as a “personification of hope.” (Hofmann 2011). This characteristic was echoed by the other participants in experimental research who



achieved sustained remission from the virus. Adam Castillejo, the "London Patient", for example, presented himself as an "ambassador of hope".

Inspired by Franklin (2022), transplants themselves can be seen as "biotechnologies of hope", as they offer the promise of hope, sometimes even more than the "successful" result itself. In this context, the regimes of truth and hope are complexly intertwined in a political economy. Curative therapeutic approaches have paved the way for a field considered promising, which creates new possibilities amidst a situation of incurability, generating enthusiasm and expectations. At the same time, therapies are linked to the search for scientific knowledge and concrete evidence to support the efficacy of these treatments, which brings with them skepticism and challenges to their legitimization.

Different actors, such as HIV specialists, activists, and the scientific establishment itself, questioned the legitimacy of the cases. Groups assessed the quality of the procedures, analyzing their advantages and disadvantages, considering the effectiveness, risks and costs involved. Skepticism was most pronounced in the case of Timothy Brown, the first to be cured in the face of the certainty that HIV was incurable. Thus, overcoming the "incurability paradigm" is a challenge for this collective interested in the current state of affairs.

The regime of hope plays an important role in this context. Both the participants in the trials and the scientists and doctors depend on hope, even though the experiment often raises doubts about the results of the treatment. In a broader context, people living with HIV and the community in general place their hopes in these scientific advances, looking forward to a possible cure that will bring about a significant transformation in their lives. In this way, hope drives ongoing research efforts.

In short, "transplanting hope" implies a continuous exchange between truth and hope, in which the search for scientific proof is intertwined with the desire for a promising solution. However, it is important to balance these regimes to avoid unrealistic expectations and guarantee the integrity of science. Although there has been promising progress in stem cell research for HIV, it must be recognized that a definitive cure has not yet been achieved. Caution with "communities of promise" (N. Brown 2003) and transparency are key to providing accurate information on the current state of medical science, the challenges faced and realistic expectations.

## **The effects of hype**

In 2011, the year in which the scientific article reporting Timothy Brown's "evidence for a cure" was published (see Allers et al. 2011), there was a consensus among the members of the International AIDS Society (IAS) that a cure intervention was a high priority for people living with HIV and necessary to control the pandemic. At that time, the IAS convened a group of more than 40 international scientists specializing in HIV/AIDS to develop a scientific research strategy for a cure. In addition to scientists, activists, representatives of the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries, regulatory and funding agencies from around the world were also consulted (Deeks et al. 2021).

According to what the members of the IAS emphasized in the document that resulted from the initiative (Deeks et al. 2012), the cure achieved in Timothy Brown highlighted the possibility that had hitherto been considered unattainable and aroused interest in studying curative interventions in the clinic. In addition to the relevance of basic and applied research for a universal cure, the ethical challenges that permeate the aspiration for a cure were also highlighted. In this respect, the group drew attention to the fact that clinical procedures for healing would involve many risks and probably few benefits for the first participants.

At the time, two broadly defined approaches to curing HIV were considered by the group: the elimination of all HIV-infected cells (a sterilizing cure); and the generation of effective host immunity to HIV that would result in lifelong control of the virus in the absence of therapy, despite not achieving complete eradication of HIV (a functional cure) (Deeks et al. 2012). The strategies developed by the IAS scientific group have been

refined over the years. New documents have been organized and published in *Nature Medicine*, in 2016 (Deeks et al. 2016) and 2021 (Deeks et al. 2021).

The most recent strategy (Deeks et al. 2021) incorporates analysis of more than 150 studies and contributions from interested parties around the world through online consultations and a questionnaire. The document makes concrete recommendations for cure research priorities in basic, translational, clinical, behavioral, and social sciences. These latter axes had not been highlighted in the first document. The main objectives outlined are: to better understand HIV reservoirs; to measure HIV reservoirs; to understand the control mechanisms of the virus; to target proviruses; to target the immune system; to boost cell and gene therapies; to include children in research; to integrate social and behavioral sciences, as well as the ethical aspects of cure research.

According to the IAS group, a cure for HIV must be safe, effective, and affordable. In this sense, emphasis is placed on equity, representativeness, scalability, and meaningful community involvement in research. To this end, the institution also supports the establishment of an international multidisciplinary research alliance and the global coordination of existing HIV cure consortia. The group believes that a cure could overcome the limitations of antiretroviral therapy, curb the spread of new infections, reduce stigma and discrimination, and be a sustainable financial solution for controlling the pandemic (Deeks et al. 2021).

Also in 2011, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) called for proposals for a collaborative grant of US\$8.5 million a year to boost the search for a cure for HIV, and several high-powered consortia applied. The NIH then added another \$4.5 million to research funding by announcing new grants for the development of therapies aimed at long-term interruption of interrupting the use of antiretrovirals. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, and the Foundation for AIDS Research also awarded grants for research related to the search for a cure (Cohen 2011).

A decade later, according to a report issued by Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention in collaboration with the International AIDS Society (AVAC and IAS 2023), US\$ 439.8 million dollars were invested in this field in 2021. This amount represents a 30.3% increase over the US\$ 337.4 million invested in 2020, and a significant five-fold increase above the US\$ 88.1 million invested in 2012. On the other hand, research funding for prevention decreased by 12.8% and for vaccines by 9.2% during the period.

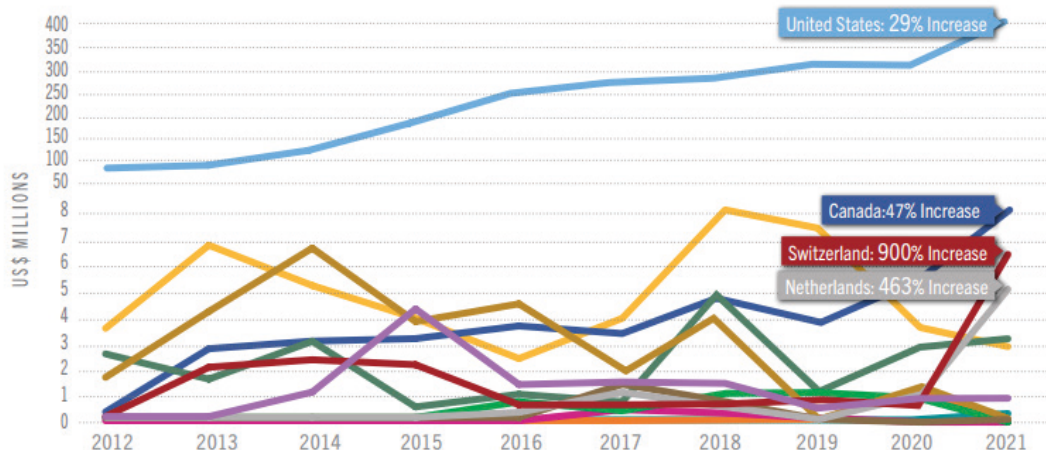
In 2021, most investments, came from the public sector, totaling \$362.2 million. The United States, predominantly through the NIH, was the leading contributor of public funding. The main funders, in addition to the US, included the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, the National Health and Medical Research Council, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, the Italian Ministry of Health, the Istituto Superiore di Sanità and Unitaid (AVAC and IAS 2023).

In addition to public funding, philanthropic entities, such as Aidsfonds, amfAR, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Campbell Foundation, the Instituto Pasteur, Sidaction and the Wellcome Trust, provided US\$ 40.8 million to research. Industry funding totaled US\$36.7 million. This figure, however, is probably underestimated considering the low return from companies, as AVAC and IAS warn (AVAC and IAS 2023). The data show that the search for curative approaches to HIV has not attracted much interest from the major pharmaceutical companies and other related private institutions.

In terms of geographical distribution, in 2021, investments in research for a cure for HIV infection came almost exclusively from countries in the global north: Australia, Canada, the European Commission, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Over the last ten years there has been consistent investment from these countries, as well as Belgium and Cuba (AVAC and IAS 2023). Figure 1 shows data on investments in research and development for an HIV cure for the period 2012-2021, broken down by country.

Figure 1. HIV Cure Research & Development Investments by Country, 2012–2021.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Australia	2.6	1.6	3.1	0.5	1.0	0.7	5.0	1.1	3.0	3.3
Belgium	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.3	0
Canada	0.4	2.9	3.2	3.3	3.8	3.5	4.9	4.0	5.8	8.5
Cuba	0	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.4	0.1	0	0
European Commission	1.6	4.2	6.7	3.8	4.5	2.0	4.0	0	1.3	0.1
France	3.5	6.8	5.2	3.9	2.3	3.9	8.2	7.5	3.7	3.0
Germany	0	0	0	0	0.7	0.3	1.2	1.1	1.0	0
Italy	0	0	0	0	0	1.4	0.5	0	0.6	0.3
The Netherlands	0	0	0	0	0.2	1.0	0.4	0.3	1.1	5.1
Spain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.5
Switzerland	0.03	2.0	2.3	2.1	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.7	6.4
United Kingdom	0.03	0.03	1.0	4.3	1.3	1.4	1.6	0.7	1.0	0.9
United States	79.4	85.9	120.4	183.2	252.1	273.6	296.0	318.7	317.8	411.3



Source. AVAC e IAS (2023, 6).

For the first time, the report was able to evaluate the phases of the research funded: basic research (38%), preclinical (40%), clinical (19%), social/behavioral (3%) and advocacy and policy (0.2%) (AVAC and IAS 2023). The vast majority of research, therefore, is concentrated in the basic and pre-clinical areas. A recent survey carried out by the Treatment Action Group (TAG) revealed that clinical research was concentrated on Phase I and Phase II studies, although there were also observational and epidemiological trials. Approximately 10% of these trials were carried out in African countries, focusing heavily on pediatric studies (TAG 2024).

Another recent TAG report found a disconnect between participants in cure research and the demographics of people living with HIV. For example, only 6% of research sponsors who reported participant data were located in Africa, even though 68% of people living with HIV in the world are on the continent. Similarly, 54% of people living with HIV are cis women, but they represent only 20% of participants in cure research. Finally, less than one percent of trial participants are trans people (TAG 2023).

According to the AVAC and IAS report (2023), there is growing recognition that research is needed in sub-Saharan Africa to ensure that a cure is available to all. The expectation is that the establishment of the public-private HIV Cure Africa Acceleration Partnership (HCAAP) will enable wider involvement and facilitate the rapid implementation of any successes in low- and middle-income contexts (AVAC and IAS 2023; Dybul et al. 2021). In addition to the HCAAP, there are two other major collaborative projects underway aimed at developing curative therapeutic approaches for HIV: the International Collaboration to guide and investigate the potential for HIV cure by Stem Cell (IciStem), in Europa, and the Martin Delaney Collaboratories for HIV Cure Research (MDC), in the United States.

IciStem was established in 2014 with the support of the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR), which has provided 1.56 million euros in funding. The project includes European researchers from different fields

(hematologists, virologists, immunologists) who are dedicated to curing HIV through hematopoietic stem cell transplants and gene therapy. Among the members are Drs. Gero Hütter, Ravindra Gupta and Björn-Erik Jensen - researchers responsible for the curative approaches used for Timothy Brown, Adam Castillejo and Marc Franke. In practice, the researchers develop and monitor clinical trials of patients living with HIV who need a stem cell transplant. The project is also currently supported by *Aidsfonds* (IciStem 2022; Wensing et al. 2019).

The Martin Delaney Collaboratories for HIV Cure Research (MDC) is the main program of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) dedicated to promoting scientific research into a cure for HIV. MDC was launched in July 2011 with funding from three collaborating projects: CARE, DARE and defeatHIV. In July 2016, the program was expanded to include three additional collaborators - ELIEVE, BEAT-HIV and I4C. In 2021, the program was expanded to include a total of 10 collaborators - CARE, DARE, BEAT-HIV, I4C, REACH, ERASE-HIV, CRISPR for Cure, PAVE, RID-HIV and HOPE. These acronyms are particularly interesting because they refer to care, daring, insistence, reach, erasure, creating a path, and hope. The NIH has awarded approximately US\$ 53 million in annual funding over the next five years to the 10 MDC organizations (NIH 2022; REACH 2023). The cases of cure of the New York patient and Paul Edmonds, the City of Hope patient, are linked to these projects.

Considering the strategies for managing knowledge, techniques, people, institutions, desires, norms and tissues, I understand that collaborative projects for curing HIV can be understood as forms of governance and governmentality (Foucault 2008b) initiatives aimed at curing HIV. This is because they are initiatives that interlink public management and the management of the community, through techniques of knowledge-power that produce and regulate subjectivities, bodies, and behaviors in effective policies.

In addition, the documents and initiatives aimed at curing HIV reveal, especially in the most recent research, a model of clinical research management that Epstein (2007) has called the "inclusion and difference paradigm". According to the author, this concept encompasses two objectives of medical research: the inclusion of members of various groups who are generally under-represented in studies and clinical trials, and the measurement of differences between these groups in relation to the effects of treatment, disease progression and biological processes. In this technobiopolitical paradigm, medical research is redefined as an area in which diverse political problems can be addressed, encompassing issues such as the nature of social justice, the limits and opportunities of citizenship, and the meanings of equality and difference in both biological and social contexts.

Finally, I think it is important to note that during the same period as the "race" to cure HIV, other international institutions and programs, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), also argued that actions capable of leading to the end of the HIV/AIDS pandemic are a global health priority. However, scientific research aimed at curing HIV does not seem to be the priority in these cases, but expanding access to diagnosis and antiretroviral treatment. The "end of AIDS" by the year 2030 has been committed to by the 193 member countries of the UN, as part of the third Sustainable Development goal which aims to ensure a healthy life and promote well-being for all people at all ages, and is one of the 169 targets for achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. (UNAIDS 2015; WHO 2016).

In 2010, UNAIDS announced for the first time its strategy of "getting to zero" between 2011 and 2016 (zero new infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero discrimination). In December 2013, UNAIDS established a set of targets in dialogue with "stakeholders" (people living with HIV, scientists, doctors, the pharmaceutical industry, among others) for the scale-up of HIV treatment beyond 2015. The so-called "90-90-90 treatment target", set at that time sought to significantly improve access to HIV diagnosis, treatment and care, and to achieve effective viral suppression. The expectation was that by 2020 90% of all people living with HIV would know their HIV status, 90% of all diagnosed people living with HIV would receive sustained antiretroviral therapy, and 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy would have viral suppression (UNAIDS, 2015). Finally, the 2016 UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS, held in June 2016, officially adopted the political declaration to "end" the HIV/AIDS pandemic by 2030 (Kenworthy, Thomann, and Parker 2018).

According to Kenworthy, Thomannband and Parker (2018), many HIV/AIDS experts and activists now find themselves at a particularly “strange” juncture in the response to the pandemic. On the one hand, there are more reasons to be optimistic than there have been in at least a decade. Access to treatment has expanded in many regions around the world, renewing hopes that the 90-90-90 targets can be achieved, even in countries with limited resources and generalized epidemics. On the other hand, there are significant threats to continued success. Even though effective antiretroviral treatments have been available for more than 20 years, with increased access to them in many countries, almost half the people living with HIV worldwide still do not have access to treatment.

Global funding for HIV-related health, which stagnated after the 2008 financial crisis, seems to have settled into a state of semi-permanent instability, with donors frequently changing priorities and funding modalities. Added to this are the growing nationalist and conservative movements around the world that further threaten global commitments to HIV funding. According to the authors, while the decade of 2000 was marked by discourses about an “out of control” pandemic and an “emergency policy” that justified activism and exceptional actions, the decade of 2010 was clearly marked by declarations about the possibility of achieving an “AIDS-free” generation (Kenworthy, Thomann, and Parker 2018).

According to the authors, the discourse on the “end of AIDS” is likely to result in two significant changes in HIV policy. The first is a reduction in donor support for long-term treatment, especially for the social and health systems that make this continuity possible. The second is a strong emphasis on short-term technical solutions, highlighting a “biomedical turn” that would have significant impacts on civil society, health systems and the effective future of the pandemic (Kenworthy, Thomann, and Parker 2018).

The “biomedical turn”, according to the authors, refers to a kind of technobioscientific “triumphalism” that is increasingly dominant in relation to HIV treatment and prevention. This in turn promotes the idea that effective interventions, based on privatized and technological processes, and in some cases supposedly more expensive, are the solution, neglecting the deficit of long-term support for lifelong antiretroviral treatment (Kenworthy, Thomann, and Parker 2018).

This biomedical turn is part of a wider trend in global health, which has seen a significant increase in focus on efforts to eradicate and eliminate diseases such as polio and malaria. Organizations such as the Gates Foundation have consistently embraced technological advances as a strategy to achieve new eradication and elimination goals. This trend is moving in several directions at once. It includes, for example the Towards an HIV Cure Initiative, supported by the International AIDS Society (IAS) (Kenworthy, Thomann, and Parker 2018).

However, there is a big discrepancy between rhetoric and reality, especially in relation to the lived experiences of researchers studying the pandemic around the world. While biomedical science and official discourse increasingly emphasize the imminence of the end of AIDS, researchers in the social sciences and public health highlight the complexity of the pandemic and the persistent barriers to achieving this goal. They point out that, for those on the front line of the fight against the pandemic, the end of AIDS seems to be a much more distant possibility, something that is disconnected from the realities faced in the daily battles to confront HIV (Kenworthy, Thomann, and Parker 2018).

N. Brown (2003) analyzed the hype generated by biotechnologies with their promises based on scientific progress, or what he calls the “political economy of biotechnological expectations”. Like Franklin (2022), he pointed out that the hopes initially placed in a biotechnology are rarely proportional to the actual future results. For Brown, to a certain extent, the intense emphasis on the future is crucial for exploring the many potential benefits embedded in biotechnology research and discourse. However, exaggerated enthusiasm has contributed to difficulties in the processes of legitimizing biotechnologies. In this sense, hype could be understood as a trap that brings down the hopes embedded in it.

The emblematic case of Timothy Brown, the “Berlin Patient”, inaugurated a technobioscientific “race” to cure HIV. This race has mobilized experts, raised millions in annual research funding, promoted partnerships

and inspired institutional strategies. Among the pitfalls of the cure hype, the current challenge is to balance scientific practices with maintaining funding and a more inclusive and diverse management model.

This set of events that entangle the HIV cure and the end of the HIV/AIDS pandemic are not isolated phenomena. Rather, they make up a wider network in the technobiopolitical regime that I will call the "political economy of the HIV cure". This network involves different agents, assemblages and perspectives related to curing HIV, consequently giving rise to new ethics. In the political economy of the HIV cure, hope transcends the past and the present, projecting itself into the future. As events unfold, we see the proliferation of new processes of governance and governmentality, highlighting the intersection between health and disease, the management of life and death, as well as scientific recognition and lucrative business opportunities in an expanding field.

As elements of a political economy mobilized by hope, therapeutic approaches to curing HIV contribute to the transformation of biological materials into resources that generate "biovalue" (Novas 2006; Waldby 2002), which are converted into information or techniques with the justification of improving human health. In this sense, cases of cures have driven the creation of biobanks that store the CCR5 $\Delta$ 32/ $\Delta$ 32 genetic mutation. (e.g. IciStem 2022). This form of "capitalization of hope" is based on attempts to realize the potential of biomedicine, transforming biological materials into resources to generate health and wealth (Novas 2006).

### **Final considerations: The HIV cure between life, science, and politics**

In the afterword to the book *A política da própria vida* [The Politics of Life Itself], Rose (2013, 350) argues that "we are neither at the beginning nor at the end, but in the middle of the 'mutations' that are taking place in the entanglements between life and politics". In this process, many hopes embedded in practices will be dashed, fears will prove unfounded and various obstacles and complications will arise. In addition, surprising and unforeseen events will occur. Thus, gradually, when new biotechnologies reach clinics, what now seems radical will become routine and within the realm of normality. At the same time, a lot of money will be made or lost. And these changes will become so embedded in our ways of seeing, thinking, and acting that it will be increasingly difficult to recognize their novelty.

As Rose (2013) affirms, biology is no longer a predetermined destiny, judgments are no longer based on a clear dichotomy between normality and pathology, and traditional distinctions between illness and health are blurring. In this way, it has become increasingly difficult to sustain the idea of a dividing line between interventions aimed at preventing illness or frailty and interventions aimed at improving capacities. The very boundaries between life and death, which were traditionally considered to be definitive limits, have now become subject to negotiation and discussion.

It is precisely in this "in-between" space that I see experimental stem cell therapies for curing HIV. For decades, there has been widespread frustration at the hopes of achieving an effective cure. To a certain extent, this search led to the conception of a "symbolic cure", represented by the "undetectable" state obtained by controlling the viral load in the body through continuous antiretroviral therapy and its biotechnological ramifications. In addition, experimental therapeutic approaches have emerged, such as stem cell and gene therapies, as extensions of regenerative medicine.

Initially, these practices generated skepticism, raised doubts about their results and generated criticism of the procedures involved. However, progressively, emerging cases of cure have indicated the adoption of personalized approaches with cell and gene therapy, which will most likely be available in clinics in coming years. I believe that these therapeutic approaches have the potential to be integrated into our daily lives, promoting new forms of subjectivation both for people living with HIV and for those who don't live with it.

Just as we see a growing interest in the innovation of antiretroviral treatment, which does not always try to improve the quality of life of people living with HIV, but to expand the profits of big pharmaceutical companies,

there is also an interest in personalized biotechnologies. These initiatives are related to the idea of regenerating and purifying bodies, something that has been sought since the early years of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in a climate tainted by stigma and discrimination. Practices such as these that connect the management of desires, and of life and death make up the technobiopolitical framework that Preciado (2008) has characterized as the "pharmacopornographic regime".

In this context, hope is intrinsically linked to the production of biomedical knowledge, the search for cures, and the involvement of patients and organizations in promoting health and guiding research. These aspects have been observed in this article and in many other studies dedicated to the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Hope is not limited to individual desire, but becomes a political and economic force aimed at realizing future collective possibilities. As a political economy, hope is configured as a powerful architecture made up of agents and actions that influence norms, narratives and technobioscientific practices.

Although still restricted to the experimental scientific field, it is possible to envision potential revenue streams from these experimental curative practices, a characteristic of contemporary technobiopolitics. After all, the production of biomedical knowledge today is legitimized by its ability to promote human health, but it is increasingly intertwined with the values of generating economic wealth (Rabinow & Rose, 2006). Thus, these biotechnologies of hope not only have the potential to promote scientific advances, but are also entangled with economic interests, reflecting the intersection between science and capital.

The fact is that research dedicated to curing HIV, a goal previously considered distant or even unimaginable, is now at the center of attention in the political-scientific community. It has become a strategic priority for various international organizations, and is driving global collaborations and advances in clinical research. From a medical-scientific perspective, the first cases of HIV cures are significant milestones that have opened the way to other therapeutic possibilities. But beyond this perspective, it is important to recognize that curing HIV infection goes beyond a purely biomedical achievement, as it is a social intervention that carries with it complexities and effects whose meaning and impact are still uncertain.

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# What's in it for Maria?

## Brazilian migrant sex workers' (de)mobilization of the “trafficking victim” identity

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### **Abstract**

The article explores the (de)mobilization of the “trafficking victim” identity among Brazilian sex workers and the benefits that the counter-trafficking apparatus offers to Brazilian migrant women exploited in the sex market. In doing so, it considers their experience as much in their country of origin, Brazil, as in Portugal. Drawing on findings from ethnographic research, the article highlights the occasional and unstable mobilization of the “victim” label as a form of defense against the counter-trafficking apparatus, rather than as an instrument of recognition of rights that can substantially benefit Brazilian migrant women in the sex market.

**Keyword:** Sex work, Exploitation, Human trafficking, Brazil, Portugal

# O que ganha a Maria com isso? A (des)mobilização da identidade de “vítima de tráfico” pelas trabalhadoras do sexo migrantes brasileiras

## Resumo

O artigo explora a (des)mobilização da identidade de “vítima de tráfico” pelas trabalhadoras do sexo brasileiras e os benefícios que o aparelho de combate ao tráfico oferece às mulheres migrantes brasileiras exploradas no mercado do sexo. Ao fazê-lo, considera a sua experiência tanto no seu país de origem, o Brasil, como em Portugal. Com base nos resultados da investigação etnográfica, o artigo destaca a mobilização ocasional e instável do rótulo de “vítima” como forma de defesa contra o aparelho de combate ao tráfico e não como instrumento de reconhecimento de direitos que poderia beneficiar substancialmente as mulheres migrantes brasileiras no mercado do sexo.

**Palavras-chave:** Trabalho sexual, Exploração, Tráfico de seres humanos, Brasil, Portugal

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### Introduction

*Que vantagem que levou vai levar  
Por amar, por sofrer e viver por você?  
Por deixar de ter sonhos e correr pelos seus  
E ficar com o fardo do ingrato adeus?*  
Fino du Rap, "Que Vantagem Maria Leva?", 2011<sup>1</sup>

Migrant women in the sex market have been the subject of heterogeneous representations that portray them either as passive victims of the patriarchal male privilege and violence of organized criminal networks, or as a threat to the integrity of borders, public health, order, and sexual and gender mores (Doezema, 2010; O'Connell Davidson, 2016). This mobilization of contrasting narratives, which combine to make migrant sex workers a group "at risk" or "a risk" group (Oliveira, 2012: 32) and which justify salvific interventions that are also criminalizing and punitive has often been directed at Brazilian sex workers in the transnational sex market (Pais, 2016; Piscitelli, 2013; Sacramento, 2020).

These women are historically one of the main nationalities within the Portuguese sex market (Oliveira, 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2007; Silva et al., 2013) and they became particularly visible in the early 2000s with the increase in Brazilian migration to the country (Gaspar et al., 2017; Malheiros, 2007; Peixoto et al., 2015). The increased visibility of Brazilian women in the Portuguese sex market was testified to by the "Mothers of Bragança" case, in 2003. Both in the city of Bragança and in other cities in northern Portugal, the numbers of Brazilian sex workers in discos, bars, clubs, and on the streets assumed unprecedented proportions, igniting a nationalist, chauvinist, xenophobic reaction from a group of Portuguese women (Pais, 2016).

The "mothers" were led by four women who, concerned with the need to protect family economies and with the alleged cultural and social degradation of the region, labeled migrant sex workers as *brasileiras* (Brazilians) – and, alternatively, as whores, prostitutes, *macumbeiras* (black magic practitioners). The group demanded the closure of prostitution sites and the expulsion of foreign sex workers (Ibid).

The early 2000s were also the era of the global "call to arms" against human trafficking, which was closely identified in both Portugal and Brazil (at least for a certain period) with "sex trafficking" (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2011; Clemente, 2019). The actors of the Portuguese and Brazilian counter-trafficking apparatus mobilized yet another image of Brazilian sex workers, that of "victim." These actors produced data on trafficking (Clemente, 2017) and mobilized human and financial resources for the construction of both countries' current counter-trafficking apparatus (Clemente, 2022c).

The mobilization of the "trafficking victim" identity has been infrequent among migrant women in the sex market along the Brazil-Europe axis (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2011, 2012, 2013; Piscitelli, 2013; Silva et al.,

<sup>1</sup> What's in it, was in it will be in it / For loving, for suffering and for living for you? / For leaving her dreams and running after yours / And to carry the weight of an ungrateful goodbye? (Our translation).



2013). The present article explores the (de)mobilization of this identity among Brazilian sex workers in Brazil and Portugal.<sup>2</sup> It pays special attention to the conceptualization of "trafficking" in Brazilian and Portuguese counter-trafficking laws and policies, the "problem" of Brazilian women in the transnational sex market and the benefits or issues that the "trafficking victim" identity creates. Our analysis is based in different ethnographic experiences conducted in Portugal and Brazil over the past 15 years. Our data highlights a rare and unstable mobilization of the "trafficking victim" category among migrant Brazilian sex workers, who most often employ it to defend themselves from the counter-trafficking apparatus while rejecting the simplified State-created understandings of "trafficking." Inherent in this rejection is a belief, backed by concrete experience, that defining oneself as a "victim of trafficking" is not an effective means of conquering labor and migrant rights. In the context of our investigations, we also observed that, when it is employed, the trafficking victim category is mobilized mainly to avoid accusations of irregular migration to Europe and to diminish women's risks of deportation and stigmatizations as *brasileiras*.

### Trafficking and the counter-trafficking "anti-politics machine"

Human trafficking - generally understood to involve the movement of people for the purpose of their exploitation in conditions similar to slavery - is currently a global concern, roundly condemned by a vast variety of social actors. Human trafficking, however, is also a fluid and polysemic concept, whose definitions and operational employment varies across space and time (Clemente, 2019; Piscitelli & Lowenkron, 2015).

The international instruments currently informing counter-trafficking legislation and policies in numerous states present a broader conceptualization of trafficking than that targeted by the conventions of the late 19th century and early 20th centuries. The 2000 United Nations Trafficking Protocol provides for a diversification of the types of exploitation, which are no longer limited, to the "exploitation of the prostitution of others" (UN, 1949: 1).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, many of the constituent elements of the definition of trafficking in this instrument remain undefined (Anderson and O'Connell Davidson, 2002; Doezema, 2005). This is the case of concepts such as "coercion" and "vulnerability" and, above all, the recurrently evoked "sexual exploitation" (UN, 2000: 42).

This lack of definition is linked to the conflicting agendas of the agencies and organizations concerned with "trafficking" and it has prompted efforts to develop tools for more harmonic interpretations of the concept of human trafficking (see Jordan, 2002; Raymond, 2001). These have not limited the variability and subjectivity of the operational definitions of trafficking, however. The definitions that are currently employed to combat the crime mostly reflect moralistic, law and order, and immigration agendas, as well as other contingent political concerns, including to the control of migrant prostitution and female migration in general, as well as the criminalization of the purchase of sexual services (Carline, 2012; Clemente, 2022c; Doezema, 2005). The fluidity of the concepts of "sexual exploitation" encountered within anti-trafficking language is expressed by the emic meanings attributed to it by sex workers. Building on extensive ethnographic research in the sex markets in the urban areas of the South-Southeast region of Brazil, Blanchette et al. (2017) draw attention to the fact that various agents exploit sex workers in the Marxist sense of the word by extracting surplus from their labor. This, however, tends to leave sex workers feeling "economically exploited as workers and not as women supposedly reduced to the condition of slaves or mere inanimate objects" (Ibid: 210). From the point of view of sex workers, then, prostitution is not significantly different from other jobs in terms of its

<sup>2</sup> Following Fredrik Barth (2000), we understand social identities as constructed and not essential, being mobilized or demobilized, within socially defined limits, in accordance with agents' interests and abilities. "Trafficking victim" is one such identity, which may be taken on or rejected in this fashion.

<sup>3</sup> The art. 3(a) of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (also known as the Trafficking Protocol or Palermo Protocol) refers to a list of exploitative practices including "the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

"exploitation" potential – a fact that has been repeatedly highlighted by sex workers throughout Blanchette's research (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2017, 2021).

However, the high stigmatization and non-recognition of prostitution as work requires the construction and maintenance of a "moral region" (Park & Burgess, 1984: 42) wherein prostitution is tolerated. In other words, the exploitation of prostitution as work is constituted in the control of the constant negotiations with and expenses paid to different actors so that these "allow" sex work to take place. One of the principal actors extracting surplus from sex work in this fashion include local authorities. Those people who are socially defined as "pimps" by the media and authorities are often nothing more than the intermediaries of this process, with the greater portion of the profits extracted from it ending up in the hands of agents of the State.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, the same State that, in many different countries (including Portugal and Brazil), does not recognize the rights of sex workers and uses its police powers to prevent sex-working women from migrating, also proposes to rescue them as "victims of trafficking" (see also Clemente, 2022c). In so doing, the State abandons political intervention directed towards protecting or aiding these women as sex workers in favor of technical interventions which usually ensure little benefit to the victims of trafficking but which often they reinforce the bureaucratic power of State (Clemente, 2022c).

It is important to note here that the social and political construction of "human trafficking" itself has facilitated this process. As Jo Doezema (2010) points out, the round of debates that led up to the Trafficking Protocol were originally intended to disassociate sex work from the concept of human trafficking. Nevertheless, the wave of moral panic that swept the world following the signing of the Protocol specifically focused on sex work as being particularly conducive to human trafficking (Doezema, 2010; Bernstein, 2010). Furthermore, in many contexts, including Brazil and Portugal, the anti-trafficking field has been established from the top down by a select group of counter-trafficking agents, rather than in response to grassroots pressure from groups deemed vulnerable to trafficking (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2015; Blanchette & Da Silva, 2012; Blanchette et al., 2013; Clemente, 2021, 2022a, 2023). "Typical" cases of trafficking have thus often been characterized in policymaking circles, in the media, and in the parahumanitarian sphere (Amar, 2013), not through empirically evidence, but according to the "evidence by citation" or the "whoozle effect" (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2012; Stransky & Finkelhor, 2008).

The "whoozle effect" is an unscientific methodology whereby facts are created through the circuitous repetition of earlier and unfounded "guesstimates" or statements by authoritative-sounding sources. This effect in some cases amounts to what might be called a "bullshit ouroboros," evoking both the legendary snake that swallows its own tail and moral philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt's concept of "bullshit" as a form of discourse which intentionally and promiscuously mixes truth, falsehood, and pure imagination for the sole purpose of mobilizing affect and making a political impact (Frankfurt, 2006). In a "bullshit ouroboros," researchers, journalists, and political actors constantly cite one another in a multilevel hierarchically ordered scheme of nested meaning, where each level's "truth" depends upon the authority of another level of the scheme which, in turn, acts as authority for a third level, ultimately coming full circle back to the first level: "evidence by citation." Elizabeth Pisani (2008) provides an excellent example of how such an ouroboros was created in the anti-HIV/AIDS field in Africa and Asia during the George W. Bush administration and Blanchette & Da Silva (2012) have documented the existence of a similar scheme in definitions of human trafficking in Brazil. In countries such as Portugal and Brazil, the counter-trafficking field has employed this sort of bad faith circular argumentation to create structures that resembles the "anti-political machine" of "development," as described by James Ferguson (1990: xv; see Clemente, 2022c). This establishes a hegemonic interpretative grid employed in conditional and shifting fashion to engage with populations understood to be "vulnerable" to trafficking,

<sup>4</sup> "Pimp" is an accusatory, legal, and emic category frequently employed to indicate third parties who supposedly profit from the sex work of others. As Blanchette & Da Silva have exhaustively documented elsewhere (2017), there is little etic or social-scientific value to this term, which is mobilized principally to create "monstrous" stereotypes that permit the acritical mobilization of state violence against certain populations.

not according to said populations' demands, but according to those of the institutions involved in maintaining and being maintained by said grid (Clemente 2021, 2022c). Anti-trafficking institutions thus create their own discourses, which simultaneously construct the populations said to be "vulnerable" to trafficking as objects of knowledge and as targets for State surveillance and control (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2010; Clemente, 2022c).

Our focus in the present article is to explore what favors and limits the mobilization of the "trafficking victim" category by Brazilian migrant women in the sex trade in this context, paying special consideration to the benefits that the counter-trafficking "anti-politics machine" (Clemente, 2022c) offers to them to take on the identity of "trafficking victim."

## Methodology

Ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews with sex workers and anti-trafficking agents were the main methods used in the projects on which this study is based. These include two Portugal-based projects: one concerned with the protection of trafficked women in Portugal (2014-2018) where the presence of Brazilian sex workers helped spur the first Portuguese counter-trafficking efforts. The other project concerns the construction of counter-trafficking systems in Southern Europe (2018-2024). In these two projects, up to now, Clemente collected sixty qualitative interviews with Portuguese state and non-state actors and four with "trafficking victims" living in Portugal. The fieldwork included participation in training and awareness actions, groups and institutional networks,<sup>5</sup> as well as first-hand observations at a Portuguese shelter for trafficked women between July 2016 and January 2017.

The Brazil-based projects were a series of investigations undertaken by Blanchette between 2003 and 2016, principally in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's largest *entrepot* for sex tourism and an origin point for sex workers bound for Europe. Originally, Blanchette conducted a total of 113 incursions into sex work venues in Copacabana (2004-2009). During these incursions, they conducted open interviews with 500 sex workers and semi-structured interviews with another twenty four. During this period, they also conducted seven semi-structured interviews with owners and managers of various venues and had thousands of interactions with sex workers and foreign sex tourists. This research was wrapped up in early 2010 with the closure of one of the most important and paradigmatic sex tourism venues of Copacabana (see Blanchette & Da Silva, 2009, 2015). As the counter-trafficking panic grew in Brazil, these investigations expanded to the other main sex work regions of Rio de Janeiro (Downtown and Vila Mimosa) and to the principal organs and committees dedicated to reviewing and enforcing Brazil's counter-trafficking laws.

This present article is mainly focused on interviews and informal discussions with three Brazilian "trafficking victims:" one in Portugal and two in the state of Rio de Janeiro with previous experiences in Portugal. In Portugal the interview (Alice) was conducted in 2019 in a city in Northern Portugal. In Brazil the interviews (Sara and Konni) were conducted in Rio de Janeiro, and also in official venues created to combat human trafficking, where self-identified victims of trafficking gather to relate their stories. Given the limitations of fieldwork in brothels our interview data in Brazil was reconstructed from field notes, as proposed by the classic ethnographic method of studying social situations in situ, pioneered by Bronislaw Malinowski (1976).

All the participants, who at the time of the interviews were aged between 29 and 46, self-described themselves as "*acompanhante*" (escort) or "*garota de programa*" (sex worker) and, as more fully described below, had begun traveling in Europe and, in particular, to Portugal, subsequent to the construction of the current counter-trafficking apparatuses. All of them occasionally mobilized the category of "trafficking victim" to describe the exploitation they experienced at some time in their experience as migrant sex workers. Significantly, these

<sup>5</sup> This is the case of the Portuguese Network on Sex Work (RTS), the anti-trafficking group of the Alternative and Answer Women's Union (UMAR) and the Portuguese Networks for Support and Protection of Victims of Trafficking (RAPVT).

three are also the only self-described Brazilian "victims of trafficking" that we have encountered in the course of our intense ethnographic studies, detailed above.

The small number of interviews with Brazilian migrant sex workers who self-identify as "trafficking victims" could, at first glance, be seen as a limitation of this study. It should be remembered, however, that these three women are the only sex working, self-identified trafficking victims we have been able to uncover in over 15 years of ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil and Portugal – including in-depth discussions with state and private organizations that "aid victims of trafficking." If neither we nor the principal anti-trafficking groups involved in attending to self-identified victims of trafficking can find hardly any among sex workers, Occam's Razor would suggest that there simply are not many to be found.<sup>6</sup> However, the analysis of the three cases we do have, along with a review of relevant anti-trafficking conventions, agreements, legislation, action plans, reports, and statistical data, offers a valuable opportunity to investigate in-depth the reasons for mobilization of the trafficking victim category by Brazilian women in the sex market on both sides of the Atlantic in those cases when it actually occurs – something which, as far as we have been able to uncover, has never actually yet been done. In order to contextualize these, in the next section, then, we must first look at the legal definitions of trafficking and the broader legal frameworks in Brazil and Portugal.

### Anti-trafficking legislation in Brazil and Portugal

The crime of trafficking was originally defined in 1940 by Article 231 of the Brazilian Penal Code in the following manner, situating the international migration of female sex workers as the *sine qua non* of trafficking, in accordance with the international legal logic of the times (Doezema, 2010):

Promoting or facilitating the entry, into national territory, of a woman who comes here to exercise prostitution, or the exit of a woman who will exercise it in foreign lands.

This definition expressed the Brazil's abolitionist approach towards prostitution and was used on several occasions to prevent the migration of Brazilian women suspected of sex work and to arrest members of their social support network (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2018). In fact, under Article 231, giving a woman a ride to the airport to catch a plane to do sex work overseas was enough to qualify human trafficking. This law was not accompanied by any consideration of aiding victims. The year following Brazil's ratification of the Trafficking Protocol in 2004, Article 231 was changed to refer to "people" instead of "women," but violence, coercion and exploitation were still not understood to be necessary for trafficking to occur. 2005 also saw the creation of Article 231a, which similarly criminalized the assisted migration of sex workers within Brazilian territory. The next round of changes in Article 231 came in 2009, when "prostitution" was defined as a synonym of "sexual exploitation" and all forms of migration for "sexual exploitation" were criminalized under the law. The Brazilian Penal Code did and does not define "sexual exploitation," so while this change was presented as an improvement, it reinforced, in juridical terms, the migration of prostitutes as a necessary and sufficient condition for "trafficking." From 2009 on, however, through the Federal Ministry of Justice, trafficking began to be codified in legal praxis as a crime that affected other categories of humans than the "sexually exploited." Furthermore, the concept of the "trafficking victim" began to be ensconced in Brazilian counter-trafficking discourses and practices, if not in the law itself, as not simply "migratory prostitute" (Blanchette & Da Silva 2010).

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<sup>6</sup> Blanchette has also uncovered a fourth Brazilian sex worker who self-identifies as a "trafficking victim." As this woman went to Switzerland as a wife (and not as a sex worker) and mobilized the victim identity to disassociate herself from her husband, a sex club owner, we have decided that it is too difficult a story to recount in the present article. This fourth case, however, also shows all the marks of the conditional mobilization of the "victim" identity to avoid police persecution otherwise discussed in this article.

This social construction of the "trafficking victim" did not proceed from "the grassroots up" in response to civil society demands (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2018, 2012; Olivar Nieto, 2015). Rather, it followed the logic of security state parahumanitarianism (Amar, 2013), in which State actors subcontracted and empowered local NGOs (often religious) under the auspices of international and United Nations (UN) demands to identify, isolate, and attend to trafficking victims. Within this dynamic, "potential trafficking victim" became synonymous with pretty much every possible marker of social marginalization in Brazil (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2010). Although counter-trafficking discourses in Brazil have become more nuanced since 2009, the authenticating stereotypes of the trafficking victim remain alive today and "trafficking victim" is still associated in the public mind with black/brown, poor, female prostitutes, and destitute of agency (Olivar Nieto, 2015).

Brazil, however, has had a long history of sex worker organization. The Brazilian Prostitutes' Network (RBP) recognized the possible negative implications for sex workers in the renewed counter-trafficking panic and quickly took steps to disassociate sex work as synonymous with trafficking. Their efforts achieved them a seat at the decision-making table in the Brazilian Federal Anti-Trafficking Committee in 2013, which was charged with helping Congress to completely rewriting Brazil's counter-trafficking law to bring it into concordance with the Trafficking Protocol. The resulting bill, Law 13.344 passed in late 2016, eliminating Articles 231 and 231A. At the RBP's insistence, the new law eliminated the congruency between prostitution and sexual exploitation. This was a victory for the RBP, although L13.344 can still be used as an anti-vice measure, given creative judicial interpretations.<sup>7</sup> It should also be emphasized that the Workers Party - for which the fight against slave labor has been a firm policy commitment - had been a major mobilizing force behind the new law that also opened up the definition of trafficking to any sort of coerced or fraudulent migration which results in a situation analogous to slavery (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2009, 2018).

More recently, the Bolsonaro government saw Brazil's anti-slavery laws as an impediment to economic progress. It soon attacked one of the key precepts of the counter-trafficking cause in Brazil: that work analogous to slavery should be criminalized as slavery under Brazil's labor laws (Amado, 2021). Along with this, the federal apparatus built up to combat slavery was systematically underfunded or dismantled (Stropasolas, 2021). As for prostitution and human trafficking, Bolsonaro appeared to be curiously ambiguous. Contradicting the position held by the Brazilian Federal Government for over 25 years, the President even seemed to be cautiously supportive of heterosexual sex tourism (Sudre, 2019).

Turning our gaze to Portuguese counter-trafficking, there are similarities but also differences with the Brazilian and with the wider international contexts. In Portugal, human trafficking was introduced into the Penal Code in 1982, where it was initially defined as the enticement, seduction or deviation of people, even with their consent, to practice prostitution or acts contrary to modesty or sexual morality in another country. In the same year, after two decades of prohibition and criminalization, prostitution was decriminalized, but with the crime of trafficking introduced. The criminalization of pimping and limitations on the migration of sex workers were further accentuated in this context (Silva et al., 2013). In subsequent years, Portugal ratified the 1949 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, and the 2000 UN Trafficking Protocol (in 1991 and 2004 respectively). The country's diligent implementation of international and European instruments against trafficking has encouraged successive adjustments of the legal definition of trafficking. In 2007, one of the most significant alterations occurred in Portugal when the country's national definition of trafficking was expanded to include non-sexual exploitation as well (Clemente, 2017). As analyzed elsewhere, the definition of the problem of trafficking and the social construction of its victims has seen the formal involvement of organized civil society, traditionally weak and substantially dependent on State political agendas in Portugal (Clemente, 2021, 2022b, 2023). The absence of any dialogue with sex workers

<sup>7</sup> Crucially, the new law still defines migration for "sexual exploitation" as a sufficient condition for human trafficking. In no place, however, does Brazilian criminal jurisprudence describe what constitutes "sexual exploitation." Judges are thus free to determine how this concept is to be to.

themselves (a category only recently organized in relatively more solid forms in Portugal) has contributed to a widespread definition of trafficking as a problem of transnational organized crime (Clemente, 2022c). This has relativized some of the phenomenon's political dimensions, beginning with the fact that prostitution continues to be unrecognized as work in Portugal, although it is not criminalized (Oliveira, 2018; Silva et al., 2013). The institutional difficulty of modifying prostitution laws (a source of conflict among feminist and religious groups, as well as a secondary concern for some politicians) has led to a cautious employment, on the part of the Portuguese State, of the idea of "sex trafficking" and an emphasis on other, more heterogeneous forms of trafficking (Clemente, 2019, 2022c).

Despite the widespread mobilization of humanitarian language in training courses, counter-trafficking campaigns, shelters, and other initiatives, protection for trafficking victims in Portugal has been subordinated to the arrest and persecution of traffickers (Clemente, 2022c). Thus in 2007, Portugal's Immigration Law transposed into the Portuguese legal system several community directives, making provision for a residence permit to be issued to "victims of trafficking" only under three cumulative conditions, including (i) the benefit of the victim's presence for the purposes of investigations and criminal proceedings; (ii) the victim's intention to cooperate with the authorities to facilitate investigations; and (iii) the victim's cessation of relations with the persons suspected of having committed trafficking. Also in 2007, a special regime was proposed for granting a residency permit for trafficking victims unwilling or unable to cooperate with law enforcement. This, however, has never been applied in practice.

The Portuguese definition of trafficking and the country's resulting policies have historically constituted a strong obstacle both to the formal identification of trafficking victims (and of the responsibility of security forces to these people) and to their access to the rights formally provided for them by the Portuguese State. As a representative of the police force explained to Clemente:

We work closely with victims so that they collaborate with justice and don't disappear. Sex trafficking victims are more difficult. They need to earn money. Brazilian women come here to improve their living conditions, to continue prostituting themselves, to gain economic capacity that they did not have in Brazil. They don't want to be here for months on end doing nothing, or with jobs for which they don't earn anything.

Thus, not surprisingly, only slightly more than a quarter of the trafficking victims reported in Portugal have been confirmed as such by the authorities (Clemente, 2017). Furthermore, according to data provided by the Planning and Training Office/SEF, only 142 residency permits were issued between 2008 and 2018 for over 2000 "presumed victims" of human trafficking. This data becomes particularly significant if we consider that residency permits are a precondition for victims' access to work, healthcare, legal aid, etc. Predictably, as emphasized by the more recent GRETA report (2022), legal provisions for compensation are also far from effective in Portugal.

### **Trafficking Cases #1 and 2: Sara and Konni**

In the face of the mobilization of the idea of trafficking by the Brazilian and Portuguese States and their allies in the counter-trafficking field (police forces, anti-trafficking NGOs, labor ministries, local and municipal governments, academic allies), our sex working interlocutors have been loath to take on the label of "trafficking victim" and its accompanying stereotypes for themselves. In the course of more than 15 years of ethnographic field work among migrating sex workers in Rio de Janeiro and Portugal, and although these women shared much information about incurring debts in order to migrate to and from Europe to work, we only encountered less than a three cases (presented below) of women who considered themselves to be "trafficking victims."

The few instances in which sex workers even brought up the term "trafficking" were generally in the context of avoiding deportation while overseas. As Sara, a white 32-year-old Brazilian sex worker put in in 2008:

I got arrested for working in a club in Europe. I was going to be deported for immigration violations and illegally working. I told the police that I had been forced to sell sex because I had become indebted. I had come to be a maid, but they forced me to be a prostitute and they took my passport.

None of this was precisely true, Sara confirmed. She had gone to Spain by taking out a debt with a club owner there. This man had come to Brazil the previous Carnival to specifically recruit women. According to Sara: "If you wanted to work in Spain, you had to get in line." The women would be extensively interviewed and, if chosen, would have their plane tickets and housing paid, working in the clubs until they cleared their debts. All the women we talked to were adamant that this was not a form of "debt slavery" as the debts were relatively quickly paid off and, afterwards, the woman would be in Europe, free to work entirely for herself. Typically, during a good year, it took around six weeks to pay off the debt. Many women reported staying on voluntarily in the clubs they worked in after they cleared their debts because such arrangements were found to be convenient.

Sara thought the idea of women being enslaved or forced to prostitute themselves was ridiculous: "Why would a club owner bother to fool a woman into working for them when so many want to do so willingly? If you want to work in Spain [selling sex], you have to get in line." As a Brazilian brothel manager also told Blanchette in 2008, the economic logics behind "forcing" women to work in prostitution just do not add up:

Why the hell would I have unwilling women working for me? Do you know how much money it would take to hire the gunmen that would be needed to make that work, let alone the police bribes? And all it would take is one client going to any cop you haven't paid off and it would be over.

It is fair to say that this system was rigged to give club owners a high degree of control and profit and that they did not shy away from confiscating women's passports as "collateral" until the women had paid their debts. But as numerous sex working migrant women have pointed out, one does not become a slave simply because one has lost one's passport. A trip to any Brazilian consulate should provide a new one. A lost passport is an expense and an inconvenience, not some key item whose absence deprives its original bearer of all agency or possibility of movement. We must emphasize the fact that sex workers themselves often tell the authors this. The only people we hear routinely repeating the myth that "lack of passport = slavery" are State officials who openly admit that they feel that it is their responsibility to reduce the level of Brazilian irregular immigration overseas, by frightening potential immigrants, if necessary (see Blanchette & Da Silva, 2011, 2012 for individual case studies of this).

In Sara's case, the possibility of her being a trafficking victim was presented to her by the police:

They asked me if I was a trafficking victim. I asked, 'What is that?' and they said someone who was forced to come to Spain to prostitute themselves. I asked them 'What happens if I am this thing?' They told me I wouldn't be deported immediately and might not even be deported at all. So, I became a trafficking victim.

Sara laughed as she said this, seeming to find it absurd. When asked what she gained from adopting the label "trafficking victim," she was very clear: her eventual deportation back to Brazil did not go into her records as a deportation, but as a repatriation. Sara felt this was important because, according to her, a deported Brazilian cannot easily take out another passport.<sup>8</sup>

As the first decade of the 21st century passed into the second, migrant Brazilian sex workers increasingly began to incorporate "trafficking" in their vocabulary, if only because Brazilian women of all types were being

<sup>8</sup> We have not been able to discover whether or not this is true but there are many indications that it is, including testimony by deported sex workers that they had to pay a bribe to the Brazilian Federal Police to "get their record clean" (*ficha limpa*) before getting another passport.

increasingly surveilled for "signs of trafficking" as they crossed international borders (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2021). Following the European and North American economic collapse of 2008 many of our Brazilian sex worker informants also found themselves in Europe – and particularly in Spain – with no ability to pay off the debts they had incurred to travel. Different than what the counter-trafficking model would suppose (i.e. forced slave labor), all of our sex working informants reported about how debts and repayments needed to be renegotiated in these circumstances.

In more recent times, on the eve of the FIFA World Cup in 2014, the counter-trafficking moral panic in Brazil had reached a new height and began percolating outwards, from the country's main urban centers (Olivar Nieto, 2015). At the same time, itinerant male laborers in construction and agriculture and trans- sex workers began to appear in the Brazilian Justice and Labor Department's reports as potential trafficking victims. Certain sex working leaders also began to understand "trafficking victim" as a category that could be mobilized to acquire scarce resources to aid sex working populations.

In this context, as a member of the Federal and Rio de Janeiro State anti-trafficking committees in literally hundreds of meetings convened by state authorities to deal with the threat of trafficking in mega-sporting events during the 2010-2016 period,<sup>9</sup> Blanchette encountered one firsthand case of the use of trafficking as a situational identity by a sex worker: one that was mobilized when it could move resources for said sex workers' projects, but which was rejected in other circumstances. On this occasion, a middle-aged white trans woman, Konni, spent an entire lunch break talking to Blanchette and a handful of sex worker activists, exchanging "war stories" of their time in Europe. Konni remembered how she had acquired a debt to migrate to Paris via Portugal and Italy for sex work and had spent three months working it off. She claimed it had taken her longer than usual because she took a month see the World Cup in France without asking her employers' permission. "When I came back they were really pissed," she declared. "But what were they going to do? They added onto my debt, but I cleared it off in a month. It was so worth it. It was the best time of my life!"

The very next day at the conference's lunch break, Blanchette overheard Konni telling the same story to a Catholic lay worker. In this recounting, she was smuggled across the French border by "mafiosos" who locked her in a closet-like room when she wasn't working. She "ran away" during the Cup but was "recaptured" and then savagely beaten. She only managed to free herself by going to the police a month later, but the police didn't want to help her because she was trans-. She was then deported back to Brazil. Which version of the story is "true" is of no import for our purposes. Konni was not lying to either Blanchette or the Catholic social worker. She had gone to Europe illegally, had been smuggled across two borders, had to pay off a debt, had skipped out on her employers and, almost certainly, had encountered all sorts of violence – physical and symbolic – on her journey. With prostitution rights activists this became a triumphant tale of resistance and self-sufficiency; with Catholic anti-trafficking activists who had money to fund Konni's NGO, it became a first-hand testimony of the horrors of trafficking.

Konni knew what she was getting in either case: political allies on the one hand and funding for a street-level trans drop-in center on the other. For the first group, "trafficking" wasn't an issue so much as the rights abuses sex workers are more generally subjected to. This group wanted Konni's NGO's support for the new counter-trafficking law, which would decriminalize prostitute migrations. In return, Konni's NGO would get cis-gendered sex working allies in her struggle within Brazil's trans movement. To this group, then, Konni used her story to signal her willingness to engage in political struggle. To the Catholic group, Konni presented herself as a classical trafficking victim, touching on almost every trope then in fashion in the Brazilian mediaspheres regarding the phenomenon (Appadurai, 1996). Her experiences highlighted her luck in surviving a situation in which others died in and underlined her acceptability as a leader of an organization that would dedicate itself to keeping young transwomen out of traffickers' clutches.

<sup>9</sup> See Blanchette & Da Silva (2021), for a breakdown of these activities and our insertion into this political process, which resulted in the reformation of Brazil's anti-trafficking laws in 2016.



### Trafficking Cases #3: Alice

The limited benefits that the mobilization of the trafficking victim category offers in Portugal are clear to many sex workers. Since 2014, when Clemente began the first research in Portugal within structures and networks dedicated to their assistance, encounters with self-declared victims of trafficking have been the exception (see also Clemente, 2017, 2022c). Meanwhile, constant informal conversations with Brazilian sex workers in Portugal suggest their paths, albeit heterogeneous, are characterized by a common element: none were forced to enter prostitution. This is also the case of Alice, who is the only Brazilian sex worker Clemente met who has declared herself to be a trafficking victim.

Alice met Clemente on her day off. The women went to the offices of a local NGO where Alice explained that she began selling sex when her family was experiencing economic difficulties. One of her sisters went to school and the others stayed at home to save money while her grandmother sent groceries to help the family. Alice started selling sweets at school and passing out leaflets for pay on the street. When Alice was 15 years old, a man offered her 100 reais for sex, but her friends suggested that she should ask for more because she was young: "I started playing around. I saw the difficulties my parents were going through. I thought, 'I am already giving it up for free to the boys in the neighborhood. Why not do it for money with old white guys?'" The times during which Alice sold sex alternated with periods of sexual-affective relationships in which access to her body still meant material and symbolic compensation. In the words of Alice: "I began dating businessmen in the city when I was 17. I won't lie or be a hypocrite: not only were they cute, they had money." Around the age of 25, when Alice was attending university that she felt the need to professionalize herself as an *acompanhante* (escort). Her family's situation had improved, but Alice wanted a higher standard of living:

I was working for Herbalife. I attended the evangelical church. At that time, they called me a *patricinha* because I lived in a good place. My father was doing better, but I wanted things for myself. At the university there were girls who dressed well. I tried to understand if they also did what I did. I was envious of my classmates. In the [my city], it was enough to go to the beach. In the [inland northeast] I needed to learn. So I contacted an agency. I had to observe and learn how things were done. In three days, I learned everything I needed.

Confirming the findings of previous studies (Da Silva & Blanchette, 2017), Alice's experience suggests that prostitution is only one form of "sexual-economic exchange" (Tabet, 2004: 7) that can alternate in individual biographies, being in its more professionalized dimensions one of the most effective means of socio-economic ascension, as well as guaranteeing enough money to meet basic needs. Even when, as in Alice's case, a woman has access to other forms of work, prostitution is also often the most effective form of social ascension outside of marriage. Prostitution is not described as an easy job by Alice. She points out that "Thank God the only one who does that it is me. I do not wish this on my sisters." As an illustration, Alice also mentioned the problems she had only a few hours previously, when one of her clients first tried to remove his condom and then tried to steal from her. This situation was alleviated thanks to the presence of a trans colleague with whom Alice works. When not traveling, the two women work together in an apartment. Alice, like most sex workers in Portugal and Brazil (see Blanchette & Da Silva, 2009; Oliveira, 2013) works mainly independently: she places ads and responds to clients. She does not share her profits with anyone and the rent of about 150 euros per week is the price necessary to secure that the moral region for labour (Park & Burgess, 1984), made necessary by the non-recognition of prostitution as a work. Both the owner of the house and any "pimp" (Blanchette & Da Silva, 2017) she resorts to when she travels for work offer services that Alice values:

The owner is one of the people I like to work with the most. She is very human and charismatic. She went through a lot because she wasn't in Portugal, where the same language is spoken. In Italy, her hair was cut and she had to wear a wig and work on the street.

Meanwhile, when Alice is working outside Portugal, she usually splits her earnings 50% with third parties – so-called “pimps.” Alice emphasizes, however, that “it’s something I look for: it makes me work less in managing calls and reservations and then I have just to open the door and serve the client.” In other words, when Alice’s lack of knowledge of contexts or linguistic capital requires it, she herself seeks out the services of third parties that will allow her to work with greater safety and comfort.

At the time of her meeting with Clemente, Alice appeared to be well-acquainted with the different European sex markets. This was not the case when she first came to Portugal more than ten years ago. In recalling that period, Alice resumed talking about her lover (Lourdes) and the end of their difficult relationship, as well as her friend (Dolores) with whom she travelled to Europe:

Dolores knew that I had already traveled to Germany. That I had fallen in love with Lourdes and my life was not easy. Lourdes used my money for other things besides the planned ones. Dolores made me the offer: ‘We are evangelicals abroad. We’re going to Portugal to try a different life. I have an old man I met in Portugal. I asked him to set up a café for me. We will work with food and we’ll see if we can find someone for you to marry.’

Dolores’ proposal was not related to prostitution but, as Alice emphasizes:

I will not be hypocritical. If she had told me: ‘let’s go to Portugal, let’s take advantage of this old man and let’s sell sex,’ I would have accepted it because it’s something I already did in Brazil, I wouldn’t have been hurt doing it in Portugal earning much more than in Brazil.

Alice did not contract any debt to travel. Rather, she sold some of her assets and travelled to Portugal with her own money. Meanwhile, Dolores was the person who already knew how things worked in Portugal: she had the cultural and social capital that Alice lacked. Despite Dolores’s friendly welcome in the days following Alice’s arrival, the situation changed:

It was Sunday and my second week in Portugal was starting. I realized that something was happening. I couldn’t scream or do anything, for two armed men and a driver appeared. (...) They put me in a basement with no windows. I started at 9-10 am and came back at 4.30-5 am. I was there 23 days without seeing sunlight. I had one meal a day, and when I didn’t reach my goal at the club, I was beaten. I have marks here that I can show you from aggression...

After a few weeks Alice managed to escape the situation that she defined without hesitation as “exploitation.” Her exploiters, thinking they had “tamed her,” gave her responsibilities and a certain autonomy in the management her affairs which she used to escape. Confirming what our self-identified “trafficked” interlocutors in Brazil have reported, Alice did not consider either reporting her abduction to the police or returning to her home country. As she put it:

I didn’t want to go back to Brazil with nothing, after having suffered everything, I had suffered with my relationship. So I said: ‘No, I’m going to stay now. I’m going to marry a man, whether for money or for love. I’m going to make my life and, when I set foot in Brazil, it will be after I get what I want. I started working for myself, paying the daily rent for the room. I think it’s correct because when I worked abroad, when I stayed in hotels, I didn’t stay there for free. I had to pay for my hotel room.

The person who helped Alice (Antonia) is an acquaintance she met during her first week in Portugal. She introduced Alice to the club in which she worked but also suggested that Alice move to work in an apartment of a friend (Patrícia) fearing that Alice would be identified by those whom she describes as her “exploiters:”

Patricia helped me a lot. Everything I know about Europe, about this work, I owe to Patrícia and Antonia. When I got up the courage marry Zé to marry, Patricia went with me to open a bank account and to deal with the papers.

Although free to work independently, Alice soon found herself in an irregular situation in Portugal. The solution she encountered was to marry a Portuguese man: "Our marriage started out as being for pay," explains Alice. "That didn't happen, however. When he saw me, he fell in love." Alice's marital relationship, which was to be a purely economic exchange, thus turned into a sexual-affective exchange. This does not mean that it did not arouse the suspicions of the police in one of the raids in which Alice was involved. It was following this that Alice mobilized the identity of "trafficking victim" for the first time:

I said I was a manicurist, but they'd already seen me in online ads. Then I said that I was selling what is mine. I knew I could prostitute myself and I wasn't pimping. But SEF [the Portuguese Immigration and Borders Service] suspected that my marriage was fake. I was desperate and asked them why they hadn't helped me when I was trafficked. I showed the marks I had from the beatings and aggressions. They were very tough at first, but then they changed their attitude.

Faced with the need to defend herself from police persecution, Alice mobilized a different identity from that of *acompanhante* or *garota de programa* that she earlier referred to. What favored police recognition of Alice as a "trafficking victim" was her decision to denounce her traffickers and the fact that these men were already being investigated by the police. Alice's collaboration prevented her request of citizenship from being compromised by the intervention of the police. Indeed, when we met, Alice had filed for divorce, having obtained Portuguese citizenship. She also kept the contacts of the three police inspectors assigned to her case on her cell phone.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The experiences of our interlocutors remind us that exploitation and violence are not rare. They encountered these in their trajectories of migration for sex work, and all of them are aware of that. Our research has found that sex workers understand the concept of "human trafficking." In contrast with the discourses created by the "bullshit ouroboros" that has grown up around trafficking (Amado, 2021; Sudre, 2019), however, the exploitation reported by our informants does not reference transnational criminal networks of traffickers. While recognizing exploitation by the social and professional networks that made their labor possible, these women distinguish this from trafficking.

Significantly, moreover, in the two cases we collected of Brazilian women claiming to be trafficking victims, one of these women was "coerced" to be such by the counter-trafficking authorities themselves.<sup>10</sup> Two of our informants, Sara and Alice, took on the identity and started to describe certain people as traffickers in order to avoid prosecution, thus becoming a victim in a legal case in order to not become tried for their irregular presence in Europe. Sara and Alice identify the biggest threat to their work and lives as the police themselves (a qualification often repeated by our non-trafficked interlocutors) and the danger of deportation and punishment. The experience of these informants indicates that, through police work, the State can actively fabricate cases of "trafficking" among "vulnerable" populations involved in international migrations and sex work. Furthermore, according to all three of our "trafficked" interlocutors, the police are not considered to be useful in confronting the truly dangerous situations migrant sex workers find themselves in.

The original goal of all our informants was to do sex work in Europe and make money and the route between Brazil and Portugal has been and is privileged by them for this end. In all our investigations of sex worker migrations along the Portugal-Brazil axis over the years, however, Alice is the only sex working migrant that we have met who has been capable of gaining some sort of positive social capital in the eyes of the State through the mobilization of the trafficking victim category.

<sup>10</sup> This was also the case in Blanchette's fourth case, not reported here (see note 8).

Our research has highlighted the occasional and fluid use of the victim category among transnational sex workers as a means to negotiate with the current regimes of work, migration and gender. Konni's case, which sees counter-trafficking as a potential space for building social and economic capital around the cause of trans migrant sex workers, is further confirmation of this. As Maria Dulce Gaspar (1985) has pointed out, sex workers (and, indeed, humans in general) frequently use real life experiences as the raw materials to tell different stories and "manipulate" the perceptions of their interlocutors. The best stories, according to Gaspar's informants, are those that are not made up but have a grain of truth to them. The stories of Sara, Konni and Alice, with their base of truth, can occasionally be mobilised as trafficking stories by both its "victims" and the counter-trafficking apparatus. However, our long-term ethnographic study points to the fact that such category has not allowed our interlocutors to obtain anything more than a defense of themselves from the same State apparatus that depoliticizes their stories and casts them as victims.

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# Between revolution and human rights: the testimonies of Brazilian exiles at the Russell Tribunal II

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## **Abstract:**

In this article, we study the testimonies given at the Russell Tribunal II, held in Rome in 1974 with the objective of denouncing Latin American dictatorships. The event was attended by exiles who had been arrested and tortured after joining clandestine organizations opposing Brazil's military dictatorship. The article analyses their testimonies based on documents published by the Amnesty Commission's Marks of Memory Project and others consulted at the Basso Foundation (Italy) and the National Archives (Brazil), as well as other dispersed records. The public expression of suffering is highlighted as a main vector of transformation in the repertoires of political action at the time, situated at the intersection between the ideals of the revolutionary left and those of human rights. This process exposed the limits to the idea of a purely individual aspect of suffering and the presumption of its incommunicable or unspeakable nature – both shown to be ways of silencing its political dimension.

**Keywords:** testimony; exile; Russell Tribunal; Brazilian military dictatorship; torture.

# Entre a revolução e os direitos humanos: os testemunhos dos exilados brasileiros no Tribunal Russell II

## **Resumo:**

Trata-se de estudo sobre os testemunhos proferidos no Tribunal Russell II, realizado em Roma em 1974, com o objetivo de denunciar as ditaduras latino-americanas. O evento contou com a participação de exilados que haviam sido presos e torturados no Brasil e integravam organizações clandestinas de oposição à ditadura militar brasileira. O artigo analisa seus depoimentos com base em documentos publicados pelo Projeto Marcas da Memória da Comissão da Anistia ou consultados na Fundação Basso (Itália), no Arquivo Nacional (Brasil) e em registros dispersos. Aponta para a expressão do sofrimento na esfera pública como principal vetor de transformação dos repertórios de ação política à época, na encruzilhada entre os ideais da esquerda revolucionária e os dos direitos humanos. Nesse processo, tensionaram-se tanto as suposições do aspecto puramente individual do sofrimento quanto seu caráter comunicável ou indizível, formas de silenciamento de sua dimensão política.

**Palavras-chave:** testemunho; exílio; Tribunal Russell; ditadura militar brasileira; tortura.

# Between revolution and human rights: the testimonies of Brazilian exiles at the Russell Tribunal II

Felipe Magaldi

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## Introduction

Our approach to being interviewed was fairly well defined. Don't try to elicit any kind of compassion from torture. Nobody was an **innocent victim** of anything. A **revolutionary war** was under way and, within it, it was essential to make its **socialist objectives** clear. Our politics was typical of the period. It was only some years later that we discovered the **systematic denunciation of torture** and began to engage with **European democratic forces**. (Gabeira, 1980, p. 15, our emphases)

The above epigraph is from the book *O Crepúsculo do Macho* (The Twilight of the Macho) by Fernando Gabeira (Gabeira, 1980). One of three works written by the author shortly after the promulgation of the 1979 Amnesty Law,<sup>1</sup> at the book's core is a reflection on the experience of living in exile during Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985). In this work, after recalling his experiences of imprisonment, torture, exile and the return to Brazil, Gabeira hints at a shift in his framework of reference from the revolutionary ideals that drove the fight against the dictatorship towards the grammar of human rights. His earlier self-image, forged by the decision to commit to the armed struggle, in which *nobody was an innocent victim of anything*, was changed by the singular experience of living in exile. This experience brought with it the figure of the exile, someone who, with his or her personal testimony, was able to demand democracy from abroad as part of a new repertoire of political action.

Far from an isolated case, this contact with the humanitarian lexicon can be identified as a wide-ranging phenomenon whose protagonists included people forced to leave Brazil during the dictatorship after being imprisoned and tortured. Prominent among them were activists for whom the socialist revolution, pursued through the tactics of the armed struggle, was of paramount value.<sup>2</sup> However, rather than involving a straightforward conversion to human rights, the exile of these self-appointed revolutionaries, many of them banished from Brazilian territory, entailed a complex process of articulation. In the international setting, a new phase emerged involving the contamination and mixture of repertoires from Marxist, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist vocabularies in a process of "confrontation, shock and osmosis" (Monina, 2021, p. 166).

As Rollemberg (1999) already pointed out in her pioneering historiographical study on exile during the Brazilian dictatorship, living in exile, with its inevitable openness to the world, led to a crisis in social identity, enabling the reconfiguration of political projects within a new field of possibilities. The anthropological notion of *metamorphosis*, as elaborated by Velho (2003), is mobilized by Rollemberg to think about the practical and

<sup>1</sup> The other two books were *O Que É Isso Companheiro?* published in 1979 (What's Happening Comrade? released as a film, *Four Days in September*, in 1997) and *Entradas e Bandeiras* (Entrances and Flags) published in 1981. For an analysis of all three works, see Waizbort (2013) who emphasizes their importance in the constitution of a collective memory between generations. He also examines the extraordinary success of the trilogy in Brazil at the time when they were written, describing the works as "a period document of huge historical intensity," given the climate conducive to change, not just political but cultural, "in which the pressure dammed up during the *anos de chumbo*, the 'Years of Lead,' began to be released" (p. 43).

<sup>2</sup> Even before the dictatorship was installed, the Peasant Leagues had already opted for armed struggle in Brazil in the wake of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. After the 1964 civil-military coup, a series of clandestine organizations emerged in the country using diverse tactics of revolutionary violence. All of these groups had been defeated by the mid-1970s, alienated from the demands of society (Aarão Reis, 1990) and the possibilities of representing the working class politically (Ridenti, 1993).

subjective transformations in various areas of the everyday lives of exiles, including the political militancy forged in the armed struggle.

Azevedo and Sanjurjo (2013), in another seminal study, this time in the field of Brazilian anthropology, suggest conceiving of exile as a situation of liminality, in Turner's (1974) sense. This process involved the suspension of the previous social positions of the exiled subjects, who ended up occupying an indefinite place where earlier categories no longer clearly applied. The authors also highlight Pollak's reflection on the processes of readapting social identities in the face of limit situations (1989, 1992) such as banishment and exile.

Here we can also turn to Das's reflections. The author suggests that *critical events* are marked by the need to create new models of understanding and action (Das, 1995), emphasizing the ways in which the extraordinary is incorporated into the ordinary (Das, 2006). Her focus is not on the historical reconstruction of moments of devastation but on understanding what happens to subjects themselves and their relations to the world they inhabit after such experiences.

In various ways, therefore, anthropological reflection can help us observe how disruptive happenings are always accompanied by ulterior forms of action that are contingent and absent from the earlier repertoire. What transformations occurred from the experiential viewpoint of the exiles themselves? In particular, we explore the trajectories of militants who, forced to leave Brazil during the dictatorship, found themselves at the intersection highlighted above between the languages of revolution and human rights, in a context of mixed and overlapping – rather than mutually exclusive – repertoires.

Pursuing this line of inquiry, we pay special attention to the public expression of suffering as a vector of transformation. More than a just a shift in vocabulary, as commonly emphasized, it was a political rearticulation of word, body and emotion.<sup>3</sup> While in the personal account of Brazil's revolutionary war quoted in the epigraph, suffering was an implicit consequence of political action to be either ignored or downplayed in the face of the primordial task of confronting and opposing the dictatorial regime, in the context of exile analysed here, it formed the raw material to be emphasized in the denunciations made in an international political context.

As Das (2006) suggests, the words that emerge from the destruction of the world are not simple narrations. This is because violence is not only narrated but above all shown. Words are also gestures, expressed in the body. For this reason the author criticizes the idea that violence is inexpressible. Pain does not destroy communication but "it makes a claim on the other – asking for acknowledgment that may be given or denied" (Das, 2006, p. 40).

Exploring public performances in which the word is convoked to be heard, our hypothesis is that the enunciations of torture, based on the testimonial expression of the exiles, was one of the guiding threads for the emergence of a new emotional grammar located at the intersection of *revolution* and *human rights*, breaking the silencing imposed by both the military regime and the moral codes of the activists. The expression of feelings of pain extended beyond individual bodies, becoming inscribed in a symbolic order and rendering intelligible what they were attempting to express socially, as shown in Mauss's classic lesson (1979).

Even at the height of the dictatorship, there were denunciations of torture in Brazil, made in spaces where some resistance was possible, like the letters and manifestos written from prisons (Pedretti, 2024) and the publication of books in the country (Maués, 2009).<sup>4</sup> Accounts of torture were a fundamental axis of these texts, as Ginzburg (2004) emphasized in his analysis of the literature from the period. This was a combat writing in the context of strong repression, an instrument of struggle and resistance (Sarti, 2019).

Our argument in this text, however, is that the scenario of exile not only allowed a different repercussion and circulation of denunciations in international reports and official forums, but it also gave them a new

<sup>3</sup> In this reflection, we have in mind various works, produced in Brazil and abroad, which have pointed to a transformation of languages, occurring especially at the end of the 1970s, that allowed the transnational reception and circulation of the human rights vocabulary as a form of struggle against the Brazilian and Latin American dictatorships (Greco, 2003; Markarian, 2005; Crenzel, 2008; Moyn, 2010; Grimaldi, 2023; Pedretti, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> The books include *Em Câmara Lenta* by Renato Tapajós (1977), *Tortura* by journalist Antonio Carlos Fon (1979), and *Cartas da prisão* by Frei Betto (1977), as well as the aforementioned bestseller *O que é isso companheiro?* by Fernando Gabeira (1979), among others.

dimension through the privileged relationship between the transformation of language and the expression of suffering – or indeed suffering itself as a language (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990), created in the new context of enunciation. A new meaning for the practice of testimony was the nodal point of this phenomenon, registered through the enunciation and collectivization of the torments. We could say that this reflects the emerging expression of the kind of *moral sentiments* described by Fassin (2011). As an integral part of humanist rhetoric, these sentiments direct our attention towards the other through affects, values, sensitivity, altruism and compassion. In our view, the intrusion of *pathos* in the public sphere does not inevitably correspond to a dilution of political meaning but to the form acquired by political discourse in such circumstances.

To address these questions, we analyse a particular event that took place precisely in the context of Brazilian exile and involved an articulation of testimonial expression and international public denunciation. This was the Bertrand Russell Tribunal II, a forum without any criminal jurisdiction, held in Italy and Belgium between 1974 and 1976 with the purpose of denouncing the Latin American dictatorships. The Brazilian regime was given particular prominence in the first session, held in Rome in 1974, including lectures and reports from jurists, doctors, theologians and social scientists.

The Russell Tribunal II (hereafter RT-II) featured a series of testimonies. In the Brazilian case, its protagonists were mostly people who, after the experience of imprisonment, were released as part of negotiations between clandestine organizations and the dictatorial government for the exchange of kidnapped ambassadors. Release of the imprisoned activists was followed by their banishment from national territory, beginning a cycle of exile through various countries.<sup>5</sup>

In this text, we analyse these testimonies, seeking to comprehend the public expression of suffering that marked them, the primary emblem of this pain being their torture by state agents. This objective in mind, rather than examine the individual and informational aspects of the testimonies (Duarte & Dullo, 2017), we focus on the social, historical and relational conditions of enunciation (Pollak & Heinich, 1986; Pollak, 1989; Sarti, 2020). Similarly to Jelin (2017), Ross (2002) and Vianna & Farias (2011) in their investigations, we ask: Who is speaking? How are they speaking? When, where and to whom are they speaking? What is spoken and what is silenced? To what and to whom are they responding? What affects are mobilized and dramatized?

Discussing the question of testimony based on the experience of Auschwitz, Agamben (2000) highlights the tension between a sacralizing perspective, which denies the possibility of comprehending this type of narrative, and another that seeks the truth behind it. Both approaches ignore the fact that testimony contains a lacuna, since the witness is the survivor, someone who can speak after the fact. In this sense, working with testimonies means asking what remains of what was lived as a trace or a ‘remnant,’ in the author’s terminology, in the sense that experience falls short of its meaning, leaving it open to resignification. The aim here, therefore, is not to reiterate the denunciation of dictatorial repression, simply reproducing the viewpoint of activists, nor to investigate the facts underlying the narratives in a positivist historical undertaking. Rather, our objective is to understand the conditions for the emergence, development, form and repercussions of the enunciations that occurred in the case under discussion, acknowledging what was said and unsaid, exploring the circumstances involved and seeking to comprehend the sensibilities mobilized during and by the event.

From a methodological point of view, the research makes use of the transcript of oral testimonies, concentrating especially on the first session of the Russell Tribunal II. The material was published in book form in Italy, the venue of this edition, organized by Salvatore Senese and Linda Bimbi (RT-II, 1975). In contrast to its international impact, though, the content of the RT-II was only belatedly published and absorbed in Brazil.

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<sup>5</sup> In total, 130 political prisoners were banished from Brazil during the dictatorship as part of the exchanges made for kidnapped ambassadors. Among them, 15 were exchanged for the US ambassador on 9 September 1969, 5 for the Japanese consul on 14 March 1970, 40 for the German ambassador on 15 June 1970, and 70 for the Swiss ambassador on 13 January 1971. Those banished would only be able to return to the country after the 1979 Amnesty Law (Greco, 2003). Initially the principal destinations were Mexico, Algeria and Chile.

At the time when the tribunal was held, within the broader scope of denying or providing false information on torture and killings, the validity of the tribunal's actions was questioned by the Brazilian government and media, who pejoratively associated it with international communism.<sup>6</sup>

It was only in 2014, as part of the Marks of Memory project, that a collection of four books was published on the Russell Tribunal II, thanks to a cooperation agreement between the Citizenship and Human Rights Centre of the Federal University of Paraíba and the Historical Archive of the Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso (FLLB), based in Rome, Italy (Tosi & Ferreira, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d). These books were published in a new context that saw the proliferation of public memory policies in Brazil between the second Lula administration (2006-2010) and the administration of President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016). The books present a broad selection of dozens of testimonies given in the three sessions of the RT-II, as well as documents compiled and produced by its members. This material is the initial source of the research, complemented by an in-situ period of study at the Basso Foundation itself, in Rome, where documentaries, visual and audiovisual materials are also found, along with complete archives relating to the testimonies.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, documents from other archives like the National Archives were used, as well as books, biographies and interviews with the event's participants and organizers.

### **The genesis of the Russell Tribunal II in the era of dictatorships**

From the moment of the 1964 military coup and the installation of the dictatorship in Brazil, there were denunciations of violations perpetrated by state agents against opponents. These were made through manifestos, reports or letters written from prison (Badan Ribeiro, 2022), albeit with limited domestic or international repercussions. As we observed earlier, some of these opponents had been forced to leave the country. Rollemberg (1999) shows how the profile of exiles initially included individuals notorious for their political activities – members of unions and political parties, or people directly involved in the reformist projects of the ousted president João Goulart, himself in exile at the time. From 1968, however, with repression worsening under the draconian Institutional Act 5 (AI-5), a new profile emerged among the exiles, characterized especially by younger men and women who, after participating in the student movement, joined various clandestine organizations and were imprisoned, tortured and banished from the country as a result.

During this second moment, the connection between the experience of exile and the proliferation of testimonies intensified. This was when the proposal for the Russell Tribunal II emerged. The first had originally been devised by the British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell and the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre at a meeting in London in 1966. It was held in 1967 in Stockholm, Sweden, and Roskilde, Denmark, as a public, non-state initiative, based on the recognition of the inadequacies of international criminal law and the need for denunciation presented by moral authorities. This first tribunal focused especially on crimes perpetrated in the Vietnam War, drawing together documents and testimonies on the role of the United States in torture and the use of illegal weapons. Held in the era of the counterculture, decolonization and the civil rights movement, on the eve of the May 1968 protests, the event can be considered one of the forerunners of the tribunals of opinion after the Second World War (Filippi, 2012).

The Russell Tribunal II started to be organized in Santiago, Chile, a country then governed by the democratic socialism of Salvador Allende and the epicentre of Brazilians exiles at the time. Between the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the Committee for the Denunciation of Repression in Brazil (*Comitê de Denúncia da Repressão no Brasil*: CDBR), composed precisely of exiled nationals, asked the Italian senator Lelio Basso to hold a tribunal

<sup>6</sup> On this point, see the dossiers produced by the Security and Information Division of the Brazilian Foreign Affairs Ministry, available in the National Archives (BR DFANBSB Z4.DHU.o.1), from 1973 onwards.

<sup>7</sup> The research was funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), including processes 2021/04529-2 (Post-Doctorate Scholarship at the Federal University of São Paulo with supervision of Cynthia Sarti, co-author of the article and the research) and 2022/07107-4 (internship scholarship in research abroad at Università Degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy, with supervision of Giancarlo Monina).

on the crimes being committed by the Brazilian state. Basso, renowned for fighting fascism in his home country, had participated in the first Russell Tribunal, where he had stood out for his activities in the “transnational field of the left” (Azevedo, 2012), as it existed at the time. The Italian politician was in Santiago at that moment to learn more about the experience of democratic socialism (Filippi, 2012). This collaboration led to the formation of the Planning Committee for the Bertrand Russell Tribunal II Campaign, incorporating representatives of the exiles, as well as socialist, communist, Catholic and human rights organizations from various countries.

Negotiations over the new tribunal took place shortly before the coup d'état that brought General Augusto Pinochet to power in 1973, making realization of the event in Chile, as planned, impossible. Allende's fall led to a new outflow of exiles – which included not only Chileans but also those banished or who had fled from other Latin America dictatorships to seek refuge in Chile, Brazilians among them – to various countries in the Americas (Argentina, Mexico, Cuba), Africa (Algeria, Mozambique) and Europe (France, Portugal, Sweden, England, Belgium, Italy, among others). Given the leading role of Lelio Basso and his allies, the tribunal ended up being organized in Europe and ran to three sessions<sup>8</sup>.

While the initial idea has been to focus on Brazil, after the Chilean coup the forum also expanded to include denunciations of other Latin American regimes. The Brazilian dictatorship was particularly highlighted in the first and most prominent session, held in Rome, along with the Chilean, Uruguayan and Bolivian cases. The dictators Médici, Pinochet, Banzer Suárez and Bordaberry, invited to defend themselves against the accusations by telegram, never responded to the convocation (Monina, 2021). In the event, the absence of criminal intent also contributed to a certain lack of impartiality, as the focus was primarily on the complaint itself. From our perspective, this is exactly what allowed the expression of suffering to emerge in the public sphere.

## Traces and memories of the Russell Tribunal II

The main historiographical reflections on the subject of Brazilian exile (Rollemberg, 1999, Chirio, 2005; Quadrat, 2011; Green, 2010; Napolitano, 2014; Cruz, 2016 etc.) have emphasized the individual or group trajectories of the exiles and their collective experiences of engagement, solidarity and transculturation, focusing on different groups and destination countries. Although mentioned, the RT-II is not the topic of any specific analysis.

The exceptions refer to the tribunal's researchers and agents of memory themselves. Ferreira (2016), one of the organizers of the collection relating to the RT-II published through the Marks of Memory project (Tosi & Ferreira, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d), wrote one of the few works containing a preliminary analysis of the testimonies. The work of Filippi (2012) is a lecture given at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) marking the occasion of the reception of the RT-II documentary archive by the Brazilian state. From the Italian intellectual field, the historian Giancarlo Monina, coordinator of the section of historical studies of the Basso Foundation, published works on Lelio Basso (Monina, 2016), the repercussions of the collaboration between Marks of Memory and the Basso Foundation in Italy (Monina, 2013), as well as a book specifically dealing with the Russell Tribunal II and the Latin American military regimes, including the Brazilian dictatorship (Monina, 2021).

In interview, the Italian-Brazilian political scientist Tullo Vigevani (2023), one of the witnesses at the RT-II and an interlocutor in our research, suggested that Italy's marginal place among the European democracies of the 1970s was a possible factor explaining the low level of interest shown in the event.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the Italian connections did not attract the attention of countries like Chile and France, which quantitatively received a larger number of exiles. Italy was going through the so-called *anni di piombo*, the Years of Lead, a period of

8 The first, entitled “Denunciations of Human Rights violations in Brazil, Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay,” was held in Rome between 30 March and 6 April 1974; the second, “Responsibility of the multinationals in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and Porto Rico,” took place in Brussels from 11 to 18 January 1975; and the third, “Cultural repression in Latin America,” was again held in Rome from 10 to 17 January 1976.

9 Interview conducted by Felipe Magaldi in Rome, 21 December 2023.

political violence in the country, even under democratic governance, and did not offer exiles refugee status, unlike countries such as Sweden and Belgium. The “historical compromise” proposed by Enrico Berlinguer from 1973 was an attempt to form a coalition between the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democrats (DC) to stabilize the country. However, this attempt would later collapse due to opposition from more conservative sectors and the kidnapping and assassination of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978, which deepened the political and social crisis in the country.

From our perspective, it is important to consider some additional factors relating not just to academic production on the topic of the military dictatorship but also the direction of the Brazilian transition within the regional framework of the Southern Cone.<sup>10</sup> While the 1979 Amnesty Law allowed exiles to return, it also featured impunity for those responsible for committing crimes and the absence of public policies to deal with the legacy of the dictatorship. The first state reparation initiatives, which only emerged from the mid-1990s, focused on economic compensations for relatives of those killed and disappeared, pushing the question of responsibility and testimony into the background. Initially, this situation continued even after the creation of the Amnesty Commission between 2001 and 2002, with an expansion of compensation payments for those whose professional and educational life had been interrupted during the dictatorship (Mezarobba, 2010).

With the end of the Southern Cone dictatorships, the agenda of redemocratization was marked by the reception of the *transitional justice* paradigm. From the perspective of this markedly normative and evaluative theoretical-practical field, developed to offer tools to address the consequences of authoritarian governments or armed conflicts (Teitel, 2003), the Brazilian transition is frequently seen as retrograde and deficient, especially when compared to neighbouring countries. The Argentinian case in particular stands out as exemplary since it established policies for investigating the facts, combined with punishment for those responsible, soon after the end of the last dictatorship (1976-1983). After its laws of impunity and pardons, the country was thus able to return to the path of justice in the 2000s, establishing a process for judging crimes against humanity (Hollanda, 2018; Magaldi, 2023a). From this point of view, events of public denunciation like the RT-II, which were held without any penal consequences and through the agency of civil society, tended to receive little attention, presumably because they were seen as relatively ineffective from the prevailing normative viewpoint.

Nonetheless, as Agamben (2000) provocatively observed with regard to the Nuremberg Trials, however necessary legal proceedings may be, they do not exhaust the problem. On the contrary, they may help spread the idea that everything is resolved since the evidence has been established and the sentences passed. This approach, intended to measure efficacies and propose solutions that reflect other realities, tends to obscure concrete processes of memory construction that, as Jelin (2003) suggests, take into account struggles that not only involve legal and state aspects but also moral aspects, blurring the boundaries between these dimensions and putting its own definition in question. Memories, the author writes, are not just an attempt to combat forgetting and silencing: they also have an affirmative dimension as a stage on which rival memories compete. It is a question, therefore, of paying attention not only to what could have been but was not done, but also to what can be and was indeed achieved.

Publication of the RT-II material in Brazil, four decades after the event took place, was made possible thanks to the configuration of memory policies in Brazil during President Lula’s second term of office (2007-2011), when important changes were introduced to the state bodies responsible for implementing them, including the entry of new political actors into the government. Journalist Paulo Vanucchi, who had been a militant in the National Liberation Alliance (*Aliança Libertadora Nacional*: ALN) and a political prisoner during the dictatorship, was appointed head of the Special Secretariat for Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic (2005-2010). During the re-democratization process, Vanucchi had been an advisor to various trade union and church organizations, including the nascent Workers’ Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*: PT). As well as a former political prisoner, Vanucchi

<sup>10</sup> By Southern Cone, we refer to a region marked not just by geographic proximity but also by the similarity of historical processes and the concrete circulation of its political actors, as Jelin (2017) proposes. This definition includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay.



had also worked on the book *Brasil: nunca mais* (Brazil: Never Again) in the 1980s (Arquidiocese de São Paulo, 1985). In 2007, the book-report *Direito à memória e à verdade* (Right to Memory and Truth) was also released with his support, the outcome of 12 years of work of the Special Commission on Political Assassinations and Disappearances (*Comissão Especial de Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos*: CEMDP). This was the first official document of the Brazilian state to present the testimonial narratives of the victims and recognize the rights violations perpetrated under the dictatorship.<sup>11</sup> The launch was held at the headquarters of the National Human Rights Program III (*Programa Nacional de Direitos Humanos – III*: PNDH-3), which included the right to memory and truth as one of its directives.

In 2007, the jurist and law professor Paulo Abrão was appointed president of the Amnesty Commission of the Ministry of Justice, then headed by Tarso Genro. Younger and not a member of the generation directly “affected” by the dictatorship, Abrão, who remained in the post until 2010, demonstrated a notable interest in international human rights law and the debates on transitional justice (Hollanda, 2019). During this period, the jurist stated that, from 2007, “the Amnesty Commission took a particular hermeneutic turn” (Abrão & Torelly, 2012, p. 30). Abrão was referring to the Commission’s projects dedicated to the educational, symbolic, moral and psychological aspects of memory, truth and reparation, without excluding the fight for justice.

The Amnesty Caravans project (2008) consisted of roving public sessions to assess amnesty requests throughout Brazil, followed by educational and cultural activities (Rosito & Damo, 2014). The Clinics of Testimony project, launched in 2013 by the Amnesty Commission of the Ministry of Justice, was a pioneer in implementing a public policy for psychological reparation for those affected by state violence during the dictatorship. The project sought to provide individual and collective psychotherapeutic care to survivors and their families. It also included training for mental health professionals to work in this area of human rights (Magaldi, 2022).

The Marks of Memory project, in particular, sought to recuperate the memory of the dictatorship’s victims by building collections of oral and audiovisual sources. It was precisely in this context that the material relating to the RT-II was published in Brazil, the same year that the National Truth Commission report was concluded (2014), during the administration of President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), herself a former political prisoner. The period was a fertile one for interest in testimonial expression and for its articulation with public memory policies.

Analysing this material from today’s standpoint means valuing this legacy but also situating it historically as part of the genealogy of the so-called ‘testimonies’ of the Brazilian military dictatorship. This is a long-term process that traversed the regime itself and continues to the present day with the experiences of imprisonment, torture and exile still echoing in books, archives, documents and institutions, leaving traces far beyond the events themselves (Sarti, 2020). It is specific sets of circumstances – such as the one that enabled the Marks of Memory project – that make it possible, or not, to publicize these testimonies years after they were originally made (Pollak, 1989).

## The era of the witness and the victim

The end of the Second World War and the subsequent trial of the Nazi leaders for *crimes against humanity* at the Nuremberg Trials (1946-1949) are often cited as the inaugural landmark in twentieth-century human rights, concomitant with the issuing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). As Moyn (2010) showed, though, it was later, from the end of the 1970s, that humanitarian language began to spread globally with human rights as the “last utopia” following the collapse of the socialist and communist utopias, whether these were nationalist or internationalist in scope.

In the historical context of the collapse of the bipolar system of the Cold War, decolonization and the emergence of a global civil society, human rights became a grammar not only of nation states but also of social

<sup>11</sup> The state’s responsibility for the unlawful actions of its security agents had been recognized during the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), by Law 9,140, or the Law of the Disappeared, issued on 4 December 1995, although independently of any court ruling and without publicizing the testimonies.

movements, political parties, non-governmental civil associations and religious and philanthropic organizations. This was neither a linear nor a progressive process but rather a complex articulation, full of tensions, disputes, contradictions and limitations. One of these questions concerns precisely how distinct rights interconnect, especially after losing their universalist reference point and becoming defined in terms of specific identities.

In this context, the ways of conceptualizing the conflicts between nations, ethnic groups or between the national state and its own civilians were transformed. War was no longer seen solely as a conflict between states but also as violence against civilians, a “state violence”. The “voice of the victims”, which previously mattered little or was the target of stigma, began to acquire public prominence, frequently accompanied by the psychoanalytic or psychiatric idea of trauma and the practice of witnessing.

Various factors were decisive in what some authors call a generalized anthropological rupture (Wieviorka, 2005) or a moral conversion of sensibilities (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009), but the diffusion of human rights in particular was fundamental to this process. The victim’s testimony and their social recognition in terms of rights shaped the very notion of violence (Sarti, 2011), while victimhood was transfigured into the contemporary mode par excellence of subjectively positioning the self in response to violence (Koltai, 2002). Organizations like Amnesty International, founded in 1961, publicized specific cases of suffering, including political imprisonments, and placed huge emphasis on the mobilization of moral sentiments like solidarity and compassion. These values, previously religious, came to be presented in a secular and modernizing version in the field of public denunciation (Fassin, 2004).

Testimonial expression began to have worldwide repercussions following events such as the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Transmitted on radio and television, his trial recorded the accounts of Holocaust survivors in a legal setting, including scenes with a strong emotional impact. Wieviorka (1998) argues that this event inaugurated the ‘age of testimony’ in contemporary history, which began to encourage accounts from diverse victims of violence previously silenced. For Felman (2003), while the Nuremberg Trials concentrated on the military history of the war, it was the Eichmann trial that gave rise to the narrative of victims’ suffering and enabled the penetration of trauma into the world of law.<sup>12</sup>

The Russell Tribunal II can be included among these transformations. While the first tribunal, concentrating on the Vietnam War, had already placed genocide at the centre of international attention, the second, focused on Latin America, incorporated *human rights violations* as its principal theme (Monina, 2021). We confirmed this view by studying the documents relating to the organization of the first session of the TR-II, selected in our research at the Basso Foundation. The archive contains references to the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and their violation by the Brazilian dictatorship, including the right to life, freedom and personal safety (Article 3) and the ban on torture and on cruel and inhuman treatment (Article 5). The inventory includes lists with concrete examples of these rights violations, accompanied by documents and testimonies. In one of these documents, we read: “The Tribunal’s principal mission is to hold the crimes of the Brazilian dictatorship accountable in terms of international law”.<sup>13</sup> The archive also contains reference dossiers produced by various organizations committed to human rights such as Amnesty International, the World Council of Churches, the International League for Human Rights, the Justice and Peace Commission and the Brazilian Bar Association.

We also ask to what extent human rights were incorporated into the language of those who testified at the tribunal itself. Here we need to bear in mind that the testimonies were given by activists from Marxist revolutionary movements in the Brazilian and Latin American community of exiles. Their previous activities in combatting the dictatorship were informed by socialist principles and thus alien to humanitarian ideology,

<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the famous “literature of testimony” of the Holocaust was gaining in impact, with Primo Levi as its clearest and most widely known expression.

<sup>13</sup> ITA FLLB TBRII 02 01 011. “Materiale sul Brasile (preparazione I Sessione),” docc. 9

as evidenced by the refusal of militants to identify with the category of victim in the face of a political choice, like the armed struggle, for which they assumed full responsibility (Sarti, 2021). Exile, by nature involving an openness to the world and to new languages and experiences (Saïd, 2003), became a strategic locus for the transformation of language and a tense and complex laboratory for new paradigms of international activism.

As Monina (2021) argues, the RT-II did not imply a simple global shift of the ideological matrix of the left, disillusioned with socialist internationalism, towards a neutral and depoliticized language. At the tribunal, the language of human rights was characterized by the concrete struggle against the dictatorship, becoming the shared space for a clearly politicized proposal. In our view, the expression of suffering intrinsic to the description of torture had a fundamental place in this proposal.

## The witnesses and their testimonies

The first session of the tribunal was held in Rome over a period of eight days, running from 30 March to 6 April 1974. Taking place in the auditorium of the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche*, next to the *Università di Roma La Sapienza*, the event was organized in thirteen hearings, which included the act of accusation, reports from the scientific commission, and dozens of testimonies from Brazilians, Chileans, Bolivians and Uruguayans.<sup>14</sup> These testimonies covered a range of themes, among which we can highlight: the circumstances and causes of imprisonment; descriptions of the tortures inflicted; relations with the press, the Church, political activism and collective subjects (workers, peasants, students, and so on); family relations; international relations; revolution; human rights; and the experience of exile itself. The first two points appear in all the testimonies and comprise their main axis.

The organization of the RT-II involved looking for potential witnesses among the community of exiles. Invitations started to be sent out in September 1973, initially to Brazilians and subsequently to other Latin Americans. The contacts were the result of various intermediations in the religious and secular networks of solidarity behind the event. The choice of witnesses was based on their availability and on geographic, social, political, cultural, religious, gender and generational representativeness, as well as the kind of repression suffered. Some witnesses had to forego attending at the last minute due to bureaucratic problems, such as the lack of a visa (Monina, 2021). An initial list of names, also contained in the Basso Foundation inventory, includes prospective witnesses who did not attend the event in person, such as the militants Gregório Bezerra, Francisco Julião and José Serra and the Dominican friar known as Frei Tito,<sup>15</sup> which suggests the difficulties of finding participants who were available at that moment of violence and banishment. There are also around one hundred written testimonies, including some made anonymously,<sup>16</sup> which suggests that not everyone was willing to expose themselves by appearing in person or by name.

The book *Brasil, violação dos direitos humanos - Tribunal Russell II* (Tosi & Ferreira, 2014) contains an initial selection of around a dozen testimonies from Brazilians, taken from the Basso Foundation inventory. In particular, the chapters “Testimonies relating to Ettore Biocca’s report Torture and Strategy of Terror in Brazil and panel questions to these witnesses” and “Legal aspects of the military dictatorship established in Brazil on 31 March 1964” were a starting point for our research. Based on this material, extracted from the inquiries of physician and anthropologist Ettore Biocca and the jurist and magistrate Salvatore Senese respectively, it was possible

<sup>14</sup> Our analysis was based on a digitized version of the *Fundo Tribunal Russell II* on Repression in Brazil and Latin America, available for consultation on the computer system of the foundation’s library in the historical centre of Rome, focusing specifically on the Brazilian cases. With the institution’s permission, a copy of part of this documentation, which contains transcribed and typed testimonies, was transferred to the personal computer of Felipe Magaldi, enabling continuation of the analysis offsite.

<sup>15</sup> ITA FLLB TBRII 02 01 011. “Materiale sul Brasile (preparazione I Sessione),” docc. 9

<sup>16</sup> ITA FLLB TBRII 02 01 019. “Brasile. Schede torturati,” cc. 618

to delineate a partial and preliminary social profile of the event.<sup>17</sup> Although data relating to the person's name, profession and age appears in the testimonies, we had to search for complementary information (membership of the clandestine organization, circumstance of exile and destination country) in external sources, widely available in historiographical articles, in the media, on the internet or in later testimonies. We return to this point later.

Table 1 - Profile of the witnesses.

<b>Name of witness</b>	<b>Profession and age</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Circumstance of exile</b>	<b>Destination country</b>
Carmela Pezzuti	Public worker - 50 years old	Comando de Libertação Nacional (COLINA); Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária (VPR)	Banished on 13 January 1971, along with another 70 prisoners, in exchange for the release of the Swiss ambassador Giovanni Enrico Bucher, kidnapped in September 1970.	Chile Italy France
Nancy Mangabeira Unger	Student - 25 years old	Partido Comunista Brasileiro Revolucionário (PCBR)	Ibid.	Chile France
René de Carvalho	Student - 25 years old	Partido Comunista Brasileiro Revolucionário (PCBR)	Ibid.	Chile France
Wellington Diniz	Filmmaker - 32 years old	Ação Popular (AP); Comando de Libertação Nacional (COLINA); Vanguarda Armada Revolucionária Palmares (VAR-Palmares)	Ibid.	Chile Mexico Belgium Angola
Marco Antonio Moro	Lawyer - 37 years old	Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB); Ação Libertadora Nacional (ALN)	Ibid.	Chile Belgium
Dulce Maia	Social worker - 35 years old	Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária (VPR)	Banished from the country in June 1970 as one of the 40 political prisoners exchanged for the German ambassador Ehrenfried von Holleben.	Algeria Cuba Chile Belgium Portugal Guinea-Bissau
Fernando Gabeira	Journalist - 33 years old	Movimento Revolucionário 8 (MR-8)	Ibid.	Algeria Cuba Chile Sweden
Rolando Frati	Trade unionist - 60 years old	Agrupamento Comunista de São Paulo Aliança Libertadora Nacional (ALN)	Banished from the country in 1969 as one of the 15 political prisoners exchanged for the American ambassador Burke Elbrick.	Mexico Italy
Tullo Vigevani	Journalist - 31 years old	Partido Operário Revolucionário Trokista (POR-T)	Left the country in 1972 via a safe-conduct mediated by the Italian Consulate in São Paulo.	Italy
Maria do Socorro Vigevani	Housewife - 27 years old	-	Ibid.	Italy

Source: the authors.

In this sample, the gender parity is clear (4 women, 6 men). In terms of generation, the average age of the witnesses was 30.5 years, with just two witnesses aged 50 or over. This confirms the presence of two

<sup>17</sup> These are the testimonies that were given orally and signed during the event. The anonymous testimonies were read by panel members in their reports.

generations of Brazilian exiles, the more experienced group and those who joined clandestine groups as students at university, as well as a certain balance in the composition of the testimonies. All the witnesses came from the south-east region of Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo or Minas Gerais) and were literate, even those who had no university education, closely associated with the urban middle class. This reveals the RT-II's construction of a profile that in the future would be socially recognized as the prototypical "victim" of the military dictatorship – to the detriment of those populations who, as well as being marked by their subalternity, did not always pursue a political project in explicit opposition to the regime (peasants, indigenous people, quilombola communities, the black population and so on) yet were nevertheless also directly affected by the military dictatorship (Leite Lopes et al., 2024). Hence, although the testimonies also mentioned these collectives, the voices invited to testify also reveal the limited possibilities at that time for subalterns to speak for themselves (Spivak, 1988).

What most witnesses had in common was involvement in some kind of clandestine left-wing organization, as well as banishment from Brazil after negotiations leading to the release of kidnapped ambassadors, their initial destination being Chile, Algeria or Mexico.<sup>18</sup>

The Italian republic, at the time without any official policy for taking in refugees, was the main country of destination for those who, Italian by birth or descent, possessed or would claim an Italian passport.<sup>19</sup> These were Carmela Pezzuti and Rolando Frati (children of Italians), Tullo Vigevani (born in Italy) and Maria do Socorro Vigevani, the latter's wife. The remaining witnesses were invited from other European countries where they were living in exile as refugees and to which they returned after the RT-II: Fernando Gabeira in Sweden, Marco Antonio Moro, Wellington Diniz and Dulce Maia in Belgium, and Nancy Unger and René de Carvalho in France.

Ross's (2002) analysis of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa shows how testimony in tribunals – whether judicial or not – reflects a prior agenda and framing and further demonstrates how the testimony given responds to this agenda. As Vianna and Farias (2011) argue, testimony involves a certain presentation of the self (Goffman, 1974) since the construction of the public presentation gives legitimacy to the testimony. In the case explored here, we can observe a certain script whose main objective was to denounce the arbitrary acts committed by the Brazilian state, based on the exposure of its torture practices.

One of the first points to draw our attention when analysing the testimonies,<sup>20</sup> as already suggested in the table above, is the nebulous – rather than underground – place of the "revolution": that is, the political ideology of the Marxist left in whose name opposition to the military dictatorship was organized. At one level, it is implicit, especially when it came to banishment from the national territory. As Dulce Maia explains, she was "imprisoned because she was a revolutionary militant" and was released after a kidnapping and sent to Algeria. Carmela Pezzuti also describes the kidnapping of the German ambassador as a "revolutionary action" that led to her release along with her children. Rolando Frati, banished to Mexico following the kidnapping of the American ambassador and his exchange, asked the tribunal for a valid travel document for himself and other "Latin American revolutionaries".

At the same time, though, there is a striking absence of explicit references to clandestine organizations and the membership of the witnesses. The latter are introduced by the rapporteurs mainly by age and profession, not their militant activity. Following the presentation of the witness, a description of the causes and circumstances

18 An exception was the couple Tullo Vigevani and Maria do Socorro Vigevani, who left Brazil via a safe-conduct mediated by the Italian Consulate in São Paulo, obtained on the basis of Tullo's Italian citizenship. It is also worth emphasizing that Maria do Socorro participated in some political training activities with workers but informally, unlike her partner. Tullo, who had graduated in engineering from the São Paulo Polytechnic School, was a member of the Trotskyist Workers' Party, one of the few organizations that did not use the armed struggle as a strategy/form of opposition.

19 Brazil is the country with the largest absolute number of Italian descendants in the world – approximately 25 million. The transmission of Italian citizenship by blood – *jus sanguinis* – is a principle present since the creation of the Italian state. At a legal level, it was reaffirmed in 1912 during the period of mass migration and later in 1992 when the law currently in force was passed. It contrasts with *jus solis*, adopted in countries like Brazil and others – especially in the Americas – that grants citizenship to people born in their territory (Zanini, 2014; Beneduzi, 2019).

20 ITA FLLB TBRII 03 01 02 004. Brasile, docc. 32.

of imprisonment was provided. Some testimonies simply detailed the scenes of the day of arrest without explaining or mentioning the circumstances of the incarceration. Others emphasized their work.

Wellington Diniz, for example, stated that “in reality, I was imprisoned because of my professional activity.” He explained that he was a television operator for the channel TV Itacolomi in Belo Horizonte and had made a film on student protests. In the film, he had shown a DOPS officer shooting at students. The report was broadcast and the next day he was dismissed from the television channel by its senior management and subsequently arrested. The testimony does not mention his participation – later publicly acknowledged – in armed raids on banks and barracks to supply weapons and money to clandestine organizations like the National Liberation Command (*Comando de Libertação Nacional*: COLINA), the Armed Revolutionary Vanguard-Palmares (*Vanguarda Armada Revolucionária-Palmares*: VAR-Palmares) and the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (*Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária*: VPR).

Tullo Vigevani, for his part, described his imprisonment through an account of his family history. An Italian citizen, his parents – Jewish in origin – migrated to Brazil in 1951 when he was eight years old. He studied in Brazil and entered the São Paulo Polytechnic School in 1961. Between 1961 and 1964, he participated “in the struggles of the student movement and the Brazilian people against backward socioeconomic structures.” Without mentioning specific groups – like the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers’ Party (*Partido Operário Revolucionário Trotskista*: POR-T) in which he was an activist, as he explained in an interview with Felipe Magaldi, almost fifty years after the event (Vigevani, 2023)<sup>21</sup> – questions were asked about the consequences of these struggles in terms of reforms, better educational conditions and helping other sectors of the population.

During his testimony, Fernando Gabeira, a journalist from Minas Gerais and a militant in Revolutionary Movement 8 (*Movimento Revolucionário n. 8*: MR8) in Rio de Janeiro, was explicitly asked by the theologian Georges Casalis what he thought about the existence of violence on both sides, including the kidnapping of ambassadors by armed combatants. In his reply Gabeira justified the “ideological actions” that had led Brazilian comrades to engage in such practices. Faced with the impossibility of *habeas corpus*, a decision had to be taken: “it was a race to save their lives. It was a violence against the ambassador’s personal freedom, for sure, but a violence to save human lives.” He concludes with a reflection on “revolutionary violence”, contextualized in its specific historical conditions, as a form of “self-defence” and “transformative violence”.

In her analysis of the RT-II, Rollemberg (1999) had already highlighted the fact that “the testimonies presented before the tribunal leave it fairly unclear what type of combat had been waged in Brazil” (p. 237). The questions from the panel avoided delving into the subject of guerrilla warfare. The reference to the kidnappings appears and vanishes quickly. The reasons for imprisonment are left hazy. “What the witness and the panel members seek to emphasize is the violation of human rights” (p. 238). In her analysis, she recognizes that it would not be easy to admit participation in the armed struggle given the adverse context of the exiles who frequently lacked any kind of official documents.

In our own analysis, we have considered the tension of speaking out in public, very often for the first time, the consequences of which were unpredictable; the uncertainty of the possibility of returning to Brazil; and the worry about family members who remained in the country who might be persecuted and tortured at any moment. As Ross (2002) wondered in relation to women’s testimonies to South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, what does it mean to be asked to speak or listen in a context that has only recently and very tentatively become receptive to such public affirmations of acknowledgment?

In making these observations, we do not mean that the unsaid should have been said. On the contrary, the unsaid says much about the transformation of repertoires in the scenario of exile. Returning to Das (2006), silenced words are not just an underground memory waiting to be unearthed. They may be on the surface

<sup>21</sup> Interview conducted by Felipe Magaldi in São Paulo, 3 December 2022.

through gestures or in the form of a language imbued with foreign hues. This is why we prefer the idea of something nebulous to the metaphor of the underground.

It is not rare to encounter some hesitation in the testimonies. Some witnesses, although present, did not wish to speak in their own name. Such was the case of Denise Crispim, an activist imprisoned when she was pregnant and who gave birth in a military hospital. She was the companion of Eduardo Leite, nicknamed “Bacuri”, a member of the VPR and the ALN. The scene of her testimony appears in the documentary *Amerika: processo ai governi della tortura*, also consulted in the Basso Foundation’s historical archive.<sup>22</sup> The film provides us with images unavailable in the typed testimonies. In it a panel member declares: “The floor goes to Denise Crispim. The witness feels unable to speak and prefers to have her testimony read out by someone else.” In the scene, Denise stands still, looking dazed, sometimes lost, while Ettore Biocca reads her testimony. The camera switches between filming the slight movements of her downcast face and the audience.

While the causes and circumstances of imprisonment appear nebulous in the testimonies, the same cannot be said of the descriptions of torture. Whether physical or psychological, individual or collective, these practices were described in extensive detail in the RT-II sessions in all the testimonies we analysed. The witnesses describe death threats, participation as experimental subjects in torture classes and gratuitous beatings, as well as other forms of violence. Electric shocks to the sexual organs appear in the testimonies of both men and women. The possibility of rape is mentioned briefly in the testimonies of some women, demonstrating how the violence was gendered.

The testimonies were not made without difficulties, as several witnesses acknowledge: “it’s painful to repeat what happened,” said Marco Antonio Moro when recounting how he was kicked and punched on his arrival at the DOPS/SP after arrest. “I think it’s pointless describing here the torture, other witnesses have already done so,” Wellington Diniz announced evasively at first, although he eventually provided a broad description of the collective torture. “Much has been said about the torture,” stated Rolando Frati, who added that he had never lost his lucidness or control in the face of the violence. The intermediate zone between the hero and the victim figures appears here.

Nor was it easy to read these testimonies as researchers. We frequently found it impossible to continue the research because of the emotional impact of the horrific descriptions. Gagnebin (2006) refers to the third element that constitutes the witness, someone who, extraneous to the scene of violence, is willing to listen to the account of the other’s unbearable pain, thereby rupturing the dyad of victim and torturer. The figure of the witness thus exists when, beyond the relation of violence between the victim and the tormentor who silences them, it is possible to find a place where the pain can be told and someone else is there to listen, a possibility opened, or foreclosed, by historical circumstances (Sarti, 2020). As anthropologists, we place ourselves here as this outside element, fifty years after the events.

The transcription of the testimonies, the basis of our documentary research, condenses into words and onto paper performative acts that were the product of an entire bodily grammar of affects, an outcome of dramatized emotion and prior relationships that give meaning to participation in the struggle (Vianna & Farias, 2011). The testimony given by Carmela Pezzuti, for example, refers to the repression suffered by her two sons, also activists:

My sons, along with other comrades, were subjected to ‘torture classes.’ The classroom was a kind of amphitheatre with around 70 young officers from the three armed forces and a table with all the torture instruments laid out. First the officers entered, then our comrades. They used every kind of torture: bound upside down on a pole [*pau de arara*], electric shocks, spanking, drowning, a special instrument for pulling out fingernails... The scene was so traumatic that the younger officers had to leave the room to vomit. My children were tortured for nine months. All

22 ITA FLLB TBRII 05 022.

this suffering, this arbitrariness to which I was victim, which I had to watch, convinced me that my sons' struggle was just. There really was a need to fight against this state of affairs in Brazil.<sup>23</sup>

Expanding our research beyond the documents in the Basso Foundation archive, we find the book *Companheira Carmela: a história de luta de Carmela*, written by Mauricio Paiva (1996), Carmela's comrade in the struggle, in close collaboration with the protagonist, a decade after the end of the dictatorship. The narrative guides the reader through the main stages of her life chronologically. Carmela Pezzuti was a public worker from Minas Gerais, divorced, with no background in politics. She began to become interested in activism when her sons, Angelo and Murilo, took part in the student movement at the Federal University of Minas Gerais and held meetings of the clandestine COLINA group. At the suggestion of one of the group's members, she was invited by her own children to join the militant organization, contributing, if not with the direct use of arms, with intelligence and information activities, as well as economic resources (Magaldi, 2023b). In her testimony to the RT-II, she also referred to the political activity of her children as a reason for her own imprisonment. She said that she was arrested "because I am the mother of two young men who belonged, at that time, to a large revolutionary movement in Brazil against the military dictatorship." Her participation at the Russell Tribunal II is described as follows:

Carmela, standing up, began her testimony timidly. But someone noticed her discomfort and quietly brought her a chair. Once seated and after presenting herself, Carmela slowly began to tell the huge audience about her sons' ordeal and her own suffering in the prisons of Brazil's military dictatorship. As she proceeded with her account, she observed many of the people seated in the first rows of chairs wiping away tears. She went into detail in describing the horrors committed in the Brazilian prisons. And she concluded her remarks by turning her thoughts to comrades who, in Brazil and Chile, were still suffering similar horrific treatment in the prisons, calling for effective action to be taken in solidarity with them and, in particular, with her comrade Inês Etienne, whom she described as one of the most tragic cases of torture in our country. Her testimony caused such a strong impression that, in presenting a program on the tribunal on Dutch TV, the reporter remarked that Mrs Pezzuti is the most striking example of humility, courage and combativeness that he (the presenter) had seen at the Russell Tribunal. (Paiva, 1996, p. 173)

In our research at the National Archives, we also found records of the central role played by the expression of suffering (and the emotional reaction of the public) in the testimonies. On this point, our attention was drawn to a document from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs containing news articles from the Italian press. It includes the transcript of a report published in the newspaper *Il Giorno* on 26 April 1974.<sup>24</sup> The text highlights the fact that while the first Russell Tribunal, held to investigate the crimes committed in the Vietnam War, received a lot of criticism, the second tribunal was subject to even more criticism due to an alleged excessive sentimentality in the testimonies. The report concedes, however, that the protest in the form of a court of opinion could serve some purpose in international politics: it allowed those fighting against dictatorships in Latin America to feel less alone. We can speculate that the state monitors were interested in the report precisely because of its critical content, which could be used in their own country, Brazil, in the event of any positive repercussions in the national press:

It will be said that it is an intellectual game, a theatre rehearsal, a utopia, naive complacency, pointless sentimentalism, that the words will not even be able to inflict a scratch on the decisions of the states, the coldest of cold monsters, as de Gaulle called them. The fact that the trial is taking place in Rome, the most sceptical city of a sceptical nation, makes matters worse still (...). There remains the fact that, as experience shows, protest has some use in the era of international politics (...)

<sup>23</sup> ITA FLLB TBRII 03 01 02 004. Brasile, docc. 32

<sup>24</sup> BR DFANBSB Z4.DHU.o.1.



The descriptions of torture – the *sentimentalism* in which they were steeped, to quote from the newspaper – did not imply the simple identification of the witnesses with victimhood, if we understand this condition in its passive sense, eluding the subject's responsibility. All the testimonies contain a reflection on torture that centres on the relationship between the body and politics. The denunciation of the systematic nature of the torture involved, as something that exists not just to obtain information but also to spread terror in a generalized way, is another striking feature of the testimonies. Fernando Gabeira provides an overview of torture practices in Brazil, mentioning the torture schools in the military barracks. Carmela Pezzuti recognizes that “torture is an instrument of the system itself to remain in power.” For Rolando Frati, “torture is a system that maintains a fascist military dictatorship.”

René de Carvalho was the son of Renée and Apolônio de Carvalho, the latter an internationalist communist activist who fought in Brazil, in the Spanish Civil War and in the French Resistance. Alongside his father and brother, René was a member of the revolutionary Brazilian Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Brasileiro*: PCBR), set up by dissidents from the PCB during the military dictatorship. His testimony sums up the relationship between body and power to which we refer:

We were not simply victims of irrationality. In reality, every process is programmed. Mass torture may well imply paranoid aspects, but we don't believe this to be its main characteristic: we were victims, in truth, of an organized system and torture represents one of its most evident, most prominent, points of sensitivity, characterizing a view of a system that has its own well-defined rationality.<sup>25</sup>

## Final remarks

The testimonies of the Russell Tribunal II were situated at a complex intersection between revolutionary ideologies – an integral part of the political education of the witnesses – and humanitarian ideologies – which were then starting to be adopted and circulated as the language available for listening. On one hand, the RT-II witnesses did not speak directly about “human rights”, although this repertoire was an explicit part of the organization of the event itself. On the other, although there were references to revolution, the armed organizations themselves were seldom named, though their actions were always justified as a necessary response to repression.

What emerges as a mediating element between these different languages is the public expression of suffering. This reveals a transformation in the viewpoint of those who took part in the militancy, a commitment involving their bodies, affects and words. This process exposed the limits to the idea of a purely individual aspect of suffering and the presumption of its incommunicable or unspeakable – both of which are shown to be forms of silencing its political dimension.

In the RT-II testimonies, we can observe how pain and politics mutually constitute each other, a process in which the very notion of an *innocent victim* – to return to the opening epigraph of Gabeira – was questioned through the recognition of the connection, present in the testimonies themselves, between violence and power. In this sense, we agree with Felman (2003) when she argues that the testimonial repetition of suffering does not just repeat the victim's history, it is also capable of recreating it.

On the other hand, we can point to the limitations of testimony when we think about the selection of those who are invited to speak and those who are not. Asad (2003) showed how the repudiation of torture has been manifested, through the language of human rights, as part of a modern project to eliminate pain in modern liberal societies. Rather than eliminating suffering, however, this project has helped generate vicious

<sup>25</sup> ITA FLLB TBRII 03 01 02 004. Brasile, docc. 32

dynamics that oscillate between secrecy and the public exposure of torture. In this process, certain types of violence become more tolerable than others, depending on the bodies and nation states involved. In the case of the RT-II witnesses, most of them were white and linked to the urban middle class, recognized as the target not of any ordinary violence but of a *political* violence.

Following amnesty in 1979, the majority of those living in exile returned to Brazil, rebuilding their lives as democratic politicians, educators, environmentalists and human rights activists. Events like the Russell Tribunal II allow us to understand how the practice of testimony became a way to denounce the different forms of violence perpetrated by the dictatorship, emerging as a prominent method of confrontation from the 1970s onwards.

Even before the development of public policies on memory and truth, the literary and audiovisual arts were already exploring the idea of testimony as a form of denunciation and an expression of pain. In the transition to democracy, reports compiled by civil society, such as *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (Arquidiocese de São Paulo, 1985), recorded accounts of torture and named the victims. Social movements like the Torture Never Again Group (*Grupo Tortura Nunca Mais*) provided clinical-legal teams to assist those affected and helped publicize their experiences. Testimony was strongly present in the work of the National Truth Commission (*Comissão Nacional da Verdade*, 2012-2014), as well as the aforementioned projects of the Amnesty Commission, which organized hearings in which the voices of those affected were invited and heard – and thus elaborated.

The RT-II and its testimonies of exile is part of this repertoire. Examining testimony for its presence and power – and not just its excesses (Sarlo, 2005) or its absences in terms of criminal justice (Seligmann-Silva, 2010) – can offer a line of flight for the melancholic leitmotif of academic research and contemporary activism on memory, truth, justice and reparation.

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# Resisting Bolsonaro: The Mobilization of the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro to Defend Their Territory and Collective Projects

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## Abstract

The main objective of this article is to examine the political mobilization of the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro (southern Bahia) during the presidential term of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022). In a context of grave rights violations, the Indigenous movement emerged as one of the main forces of resistance to Bolsonarismo. Through an analysis of the strategies developed in Serra do Padeiro, we take five key episodes as starting points: the uncovering of a targeted plan to exterminate Indigenous leaders, an attempt to build a resort on Tupinambá territory, setbacks in the demarcation procedures for the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory, mobilization of repressive forces against protective measures adopted in Serra do Padeiro during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the granting of an eviction order against the Tupinambá. Through a detailed examination of a specific case, we seek to contribute to the production on forms of collective action carried out by Indigenous peoples.

**Keywords:** Indigenous mobilization; Bolsonarismo; Tupinambá; land retakings; conflict.

# Resistindo a Bolsonaro: a mobilização dos Tupinambá da Serra do Padeiro na defesa de seu território e projetos coletivos

## Resumo

Examinar a mobilização dos Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro (sul da Bahia) durante o mandato presidencial de Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022) é o principal objetivo deste artigo. Em um contexto de graves violações de direitos, o movimento indígena emergiu como uma das principais forças de resistência ao bolsonarismo. Aqui, partimos de cinco episódios-chave para analisar as estratégias desenvolvidas na Serra do Padeiro: o desvelamento de um plano para assassinar lideranças indígenas, a tentativa de construção de um *resort* no território tupinambá, retrocessos no procedimento de demarcação da Terra Indígena Tupinambá de Olivença, a mobilização de forças repressivas contra medidas protetivas adotadas na Serra do Padeiro face a pandemia de Covid-19 e a concessão de uma liminar em ação de reintegração de posse contra os Tupinambá. Por meio da consideração detida de um caso específico, esperamos contribuir com a produção analítica sobre formas de ação coletiva levadas a cabo por povos indígenas.

**Palavras-chave:** Mobilização indígena; Bolsonarismo; Tupinambá; retomadas de terras; conflito.



# Resisting Bolsonaro: The Mobilization of the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro to Defend Their Territory and Collective Projects<sup>1</sup>

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“Bolsonaro gained leverage by saying that he would not demarcate an inch of Indigenous land, that he would move forward with mining projects on Indigenous lands and arming society to attack those who occupy the land – and, once again, kill us (our translation)”. In an interview given in January 2023 shortly after Jair Messias Bolsonaro’s presidential term (2019-2022)<sup>2</sup>, Chief Babau (Rosivaldo Ferreira da Silva), the main political leader among the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro in southern Bahia, used these terms to analyze the rise of the far-right leader. “The agenda of his campaign was to take away constitutional rights from Indigenous peoples, rights which should never have been taken away. Once elected, he put this agenda into practice immediately. He was supposed to leave the presidency as a prisoner because these are deadly crimes against democracy and against the existence of various peoples. It is a genocidal project. Bolsonaro is a pawn in a genocidal project.”

The main objective of this article is to examine the political mobilization in Serra do Padeiro during Bolsonaro’s term. The period was characterized by numerous attacks on the rights of this community, facilitated by the federal government through direct action or omission. In navigating these turbulent waters, what strategies did the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro devise to protect themselves and defend their territory? How did they resist harmful measures by the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches and other actions that aimed to undermine their rights? A close examination of these issues proposes even more questions. Is it possible to identify changes in the dynamics of collective action in recent years? What interpretations circulated in the village regarding the situation, and how do they fit into deeper historical and cosmological frameworks?

The Serra do Padeiro village is located in the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory, which covers approximately 47,000 hectares in the municipalities of Buerarema, Ilhéus, São José da Vitória and Una, and encompasses one of the few remaining areas of Atlantic Forest in the state. A census carried out in Serra do Padeiro in 2016 counted 483 Indigenous people (Alarcon 2022)<sup>3</sup>. Since 2004, the village has been deeply engaged in carrying out direct actions to recover the territory, known as *retomadas de terras* (land retakings).

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<sup>1</sup> This article was produced as part of the project “Resisting Bolsonaro: The Mobilization of the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro to Defend Their Territory and Collective Projects amid Violations of Rights and Anti-Indigenous Policies,” coordinated by Daniela Fernandes Alarcon and Glicéria Jesus da Silva. It was selected by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for the first edition of their Engaged Research Grant, with the four authors of this article composing the team that developed research between 2022 and 2023, supported by the Associação dos Índios Tupinambá da Serra do Padeiro (AITSP, Association of Tupinambá Indians of Serra do Padeiro). A preliminary summary of the attacks on the Tupinambá during the period was published in Alarcon (2023). Some of the arguments discussed in depth here were initially explored in research developed with funding from the Mellon Foundation (Just Futures Initiative Grant N-2009-09221), through the project “Dispossessions in the Americas: The Extraction of Bodies, Land, and Heritage from la Conquista to the Present,” administered by the University of Pennsylvania, coordinated by Tulia G. Falsetti and co-coordinated by Margaret Bruchac, Ricardo Castillo-Neyra, Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Michael Hanchard, Jonathan D. Katz, Richard M. Leventhal and Michael Z. Levy. The authors are grateful for their support. We also thank Ryan B. Morrison, for the translation.

<sup>2</sup> Elected by the far-right Social Liberal Party (PSL), Bolsonaro ended up without a party for half his term, from November 2019 until November 2021 when he joined the Liberal Party (PL).

<sup>3</sup> Data from the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health of the Ministry of Health (Sesai/MS) relating to the IT in 2019 indicated a total indigenous population of 5,038 people.

The objective is to reverse a long process of dispossession – intensified from the end of the nineteenth century with the expansion of cocoa farming and tourism – which triggered an acute diaspora. The administrative procedure for demarcating the Indigenous Territory which began in 2004 has not yet been completed. Despite the sluggishness of land regularization, which renders Indigenous possession precarious, the socioeconomic and political transformations resulting from territorial recovery and the reversal of the diaspora are profound, so much so that at times they can be difficult to measure<sup>4</sup>.

Having regained around 5,000 hectares of land, with the completion of ninety-five land retaking actions, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro are in possession of approximately 70% of the area of the village<sup>5</sup>. The recently mentioned census found that 321 Indigenous people lived in retaken lands and 162 on smallholdings. The fact that approximately two-thirds of the Indigenous population of Serra do Padeiro were living on recovered estates and among those living on smallholdings, many were developing their economic activities on retaken land highlights the relevance of the process of territorial recovery for the contemporary existence of the group. Due to the successful struggle for land, Serra do Padeiro became a preferred target for anti-Indigenous sectors, with recurring episodes of police brutality, mobilization of paramilitary groups and criminalization of leaders, among other widely documented phenomena.

In the next section, we will present a brief general characterization of the Bolsonaro period with regards to the violation of Indigenous rights, at the same time inscribing the term within a structural framework of violence against Indigenous peoples and illuminating its specificities. Thereafter, taking the 2018 and 2022 presidential elections as frames of reference, we will focus on five key episodes of the conflict with regards to the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory: the uncovering of a targeted plan to exterminate Indigenous leaders, an attempt to build a resort on Tupinambá territory, setbacks in the demarcation procedures, mobilization of repressive forces against protective measures adopted in Serra do Padeiro during the Covid-19 pandemic and the granting of an eviction order against the Tupinambá. In addressing these events, we do not intend to chronologically outline the violations and focus on the actions of state representatives and sectors opposed to the rights of the Tupinambá. Instead, the processes discussed here are treated as starting points for exploring the political strategies engendered in Serra do Padeiro, to be described and analyzed in the subsequent section.

Before proceeding, a brief theoretical and methodological note. The research that gave rise to this article combines ethnographic work and archival research, aimed at producing a detailed analysis of contemporary mobilization in Serra do Padeiro. The research was conducted by a team composed of three Indigenous researchers and one non-Indigenous researcher, the latter an anthropologist who carries out research in Serra do Padeiro focused on socio-territorial dynamics and collective action, examining mechanisms of dispossession historically employed against the Tupinambá, as well as the strategies they have developed to defend their territory and realize their collective projects. This research has been carried out in close collaboration with Indigenous leaders, within a framework engaged in the defense of Tupinambá rights. These guidelines also inform this present article, which, by contributing to a more accurate understanding of Indigenous forms of action, seeks to offer a scientifically-based counterpoint for a setting still characterized by the devastating social effects of more than half a decade of anti-Indigenous policies, combined with powerful discriminatory rhetoric.

In the first months of 2023, we conducted intensive field research, carrying out team meetings, informal conversations, and structured and semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in different ways in Tupinambá mobilization. Archival research, in turn, was mostly carried out during 2022 and the first

4 For a detailed discussion of the process of territorialization and territorial recovery underway in Serra do Padeiro, see, among other works, Alarcon (2019, 2022).

5 The village covers around 8,500 hectares, including inhabited areas, farmland and forests. Before the first land retakings, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro were in possession of approximately 10% of the area, restricted to around forty smallholdings that they had maintained over the generations, most of which were twenty hectares or less.

half of 2023. Focusing in particular on documentary sources produced during the Bolsonaro administration and stored in public and private archives, we systematized a wide range of documents prepared by the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro, their legal representatives and allies; other segments of the Indigenous movement and civil entities; and public authorities at the municipal, state and federal levels. In addition, we compiled journalistic articles published in Brazil and abroad.

We paid special attention to the minutes of the regular and special meetings held between 2018 and 2022 by the Association of Tupinambá Indians of Serra do Padeiro (AITSP), the main organizational body of the village<sup>6</sup>. This valuable material captures shared political perceptions as the events analyzed in this article unfolded, and contains details of actions taken by the Tupinambá in response to these same events. Other sources worth highlighting include those contained in the administrative legal proceedings for demarcating the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory, to which we had full access for the purposes of this research and contributed decisively to the reconstruction of government actions related to land regularization and the rights of the Tupinambá more broadly<sup>7</sup>. While focusing, as mentioned, on documentation produced in recent years, we were also able to draw on a broader archive of documents compiled over the past fifteen years, within the frameworks of research developed by the first author of this article.

## Undoing Policies for Indigenous Peoples

Considering the centrality of the conquest and territorial invasion in the constitution of the Brazilian nation-state, which is characterized by the persistence of colonial power, Cruz (2022) proposes the notion of an “Indigenous history of suffering,” marked by “white lethality”. It is in this sense, he argues, that violations of Indigenous rights should not be analyzed as isolated events, but rather as an “expression of a structured web for the obliteration of Indigenous existence,” which has a territorial dimension as its common axis and entangles Indigenous collectives in its structure, even in the most favorable of circumstances (Cruz 2022: 27, our translation).

In an analysis focused on the so-called “redemocratization,” Souza Lima and Oliveira (2022) argue that the bloody battle to destroy Indigenous territorial rights, intensified at present, may be clearly perceived throughout the entire period. Since the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, there have been numerous attempts to undermine the guarantees provided therein. During the Constituent Assembly, great efforts were made through legal and illegal means to block the inclusion of Indigenous rights in the Brazilian Magna Carta. Even during the four previous presidential terms of the Workers’ Party (PT), that is, the administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), policies guided by a hegemonic vision of “development” and “economic growth” led to “a brutal and violent advance on their [Indigenous] lands” (Souza Lima and Oliveira 2022: 66, our translation). With regards to the context focused on here, the administrative legal proceedings for demarcating the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory – initiated in 2004 as we have seen – spanned four PT presidential terms without reaching a conclusion.

It should be noted that the Tupinambá case does not deviate from the norm. In August 2016, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, then United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, after a mission to Brazil which took place in March of that year and which included a visit to Serra do Padeiro, warned of an “extremely worrying regression in the protection of Indigenous peoples’ rights” (Tauli-Corpuz 2016: 19). It is undeniable, however, that the previously existing tensions became even more acute after Rousseff’s impeachment in 2016. Analyzing the rise of Michel Temer (Brazilian Democratic Movement - MDB) to the

6 For more information on AITSP, see Alarcon (2022). Regarding the period considered here, attendance records at meetings are poor, and are absent from most minutes. Considering the available data, attendance ranged from seventy-two to 156 people.

7 File No. 08620.001523/2008-43, to which the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples granted us access (Protocol No. 15001.000196/2023-02).

national presidency, a position he held until 2018, Carneiro da Cunha argues that a “new level of violence was then established in rural Brazil,” in the context of “a political crisis without precedent,” with a strong predominance of a ruralist front oriented towards the dissolution of the rights of Indigenous and quilombola peoples, other traditional peoples and communities, and peasants in general (Carneiro da Cunha et al. 2017: 405-406, our translation).

During Lula’s terms, Congress held a series of Parliamentary Inquiry Committees (CPIs) targeting agrarian reform and the mobilization of landless workers. Beginning in 2010, according to Terena and Vieira (2021: 112, our translation), “the strength of the Indigenous movement, land retakings and the advance (albeit weak) of the demarcation of traditional lands” has diverted the focus of ruralists. On November 10, 2015, a CPI was established allegedly “aiming at investigating the actions of the National Indigenous Peoples Foundation (FUNAI) and the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) in the demarcation of Indigenous and quilombola lands.” In August 2016, the CPI concluded with the expiration of its timeline after having been extended twice, without producing a final report. Also, from 2015 and 2016 in the state Legislative Assembly of Mato Grosso do Sul, the so-called “CIMI CPI” was carried out, to investigate the participation of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) – a branch of the Catholic church, widely recognized for its defense of Indigenous rights – in “incitement” and feasibility of land retaking actions in the state.

On May 2, 2017, during the Temer administration, the second FUNAI-INCRA CPI, which had been instated on October 25 of the previous year, approved its final report (Brasil, Câmara dos Deputados, Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito destinada a investigar fatos relativos à Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) e ao Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA) nos termos que especifica, 2017). The main purpose of the two incarnations of the CPI was to promote administrative changes that would make the land regularization of Indigenous and quilombola territories unfeasible and block agrarian reform. The first version of the report called for the abolition of FUNAI. With a substantial chapter on the Indigenous context of southern Bahia, analyzed in Alarcon (2018), the document requested the indictment of sixteen people involved in the Tupinambá case, including Babau; Chief Jamapoty (Maria Valdelice de Jesus) who lives in the Itapoan village in the coastal region of the Indigenous Territory; the anthropologist Susana de Matos Dores Viegas, responsible for the official studies for the demarcation of the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory; and the first author of this article. As Terena and Vieira (2021: 142, our translation) have concluded, even though the CPI did not have the power to propose criminal actions or carry out convictions and the requests for indictments were not met, it contributed to consolidating “a criminalizing narrative about the actions of organizations that are part of the field of defense and implementation of public policies related to Indigenous territorial rights.”

Taking stock of the threats to Indigenous peoples perpetrated by the three branches of government during the Temer government, Amado (2018: 179, our translation) highlights the fact that interests contrary to the guarantee of Indigenous territorial rights “were articulated and took root in the structures of the Brazilian State.” After a visit to Brazil in November 2018, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) expressed strong concern: “They face not only threats of invasion of their territories by non-indigenous individuals, but also major challenges with respect to the titling and protection of their lands. More often than not, indigenous peoples and communities lack the State protection they need” (Organization of American States, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2021: 29).

The anti-Indigenous agenda set in motion by Temer intensified under Bolsonaro, intertwined with the dismantling of environmental policies, both of which reached unprecedented levels since the last dictatorship (1964-1985). The effects of these policies during this more recent period were only stymied due to the actions of the Indigenous movement, including forms of strategic litigation. In the most well-known of these cases, the Action for Noncompliance with a Fundamental Precept (ADPF) No. 709 which aimed to protect the lives of Indigenous peoples in the face of the complete inadequacy of the government’s response to the Covid-19

pandemic, the country's highest court admitted the active legitimacy of the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) to file actions of this nature, constituting a historic milestone (Terena 2022). In August 2021, APIB presented a communiqué to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague (Netherlands), denouncing Bolsonaro for crimes against humanity and genocide (Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil 2021).

A study by APIB and Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI)<sup>8</sup> detailing eleven situations of criminalization including the Tupinambá case, found an increase in the vulnerability of Indigenous peoples under Bolsonaro's administration, which acted to "undermine the legal protection of their rights, fueling hatred and racist discourse and supporting vested interests, from private investments to fundamentalist missionaries" (Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil and Indigenous Peoples Rights International 2021: 11, our translation). Along with the Executive branch, the Legislative branch represented another locus of intense attacks on Indigenous rights. As Batista, Jucá and Guetta (2023: 77, our translation) indicate, the legislature of the period, led by the Parliamentary Front for Agriculture (FPA), known as the "ruralist caucus,"<sup>9</sup> processed a large volume of proposals that "flexibilize, revoke or distort the legislation" to safeguard Indigenous rights – using as a standard the "violations of due legislative process."

Marcelo Augusto Xavier da Silva, FUNAI's president from July 19, 2019 to December 29, 2022, played a prominent role in the destruction of policies for Indigenous peoples. He acted as a "consultant" in the FUNAI-INCRA 2 CPI, invited by the ruralist caucus. In this role, he participated in an investigation in Serra do Padeiro in 2016. A Chief of the Federal Police with strong ties to agribusiness and a history of accusations of Indigenous rights violations, Xavier became known for criminalizing leaders, persecuting and harassing civil servants, severely dismantling FUNAI, and adopting measures that were contrary to Indigenous rights, as widely reported. On his first day in office, through Provisional Measure (MP) No. 870/2019, he attempted to take away from FUNAI the role of demarcating Indigenous Territories, and transfer the agency to fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights, headed by Damares Alves, accused of serious violations of Indigenous rights.

Although Bolsonaro's plans did not come to fruition due to intense mobilization to the contrary, his administration found ways to subvert FUNAI's work. Under Xavier, the aim was to promote what he called the "new FUNAI," "based on a tripod of promoting 'legal security,' 'pacification of conflicts' and 'Indigenous dignity and autonomy,' which translates, nonetheless, into putting the institution to work to weaken Indigenous territorial guarantees and open up Indigenous Territories to economic exploitation by third parties" (Indigenistas Associados and Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos 2022: 23, our translation).

On May 21, 2021, Xavier requested that the Federal Police open an investigation against Ciro de Lopes e Barbuda, a lawyer working at FUNAI, due to the issuance of a legal opinion in favor of the Tupinambá (Brasil, Ministério da Justiça, Fundação Nacional do Índio, Presidência 2021 *apud* Brasil, Ministério Público Federal, Procuradoria da República no Distrito Federal, Décimo Ofício 2022)<sup>10</sup>. According to the then head of FUNAI, Lopes e Barbuda had engaged in condoning criminal behavior by "defending Indigenous land retaking, thus non-complying with legal provisions" (Sassine 2021, our translation). Welcomed by representatives of agribusiness ("Ruralistas saem" 2021), the initiative ended up producing an official slander complaint filed against Xavier by the Public Prosecutor's Office on May 18, 2022 (Brasil, Ministério Público Federal,

8 Entity founded by Tauli-Corpuz and Joan Carling, the latter of whom was part of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

9 Terena and Vieira (2021: 102, 100, our translation) define the FPA, created in 2002, as "an instance of supra-partisan organization of ruralism in the National Congress," understanding the latter as a "political movement of organization and institutionalization of the interests of fractions of the agrarian ruling class in Brazil," associated with "an institutional political project to make the demarcation of Indigenous lands unfeasible and reaffirm the hegemony and absolute nature of private property in the countryside."

10 Brasil. Ministério da Justiça. Fundação Nacional do Índio. Presidência. 2021. Ofício nº 815/2021/PRES/FUNAI. Brasília, DF. In response to the request made by Xavier, who attacked Lopes and Barbuda after the preparation of Information No. 00042/2021/COAF/PFE-FUNAI-PGU/PGF/AGU, the Federal Police opened Police Inquiry (IP) No. 1062242-60.2021.4.01.3400-PJE/TRF1.

Procuradoria da República no Distrito Federal, Décimo Ofício 2022)<sup>11</sup>. In May 2023, Xavier was indicted by the Federal Police for acting carelessly and taking risks that may have resulted in the homicides of Indigenous rights specialist Bruno Pereira and journalist Dom Phillips, murdered in June 2022 in the Javari Valley in Amazonas state. Four years earlier, Phillips had published an article in *The Guardian* expressing concerns about Xavier's appointment (Phillips 2019).

In Babau's assessment, Xavier was appointed to FUNAI for it to be "completely dismantled," preventing employees dedicated to their duties in defense of Indigenous rights from performing their work, and appointing co-opted Indigenous functionaries, neo-Pentecostal evangelical leaders and military personnel. The head of FUNAI, Babau observed, acted to impose bureaucratic obstacles to normal operations concerning the fulfilment of Indigenous rights, publishing internal regulations that made it impossible, among other actions, for employees to quickly access Indigenous areas to verify complaints, especially invasions, and mediate conflicts. "When he does this, it's the same as saying [to anti-Indigenous sectors]: 'I'm blocking FUNAI employees so that you can invade Indigenous lands.'" In addition to Xavier, Babau pointed out, Bolsonaro used other actors in his attack on Indigenous rights, including Sergio Moro, who headed the Ministry of Justice and Public Security from 2019 to 2020, and Augusto Aras, who was appointed Attorney General of the Republic in 2019. Throughout Bolsonaro's term, Babau and other leaders dedicated themselves to closely observing the tactics of Bolsonarismo, trying to understand them and even anticipate them with the aim of outlining strategies, as it will be clear through closer examination of AITSP's minutes.

It is important to highlight that, although there is a certain profusion of descriptions and analyses of policies for Indigenous peoples and violations of Indigenous rights under Bolsonaro, an extensive archaeology of the matter, based on an analysis of more specific cases, has yet to be rendered. An ethnography of the administrative processes that were handled at the time, for example, could be a particularly suitable way of achieving this objective. It has not been our purpose in this section to advance a comprehensive and systematic characterization of the period, but to outline a broad framework, incorporating information directly related to Serra do Padeiro whenever possible, to offer basic necessary instruments for navigating the arguments that follow.

## Attacks on Serra do Padeiro

Today, it is well documented that the 2018 electoral cycle, beginning with the campaign phase, was characterized by widespread threats against Indigenous peoples and invasions of territories. Identifying Bolsonaro as a legitimate representative of their aspirations, sectors mobilizing against the demarcation of the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory enthusiastically supported his candidacy. A four-page electoral booklet that circulated in the 2022 election titled "Alerting the People of Buerarema", established the connection between the mobilization against Tupinambá rights and support for Bolsonaro, who appeared smiling on the back cover. Referring to the "sacred right to property" and "the criminal Babau and his gang," among other factors that should be considered by voters, the pamphlet urges: "For all these reasons, do not vote for candidates linked to the PT."

Buerarema has crystallized over the last four electoral processes as one of the most visible anti-PT bastions in Bahia. In 2013, the municipal headquarters, which is about sixteen kilometers from Serra do Padeiro, was the epicenter of a noisy offensive against the land retakings, which included the destruction of official vehicles, the burning of Indigenous homes located in the urban area, invasions of public buildings, threats and beatings.

<sup>11</sup> The complaint was filed under Criminal Investigation Procedure (PIC) No. 1.16.000.003292/2021-50.

In the 2014 elections, Buerarema was the only municipality in Bahia where Rousseff lost in the first round<sup>12</sup>. This led the town to be profiled in the *Folha de S.Paulo*, in a piece which openly associated the result with the demarcation of the Indigenous Territory (Bittencourt 2014). The results gain even more relevance when compared to those of 2006, when Buerarema favored Lula in both rounds, with a significant margin<sup>13</sup>. The rejection of the PT, particularly acute in Buerarema, is also visible in the other municipalities in the region.

In urban centers around the village, Bolsonaro's victory was celebrated with fireworks and other public demonstrations. Of the six municipalities in Bahia that elected him in the first round in 2018, five are in the south or far south ("Mapa da apuração" 2018a) where the largest Indigenous Territories in the state are located, inhabited by the Tupinambá, Pataxó Hãhãhã and Pataxó. These municipalities include Buerarema and Itabuna. The latter, located northwest of the Indigenous Territory, is one of the main regional centers in southern Bahia. In the second round, the number of Bahian municipalities in which the far-right won fell to four; Buerarema remained on the list ("Mapa da apuração" 2018b)<sup>14</sup>. In 2022, Bolsonaro's advantage in the municipality, in both rounds, was even greater than in the previous election cycle, consolidating the trend pointed out here, a backdrop to the episodes focused on in this article<sup>15</sup>.

At the end of January 2019, only a few weeks after Bolsonaro took office, a plan of extermination targeting leaders from Serra do Padeiro was made public. Uncovered by the Indigenous community itself, the scheme was reported in *Folha de S.Paulo* and *Mongabay*, the latter a news outlet focused on socio-environmental concerns (Valente 2019; Branford and Torres 2019). Testimonies and audiovisual evidence gathered by the Tupinambá, with the help of non-Indigenous supporters, suggested the involvement of farmers and hotel businessmen in the plan, as well as agents of the civil and military police and other public officials. Outlined in meetings in the city of Itabuna, the attack was directed at five main targets, all of whom are relatives of Babau, including two of his nieces who are authors of this article: Jéssica Silva de Quadros, pregnant at the time, and Sthefany Ferreira da Silva, then still a teenager. Although it is not possible to draw direct connections between the plan of extermination and Bolsonaro's victory, in the political climate that prevailed in the country at the time, episodes of open violence became more frequent. In other words, Bolsonaro's virulent far-right rhetoric had quickly produced concrete effects.

In October 2019, Gilson Machado Neto, president of the Brazilian Institute of Tourism (EMBRATUR), was accused of lobbying in favor of the Portuguese Vila Galé group<sup>16</sup>, which, through its company Vila Galé Brasil - Atividades Hoteleiras Ltda., planned to build a resort in a mangrove area in part of the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory in the municipality of Una. The case came to light when *The Intercept Brasil* (Audi 2019) published a letter sent by Machado Neto to the then president of FUNAI, dated July 26 of that year, which reads: "Embratur hereby expresses its interest in ending the demarcation process of Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous lands," thus removing the legal obstacles to the installation of Vila Galé Costa do Cacau (Brasil, Instituto Brasileiro de Turismo 2019, our translation). "This is an area with exceptional potential for tourism development, and the Government of the State of Bahia and the Municipal Government of Una have even signed an intentions agreement with the Vila Galé Group, with an investment of over R\$200,000,000.00 [...]."

12 In the first round, Rousseff received only 25.74% of votes, compared to 66.63% for Aécio Neves (Brazilian Social Democracy Party - PSDB). In the second round, votes were 30.80% and 69.20%, respectively (Brasil, Tribunal Superior Eleitoral 2014a, 2014b).

13 Lula and Geraldo Alckmin (the PSDB candidate) obtained, respectively, 52.33% and 40.24% of the votes in the first round, and, in the second, 63.85% and 36.14% (Brasil, Tribunal Superior Eleitoral 2006a, 2006b).

14 In the first round in Buerarema, Bolsonaro obtained 46.46% of the votes and Fernando Haddad (PT), 36.71%; in the second round, respectively, 55.26% and 44.74% (Mapa 2018a, 2018b). In Itabuna, the result in the first round was 40.62% for Bolsonaro and 36.57% for Haddad, while in the second round, Haddad obtained 51.31% of the votes and Bolsonaro, 48.69%.

15 In the first round, Bolsonaro obtained 53.37% of the votes and Lula, 38.95%, while in the second round, the results were, respectively, 59.64% and 40.36% (Brasil, Tribunal Superior Eleitoral 2022a, 2022b).

16 According to the description on the group's website, Vila Galé - Sociedade de Empreendimentos Turísticos S.A., established in 1986, owns 31 hotels in Portugal and ten in Brazil. Jorge Afonso Campos Rebelo de Almeida is the group's president and founder.

On August 27, 2019, the mayor of Una, Tiago Birschner (Progressive Party - PP), wrote to Sergio Moro, then Minister of Justice, requesting the demarcation case be shelved (Una, Prefeitura Municipal, Gabinete do Prefeito 2019). In the document, the mayor advocates for the hotel company and defends the applicability of environmental licensing at the municipal level – even if the project fits into the category requiring federal licensing. Without any mention of the Indigenous Territory, on December 4, 2018, the Municipal Secretariat for Economic Development, Agriculture and Environment of Una had granted Vila Galé a preliminary environmental license (Una, Prefeitura Municipal, Secretaria Municipal de Desenvolvimento Econômico, Agricultura e Meio Ambiente 2018). The overlap with the Indigenous Territory would only be brought up for debate in a statement to FUNAI made by the Bahia Institute of the Environment and Water Resources (INEMA), a state-level body, on February 21, 2019 (Bahia, Instituto do Meio Ambiente e Recursos Hídricos, Coordenação de Turismo e Urbanismo 2019).

The area in question neighbors the Una Biological Reserve, created in 1980 and expanded in 2007, and the Serra das Lontras National Park, established in 2010. The region is crucial for environmental conservation and for the Tupinambá to carry out their way of life. Crabbing and gathering of other species represent practices that date back to the ancestors of Indigenous communities in the area. Furthermore, if the resort were to come to fruition, it would be located approximately five kilometers from the Lagoa do Mabaço on the southern border of the Indigenous Territory, whose two bodies of water are important symbolic sites for the Tupinambá. It is worth noting that for years, families in the region faced pressure from tourism and attempts to fence them in as a result of a luxury hotel that had as a partner Armínio Fraga Neto, former president of the Central Bank of Brazil (Alarcon 2019).

In a statement from November 18, 2019, Vila Galé declared to the Portuguese press that it had given up on the project, in the wake of intense Tupinambá mobilization (Martins 2019b, Vila Galé 2019)<sup>17</sup>. Their retreat from the project, however, was accompanied by statements questioning the territorial rights of the Tupinambá and even denials of their Indigenous identity. In an interview given weeks before the withdrawal, Jorge Afonso Campos Rebelo de Almeida, president and founder of the Vila Galé Group, declared: “If I were in his [Bolsonaro’s] place, I would say that Indigenous people, who are in various parts of the country, have the right to be *integrated* into Brazilian society. We are not going to create autonomous islands [...]. At most, if it were in the middle of the Amazon, somewhere that had no contact with the outside world, it could still make sense. Now, on the southern coast of Bahia [...], talking about an Indigenous reserve is ludicrous, to say the least” (Gomes 2019, our translation and emphasis). On October 6, 2023, in a special session of the Legislative Assembly of Bahia, Almeida received the title of Bahian Citizen, as proposed by state deputy Eduardo Salles (PP), unanimously approved by the sixty-three members of the house (Bahia, Assembleia Legislativa da Bahia 2023)<sup>18</sup>. It is worth noting that “to support initiatives that help to encourage social welfare and nature preservation” and “to adopt economically viable and socially fair processes” are among the hotel chain’s “commitments,” as presented on its website<sup>19</sup>.

While the Tupinambá were still celebrating their victory in the battle with the Portuguese group, on January 28, 2020, covert government actions aimed at dismantling their rights were revealed by the press (Valente 2020). On December 30, 2019, the Vice-Minister of Justice, instead of moving forward with the final stages of the demarcation procedures for the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory, in accordance with its legal responsibilities, returned it to FUNAI, following the recommendation of its legal consultants (Brasil, Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública, Secretaria Executiva 2019b). This was an *en bloc* return, affecting

<sup>17</sup> The statement in its entirety can be read in Leal (2019).

<sup>18</sup> A recording of the session is available at: <https://indigenous.youtube.com/watch?v=CWO1X8-R3Gc>.

<sup>19</sup> “About Vila Galé”. Available at: <https://www.vilagale.com/en/group/about-vila-gale>.



seventeen Indigenous Territories. The decision was based on a non-statutory regulation approved during the Temer administration by the Attorney General's Office, dated July 19, 2017.

This regulation determined compliance with the 2009 Supreme Court's ruling on Petition (PET) No. 3,388 referring to the Raposa Serra do Sul Indigenous Territory, in Roraima state, and imposed the "timeframe" thesis<sup>20</sup> for all ongoing demarcation procedures, even though, at that time, the Supreme Court's judgment in Extraordinary Appeal of Generally Binding Precedent (RE) No. 1,017,365, which analyzed the validity of the thesis, had not yet been handed down. The clear aim was to impose an understanding on a matter still under consideration by the Judiciary via an Executive action. The judgment was handed down on September 21, 2023, with the rejection of the thesis.

Attempts to delay or completely suspend the demarcation process for the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory have been recurrent. In 2014, for example, the then Minister of Justice, José Eduardo Cardozo, set the course of action back in response to a direct request from the Association of Small Farmers, Business Owners and Residents in the Alleged Area Affected by the Demarcation of Indigenous Lands of Ilhéus, Una and Buerarema (Brasil, Ministério da Justiça, Gabinete do Ministro 2014; Associação dos Pequenos Agricultores, Empresários e Residentes na Pretensa Área Atingida pela Demarcação de Terra Indígena de Ilhéus, Uma [sic] e Buerarema 2013). The previous year, the group had filed a preventive writ of mandamus, requesting an end to the demarcation, under the allegation of procedural defects<sup>21</sup>. On April 5, 2016, the judge presiding over the case, Napoleão Nunes Maia Filho from the Superior Court of Justice, granted the requested preliminary injunction (Brasil, Superior Tribunal de Justiça 2016). Allegedly in defense of the "procedural fairness necessary for the demarcation process" (our translation), he reviewed a decision he himself had issued on December 11, 2013, which had denied the request for a preliminary injunction (Brasil, Superior Tribunal de Justiça 2013). With the new decision, the process was paralyzed for just over five months, until September 14 of the same year when the judges of the Superior Court unanimously overturned the preliminary injunction (Brasil, Procuradoria-Geral da República 2016).

Turning to more recent events, it should be noted that just over four months before the case was returned to FUNAI at the end of 2019, the Ministry of Justice advisory team underscored that the procedural aspects of the demarcation process were legally compliant: "The analysis of the objections to the demarcation presented by affected parties was not accompanied by any evidence capable of reversing the course of the procedure in question, nor were any technical or administrative flaws or failures identified" (Brasil, Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública, Secretaria Executiva 2019a, our translation). In addition, the document reported that the legal aspects of the case had been endorsed by FUNAI's legal team, which led its president to submit the case to the Ministry of Justice, to follow its course

After being sent back to FUNAI, the case remained frozen for three years, even though on May 6, 2020, in the context of Extraordinary Appeal No. 1,017,365, Justice Edson Facchin had provisionally suspended all effects of the Attorney General's Office regulation issued in 2017 (Brasil, Supremo Tribunal Federal 2021b). It is worth noting that, before the case returned to FUNAI, the agency had already proven the continuity of the Tupinambá occupation of the land throughout time, rendering this setback in the procedure baseless even in a scenario recognizing the validity of the "timeframe" thesis (Brasil, Ministério da Justiça, Fundação Nacional do Índio, Coordenação de Delimitação e Análise 2018). Finally, in March 2023, the process moved forward once again<sup>22</sup> and, on May 25, the president of FUNAI forwarded it to the recently created Ministry of

20 The unconstitutional "timeframe" thesis states that, to have their territories demarcated, Indigenous peoples must prove that they were either in possession of these specific areas on October 5, 1988, when the Federal Constitution was promulgated, or in litigation for dispossession at the time.

21 Case No. 041083486.2013.3.00.0000.

22 On March 24, FUNAI's General Coordinator for Identification and Delimitation certified the technical integrity of the process and the absence of administrative impediments for its continuation (Brasil, Ministério dos Povos Indígenas, Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas, Diretoria de Proteção Territorial, Coordenação-Geral de Identificação e Delimitação 2023), a decision approved by the Director of Territorial Protection four days later (Brasil,

Indigenous Peoples for the following stages (Brasil, Ministério dos Povos Indígenas, Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas, Presidência 2023). However, on June 19th, by the force of Law No. 14,600, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples lost the authority to issue declaratory ordinances in demarcation processes. As a result, on September 29, the case was forwarded to the Ministry of Justice, once again responsible for the next step in the land title regularization of the Indigenous Territory (Brasil, Ministério dos Povos Indígenas, Gabinete da Ministra 2023).

While the process laid dormant, the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in Brazil; in its wake, tensions in the territory intensified once again. On March 23, 2020, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro established sanitary control barriers on two main roads cutting through the village<sup>23</sup>. Working together with non-indigenous smallholders, they installed a traffic control system on highway BA-669 and a total blockade of highway BA-668. As is well known, Indigenous peoples throughout the country have resorted to initiatives of this nature in order to protect themselves. Together with their neighbors, the Tupinambá created security protocols for the movement of people and cargo, consisting of eleven measures established by consensus.

On March 30, however, civil and military police from Buerarema traveled to the BA-668 and, according to reports, made threats and fired shots. The following day, Mayor Vinicius Ibrann Dantas Andrade Oliveira (Democrats - DEM) sent an official letter to the Secretariat of Infrastructure of the Government of the State of Bahia requesting the reopening of the roadway that had been “blocked by the so-called ‘Indians’” (Buerarema, Prefeitura Municipal 2020). On April 3, police officers once again arrived at the blockage. Nonetheless, official complaints filed by the Tupinambá with the Governor’s Office put an end to the harassment. On the fourteenth, by decision of the Tupinambá and their non-Indigenous neighbors, the total blockade of highway BA-668 was replaced with a checkpoint. On June 4, the barriers were dismantled in favor of other strategies.

The last episode we will focus on took place on March 30, 2021, when Federal Judge Wilton Sobrinho da Silva from Itabuna ordered the issuance of a judicial eviction order against the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro (Brasil, Subseção Judiciária de Itabuna-BA, 1ª Vara Federal Cível e Criminal da SSJ de Itabuna-BA 2021)<sup>24</sup>. The decision favored businessman José Ferreira de Almeida Matos, who in 2013 had filed a possessory action with a request for a preliminary injunction against the federal government, FUNAI and the Tupinambá (Matos 2013). In the request, he claimed ownership of approximately thirty-three hectares and possession of around fifty hectares on state lands in Arataca, Bahia. However, the Tupinambá de Olivença Indigenous Territory does not overlap with Arataca and Tupinambá are not occupying areas in this municipality. Although the inconsistencies in the possessory action have been repeatedly underscored, the proceedings have motivated, since 2015, attempts to evict the Tupinambá from an area effectively in their possession, retaken on August 11, 2013, in the municipalities of Una and São José da Vitória.

The ruling issued by Silva violated a decision made by Justice Facchin on May 6, 2020, suspending all eviction orders against Indigenous groups until the handing down of RE No. 1,017,365 or the end of the pandemic, whichever occurred after (Brasil, Supremo Tribunal Federal 2021b). On April 23, the eviction order was suspended by Justice Rosa Weber, who granted a preliminary injunction in a complaint filed by the Federal Public Defender’s Office (Brasil, Supremo Tribunal Federal 2021a; Brasil, Defensoria Pública da União, Gabinete do Defensor Regional de Direitos Humanos na Bahia 2021).

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Ministério dos Povos Indígenas, Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas, Diretoria de Proteção Territorial 2023a). On May 23, after FUNAI’s legal team reanalyzed the legal aspects, which we will not detail here, the Director of Territorial Protection recommended sending the case to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples (Brasil, Ministério dos Povos Indígenas, Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas, Diretoria de Proteção Territorial 2023b).

23 For a detailed analysis of Serra do Padeiro’s response to the pandemic, see Alarcon and Silva (2022).

24 Case No. 0003915-29.2013.4.01.3301 (Possessory action with request for preliminary injunction). As far as we know, this was the second time during the pandemic that a judge ordered the eviction of an Indigenous group in the state of Bahia; the previous year, the target were the Pataxó of the Ponta Grande Indigenous Territory (located in Porto Seguro and Santa Cruz Cabrália).

The facts presented here show that the attacks against Serra do Padeiro during the Bolsonaro period began quickly, even before the far right's presidential victory, and intensified during the first month of Bolsonaro's term. The Tupinambá swiftly noted the rapidity with which the situation had deteriorated. At a regular AITSP meeting on December 2, 2018, as the minutes show us, predictions were made regarding the political landscape that would emerge following the election. The first balance recorded in minutes "regarding the consequences already brought on at the beginning of the term" dates to February 17, 2019. Reviewing all the meeting records in chronological order reveals their perception of a crescendo. After almost a year of Bolsonaro's government and in the wake of the Vila Galé case, the minutes on November 26, 2019 indicate: "Babau recommends that everybody prepares for more difficult times." In the same vein, on January 5, 2020, the records predict "a year with few open doors." Less than a month later, the setback in the demarcation process would be publicized. Monitoring the situation closely and sharing assessments as events unfolded, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro devised effective strategies to protect themselves, as we will see in the next section.

### **"No one has ever governed, nor will ever govern the Tupinambá"**

Even before Rousseff's impeachment, Bolsonaro's election or the pandemic, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro had known that difficult times laid ahead. Informed by prophecies and warnings brought by the *encantados*, non-human entities, they had been preparing for contexts of instability and deterioration of living conditions<sup>25</sup>. On January 19, 2019, the village sent a powerful letter to Brazilian public actors and supranational organs, signed by Lírio (Rosemiro Ferreira da Silva), the shaman of Serra do Padeiro, and Babau<sup>26</sup>. Written at the request of the *encantados*, the missive was distributed on the main date of the village's political and religious calendar, the feast of Saint Sebastian, when predictions for the coming year are shared and the main collective strategies to be adopted are agreed upon. With translations in English and French and reproduced in the press, the letter publicized the Serra do Padeiro's position.

"In his campaign, Bolsonaro constantly attacked Indigenous communities, treating us in a hostile manner and stating that, from the beginning of his term, not one centimeter of land would be demarcated for Indigenous peoples," the document states. "After the election, he began to fulfill his promises through provisional measures and presidential decrees, repealing Indigenous rights that had been acquired over years of struggle." This is followed by a historical account of five centuries from the village's perspective, outlining their determination to never leave the territory under any circumstances. "Know this: no one has ever governed, nor will ever govern the Tupinambá of the Serra do Padeiro. [...] With this new letter<sup>27</sup>, we, Tupinambá from Serra do Padeiro, want to inform the Brazilian and international authorities that we do not agree with the attitude of the new president," the text continues, alluding to the anti-Indigenous measures that he had already tried to implement in that short period of time.

Through daily and special actions, the village remained deeply mobilized during the period under analysis – from deliberations during the highly-attended AITSP monthly meetings to the interpretation of dreams, and proposals for legal actions to interactions with deceased relatives revealing themselves at crucial moments in the struggle. A careful reading of the AITSP minutes exposes both political assessments of the Bolsonaro government, in particular Babau's analyses, which were described in greater detail, and some of the main strategies adopted by the village. This context reveals the crucial nature of the material and organizational

25 For an analysis of these prophecies, see Alarcon e Silva (2022).

26 The letter, which can be read in Holanda (2019), was addressed directly to José Antonio Dias Toffoli, president of the Supreme Court and the National Council of Justice; Raquel Dodge, Attorney General of the Republic; Eunício Oliveira, president of the Federal Senate; Rodrigo Maia, president of the Chamber of Deputies; João Cravinho, ambassador of the European Union in Brazil; Tauli-Corpuz; and Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the OAS.

27 Allusion to the letter from Serra do Padeiro dated May 15, 2016, denouncing the preliminary decision of Nunes Maia Filho that suspended the demarcation procedure of the Indigenous Territory.

gains amassed by the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro over the last two decades – with the decisive advances of territorial recovery which expanded land ownership and economic income, thus destabilizing asymmetrical power relations – combined to the community’s creativity and openness to experiment with political avenues previously underexplored by the group.

Observing the Tupinambá response to the unmasking of the previously mentioned plan of extermination represents an opportunity to emphasize the abilities to building alliances not only of the Indigenous leaders, but of the village as a whole. The first revelations about the plan were transmitted to the Tupinambá by non-Indigenous actors from neighboring cities who had access to spaces dominated by members of the local elite and closed off to members of the Indigenous community. Maintaining friendly relations with peasants, merchants, a small number of council people and other actors, while at the same time striving to build a solid reputation as an organized, hard-working and trustworthy community, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro value these networks of local relationships as an important defense mechanism (Alarcon 2022).

It should also be mentioned that Lírio is considered a powerful religious leader, sought out not only by Indigenous people, but by a wide range of individuals, thus forming lasting bonds of trust. Some non-Indigenous people have even undergone processes of ritual initiation with the shaman, forming a single religious community. On the other hand, in the context of the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro Indigenous State School – which serves non-Indigenous students and families, many of whom are landless rural workers, seasonal workers, sharecroppers and others – daily coexistence also strengthens relationships between different segments within local society. These and other interactions have helped to dispel stereotypes about the Tupinambá that have circulated even among working-class individuals (Quadros 2016). While it is true that Bolsonaro’s election has shaken or put an end to some local relationships, it has not completely undermined them, and the Indigenous efforts to cultivate alliances in this region are noteworthy.

It was through the context of these relationships that the Tupinambá received not only the initial warning about the plan of extermination, but also evidence – including video footage and witness statements<sup>28</sup> – which equipped them with materials to file complaints with the press, civil society organizations, and public authorities at the state, federal, and supranational levels. Between January 31 and February 15, 2019, Babau carried out missions in Salvador (Bahia) and Brasília (Federal District), meeting with representatives of the state government, notably in the area of public safety; the Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Communicators, and Environmentalists; the Public Attorney’s Office; CIMI; and the Brazilian Office of the European Union, among others. Preparations for these trips began as soon as the plan was exposed. As the AITSP meeting minutes from January 17, 2019 show, on that date Babau informed those present about the measures that were being taken to facilitate his visit to Brasília. Reports on agreed upon measures while in the nation’s capital would be shared in subsequent meetings on February 3 and March 3.

With regards to filing complaints with the government, particularly in a case in which state agents are implicated, it is worth considering the protocols for these types of relations outlined by the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro in the context of the struggle for land. If, as we have indicated, numerous violations against this community have been committed by the government itself, the state certainly should not be seen as a homogeneous body. To cite just one example, sectors of the Public Attorney’s Office have been vocal in defending the rights of the Tupinambá – to the point that the final report of the CPI FUNAI-INCRA 2 initially proposed the indictment of federal prosecutors in Ilhéus for alleged misconduct<sup>29</sup>. Over the years, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro have succeeded in establishing important tactical alliances with state agents, which, among other effects, have contributed to the legitimization of land retakings.

28 To ensure the safety of the Tupinambá and the non-Indigenous actors who aided them on this occasion, we will not provide details on other aspects of the revelations and allegations.

29 The report would later be amended, leaving out the prosecutors’ requests for indictment.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the ascendance of the extreme right to the federal government has raised concerns, for example, regarding the legal defense of the community, in which FUNAI's legal team have traditionally played a prominent role. Indeed, due to intense criminalization of their political leaders, the community has also retained a private attorney for the past two decades, whose fees are paid by the AITSP through a collective fund supplied in part by profits made through agricultural work. Under Bolsonaro, however, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro have come to feel greater dependency on this attorney. To deal with both the setback in the demarcation process and the eviction order, they filed a lawsuit and have sought the legal assistance of APIB. In the AITSP minutes from January 5, 2020, the relationship between financial autonomy and a capacity for legal defense is made explicit: "The important thing is to protect our territory. If FUNAI is not at the forefront of the situation in the retaken areas [acting legally in possessory actions], we here in the community [will be there]. But, for that to take place, we must have cash in hand to protect ourselves by our own means."

As we have seen, the Vila Galé group's plans would only become more well known in October 2019. Still, by the time of Babau's missions in the first half of the year, the village already possessed preliminary information about the case, as documented in meeting agendas. For example, in an event held in Brasília on February 14 coordinated by the Deputy Attorney General of the Republic Antônio Carlos Bigonha, with the presence of a representative of the Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, those present discussed the attempt to build the resort and the plan of extermination (Ministério Público Federal, Sexta Câmara de Coordenação e Revisão 2019). Likewise on the fourteenth, in a letter to the Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and the Brazilian Committee of Human Rights Defenders, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro requested protective measures (Quadros 2019a).

Two other communiqués in the same vein had been sent on February 13, the day before. The first, an open letter signed by twenty-five researchers from different disciplinary areas and academic affiliations who worked with the Tupinambá, including one of the authors of this article, demanded an "urgent investigation of the threats and plans of extermination against members of the Tupinambá people, with accountability for all those involved," as well as "the immediate adoption of effective protective measures for the Indigenous actors."<sup>30</sup> In turn, APIB and the Indian Law Resource Center<sup>31</sup> sent Paulo Abrão, the then Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), briefs with information supplementing the oral remarks made at a hearing during the 171st Regular Period of Sessions of the IACHR, which took place from February 7 to 16 in Bolivia, where the Tupinambá case was mentioned (Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil and Indian Law Resource Center 2019). Finally, on February 25, the Association of Lawyers for Rural Workers in the State of Bahia (AATR) sent a letter about the case to Tauli-Corpuz and Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders (Associação de Advogados de Trabalhadores Rurais no Estado da Bahia 2019).

This brief overview provides an idea of the wide range of local and extra-local relationships in which the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro engage, like what occurred in the second half of 2019, when the Vila Galé case reached the international press and the Portuguese Parliament, among other spaces. An understanding that the cultivation of these relationships creates far-reaching alliances, constituting an important form of defense, also appears in AITSP minutes. At the December 2, 2018 meeting Babau established a connection between the development of academic research focused on the village and an increase in the group's visibility. In this sense, he urged those present to welcome researchers who sought them out, provided that these types of activity help reveal positive aspects of the village to wider society, acting against the dissemination of distorted

<sup>30</sup> Published in Portuguese, English, Spanish and French, the letter can be read in Carvalho (2019).

<sup>31</sup> Legal advisory and strategic litigation entity composed of Indigenous lawyers based in the United States and founded in 1978.

images and false information associated with attempts to criminalize them. By way of their struggle and with the participation of diverse supporters, he emphasized, Serra do Padeiro became widely recognized, even on the international stage.

As we have seen, reports on the plan of extermination were published in *Folha de S.Paulo* and *Mongabay*, both containing interviews with Babau. Also, as part of the effort to confront this plan by making it visible – and therefore costly for its perpetrators –, Indigenous leaders participated in filming a video condemning the plan titled *Tupinambá – Pelo Direito de Viver (Tupinambá – For the Right to Live)*<sup>32</sup>. Produced by CIMI and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), also a branch of the Catholic church, the video was released on the internet on March 11, 2019, with subtitles in English, Spanish, French and German. There were even plans to publish an article in *The Guardian*, which ultimately did not materialize. The testimony given to the newspaper by one of the people involved, Jéssica Quadros, provides evidence of the analyses rendered by the Tupinambá throughout the course of events. First, she established a direct link between the incitement to violence by then president and the threats: “Bolsonaro’s prejudiced and violent speech directly affects us. His words have reinforced the hatred that some people have for us. [...] Bolsonaro needs to keep his mouth shut” (Quadros 2019b, our translation). Later, she pointed out a more subtle layer regarding the failure of the plan: “The encantados won’t let anything happen to us. We end up finding out and the plan ends up falling apart before it can happen, they really won’t let any of this happen. If it weren’t for them, I don’t know what would have become of us.” In the same vein, at an AITSP meeting on September 14 of that year, Babau stressed that the strength of Serra do Padeiro in the resistance against Bolsonaro came from the encantados.

Consequently, when we point out the role of relationships in outlining the strategies of the Tupinambá, we certainly must not limit ourselves to the realm of human relationships. Cultivating their connections with the encantados on a daily basis, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro depend on the actions of these entities. In the analysis of our interlocutors, the protection of the village during the pandemic was guaranteed not only by the sanitary barriers and other measures adopted by the Indigenous community, but, above all, by the stirring of cosmological connections to spiritually isolate human bodies and the village. It is worth mentioning that relationships with the deceased also enter the equation. In this regard, Alarcon (2022) analyzed an episode of conflict that occurred in 2016 on the coastal strip of the Indigenous Territory when two deceased relatives emerged through physical spirit possession, to help the living in direct action against mining activities in their territory – among them, João de Nô (João Ferreira da Silva, c. 1905-1981), the shaman’s father and considered the village’s first religious leader. Under Bolsonaro, in 2021, João de Nô materialized once again. Before that, as far as memory can recall, he had only appeared once, in 1982, at the deathbed of his daughter. It is noteworthy that the village’s most prominent ancestor was present twice in five years, after a lapse of more than thirty years. It appears that the gravity of the situation made him feel it necessary to communicate directly with his relatives on both occasions, instructing them on new strategies.

Returning to the Vila Galé case, attention should also be paid to Serra do Padeiro’s organizing with other Tupinambá villages, the broader Indigenous movement and other mobilized social segments. On June 16, 2019, Babau took advantage of a special inaugural meeting of the recently elected AITSP new board to provide feedback on mobilizations with two fishing associations representing populations that would also be affected. As reported in the minutes from July 7, an expanded meeting was held on the same day in the Tupinambá village of Mamão involving several leaders, as well as representatives of CIMI, to outline plans of action against the project. On October 29th, APIB requested the Attorney General’s Office to open a public civil inquiry (ICP)

32 *Tupinambá – For the Right to Live*. Screenplay: Daniela Alarcon and Thomas Bauer. Photography, sound and editing: Thomas Bauer. Produced by the Indigenous Missionary Council and the Pastoral Land Commission. Brazil, 2019, 8’55. Available at: <https://cimi.org.br/2019/03/tupinamba-pelo-direito-de-viver/>. Accessed on: March 11, 2019.

to investigate possible administrative impropriety at FUNAI and to propose a public civil action (ACP) against the president of EMBRATUR (Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil 2019).

As far as the resort is concerned, an expansion of the scope of Tupinambá mobilization and building a case with greater visibility are both clearly visible. The Bolsonaro period marked the beginning of direct participation of the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro in international missions for political advocacy. The first of these was in 2019, when Glicéria Jesus da Silva, one of the authors of this article, spoke at the 40th session of the UN Human Rights Council, in Geneva, Switzerland. In the same year, she represented APIB in public hearings during the 172nd Period of Sessions of the IACHR in Kingston, Jamaica. It is worth noting that, in recent years, Glicéria has also come to be recognized as a leading Indigenous artist in Brazil – to cite one example, she was the first artist named in the country's official representation at the 60th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, in 2024. Her inclusion in this circuit and in debates on processes for the restitution of Indigenous artifacts still held in museums abroad has taken her to many other destinations, also serving as a stage for interventions in favor of Tupinambá rights.

It should be added that the nationality of the Vila Galé group contributed to attracting public attention in Portugal, further stimulated by the direct action of Susana Viegas – as we have seen, responsible for studies for the demarcation of the Indigenous Territory –, a professor at the University of Lisbon. In addition to giving interviews to major Portuguese media outlets such as *Expresso* and the Lusa news agency<sup>33</sup>, she took up measures with the Portuguese Parliament, where the case became a priority for MP José Soeiro (Left Bloc - BE) and other members of the same faction. Furthermore, working together with the first author of this article, Viegas acted to circulate a joint petition proposed by the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA) and the Portuguese Anthropology Association (APA)<sup>34</sup>. These and other actions brought visibility to the case in civil society, both in Brazil and in Portugal, which led to the Vila Galé group's social networks being flooded with messages in opposition to the resort. The fact that the hotel group concluded that it was unfeasible to move forward with the project, due to the risk of permanent damage to its public image, demonstrates the effectiveness of this course of action.

In Serra do Padeiro, it is believed that recovery of the territory and its care represent an obligation, determined by the encantados. As owners of the land, the encantados demand that the Tupinambá defend the territory, while protecting and strengthening them in an intimate relationship charged with political and cosmological ramifications. It is in this sense that it can be stated that the Tupinambá resistance to Bolsonarismo, beyond the obvious and more immediate goal of ensuring the continuity of the community over time, derives from profound justifications and as indicated, benefits from knowledge and tactics that emanate from non-human entities and the deceased. The assemblage of examples of actions taken within the framework of the attacks described here demonstrates how, using contextual and supplemental strategies, the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro have found effective ways to defend their village, rooted in their territory, articulated within the Indigenous movement, and connected to the encantados and their ancestors.

## Final considerations

Our work is part of a broader effort to analyzing the actions of Indigenous peoples as historical subjects, focusing on everyday aspects of political mobilization, the incessant work of building social collectives, and the ways in which the strategies they engender are anchored in deeper cosmological perspectives.

<sup>33</sup> For an example, see Martins (2019a).

<sup>34</sup> The petition, addressed to the Ministry of Justice and the Vila Galé group, was released on October 31, 2019, and signed by more than 88,000 individuals. See: <https://www.change.org/p/ministerio-da-justica-brasil-pelo-cancelamento-de-projeto-hoteleiro-no-territorio-tupinamba-2951fed5-9091-4402-8e-2c-b664fo16b9ac>.

In recent decades, this research trend has strengthened, directly influenced by the agenda established by Indigenous peoples themselves, their intellectuals, and the Indigenous movement. Although Indigenous peoples in Brazil have forged varied strategies to confront genocide and colonial power since the Portuguese invasion, for a long time, the agency and creativity of these subjects received little academic attention (Monteiro 2012).

This distortion is even more evident in certain contexts, including the Northeast, due to a supposed absence or low intensity of cultural contrasts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, due to the earlier date of non-Indigenous intrusions (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998; Carvalho and Reesink 2018). The marginalization of Indigenous peoples in the Northeast within the field of Anthropology began to lessen in the 1970s, though a more pronounced rupture did not occur until the 1990s. As Pacheco de Oliveira (2018: 7) highlights in commentary on recent research carried out in the Northeast and other regions of the country related to processes of Indigenous territorialization and mobilization, when we understand that “it is the mobilized indigenous communities that delimit and enforce respect for their territories,” we have the opportunity to reveal not only circumscribed land struggle processes, but also “indigenous conceptions of time, person and the nature of the world, the construction of new sagas and utopias [...].”

Based on a detailed examination of the responses of the Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro to violence, our purpose is to contribute to the production on forms of contemporary political action rendered by Indigenous peoples in Brazil, forming a politically and academically relevant research agenda not only for this specific group. Among other aspects, we seek to demonstrate how Tupinambá mobilization is a dynamic process within which strategies are transformed daily, informed by both profound and circumstantial motivations, inseparable from their ongoing struggles for territorial recovery.

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# Filming Up: Brazilian Elites Through an Ethnographic Lens

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## **Abstract**

This article is based on the idea of filming up, contextualizing it in both visual anthropology and documentary history. We will first offer a brief analysis of audiovisual production concerning elites to reflect on how they are pictured and how this is of interest to anthropological studies. Considering the category of production infrastructure, we will then focus on the cinema scene in the city of Recife (Brazil), underlining how it enables the production of documentaries that focus on elites. Social inequalities within and outside cinema production infrastructure allow the affirmation of several directors, who implicitly contest this postcolonial order through their production focused on empowered groups. The analysis will show that movies are potential tools for creating ephemeral communities, enabling critical confrontation between separated social groups. Moreover, we will underline how these production practices potentially stress visual anthropological theory, forcing us to reconsider both the practices of visual fieldwork and the mainstream linguistic form that circulates within festivals and teaching institutions.

**Keywords:** Ethnography; visual; elites; Recife; Brazil.

# Filmando para cima: as elites brasileiras através de uma lente etnográfica

## Resumo

Este artigo tem como ponto de partida a ideia de filmar para cima, contextualizando tanto a antropologia visual quanto a história do documentário. Em primeiro lugar, apresentamos uma breve análise da produção audiovisual sobre as elites, a fim de refletir sobre a forma como são retratadas e como isso seja de relevante interesse para os estudos antropológicos. Considerando a categoria de infraestrutura de produção, focalizaremos na cena cinematográfica da cidade de Recife (Brasil), destacando como ela possibilitou a produção de documentários que retratam as elites. As desigualdades sociais dentro e fora da infraestrutura de produção cinematográfica permitiram a afirmação de vários cineastas que, implicitamente, contestaram esta ordem pós-colonial através da sua produção centrada em grupos com poder. A análise mostrará que os filmes são ferramentas potenciais para a criação de comunidades efêmeras, permitindo o confronto crítico entre grupos sociais separados. Além disso, destacamos o modo como estas práticas de produção colocam potencialmente em tensão a teoria antropológica visual, forçando-a a reconsiderar tanto as práticas de trabalho de campo visual como a forma linguística dominante que circula nos festivais e nas instituições de ensino.

**Palavras-chave:** Etnografia; visual; elites; Recife; Brasil.



# Filming Up: Brazilian Elites Through an Ethnographic Lens<sup>1</sup>

Alex Vailati and Walter Andrade

## Introduction

Fictional cinema has historically been one of the most widely used means to give visibility to groups of society that stand out for some reason or another – whether due to economic or political power or any other type of capital they possess. In several cinematographic traditions, elites are groups that control the media, but are also, in many cases, protagonists of the representations that the big screen convey, as Orson Welles (1941) films showed in his famous *Citizen Kane*, which is a film that described media power and, at the same time, instituted a model of elites as controllers of large media outlets in the popular imagination. Fiction in this sense has a specific metonymic function, showing something that can be considered “real”, but that also enables dominant groups to continually reinvent their own image. However, if we turn our gaze to the field of documentary filmmaking, whose specificity is to “index” something that may be considered “real”, elites become a typology of subjects that rarely appear on the screen as protagonists. Clearly, in documentaries that are spread through large platforms of on-demand video, we often find power elites – political, economic, military, etc. – as Wright Mills (2000) defined them. However, if we address a cinematographic language grounded on the proximity that is typical of the ethnographic encounter, these elites disappear nearly completely. This partially reflects ethnographic literature based on writing, which is more directed at the study of subaltern and colonized groups.

A relevant example is Australian cinematography, where we find pioneering works that have been incorporated into the history of visual anthropology, such as *Cannibal Tours* by Dennis O’Rourke (1988), in which the protagonists are American tourists on a trip to Papua New Guinea or *First Contact* by Robin Anderson and Bob Connolly (1983), which is based on interviews with gold prospectors that exploit New Guinea. In both films, the protagonists are people who are at the top of the hierarchical structure that defines the contexts in which the films are recorded, and the images enable us to perceive how they relate to subaltern groups. However, the most relevant example in the entire history of visual anthropology is probably the *Doon School Chronicle Quintet* directed by David MacDougall (2004), which is a series of five films shot at a school for elites in India. In these films, we have an emblematic proximity of the camera, where the evidently elitist dimension of the context in which the director circulates is, however, mediated by the interest in youth and education.

Brazilian cinematography, which is the focus of our analysis, reveals, as in many other contexts, a non-recurring presence of elites in the documental field, as individuals in situations of social vulnerability are generally the focus of such works. However, there are other documentarists in the country who have made films linked to the field of the elites, such as *Theodorico, Emperor of the Semiárid*<sup>2</sup> by Eduardo Coutinho (1978), *Intermissions*<sup>3</sup> by João Moreira Salles (2004) and the more recent *The Edge of Democracy*<sup>4</sup> directed by Petra Costa (2019). These works are more focused on influential political figures – generally known locally or nationally.

1 This research was founded by Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) and by Fundação de Amparo à Ciência e Tecnologia do Estado de Pernambuco (FACEPE). We would like to thank Maíra Souza e Silva Acioli e Paulidayane Cavalcanti de Lima for reading and commenting this article.

2 The original title in Portuguese: *Theodorico, o Imperador do Sertão*.

3 The original title in Portuguese: *Entreatos*.

4 The original title in Portuguese: *Democracia em Vertigem*.

Their main objective is to show the personalities of these public figures and their involvement in political arrangements, power games, corruption, embezzlement and other actions linked more to politics. More properly ethnographic cinema in Brazil rarely addresses elites directly, notwithstanding those present in the films, as in the case of *Martyrdom*<sup>5</sup> by Vincent Carelli (2017), with co-direction by Ernesto de Carvalho and Tita, in which rural elites are seen but do not have any true encounter with the camera, appearing only as passive actors in the exploitation process of indigenous peoples.

All those movies underline how proximity with elites imply the embodiment of specific *habitus*, that involve taste, convention and ideologies that in many cases are abject to visual ethnographers. Embodying a specific gaze (Tiragallo 2007) in this case is a play that needs specific strategies where transculturality often is developed through oppositional glances. Through an ethnography of audiovisual production, we will underline strategies and infrastructures that enable these directors to “film up” (Nader 1972), directing their cameras at elites.<sup>6</sup> Firstly, we can consider these documentaries as tools for viewing subjectivities that do not want to be viewed and that enable a theoretical reflection on the “production” of elites. Secondly, these productions are extreme examples of critical engagement that nevertheless exclude *a priori* a more intimate proximity to the subjects portrayed, which is fundamental to an ethnographic approach. This limit, however, is also a challenge for ethnography, particularly visual ethnography, when it seeks to show class inequalities by “looking up” rather than at the exploited. We will focus on the production of Brazilian documentary films, particularly in the city of Recife, which is the capital of the state of Pernambuco. In this scene, we found several recent documentaries that aim to place local elites on the screen.

## Picturing elites

As several analyses have demonstrated (Abbink, Salverda 2013), the definition of the term “elites” is complex. Some examples in the literature show us how “elite” can be considered a group of subjects who exert a type of power or, adopting the category of hegemony, a group who dominates the symbolic production that establishes norms for society. As Shore points out, “an anthropology of elites is necessarily an exercise in political reflexivity since it obliges us to position ourselves more self-consciously in relation to the wider systems of power and hierarchy within which anthropological knowledge is constructed” (Shore 2002: 2). Consequently, the term elite can be considered a social commutator (Durham 2000), that is, a term that, depending on its reference, imposes different interpretations of the networks of relationships considered. The position of the anthropologist or filmmaker who is producing written or visual knowledge on a specific context can be considered a reference that defines the term elite.

To analyze what people the term elite is “indexing”, the category of frontier becomes interesting here: “Elites only exist vis-à-vis other social groups – be they the marginalized, dependents, supporters, or the counter-elites” (Salverda, Abbink 2013: 16). Starting from the Latin etymology of the term “elite”, we encounter its relational dimension. Elite is associated with concepts such as choice or the chosen, elected, selected, that is, groups who are differentiated from others due to specific characteristics. It is therefore fundamental to walk down an ethnographic path and address, in the first place, the frontiers that separate such “elected ones” from the “others”. These boundaries, as the wealth of ethnographic studies on elites produced in Brazil in recent decades has shown, are configured differently in each field. However, they always involve a different kind of tension between researcher and researched, in a context marked by inequalities, in which “writing is an instrument of power and segregation” (Castilho, Souza Lima, Costa Teixeira 2014: 11). Ethical dilemmas,

<sup>5</sup> The original title in Portuguese: *Martírio*.

<sup>6</sup> “Film up” is in reference to the important article by Laura Nader, in which she explores the category of “studying up”, defining an important agenda for ethnological research on elites.

such as whether the researcher would be willing to incorporate traits of these elites, protect themselves from possible attacks, or attack the otherness of the students, are common in this field, even more so if it focuses on image production.

One of the most outstanding ethnographies of elites in the recent history of anthropology passed through the lens of a camera. *The Act of Killing* by Joshua Oppenheimer (2012) is a documentary in which, through ethnographic research conducted in Indonesia, the director dialogues with men who tortured and killed opponents to the violent coup d'état that established the military dictatorship in 1965. When the film was made, these men were still considered “national heroes”. The director encourages these “heroes” to produce a fictional film about their past, mobilizing a psychodrama that reveals the complexity of this ethnographic relationship. In the film, we find an implicitly critical linguistic experimentation on the protagonists of this ethnography that reflects an innovative use of a “number of theoretical sources, analytic styles, rhetorics and descriptive procedures” (Marcus, Fischer 1999:162).

This project of complexity that we find in the film can be a starting point for a reflection on visual ethnography of elites. If access to the field is mediated in some cases by the insertion of the anthropologist in the same social network as the subjects involved, as in the pioneering ethnography about the upper-middle classes of Rio de Janeiro by Gilberto Velho (1998), such access is completely unviable in other cases. To allow ethnography, as Nader has stated, “The use of personal documents, memoirs, may substitute for anthropological participation in some areas of culture that take long years of participation to really understand” (Nader 1972: 307).

In the current scenario of public virtual networks enabling access to personal information, we may think that anthropologists have never had similar access to exclusive groups. Concerning the ethnography of elites, the biographical dimension, which Velho (1998: 63) highlighted as one of the most relevant narrative constructions mobilized to differentiate themselves from others, is often considered a fundamental “trace” in more recent literature (Comaroff, Comaroff 1992). As Coehn points out, “an elite is forced to organize itself particularistically, to keep itself in existence, and enhance its image” (Cohen 1981: XII). The symbolic dimension of the “image” leads us to think again about Oppenheimer’s work. When we see the director engaged with such powerful men, we watch these images with an uncanny feeling (Marcus 2010). This feeling of uneasiness, however, is related to the opportunity that the killers are given to renegotiate their image and, in some way, justify their actions.

The public image of elites, in many cases, reflects this uneasiness. Studying the philanthropic activities of sugarcane elites in the state of São Paulo, Jessika Sklair (2018) stresses how a project of critical ethnography addressing elites necessarily has to consider the possibility that the anthropologists “did not always share the same political views and interpretations of the subjects and events we discussed in the field” (Sklair 2018: 32). Studying elites means dealing with subjectivities – which often reveal one’s own unease – and pendulating between “these elite universes and those of others on whom elite activity bears an influence, within and beyond the ethnographer’s field” (Sklair 2018: 40). Incorporating uneasiness into ethnography allows developing critical ethnographies that enable us both to explore the field as well as its effects on “others”.

In this sense, filming elites becomes an even more complex practice than ethnography finalized in the production of texts. Tracking the history of visual anthropology and documentary film, we find that the category of device should be central to understanding processes of imagetic production regarding the elites. The device is based on an explicit agency of the director-ethnographer, who creates a specific field of relationships between humans and non-humans that enables “shooting” interactions (Migliorin 2006) and requires some criteria for its functioning, such as an agreement/pact between the participating parties to ensure a minimally possible mutual understanding, enabling the interlocutor to feel inclined to participate based on that which the film exposes as its objective. Thus, the device is mutable; it is a flexible proposal and to the taste of the one who performs it and, to a certain extent, to those who are disposed to this. The rules are defined by the one

who idealizes the device; they may be strict, limiting the interaction between people, creating an alternative space or a “chosen universe” (Migliorin, 2006: 1) by the direction of the film. The counterbalance of all this is the result of the part of a larger aperture generated by the filmic device – of the interaction of individuals themselves throughout the proposed process.

From this, we may think that we then have a different narrative approach from the more traditional of an investigative documentary focused on the quest for “truth”, in which filmmakers wish to prove some theory presented in their hypothesis, developing it in such a way as to prove their point of view and often polarizing the narrative through the personification of a character as an enemy. There is a problem in dealing with narratives of this type, which theoretically seek to present distinct viewpoints, but that come up against the difficulty of impartiality, supporting only the viewpoint that most pleases the one who directs the film and the target audience. Looking at the history of visual anthropology, we perceive how the use of the filmic device is not recent. Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch (1961), to some extent, used some principles of this approach in *Chronique d'un été*. Although the directors did not explicitly use the category of device as a concept *per se*, is it evident from the visual standpoint that they experienced, in particular Jean Rouch mode, the use of fictional moments as elicitors of interactions and performances from the social actors involved in the films. Reflecting on the work of director Oppenheimer, we see how he opts for the presentation of an experience in which individuals reenact deaths and the procedures of murderers of their enemies, performed in an apparently very “natural” manner, without demonstrating any shame or regret. There is considerable meaning in the way this information is placed on the screen through the staging of the actors-subjects, who at the same time stage and tell about their lives. Although the end of the film offers an explicit reflection from one of them, Anwar Congo, the film already says much by showing those staged scenes of the murders and the stories behind them.

Returning to Jean Rouch, he also presented his interlocutors through an ethno-fiction, activating a narrative collaboration that constructed the film – albeit a limited collaboration, as the director continued to have more power of control over the end product. Therefore, like Rouch, Oppenheimer presented his characters through a fictional (re)construction of their roles, acting out the very actions that consecrated them as national heroes. The main issue we want to highlight with these examples is the broadening of the scope of ethnographic methods, offering anthropologists another option as a research tool. The application is diverse and adaptable; it can and should be explored more, always taking into account methodological and ethical issues as well as contexts that may be applicable. It should be stressed that, in both cases and more explicitly in *The Act of Killing*, the strategies adopted enabled filming a specific type of elite.

## Production infrastructure

Attention to the infrastructure of audiovisual production is a methodological theoretical requirement that emerges from the circulation of both authors of this paper in the productive and distributive context of cinema and audiovisual produced in the state of Pernambuco. Our specific focus is on the metropolitan region of Recife, where the largest audiovisual production center in the state is found. Ethnography is the result of an immersion in this medium whether as social scientists, directors of films or organizers of events, which, in turn, involve other films and directors on whom a light is cast in this paper. Looking at productive infrastructure, which is comprised of a socio-technical set of items that enables the production and circulation of sensible forms, becomes a means for investigating relationships and sutures between political and representational dimensions (Larkin 2013)

Our circulation in this field, whether through the structural inequalities that constitute the field of cinematographic production or through the specific context in which this study was developed, brought attention to how the elites become very present subjects in documentarist production in this region in

comparison to other contexts. To understand how this set of productions took a place in the local and national cinematography, it is necessary to cross the linguistic analysis of the sensible with an exploration of the productive dynamics of these film materials. In her study on cinematographic production in the region, Amanda Mansur Nogueira (2014) points out how the films are the result of a set of relationships founded on proximity, defined with the emic category of “*brodagem*” derived from the English term “brother” and used in the sense of comradeship, which highlights networks of relationships that enable the sharing of a gamut of feelings that evidently influence the sensitive forms of the films produced.

Offering a brief account of local history, the economy of the state of Pernambuco originated through a tradition of sugarcane agriculture, sugar mills and a profoundly, unequal, enslaving society dominated by patriarchy. This configuration, however, is supported by a long and important tradition of cinematographic production that is still founded on a past strongly influenced by colonialism and landownership. The importance of the capital, Recife, comes from its strategic geographic location in relation to the former capital, Olinda, as well as its commercial and maritime development over the years.

Despite having undergone an economic decline with the demise of the old sugar mills and consequent impoverishment of part of the sugar elites, the city constructed other forms of economic activity, such as technological development and the service industry. Whether historically or in contemporaneity, Recife figures as one of the most important Brazilian centers of audiovisual production and as an economically strategic location for the northeastern region of Brazil.

Since the emergence of the first Brazilian films with more regionalized productive cycles at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the “Recife cycle” was one of the hotspots of Brazilian cinematography. Although the major centers of cinematographic and television production remain located in the southeastern region of the country (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo), directors from Pernambuco have been gaining greater visibility due to films that have won awards in both national and international film festivals. “*Pernambucano* cinema”, which is a term often automatically applied as a synonym for referencing all films made in the state of Pernambuco or by *Pernambucanos(as)*, is the form that commonly classifies the most recent film production derived from the state. Nonetheless, this international visibility has to be considered a result of the multiple productive cycles experienced by local production, which are commonly classified as the “Recife Cycle”, “Super 8 cycle” and the cycle of “*Pernambucano* cinema”, which is the most current (Nogueira 2009).

What this brief background also presents us is the emergence and consolidation of an infrastructure dedicated to audiovisual production in the state. Although Pernambuco had already historically been a site of production, albeit in a discontinuous manner but with some kind of relevance in the Brazilian scenario, it only became constant with the installation of a technological infrastructure that “creates material channels that organize the movement of energy, information, and economic and cultural goods between societies but at the same time creates possibilities for new actions” (Larkin 2008: 292).

Pedro Severien and Cristina Teixeira de Melo (2016) provide a very good contextualization of how the political-social situation of Recife is reflected in the relationship with the films produced here. The authors offer an in-depth discussion of the essayist film *Self-portrait* (2012) of anonymous authorship, whose focus is one of the businessmen responsible for the enterprise in the area of the José Estelita Wharf. The camera in the film attempts to subvert the relationship with financial elites, represented by the character Eduardo Moura, filmed begrudgingly: “looking at him is, to some extent, like looking at a certain tradition of our elite who think that their privileges are inalienable rights” (Severien, Melo 2016: 108). Starting from the viewpoints of the filmmakers and researchers, who share the same position from many standpoints, the film functions as an urgent denouncement of the current form of occupation in the city – of inequalities and their perpetuation.

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7 Pernambuco stood out quite early in the scenario of national production, which, in turn, started out in a more regionalized manner, as with other states and their respective cycles, such as São Paulo and Cataguazes.

Some of the most recent fictional films also cast their gaze on the local elites. *Neighboring Sounds* (Mendonça Filho 2012)<sup>8</sup> and *Divine Love* (Mascaro 2019)<sup>9</sup> are two important examples. The first film explores the decadent sugarcane elites implanted in an upscale neighborhood in the capital of Pernambuco (Recife), representing issues of class, social status, security and patriarchal authority. The second film presents a dystopic future in 2027, with a Brazil dominated by the Christian religion, without Carnival and with new forms of relationships, directly questioning the new evangelical elites who have become drivers of institutional policy in recent years through conservative, reactionary discourse.

## Strategies

The focus of our analysis will be on four recent productions that stand out for an approach to an alterity that may be considered distant and opposite to the subjectivities of the filmmakers. Considering the proposed interpretation of the categories of elites, the position of the filmmakers in relation to the topic developed in the films turns these alterities into a set of individuals who, with regards to specific attributes, have greater power than anyone who researches or films.

The first film, *High-Rise* directed by Gabriel Mascaro (2009), addresses residents and their luxury penthouse apartments in the cities of Recife, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The second film, *Câmara Escura*<sup>10</sup>, a short by filmmaker Marcelo Pedroso (2012), was filmed through an experiment with a box and an embedded camera in a middle and upper-class residential neighborhood of Recife. To some extent, the issue of habitation and occupation of the city is also present here but placed in relation to the social structure that creates fortified cities surrounded by walls, cameras and surveillance. The third film analyzed, *Mirror Camera*<sup>11</sup> directed by Dea Ferraz (2016), places several men in a room surrounded by cameras registering their interactions and conversation on different topics related to women, sexuality, family and religion. Lastly, the short *The Grand Club*<sup>12</sup> by Joelton Ivson (2016) addresses leisure and sports social clubs of the elites of Recife, which are privileged places of whites and rich people contrasted with the presence of generally black employees.

It would be inevitable to comment on this issue without considering the work of Jean-Louis Comolli (2008) and his study on how to interact with and film the enemy or the abject – to use the common term in contemporary anthropological literature – that is, those with whom the director does not share the same ideas and beliefs. This means dialoguing directly with individuals situated in opposing political and social spectra, establishing with them an atypical, unexpected relationship. Unlike filming someone admired or with whom there is some affinity, the difficulty is determining in what way an individual that we consider to be the “enemy” should be filmed.

Although Comolli’s reflection is situated in a specific context of political disputes and a particular time in history, our focus is not to analyze the character of the enemy, but rather how the films cited use the tool of the audiovisual device to enter a universe previously inaccessible by other means – to achieve an encounter with the elites.

For such, we begin with the perspective of Marcelo Pedroso (Jesus 2014), director of the film *Camara Escura*, who can be considered one of our main interlocutors in this study. To a certain extent, the filmmaker also approaches Comolli by stating that, regardless of whoever the other being filmed is, the filmmaker is moved by a tendency toward conformity or adversity in relation to the subjects. We are, therefore, speaking about

8 Released in 2012, directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho. The original title in Portuguese: O Som ao Redor.

9 Released in 2019, directed by Gabriel Mascaro. The original title in Portuguese: Divino Amor.

10 We can translate it by Dark Chamber.

11 The original title in Portuguese: Câmara de Espelhos.

12 The original title in Portuguese: O Grande Clube.

the “proneeness toward the anonymity of the filmmaker” (Jesus 2014: 40) – it is not a question of sympathy or antipathy with the other, but rather a field of convergence or divergence involving the director and the subject filmed. The duration of this state of anonymity is variable and may or may not be altered throughout the process.

There are what we may call regimes or states – the state of conformity, in which “although the filmmaker may be situated in a completely adverse context to that to the subject being filmed, he nourishes a feeling of affinity, of alignment, in relation to the other” (Jesus 2014: 41). Thus, there is a kind of convergence between these individuals. In the cases of the regime of adversity, however, “contrary feelings arise – of non-affinity, of discordance” (Jesus 2014: 41) in a field of divergence. Pedroso also states that the director could establish a relationship of complicity with those he films, but this would not necessarily mean that there is conformity (agreement) between the director and the subject being filmed.

In the regime of adversity, it is necessary to find a kind of “reconcilable arrangement” between opposing forces, “[...] the proneeness of the filmmaker to adversity toward the subjects being filmed and the imperative of complicity as a constructor [sic] of the relational theme that gives rise to the film” (Jesus 2014: 42). He also speaks about the ethical arrangement that takes this duality into consideration and seeks to overcome this impasse. However, the key word for us regarding this regime is the issue of enabling to humanize and complexify the filmed subjects (Jesus 2014: 42) and not combat them; which would be a difference for the regime of adversity in comparison to documentaries based on other types of regimes the author discusses.

It is important to add here the use of these categories and concepts for two reasons. In the first place, because the director himself is analyzing part of his film work and trajectory from this standpoint of the regime of adversity. In this sense, these reflections can be considered emic – the result of the experience of one of the filmmakers in the field of Recife cinematography. In second place, because of the relationship that the author established with other directors, as Marcelo Pedroso and Gabriel Mascaro worked together and collaborated on other films, whereas Dea Ferraz also had interlocutions with the literature that is also shared in Pedroso’s perspective, which strengthens our interest in these reflections.

“However, I can say that it makes all the difference to watch the film knowing that the choices were conscious and that the issue is not to make a film about people I like or don’t like, on the contrary, to make a film that, through its characters, with their own faces and lives, is capable of making us think about society and its patriarchal, colonial, racist *modus operandi*.” (Ferraz 2021)

Thus, the four films analyzed here have the similarity of the directors placing themselves at opposites poles to that of the interlocutors in the documentary – especially in the cases of the film by Dea Ferraz, in which the director films two groups of cisgender men with the aim of understanding sexism through their speech and interactions, and in the film by Joelton Ivson, who is a young black man – at the time a film student – trying to enter exclusive clubs of the elites to film a project for college. He attributes his success at gaining access to these places – where he would normally be barred – solely to the fact that he is a student at a public university.

Regarding the other two films, Marcelo Pedroso and Gabriel Mascaro are white men with university diplomas and who come closer to the spectrum of the elite, which may be taken into account in the contact with the elites that they filmed. Especially Marcelo Pedroso, who was – as shown in his film – taken to the police station during the filming process and assured of his right to defense with regards to the episodes that brought him there.

We could state that they focus specifically on alterities distinct from themselves, with whom they do not share any conformity, speaking of a concept aligned with that proposed by Marcelo Pedroso. While he and Gabriel Mascaro address economic elites, Dea Ferraz – a white woman with a higher education – works with individuals who are in a privileged position in the context of gender relations because of sexism. In all these films, each director used different strategies to gain access to their respective interlocutors and their “worlds”.

They developed specific strategies, creating, to a greater or lesser degree, a type of “device” to be able to make the recordings.

We can understand “device” as “unscriptable experience” (Migliorin 2006: 2), a kind of element that has attributes defined by the director, who creates a unique social world with previously determined rules, limits and settings with the intention of resulting in interactions between these individuals and all people involved in their filming.

In *Mirror Camera* (Ferraz 2016), the director and her team remained isolated in a room with no contact with the interviewees but with a view into and direct contact with the recording room where the characters interacted with each other so that they would be filmed. Dea Ferraz commanded the transition of the topics discussed by inserting videos in the TV in the room,<sup>13</sup> which served as the jumping off point for the discussions. An infiltrator from the film team was also among the subjects, exercising the function of presenting counterpoints to what the other participants were saying, thereby giving more impetus to the discussions.



Film excerpt: *Mirror Camera*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1Rj\\_MzEM4w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1Rj_MzEM4w)

The director herself classified it with a division in four layers: 1) The box where the interactions take place, serving therefore as a cutout of the social space into which sexism is inserted on a daily basis; 2) The archival images serving as “triggers” of the interactions of the subjects in the box; 3) The characters (men) from diverse contexts and backgrounds who agreed to participate in the selection for the film; 4) The director and the relationship with these subjects, who was not to have contact during the recordings – an imposed rule to establish a certain distancing and so that she would not “contaminate” the material of the film (Ferraz 2021).

The room created for the recording is a device used to give support to the narrative, which could only be developed from the presence of the subjects and their interactions throughout the process of filming. The documentary exists due to this experience with the device and the pact created between the filmmakers and participants, which ensured its functioning.

Thus, we may assume that the director developed her device to be able, as a woman, to gain access the world of a certain group of individuals – cisgender, heterosexual men expressing sexist thoughts. According to our interpretation, as a woman who suffers sexism on a daily basis, the director also used her film as a form of political struggle by revealing sexism in its simplest form: the commonplace interactions of men in a space that simulates the daily environment of the reproduction of this sexism – something that she experienced, like other women, throughout her existence in different settings.

For Dea Ferraz, contact with the film still generates anguish and implications even after so much time:

<sup>13</sup> The selection was made to instigate the men to talk about the topics expected by the film team. The choice of the scenes of this material was made by Ferraz in partnership with the researcher Tatyane Oliveira (UFPPB), specialist in gender studies.



Returning to it is a reminder of a process of violence, because films not only can and should place us before the day-to-day forms of violence of a colonial, patriarchal, racist society. They also make us experience such violence in their very construction – in the very process of making them. (Ferraz 2021)

Generally present at public showings of the film, Dea Ferraz's discomfort becomes explicit in many cases and her description of the productive process of the film, which required ample periods of reflection and re-working, does not hide the difficulties of pitting oneself against abject alterities, particularly through the visual medium.

In the case of the full-length documentary by Gabriel Mascaro, which is the second film analyzed here, the director uses false information that he is a famous director wanting to make a film about penthouse apartments.<sup>14</sup> This is the key that enables him access to some individuals of the elite and to make the film. Here, the ethical issue regards the rupture of the collaboration due to the lack of an explicit pact between the director and the other party being filmed, as the proposal presented to record the interviews diverges from that which permeates the final cut of the film, creating a different narrative from that which the subject expected (the glorification of penthouses), with a characterized representation of the subjects filmed, placing them on the screen in an even jocular manner.



Film excerpt: *A place in the sun*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Bb1nhSg9hg>

Gabriel Mascaro selected the participants using a book that registered 125 owners of luxury penthouse homes in the country, only nine of whom agreed to participate in the film (Guimarães 2011). The participants were presented with the notion that the film would address the lifestyle linked to life in penthouses, the sensation of being in such places – treated in a positive, complimentary way.

In the film, Mascaro placed himself in an ethical dilemma with regards to how he chose to portray his characters. It is evident that the director opted for open criticism of the lifestyle and thinking of the individuals interviewed. Even with this issue in vogue due to the imminent difference between the final product and the initial proposal of the film, he opted for an approach that divides analyses on the ethical validity of the film due to the “trap” used to get the recordings. This is confirmed in the following excerpt from the official educational support material of the film:

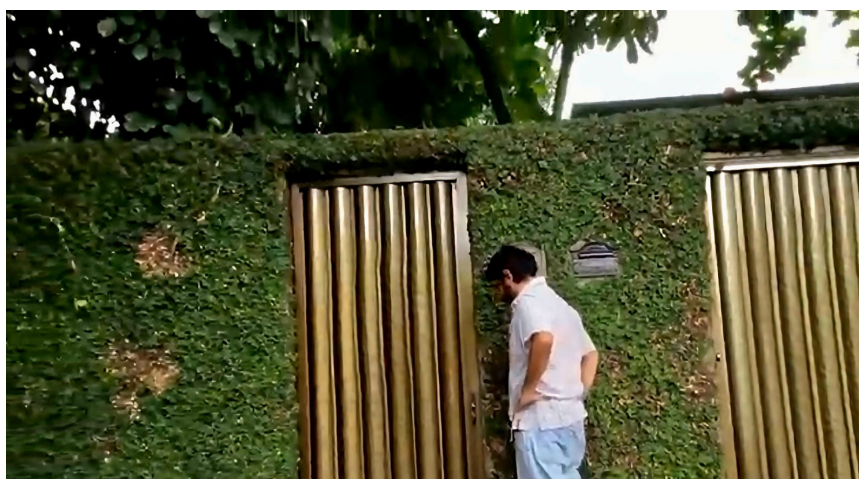
“The director pretended to be an important filmmaker to gain the trust of the interviewees, saying that he would make a film about the day-to-day life of residents of penthouses. He was only 22 years of age at the time of the

<sup>14</sup> Information available in the educational material on the film created by the producer.

filming and this trick was used to ensure that he could approach these people, since it is rare to gain access to this social group. It is noteworthy that the production of documentaries of this nature is practically null in Brazil.”<sup>15</sup>

The discussion is complex if we consider that, on the one hand, subjects of the elites have economic and political powers that facilitate the creation of a positive image or one that matches their expectations. On the other hand, however, Mascaro’s trick is questionable from an ethical standpoint, as it subverts the pact established with the subjects of the film. This debate merits a more detailed discussion, as it requires numerous considerations that go beyond the scope of the present article, the aim of which is to present a panorama of possibilities and tools for anthropology. In the case of a scientific study, approaching subjects with a “false” research proposal would compromise our code of ethics<sup>16</sup> due to the breakdown of the trust between researcher and researched, which could render its adoption in the anthropological field unviable and even cause complications with ethics committees and among peers.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, we can speak with greater liberty and flexibility regarding the adoption of such an approach in the film by Gabriel Mascaro, although it is not free of retaliations and court disputes, as the director expressed to us veiledly on several occasions. Without the intention of exhausting the discussion here, the director’s film undeniably enables us a little access to the lifestyle of Brazilian elites.

In the third film of our analysis, “*Câmara Escura*” (2012), the director Marcelo Pedrosa placed a black box with a hidden camera at the door of some residences of a middle/upper class neighborhood in Recife. He rang the doorbell, announcing a supposed delivery at the door and then left without placing it in the hands of the residents, but waited at a distance to determine whether they would pick up the box or not. After some time, he returned to the residence to recover the product and, at this point, interacted with the characters, being asked about what he had done, what was the purpose and about the way he had decided to make his film. In the same work, the director presents images of the conversation with police, who called him in due to the complaints of the residents who received these boxes and became frightened.



Film excerpt: *Dark Chamber*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGtoqe\\_ETW4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGtoqe_ETW4)

15 “Um Lugar ao Sol um Filme de Gabriel Mascaro - material Pedagógico para Escolas Do Ensino Médio” [A Place in the Sun a Film by Gabriel Mascaro – Educational material for high schools] (2010).

16 The code of ethics of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology states that “populations” who are objects of research have the “1) Right to be informed regarding the nature of the research. (...) 4) Assurance that the cooperation offered to the investigation is not used with the intention of harming the investigated group.” Available at: <http://www.portal.abant.org.br/codigo-de-etica/>.

17 The perspective can and should be discussed, as we could consider a break from this ethical element when the result is beneficial to historically oppressed populations, which goes beyond a discussion of elites, including the action of diverse groups who normally do not enable us access to their thoughts and actions. As an example, we may cite cases of infiltration in “Bolsonarist” groups on social media or groups of fascists by anthropologists, journalists, etc. The elite would fit in this field, but this debate requires more elaboration than we could analyze in the present article.

Pedroso's film differs from Mascaro's due to the intention of not previously agreeing anything with the subject – the film would only work when the individuals picked up the unknown box and took it inside the house without knowing who had sent it. However, both directors did not establish a previous pact of participation in their films, but rather used “traps”. Although Pedroso returned to retrieve the boxes and subsequently presented himself to the characters, his film faces a similar ethical dilemma as that found in Mascaro's.

In terms of the applicability of a procedure more common to documentaries or ethnographic research, we once again bring up the film by Ferraz; would the result have been the same if she dialogued directly with the men? Even if there was period of interaction to establish familiarity with them, there would probably have been some resistance or some form of intimidation when speaking about those subjects directly with her, as she would question them face to face about their behaviors and opinions with regards to women. The notion of exploring the male universe through dialogues among men themselves while replicating a setting of comradery was quite effective, as it created a greater sense of comfort and freedom that led them to express their opinions openly.<sup>18</sup>

The lack of direct contact with Ferraz in this case can also be justified by the intention to not establish ties with the participants – something that would interfere in the result of the filming – as well as the director's wish to experiment with an approach that contributed to the simulation of a day-to-day space in which such thoughts are recurrent and widespread. Her presence in the room could be felt through the instructions given to the infiltrated Djair Falcão, who was instructed to present counterpoints and tension in the discussion, differing from a speech of agreement or unison on the issues. Another form by which the director is present is through the previously selected videos.

In the case of the film “*O Grande Clube*” directed by Joelton Ivson, we perceive another example of an “outsider's” look, who, as the result of a specific strategy, is ensured entrance in a world to which he would otherwise not have access. Through the language of so-called visual symphonies, the film portrays the day-to-day functioning of a golf club and nautical club in the city of Recife that can be considered spaces for the most exclusive (VIPs). The film is the result of a documentary project developed for the film course at the university and the director, who was a student at the time of the filming, highlights the difficulties suffered by a black student from the lower class taking a course in a field of knowledge still supposedly of elites (cinema) – a report that coincides with what much literature has stated.



Film excerpt: *The grand club*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkmmLg8fQSo>

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the director deleted several scenes that she considered to be excessively heavy and that could generate some problems for the individuals speaking. Hence, she demonstrated the care of someone who participated in the film, even with the individual not being close to her and having explicitly agreed to participate in the film. She tried in several ways to not personify each individual as responsible for sexism, but rather attempted to understand them from a macro perspective.

These contrasts permeate the linguistic dimension of the film, in which day-to-day life in these exclusive clubs is the result of an economic contraposition between the members – the majority of whom are white and from the upper classes – and the employees who enable the functioning of the leisure spaces, who, on the screen, are all black. In this case, the device that enabled the director's entrance into the field was to identify himself as a student whose work would have its legitimacy ensured by the most important university in the city – something that could have been interpreted as a confirmation of the prestige of the golf club.

In this sense, the director's gaze is relevant because it incorporates ambiguous attitudes. On the one hand, we see distancing – the result of contact with a context to which he would otherwise never gain access and that generates a strong discomfort with respect to the existence of the space, which, according to the director, brings to mind the book *"The Master and the Slaves"* (Freyre, 1956) – the spatial separation of the homes of the masters from those of the slaves, which remains emblazoned in the urban imagination of the city. On the other hand, this distancing allows creating forms that enable a dual identification: the identification of the elites with the space, whose gaze is virtually not trained to perceive the structural inequalities that the film reveals, and the identification of the director and a possible view of a black subject, who precisely reveals the same symbols of inequality.

The experience of spectatorship is also an important particularity in these films, as there is an extension of the screen beyond the imagetic space of the film, something perceptible to the audience, an impactful topic and the naturalness of sexist discourse in the case of Ferraz or racism in the case of Ivson – it is disconcerting and generates a kind of inclusion within the filmic space, which is comprised of a black box in the first case and an apparently inclusive open space in the second. In the case of Mascaro and Pedroso, the dilemma was also not trivial. Although we can say that the end result would have been affected by the presentation of the real intentions of the film with the interviewees, we are reminded of the previously cited work by Oppenheimer and the strategy that the filmmaker used for the presentation of the tales of murder committed by his characters. In the film, the mechanism for the conduction of the narrative starts with the creation of a fiction that would be the adequate portrait for those men to demonstrate their actions in a film, allowing them to show their procedures in times of a civil war, leaving the judgment on what was presented up to the spectator.

The difference in the adoption of the approach also exerts a direct influence on the level of cooperation and a deepening of the conversation permitted by the interlocutors. The first needed to interrupt the filming in the middle of recording with an interviewee who no longer wanted to answer questions, although the director nevertheless continued. It seems to us that the possibility of rendering a film unviable due to desistance on the part of interviewees who perceive some duality in the questions is always hanging overhead due to the path taken by the documentarist throughout the interview. Regarding Pedroso's experience, he faced legal problems when being called by the police to clarify the situation of the strange boxes at people's doors. Hence, the strategies chosen by the filmmakers also brought adverse consequences that could have rendered the execution of the films completely unviable.

Especially in the latter two films, but to a certain extent in all others addressed here, we can highlight the difficulty and presence of relevant counterpoints that are inevitably linked to any option that directors may create as a device. However, the four films cited here have quite distinct approaches, with difficulties and important considerations. None of them is exhaustive or infallible; all were burdened with a possibility of failing. However, as the difficulty in gaining access to elites is not novel, the approaches of the directors, although diverse, resulted in films that managed to present to the audience a part of this restricted world of the elites. Thus, we can consider that they reached their goals, which was to show this world.

These open windows into the world of the elites clearly passed through choices related to the background and path of each film and each director. This does not mean that the films by Mascaro and Pedroso are wrong or have less value; to the contrary, they give rise to an ethical discussion, with which anthropology has historically

dedicated considerable care, on what strategies ethnographic research has to adopt, especially when dealing with subjects who explicitly play an important role in the oppression of other groups. In this sense, these films are examples of possible configurations in which empathy and cultural criticism converge and diverge into different modalities and cannot therefore be ignored by ethnographic theory. Lastly, it should be stressed that strategies need to be considered taking into account ethical issues linked to anthropology for a possible reapplication.

## Filming up

In a time of continual reconfigurations of digital technologies, being invisible from the mediatic standpoint has become and will be in the future something that can be achieved by a small part of the population. Thus, control over the production of representations becomes a fundamental issue for the maintenance of social differences. If elites normally have control over the representations that they produce through a broad apparatus of photographers, filmmakers, biographers and lawyers (Marcus, 2019), the cases analyzed here become spaces that clearly break from this thinking, making visible traits that even the subjects represented did not wish to reveal.

In the context of Recife, where both visible and invisible walls mark spatial class divisions, the same contact unmediated by labor relations becomes a nearly impossible option. The films presented here can be analyzed as spaces populated by “ephemeral communities” (Sansi 2015: 10), in which the devices employed enable unprecedented contacts. Besides making visible subjectivities that do not want to be visible, these films become sensitive devices that permanently address one of the greatest postcolonial traumas – social inequality. Considering the diversities among the directors with whom we interacted, we underline the importance of their subjective positioning and their habitus, which, depending on class, gender or race, enables them to approach – or not – a specific elite defined through peculiar parameters.

If we see in these films an engagement that seeks to include new forms of social experimentation – the coexistence of subjects that belong to different social groups –, on the one hand, we find forms that can be problematized in light of ethnographic experience. These films are evidently an attack on the elites represented, developed through devices that remove, from many points of view, a possible agency of the subject involved, revealing a common problem in ethnography. However, we can consider the recent discussion on how critical ethnography can be developed among the elites. As Gilbert and Sklair state, “to maintain an openness to critical language (and the language of class and capital) is to make space for the possibility of getting closer to our ethnographic subjects than might be possible where a language of class, capital, and inequality is treated a priori with suspicion” (Gilbert, Sklair 2018:10). In the case of a visual ethnography of elites, this problem becomes all the more complex, considering that the visibility of the subjects is infinitely greater with the audiovisual compared to writing. Moreover, their habitus are often considered as dominant. The films analyzed here are extreme examples of critical engagement that do not exclude a priori a more intimate proximity to the subjects portrayed, which is fundamental for an ethnographic approach, but that may be something to be dismissed by the same actors when they explicitly do not wish to become part of a research project.

Ethical reflections, which often limit the field of ethnography due to its colonial heritage, are reconfigured in this case. When dealing with elites of some kind, ethnographers necessarily have to think in terms of the exposure (Vailati, 2024) of them. This could be through text or images, which will turn autonomous subjects and which provide the abduction of agency, emphasized by Gell (1998). In the case analyzed in this article, ethnography becomes complementary to the image production processes, in providing an overview of this “exposure”

This limit, however, is simultaneously a challenge for ethnography, particularly visual ethnography, when one intends to show class inequalities by looking up rather than at the exploited. However, it is also a response to the incipience of documentary productions that seek to encounter elites whether in the national Brazilian context or internationally. The potentialities of the filmic materials analyzed here are explicit results of productive dynamics founded on the association and creation of a dialog among the filmmakers. These films question implicit inequalities in the field of cinematographic productions and the elitist structure of Pernambuco society, regardless of the parameter that distinguishes who is on top and who looks down.

We will therefore conclude this article with a problematization of this point through the cross between an anthropological approach to elites and a contemporary reflection on art and anthropology. This enables us to intertwine the films analyzed here with social theory, which has widely questioned the representational dimension of the forms produced to consider artistic practices as meeting places between alterities (Sansi 2015, Schneider, Pasqualino 2014 Schneider, Wright 2013). Crossing legal and ethical boundaries, which are often impediments in the field of academic production, the films analyzed here can signal new paths for ethnographic practice. Ethical reflections, which often limit the field of ethnography due to its colonial heritage, are reconfigured in this case. When dealing with some kind of elites, ethnographers necessarily have to think in terms of the exposure. This could happen through written or imaged forms production, which will turn autonomous subjects and which provide the abduction of agency, emphasized by Gell (1998). In the case analyzed in this article, ethnography becomes complementary to the image production processes, in providing an overview of this “exposure” processes that films made possible.

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# A Photographic Essay on Solid Waste Recycling: Street Ethnography and Innovative Experiences in the Netherlands

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## **Abstract**

This photographic essay explores solid waste management and recycling practices among residents of Zaandam and other towns in the Netherlands. The study was based on ethnographic research conducted in September 2019 and December 2021 that included street ethnography, landscape observation, and recorded interviews. The photo essay presents a narrative of the researcher's observations and experiences, highlighting the challenges and successes of waste management and recycling practices in the Netherlands.

**Keywords:** photographic essay, solid waste management, recycling practices, street ethnography, Zaandam, Netherlands.

# Um ensaio fotográfico sobre reciclagem de resíduos sólidos: Etnografia de rua e experiências inovadoras na Holanda

## Resumo

Este ensaio fotográfico explora as práticas de gestão e reciclagem de resíduos sólidos entre os moradores de Zaandam e outras cidades da Holanda. O estudo foi baseado em pesquisa etnográfica realizada em setembro de 2019 e dezembro de 2021, que incluiu etnografia de rua, observação do contexto paisagístico e entrevistas gravadas. O ensaio fotográfico apresenta uma narrativa das observações e experiências do pesquisador, destacando os desafios e sucessos da gestão de resíduos e práticas de reciclagem na Holanda.

**Palavras-chave:** ensaio fotográfico, gestão de resíduos sólidos, práticas de reciclagem, etnografia de rua, Zaandam, Holanda.

# A Photographic Essay on Solid Waste Recycling: Street Ethnography and Innovative Experiences in the Netherlands

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*Carmen Silvia de Moraes Rial*

“Oh, I know who you are. You’re the ones going around taking pictures of trash cans,” a young vendor at a newsstand in Zaandam [Netherlands, 2019] said to us while laughing. We hadn’t been in the small municipality for a week, yet had already lost the protective invisibility of anonymity (Pétonnet, 1987), because we were not acting like the usual tourists in Zaandam who photograph the houses of the French painter Monet, located on the banks of the river Zaan, or that of Czar Peter the Great, who settled in the city to learn about the art of shipbuilding<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, it is difficult to go unnoticed when taking pictures of simple trash cans, garbage trucks, and municipal waste collection carts, or of the garbage floating in the canals. But the laughter of the vendor made us think that unintentionally we were displaying a very weird image, bordering on mental disturbance.

Our photographic approach to Zaandam (more precisely to the Russischebuurt neighborhood) and the other locations visited did not involve “top-down” photos, such as aerial photographs, as suggested by Collier Jr. (1986). In the past this was difficult because the Netherlands is a flat country, and it would be challenging to find a hill or a building that would allow a comprehensive view of the city. But today we have mapping and aerial imaging resources with applications like Google Earth that more than adequately meet the need to see the whole of a place and its boundaries for a more focused approach to an object. This resource was extensively used, along with [google.com/maps](https://www.google.com/maps), and it is not an exaggeration to say that it was a central research aid, guiding us through roads and streets to the companies where we conducted interviews and produced images.

In Amsterdam, in 2019, we directed our exploration towards the central streets, following the canals, observing, and taking photographs, especially of trash bins, while trying to understand the local norms for collecting discarded materials. But we also had the opportunity to visit a house in Amsterdam and document the storage of recyclable and compostable waste. We were able to do the same in Groningen (a city in the northern Netherlands) in 2021, where a visit to a former hospital that now serves as housing allowed us to observe how the ORKZ occupation organized its recycling, a central concern of its inhabitants.

In Zaandam, all our movements were by foot. When leaving our accommodation, the most common route included the streets surrounding the canal, always starting from the main avenue, focusing more attentively on urban elements along the way. Strolling along the main canal in a street ethnography (Eckert, Rocha, 2016) was the methodology used there. However, we also conducted research in archives.

To prepare for the scheduled interview with the librarian Geke who provided us access to digital archives at the Zaandam municipality, we consulted the municipality website and downloaded photos and videos available on YouTube. The photographs include records from different eras, some showing how waste (especially dirty waters) was removed from houses. Photos document this waste from the 19th century until the mid-20th century, as Zaandam was one of the last municipality in the country to have a sewage system, which was installed around 1950.

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<sup>1</sup> Zaandam was a major shipbuilding center, providing support to both the West India Company (which dominated Pernambuco Brazil) and the East India Company (responsible for establishing Dutch colonies in Asia).

We took all of the photographs in this essay and in some cases we appear in the images as they are records of encounters or inspections. The act of taking photographs is not simple because it often involves negotiations, especially when other subjects may appear. As unusual as it may have seemed to the young man at the newsstand, photographing trash in the street had the advantage of requiring few formal contacts (Rial, 1998) or informed consent. There is considerable freedom to photograph in public spaces, and we observed this while conducting street ethnography in Zaandam and Amsterdam. Our movements in the city were daily. We followed a planned route, such as walking through streets in the old industrial neighborhood, in neighborhoods with more recent housing, in condominiums, and on streets where commercial houses surround the main canal.

Although waste collection equipment was our main focus, as well as any visible trash on the ground, we sought to contextualize the shots by photographing the environment. These scenes were often composed of beautiful landscapes that converged with the imagery of a Dutch town, while at other times they featured old houses or a series of unremarkable warehouses. With a camera always in hand and occasionally an umbrella in the other, nothing prevented our access to waste collection devices found along the sidewalks, whether those of individual residences or stores, awaiting the Renewi truck or that of another company. The passage of the waste collection trucks, marked with the emblem “Trash”, generally meant the end of our daily walk, after which we dedicated ourselves to writing the field diary and organizing the images produced on our laptops.

The same ease of recording was found at almost all the recycling companies we visited in 2021, and with individuals interviewed at street markets, cafes, or in their homes. Almost all our interlocutors agreed to be photographed and filmed. This included Geke, the librarian from Zaandam; Niko, a composter in Amsterdam; a young man generating energy with a bicycle at a street fair; the CEO of Soiltech; and Hans, the head of the recycling committee at the ORKZ occupation mentioned.

However, when it came to documenting the activities of those working with waste, we sought prior consent for ethical reasons, and not all those encountered agreed. This negotiation sometimes occurred without words as many workers did not speak English, and we resorted to mime or a simple inquisitive smile. In cases where distance did not allow close contact, we avoided capturing faces.

There was a certain flexibility, with initial refusals followed later by consent. Interlocutors who initially showed suspicion changed their position over time. For example, Spencer, the head of the garbage collectors who spoke Portuguese, initially asked not to have his face photographed—only permitting us to use his voice and images of his collection practice. But from the second contact onwards, he did not oppose being filmed. The most unusual case was that of the young owners of a company who not only prohibited images but even went so far as to hide their product, as detailed in our article published in this dossier entitled “Solid waste recycling in the Netherlands: ethnography of the circular economy.”

The photos sought to address the same questions as the written text: What do we do with our waste? How do municipalities and the state handle waste? What and how do companies recycle in Netherlands? Therefore, the images in this essay intertwine with the article (as well as a previously published article [Eckert, Rial, 2020]), where these questions are more explicitly elaborated.

The photos are linked to these texts. It would be simplistic, however, to say that the photographs merely complement the written text. Grounded in Barthes’ ideas (1988), we understand that photography, even when apparently serving an illustrative function, establishes a relationship with the observer in which meanings are diverse and independent of the image’s intentions.

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## Street Ethnography in Zaandam, 2019



Picture 1: View of Zaandam, characterized by its industries. Zaandam is located in Greater Amsterdam-Noord. Our choice was influenced by its long history of industrial production, the presence of working families, and the ongoing processes of both revitalization and gentrification. Photo by Carmen Rial.



Picture 2: Sanitation worker. Zaandam. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 3: Classic windmills that have been transformed into a tourist site. Zaandam. September 2019. Photo by Carmen Rial.



Picture 4: Old factory on the banks of the Zaan River. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 5: Traditional architecture, hotel in the center of Zaandam. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 6: Solid waste receptacles in a supermarket. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 7: The Gedempte Gracht canal in the center of Zaandam. At right, a worker cleans the trash cans and canal with special equipment. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 8: Cleaning of waste bins along the canal. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 9: Researcher Carmen Rial observing the receptacles organized by color, Zaandam, September 2019, Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 10: Sophisticated waste collection equipment in downtown Zaandam. Access is by magnetic cards, September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.





Picture 11: Carmen Rial interviewing an interlocutor in Amsterdam about the waste collection system. Amsterdam. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 12 Carmen Rial conducting an interview while generating the energy to blend juice, during the Cultural Festival in Zaandam. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.

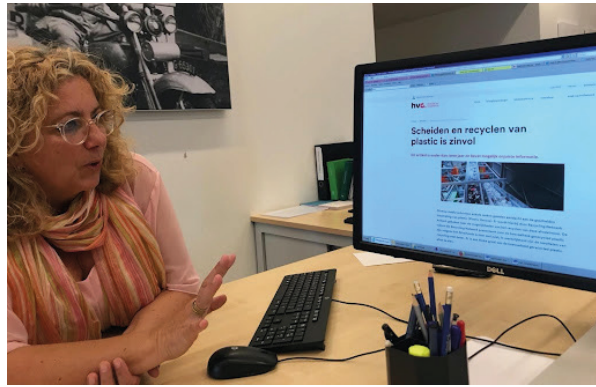


Picture 13: Cornelia Eckert photographing a Renewi truck. September 2019. Photo by Carmen Rial.



Picture 14: Zaandam City Hall with flags of different towns in the municipality on the facade. September 2019. Photo by Carmen Rial.

Picture 15: Our interlocutor Geke, a city employee responsible for the municipal archive. Geke provided us with historical information and showed us how to access the digital archive. She also gave us details on garbage policies and explained how citizens manage waste in their daily life. Regrettably, she had left her position in 2021 and we were unable to reconnect with her. September 2019. Photo by Carmen Rial.



Picture 16: Collectors of wastewater with buckets. Zaandam was one of the last municipalities to have a sewage system, which was installed in 1950. Before that, dirty water was collected by boats, carts and later by trucks. Image from the municipal archive.



Picture 17: Renewi trucks with the slogan, "Waste no more", Renewi is the primary company for recycling waste collection in the country. We visited several of its warehouses in various municipalities and observed the work of its employees. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 18: Solid waste bins for collection by a Renewi truck at the back of a store. Renewi install bins in public spaces, particularly in proximity to stores and supermarkets. September 2019. Photo by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 19: "Bottle and crate intake" in a supermarket. On the left electronics and on the right bottle cap collectors. Spencer explained that plastic bottles can be exchanged for cash in supermarkets using this machine. His son often earns money this way. We observed a hotel maid with a bag full of them, presumably for this exchange. It was under supermarket pressure in the 1960s that plastic packaging, especially for mineral water and oil, became prevalent. Photo by Carmen Rial, Zaandam, 2019.



Picture 20: Plat at a waste collector. To motivate young people to dispose of items properly, collectors engage in a game; tossing the rubbish into the basket. Photo by Carmen Rial and from the municipality of Zaanstad image archive. Zaandam, 2019.



Picture 21: Tool and collector for cigarette butts. Garbage collectors draw attention as they provide separate containers for selective waste collection. On the streets, numerous garbage collection cans with attached devices are available for extinguishing cigarettes and disposing of butts. However, it's disheartening that despite these facilities, instances of cigarette remains being thrown on the ground are not uncommon, requiring city hall employees to address the issue. Photo by Carmen Rial, Zaandam, 2019.



Picture 22: Personal card for opening a bin, Zaandam. "Containers must be placed on the street before 8 am and removed by 8 pm. On windy days, this can pose a problem. Failure to adhere to the schedule, such as placing the containers out too early, results in a fine, as they inspect the address. Plastic collection occurs once a month, and if, for any reason, you forget, you'll have to wait for the next month" told us Geke. Photo by Cornelia Eckert, 2019.

## “Waste no more”, Netherlands, 2021



Picture 23: Solid waste reception site. Carmen Rial (CR) negotiates our entry to the facilities. Lots of trucks, few employees. Abbenes, December 5, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 24: Plastics Recycling Company, Duin. Plastic is the most sought-after material for recycling in the country. On the other hand, aluminum, despite its high value in Brazil, is poorly recycled. December 10, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 25: Soiltech Company. Agricultural products recycling company. Specializing in manufacturing fertilizers and biostimulants that recycle organic waste, it has become a leading producer of soil improvers and raw materials for the potting soil industry. Biezenmortel, December 10, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 26: Carmen Rial interviewing the CEO and owner of Soiltech. Mark told us he collects two types of “green waste” - twigs, which municipalities sell, and yard waste from household units. They also collect food products. *Soiltech's* composting technology has resulted in a highly concentrated foliar fertilizer that Mark considers revolutionary in agriculture. Biezenmortel, December 10, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 27: Circulation of vegetable matter requires quality, scale, and innovation. The result of composting is sold to agro-companies in Europe: in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. “What about France?”, we asked Mark. “Too far, not worth it. A truck costs 8 euros per hour”. Photo by Soiltech Company website.



Picture 28: On the road in search of recycling companies. The list of companies and their addresses was compiled before the trip. We sent emails to the CEOs and received a few responses. However, upon our arrival, we discovered that in many cases, they were already aware of our research, facilitating the initial contact. December 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 29: Streetside residue bins in Amsterdam, classified by color for each material. The large bins are situated underground. December 11, 2021. Photography by Carmen Rial.



Picture 30: I was here. In the scene, Carmen Rial checks the discard. Zaandam, December 13, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 31: Residue bin found on a walk through. Zaandam, December 13, 2021. Photography by Carmen Rial.



Picture 32: Your bulk waste is reused. Zuiderhout. The Afvalbrengrstation (waste disposal stations) are present in all municipalities, covering an area of one to several acres. They are financed by both public and private funds, and some, such as the one in Zaandam, employ individuals who are unemployed and receiving public aid. Residents can enter with their cars into the waste disposal station and deposit debris to be recycled in the corresponding bins. December 13, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 33: Bin with waste and the sign: "Are you ready to come back soon with more residue?". Afvalbrengrstation in Zaandam Oude Haven. December 13, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 34: Metal debris. Zaandam Zuiderhout. December 13, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 35: Paper debris. Zaandam Zuiderhout. December 13, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.

Picture 36: Each bin in the "Afvalbrengrstation" of Zaandam is numbered and has a flag indicating the specific type of debris to be deposited. There are more than 30 bins available for different types of waste. Zaandam Zuiderhout. December 13, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.





Picture 37: Waste collectors near a market. The number of available bins vary. East Amsterdam, December 14, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 38: Waste collectors. East Amsterdam. December 14, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 39: Visit at Amsterdam University College. The Amsterdam University College (AUC) is an independent institution of higher education located in Amsterdam, Netherlands. It is a liberal arts college that offers bachelor's degree programs in various disciplines. Amsterdam East. December 16, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



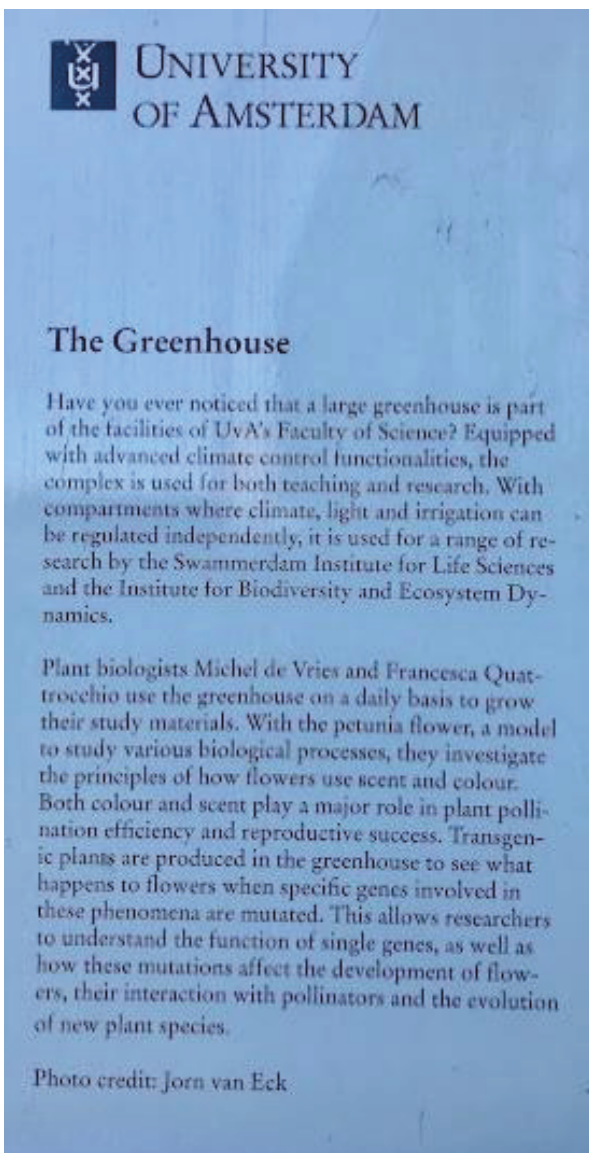
Picture 40: Meeting with Prog. Barbara Arisi who invited us to participate in a Circular Economy class at the Amsterdam University College. East Amsterdam. December 16, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 41: Prof. Barbara Arisi and students presenting research on Food Waste and Reciprocity. East Amsterdam. December 16, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Pictures 42 & 43: Waste collectors, UCA. December 16, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 44: Poster about the Greenhouse of the Faculty of Science of UvA. The Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA) is a comprehensive research university located in Amsterdam. It offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in various disciplines, including sciences, humanities, social sciences and many other areas. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 45: Banner in a corridor at UCA. Amsterdam University College. East Amsterdam. December 16, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 46





Pictures 47 & 48: The ORKZ (Oude Rooms Katholieke Ziekenhuis) is a former Catholic hospital in Groningen, Netherlands. It was transformed into a cultural and residential complex known for its alternative and creative community. The ORKZ provides spaces for artists, musicians and various cultural activities. It has become a unique and vibrant hub for alternative culture in Groningen. The ORKZ is a squatters site that the state legalized in 1985. There, we interviewed Hans, the coordinator of the recycling sector of the residence which has 350 people. The recycling location is in the basement. Prog. Arisi translated, Prof. Rial filmed. Groningen, December 17, 2021. Photographies by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 49: Sign at the entrance to the basement of ORKZ. Groningen, December 17, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 50: Hans explains the monetary value of each type of solid waste, how they are collected by residents and how income from sales pays for improvements and repairs to the residence, as well as social actions. Groningen, December 17, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 51: Electronic waste ready for recycling in ORKZ. Groningen, December 17, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 52: Hans, Carmen and Barbara in the main recycling room. Groningen, December 17, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Pictures 53 & 54: Prof. Arisi explains the composting process in the courtyard of ORKZ filmed by Prof Rial. On the right, a compost bin at ORKZ located in the common garden. Groningen, December 17, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Pictures 55 & 56: A resident entering the waste station of Hemmen, with debris to be disposed of. Hemmen “Afvalebrenstation” is a small municipal solid waste collector compared with the Zaandam. It is located near a Renewi collection site. The poster indicates the types of materials that can be deposited in the tanks indicated by number and color. Hemmen, December 19, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 57: Waste bins on the road to Drachten towards Leeuwarden. It reads “Place clothes, shoes and textiles in sealed bags”. December 20, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 58: Renewi warehouse. Leeuwarden, December 21, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 59: Cardboard in front of a store in Amsterdam Street, to be collected by a Renewi truck. Amsterdam, December 22, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.



Picture 60: PET bottle collector at the Schiphol International Airport, southwest of Amsterdam. December 22, 2021, Photography by Carmen Rial.



Pictures 61 & 62: Time to go home. Metro and Schiphol airport photos. Professors Carmen Rial and Cornelia Eckert. Holland, Amsterdam, December 23, 2021. Photos by Carmen Rial.



Picture 63: Common scene in contemporary Dutch cities: choosing food from the food wall which has small drawers containing small portions of snacks. Schiphol airport, Amsterdam, December 23, 2021. Photo by Carmen Rial.



Pictures 64 & 65: On the left, green trash cans being transported. On the right, vacuum cleaner for garbage in action. Schipol airport photos. Amsterdam, December 23, 2021. Photos by Carmen Rial.



Picture 66: To conclude, an image of traditional bicycles in Amsterdam that symbolize its sustainable policy. Amsterdam, 22 December, 2021. Photography by Cornelia Eckert.

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This photographic essay is the outcome of the “Circular Economy: Trash/Solid Waste Anthropologies and Innovative Experiences between Holland and Brazil” project, funded by the CAPES/NUFFIC Program and coordinated by the “Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina” and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The essay is divided into two parts. The first is based on ethnographic research conducted in 2019 (Eckert, Rial, 2020), which included observations and interviews (Eckert, Rocha, 2016) with waste pickers employed by the cities of Zaandam<sup>2</sup> and Amsterdam regarding

<sup>2</sup> Zaandam is the main city in the municipality of Zaanstad. It is located along the Zaan river, just north of Amsterdam. The district of Zaandam, which includes the city and the surrounding countryside, has a population of around 76,800. It has traditionally been a working-class town that now has a subaltern and multicultural population.

public and domestic infrastructure for solid waste collection. The second part presents an ethnography conducted in several cities in the Netherlands in 2021 and focuses on companies and residences that collect and recycle solid waste. Over the past decade, the European Union has been pressuring member countries to transition to a circular economy, which involves creating, developing, and using products and materials that can be transformed to avoid disposal. The Netherlands has been working to meet requirements and develop a circular economy (Savini, 2019).

The article “Solid waste recycling in the Netherlands: ethnography of the circular economy”, is included in this dossier and provides a detailed account of the ethnographic experience related to circular economy and solid waste recycling.

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# Más allá de los desechos: un ensayo fotográfico en el basural a cielo abierto de Oberá, Misiones

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## Resumen

Este ensayo fotográfico tiene como objetivo retratar formas de vida y resiliencia en el basural a cielo abierto de la ciudad de Oberá, Misiones, en diálogo con algunas ideas de Anna Tsing, Isabelle Stengers y Donna Haraway. Presento aquí imágenes que, desde el sentido común, parece improbable encontrar en medio de la basura y de los escombros. Sin embargo, nos permiten reflexionar acerca de las colaboraciones multiespecies y las posibilidades de supervivencia en un ambiente contaminado. Se trata, pues, de cultivar una forma de observar, atenta y sensible, y de transmitirla siguiendo lo que Haraway denomina “art-science activism”.

**Palabras clave:** Antropoceno, residuos, fotografía, colaboraciones multiespecie

# Além dos resíduos: um ensaio fotográfico no aterro a céu aberto de Oberá, Misiones

## Resumo

Este ensaio fotográfico tem como objetivo retratar formas de vida e resiliência no aterro a céu aberto da cidade de Oberá, Misiones, em diálogo com algumas ideias de Anna Tsing, Isabelle Stengers e Donna Haraway. Apresento aqui imagens que, do senso comum, parece improvável encontrar em meio ao lixo e aos escombros. No entanto, nos permitem refletir sobre as colaborações multiespécies e as possibilidades de sobrevivência em um ambiente contaminado. Trata-se, portanto, de cultivar uma forma de observar, atenta e sensível, e de transmiti-la seguindo o que Haraway denomina “art-science activism”.

**Palavras-chave:** Antropoceno, resíduos, fotografia, colaborações multiespécies

# Beyond junk: a photographic essay in the waste landfill of Oberá, Misiones

## Abstract

The goal of this photographic essay is to portray forms of life and resilience in the waste landfill of the city of Oberá, Misiones, in a dialogue with some of Anna Tsing’s, Isabelle Stengers’ and Donna Haraway’s ideas. I present here images that, from a certain common sense, would appear improbable to find in the midst of trash and rubble, but that nevertheless allow us to reflect about multispecies collaborations and the possibilities of survival in a contaminated environment. This essay is about cultivating a way to observe, attentive and sensitive, and to transmit it following what Haraway calls “art-science activism”.

**Key words:** Anthropocene, waste, photography, multispecies collaborations



# Más allá de los desechos: un ensayo fotográfico en el basural a cielo abierto de Oberá, Misiones

Ana Goldemberg

“I find myself surrounded by patchiness, that is, a mosaic of open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life, with each further opening into a mosaic of temporal rhythms and spatial arcs. I argue that only an appreciation of current precarity as an earthwide condition allows us to notice this—the situation of our world.”

**Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing**

*(The Mushroom at the End of the World, 2015)*

Empezó la primavera en Misiones. Con las agradables temperaturas de las últimas semanas comenzaron a sacar brotes verde claro los árboles y a cantar desde temprano las aves. Observo a mi alrededor y veo flores fuchsia que forman un colchón mullido en el piso, cubriendo de a poco unos escombros. Más lejos otras flores, esta vez de color naranja y amarillo, sobre las cuales se posan mariposas y moscas. Entre los árboles que bordean el predio, Guayubiras, Fumo Bravo, Paraísos y Pimenteros entre otros, vuela una bandada de Anóchicos, unos pájaros negros cuyo pico característico, grueso y con la parte superior curvada, permite que se lo reconozca fácilmente. Un poco más lejos, unos jotes, aves carroñeras de gran porte, observan el entorno desde lo alto de otro árbol al cual no llega el humo. De repente veo pasar frente a mí una pareja de Arasarí fajados, de la familia de los tucanes, de pico largo y plumaje rojo y amarillo contrastando con el dorso negro. Me quedo observándolos un rato hasta que siguen camino. Al darme vuelta advierto, a unos 20 metros de mí, un lagarto de gran tamaño tomando sol. Quiero sacarle una foto pero en cuanto percibe mi movimiento se escabulle, probablemente entre las Ortigas bravas. Es un día precioso de primavera, y este lugar casi podría parecer un pequeño jardín de Edén, si no fuera porque me encuentro en el basural a cielo abierto de Oberá.

Llegué por primera vez al basural en agosto del 2021 para hacer mi trabajo de campo, y desde entonces siempre que fui me sorprendió el inmenso contraste de este ambiente: por un lado un suelo contaminado por residuos de todo tipo, plásticos, vidrio roto, chatarra, incluso productos químicos tóxicos (restos de combustible y agroquímicos como el glifosato, por ejemplo), sumado al humo constante emanando de los montículos de basura; y, por otro, una asombrosa diversidad de plantas y animales que, junto con los recuperadores urbanos que trabajan en el predio del basural, encuentran allí condiciones posibles de subsistencia. Por más que resulte contra-intuitivo, este lugar en el cual se amontona el descarte de la sociedad de consumo no deja de ser un espacio de vida, humana y más-que humana<sup>1</sup>.

Esta convocatoria para pensar las “Utopías del reciclaje”, en un primer momento, me resultó un verdadero desafío. Me preguntaba qué clase de optimismo podía invocar cuando observaba este espacio transformado por décadas de amontonamiento de residuos. ¿Qué esperanza escondida pretendía encontrar en las historias de contaminación y exclusión social que me cuentan los trabajadores del basural? La tarea no era fácil. Para lograrlo, quizá lo que necesitaba era un cambio de punto de vista, ampliar el horizonte para incluir en mi mirada las formas

<sup>1</sup> El filósofo ecologista David Abram (1996) fue quién acuñó el término “más-que-humano” [more-than-human], que hace referencia a los mundos de los distintos seres que habitan la Tierra, incluyendo y traspasando las sociedades humanas.

de vida que sí logran prosperar a pesar del desastre ambiental y social que representa el basural. Este trabajo pretende ilustrar, mediante fotografías<sup>2</sup>, las posibilidades de la vida multiespecie en las ruinas capitalistas. No se trata de romantizar el basural, ni de idealizar las condiciones de trabajo de los recuperadores urbanos, sino de darse la oportunidad de observar de manera más completa y compleja este paisaje en el cual la devastación cohabita con la posibilidad. Para ello elegí invocar a tres pensadoras cuyas ideas me permitieron reflexionar más allá del desastre. Se trata de la antropóloga Anna Tsing, la filósofa Isabelle Stengers y la bióloga Donna Haraway, gracias a quienes pude empezar a considerar, si no una utopía, al menos un tipo de ciencia ficción colaborativa.

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<sup>2</sup> Esta idea fue inspirada por el ensayo visual de Lucas Rodrigues, que se puede encontrar bajo el siguiente link: <https://www.residualab.uerj.br/favela-mais-que-humana-animais-favelados-e-as-paisagens-multiespecies-ensaio-visual/>. Todas las fotografías que aparecen en el presente ensayo son propias.

## No se puede proteger lo que no se advierte

Retrato 1: una abeja buscando su camino entre los restos de basura carbonizada



Estamos en un basural a cielo abierto, un espacio al cual década tras década se han traído los desechos de actividades humanas, el descarte y las sobras del sistema capitalista. Este lugar alguna vez fue solamente monte, una selva tupida y sana. Hoy en día el predio del basural aún está rodeado de árboles y vegetación. Es una particularidad de Misiones ser una provincia en la cual el verde avanza, se impone, se infiltra en cualquier recoveco en el que pueda nacer una semilla, crecer una planta, convertirse en *capuera*<sup>3</sup>. Por más que se trate de un lugar contaminado, hecho de plásticos carbonizados, hierros oxidados, humo y agua putrefacta, la vida encuentra aquí la forma de hacerse lugar, prosperar a pesar de las condiciones que, a primera vista, parecen hostiles. De eso se trata, ir más allá de la primera vista, no recostarse en un sentido común que preferiría quizá que las cosas fueran más claras: selva por un lado, contaminación por otro, en otras palabras, naturaleza por un lado, cultura por otro. Nada de esto aquí, donde todo se mezcla, se asocia, se condensa en una realidad compleja, hecha de relaciones multiespecie y equilibrios precarios.

<sup>3</sup> En las zonas rurales de Misiones se denomina *capuera* a las malezas, especialmente las que crecen en espacios abandonados pero que anteriormente fueron productivos. La *capuera*, por lo general, se compone de especies cicatrizantes y pioneras, como la chirca, la cola de zorro, el fumo bravo, el pimentero o la ortiga brava (Cinto y Marino, 2021). Sobre la percepción de la *capuera* en la ruralidad misionera, ver Ferrero (2009).

Retrato 2: un mullido colchón de petunias silvestres cubre de a poco un montículo de residuos



El desafío se encuentra, pues, en predisponerse a observar y a poder sorprenderse, incluso maravillarse. El Antropoceno<sup>4</sup>, este período extraño e inquietante en el cual nos encontramos, puede resultar difícil de aprehender. Para Anna Tsing, nada mejor que intentar entenderlo en inmersión dentro de los paisajes que lo conforman. Esto se logra advirtiendo [noticing] las disposiciones superpuestas de humanos y no humanos, prestándole atención a las ruinas del capitalismo. Se trata de una tarea que pide cierta humildad, que nos arrodillemos para acercarnos al suelo, que levantemos la cabeza para observar la copa de los árboles, que ejercitemos la mirada para ver más allá (o más acá) de lo obvio, de la basura y la mugre, y así advertir las distintas formas de vida que permanecen allí, retazos de Holoceno<sup>5</sup> que nos recuerdan que, quizá, todo no está perdido. No se puede proteger lo que no se advierte. En este tiempo de catástrofe planetaria y paisajes devastados, debemos conservar nuestra curiosidad y notar lo extraño y lo maravilloso, así como lo terrible y lo aterrador (Tsing, 2017).

4 El Antropoceno es una propuesta para delimitar un nuevo período geológico basándose en los cambios estratigráficos producidos por la acción humana. El incremento en la atmósfera de los gases de efecto invernadero, el uso del nitrógeno sintético en la agricultura convencional, la pérdida de biodiversidad y la omnipresencia de residuos son algunos ejemplos de estos cambios. Sobre el concepto de Antropoceno y algunas de sus variaciones, ver Crutzen y Stoermer (2013); Moore (2017); Moore y Molinero Gerbeau (2021); y Haraway (2015, 2016).

5 Se denomina “Holoceno” la época geológica de aumento de las temperaturas a nivel global que empezó luego de la última glaciación, hace aproximadamente unos 11000 años.

Retrato 3: unas diminutas hormigas llevan a cabo la tarea colectiva de recomponer un suelo contaminado



### **Sympoiesis: el arte de hacer-con**

Una vez que nos ponemos a observar los mundos humanos y no-humanos que nos rodean, detectamos ensambles, temporalidades múltiples, un verdadero mosaico hecho de supervivencias colaborativas. De a poco nos vamos dando cuenta que los seres vivos no están simplemente en el entorno, sino que componen el entorno, transforman el paisaje y son transformados por él. Isabelle Stengers et al. (2019) proponen una reflexión ecológica en la cual se deja atrás el organismo individual para enfocarse en las interdependencias que fabrican tanto los cuerpos como los entornos. A esto lo llama, siguiendo a Donna Haraway (2016), “sympoiesis”, que significa hacer-con, y también hacer-gracias a, hacer-a pesar de. “Los vivos están todos activos, hacen; pero lo que hacen implica, presupone o crea relaciones unos con otros. Están implicados unos con otros. Y juntos, hacen mundos” (Stengers et al. 2019: 25).

*Retrato 4: unos jotes cobran vuelo desde lo alto de su árbol, por encima de residuos humeantes*



En el basural observo formas de vida entrelazadas, posibilitadas unas por otras. Entre los árboles del predio reconozco Pimenteros y Fumo Bravo, dos especies que se denominan “pioneras”: crecen rápidamente, van mejorando la composición del suelo y aguantan tanto la exposición a un sol fuerte en verano como a las heladas en invierno. Ellas permiten que otras especies menos resistentes vayan repoblando el lugar progresivamente, generando condiciones más propicias. Estos árboles asimismo proyectan la sombra bajo la cual se cobijan los recuperadores urbanos en las horas de calor, creando un espacio donde encontrarse a charlar y organizarse. También sus copas sirven de refugio, pasajero o permanente, para una gran cantidad de aves que, a su vez, colaboran con la diversidad de especies vegetales esparciendo desde los aires semillas traídas desde lejos. Las abejas, atraídas por los restos de alimentos, fruta y verdura que cada semana descartan los supermercados locales en el basural, participan de la reproducción de la vida polinizando las flores de los alrededores. No son las únicas. Se ven y oyen cantidades de insectos, muchas moscas como es de esperar entre medio de la basura, pero también mariposas coloridas y libélulas. Humanos y no-humanos están en constante interacción, recuperando y procesando lo que aún puede serlo, aprovechando el entorno de la mejor manera para lograr sobrevivir.

Retrato 5: un gato se cobija a la sombra de unos palets, entre medio de vidrios rotos y desechos diversos



Como investigadoras, explorar estos paisajes no nos puede dejar indiferentes. Si sostenemos que existe una correspondencia entre los seres vivos y sus entornos, entonces estar presentes allí, observar atentamente y con todos nuestros sentidos, implica también dejarse afectar por lo que percibimos. Según Stengers et al., “los investigadores no traen simplemente resultados, hacen intervenir la manera en que lo que estudian los afecta, se comprometen en relaciones que no están solamente al servicio de un conocimiento a adquirir sino también de una sensibilidad a desarrollar o recuperar” (2019: 31). En este sentido, podemos formular preguntas e hipótesis, esbozar definiciones, reflexionar acerca de lo que nos rodea, pero es imprescindible aprender a conectar con el entorno y los seres que lo habitan, entrar en una relación, ya no de sujeción, sino de verdadera colaboración. No estamos “por fuera” de lo que observamos, una naturaleza abstracta que se trataría de descifrar. Al contrario, nos encontramos inmersas en esas relaciones, historias entrelazadas en distintas escalas, composiciones que se necesitan mutuamente en la red sympoiética de la vida. Y si queremos producir conocimiento que sirva, que sea verdaderamente útil para afrontar los desafíos actuales, es imprescindible empezar a hacer-con, a pensar-con.

Retrato 6: una mariposa se posa sobre una flor de lantana, un especie muy adaptable y que produce una gran cantidad de néctar



### Contar historias de ciencia ficción

¿Cómo dar cuenta de estos paisajes en ruinas en los cuales, a pesar de las condiciones hostiles, la vida encuentra intersticios en donde florecer? Vivimos una época de noticieros catastróficos y titulares aterradores. Sin embargo, a pesar del desastre, aún quedan historias que vale la pena contar. En estos parches del Antropoceno<sup>6</sup>, encuentros inesperados son dignos de ser retratados, en un intento de hacer lo que Donna Haraway (2017) llama “art-science activism”: un compromiso con una recuperación parcial, una rehabilitación modesta, una práctica sympoiética para (sobre)vivir en este planeta dañado. En este ensayo elegí la fotografía como forma de visibilizar lo que, a primera vista y desde el sentido común, no se espera encontrar en un basural a cielo abierto, una fuerza natural improbable, resiliencia a pesar de la destrucción capitalista. Entiendo el art-science activism como una forma de militancia en la cual procuro transmitir aquello que observo y con lo que me relaciono en el basural, generando así un conocimiento sensible que pueda nutrir una reflexión-acción.

<sup>6</sup> Tsing, Mathews y Bubandt proponen el término “Antropoceno parchado” como herramienta de análisis para dar cuenta de “las condiciones desiguales de habitabilidad más-que-humana en paisajes cada vez más dominados por formas industriales” (Tsing et al. 2019: 186).



Tríptico 1: “Milpa” del Antropoceno. Unas plantas de maíz, de poroto y de zapallo crecen a pocos metros unas de otras.



*Maíz*



*Poroto*

7 La milpa es un agro-ecosistema tradicional de varios pueblos indígenas de América, en el cual se asocia el cultivo de maíz, del zapallo y de poroto (aunque pueden agregársele otros). El zapallo es una planta rastrera, cubre rápidamente el suelo, formando un acolchado que ayuda a mantener la humedad. El poroto aprovecha el estrato alto del maíz para treparse. A su vez, al ser una leguminosa, fija nitrógeno en el suelo y nutre a las otras dos plantas. Este consorcio es un ejemplo perfecto de colaboración entre especies, que sorprendentemente también se encuentran creciendo en el basural.



*Zapallo*

Sin duda estas imágenes no son un material suficiente para pretender contar “utopías del reciclaje”. Por más sorprendentes y maravillosas que sean las manifestaciones de vida en este lugar contaminado, cuesta pensar que estos escenarios sean deseables. Por eso prefiero la idea, compartida por Stengers et al. (2019) y Haraway (2016), de ciencia ficción. La ciencia ficción ejercita nuestra capacidad de imaginar otros posibles, en los cuales lo que nos parece evidente podría llegar a ser distinto. La ciencia ficción es especulativa, precaria, es un camino en donde se entrelazan pasados, presentes y futuros por venir. La ciencia ficción nos permite pensar historias de cooperaciones multiespecie, supervivencias colaborativas, mundos más-que-humanos. Como en un compost, en donde se deshacen las identidades individuales para dar lugar a nuevas composiciones, metamorfosis mutuas que se vuelven tierra fértil, un sustrato rico para la reflexión.

Retrato 7: un perro olfatea entre la basura carbonizada en busca de comida



### Del otro lado del caos

Este ensayo nació como respuesta a la propuesta de pensar “utopías del reciclaje”. Las fotografías que presenté aquí se combinan con reflexiones de Tsing, Stengers y Haraway para crear un ritmo, que se quiere un ida y vuelta entre el paisaje del basural y la discusión académica. He decidido nombrar mis fotografías “retratos”, adrede. En las bellas artes, el retrato es una representación plástica de una persona. Por lo tanto según esta definición mis fotografías serían consideradas como paisajes, animalística o quizá naturaleza muerta. Llamarlas “retrato” es una forma de darles un estatuto ontológico equivalente, como parte de una reflexión militante acerca de nuestra forma de representar la vida que nos rodea. Usé las imágenes para presentar la esencia de mi argumentación, no como piezas para analizar.

Retrato 8: un grupo de recuperadores urbanos carga un pesado fardo de papeles y cartones sobre la camioneta



El texto tiene tres tiempos. En primer lugar, se trata de advertir: queda vida en los escombros, a pesar de la contaminación existen formas de supervivencia en equilibrio precario. Si queremos preservarlas es imprescindible darnos cuenta que están allí. En segundo lugar, notar que estas supervivencias son colaborativas, hechas de relaciones multiespecie, *sympoiéticas*, de las cuales también somos parte. Los vivos hacen mundos, unos con otros. Esto me lleva al tercer punto, el de encontrar la forma de dar cuenta de todo aquello, ya que mientras haya vida habrá historias que contar. Allí es donde interviene la ciencia ficción, una herramienta para pensar otros posibles.

Retrato 9: un recuperador urbano cocinando para un almuerzo grupal en el basural



El basural a cielo abierto es un lugar desde el cual ejercitar la imaginación. En los márgenes, en este espacio donde mi sentido común esperaba hallar puro caos, encontré semillas creciendo, aves cantando, mariposas volando. En los escombros capitalistas encontré organización social, solidaridad, ayuda mutua. A veces, los recuperadores urbanos del basural recogen un zapallo maduro para añadir a su almuerzo. Llevan a sus gallinas a picotear por ahí en los restos de alimentos que descartan los supermercados. Se juntan a la sombra de un árbol a descansar un rato y compartir un mate. Estamos lejos de la utopía, pero tenemos materiales con los que trabajar.

“Naturaleza viva” 1: el almuerzo compartido se sirve sobre una tabla de madera encontrada en el basural, con mantel de cartón y ruedas en desuso como asiento



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# Ambientalismo y Desarrollo Sustentable: Nueva ideología/utopía del Desarrollo<sup>1</sup>

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Este es un texto francamente polémico. En una época donde “crisis de paradigmas”, “orfandad”, “perplejidad”, “ausencia de interpretaciones totalizantes” se han vuelto expresiones y sensaciones recurrentes entre la intelectualidad y los políticos, la necesidad de establecer debates y encarar la controversia se impone por sí misma. No se trata de tomar partido, de manera oportunista, de los cambios políticos y económicos en marcha en el mundo contemporáneo. Es así porque cualquier pronóstico cerrado, ante la fluidez e incertidumbre que los propios cambios instalan, carga consigo una alta probabilidad de fracaso. Se trata, más bien, de procurar contribuir a situarnos en el flujo de los acontecimientos, en busca de comprender alternativas interpretativas que demostrarán ser más o menos apropiadas en función de cómo se desarrollen los acontecimientos. Con las idas y vueltas que acompañan la llegada de los límites del “socialismo real”, las discusiones positiva o negativamente vinculadas a la postmodernidad o al ambientalismo han atraído buena parte de la imaginación de aquellos que se preocupan por una solución posible a los dilemas actuales. Entenderlas como parte de una lucha por la hegemonía interpretativa no las descalifica, como groseramente podría creerse, como alternativas que vengán a establecerse o a desvanecerse en el horizonte.

## Introducción

El desarrollo es una de las nociones más inclusivas existentes en el sentido común y en la literatura especializada. Su importancia en la organización de las relaciones sociales, políticas y económicas llevó a algunos antropólogos a considerarla no sólo como “una de las ideas básicas en la cultura moderna europea occidental” (Dahl & Hjørt, 1984: 166) sino también “algo así como una religión secular” incuestionable, ya que “oponerse a ella es una herejía casi siempre severamente castigada” (Maybury-Lewis, 1990:1). El alcance de esta noción<sup>2</sup> abarca desde derechos individuales, de ciudadanía, hasta esquemas de clasificación de los Estados Naciones dentro del sistema mundial, pasando por atribuciones de valor al cambio, la tradición, la justicia social, el bienestar, el destino de la humanidad, la acumulación de poder económico, político y militar, y muchas otras connotaciones vinculadas a ideas de relaciones apropiadas entre los hombres, y entre éstos y la naturaleza. Son, sin dudas, el alcance y las múltiples

<sup>1</sup> Una primera versión de este trabajo fue presentada y discutida en la conferencia “Cultura y Desarrollo” del Instituto de Estudios de Religión (ISER), Río de Janeiro, el 13 de agosto de 1991. Agradezco las sugerencias de Carlos Eduardo Rabelo de Mendonça, Maria Laura Viveiros de Castro, Luis Eduardo Soares, Lygia Segala, Otávio Guilherme Velho, Regina Novaes y Rubem César Fernandes. Como de costumbre, asumo toda la responsabilidad por el contenido de este texto. Versión en portugués originalmente publicada en *Revista de Antropologia*, Universidade de São Paulo, n. 34, 1991, pp. 59-101.

<sup>2</sup> Como se verá, en este texto se hará referencia al desarrollo como noción, ideología, utopía y sistema ideacional. En efecto, las referencias pueden ir desde un intento de sistematización académica para interpretar el cambio socioeconómico, hasta conjuntos de ideas que orientan y legitiman las acciones de los actores sociales.

facetas de desarrollo que permiten un enorme número de apropiaciones y lecturas muchas veces divergentes. En suma, el desarrollo, al igual que la modernidad, son categorías vinculadas a un tipo de universo ideacional de una plasticidad tal que hace creer que se está ante una caja negra o una noción vacía.<sup>3</sup> En efecto, los antropólogos suecos que investigan el “Desarrollo como ideología y modelo *folk*” (DAS, s/d: 4) se refieren al carácter de espejismo que posee la noción de desarrollo: “Todos hablan sobre desarrollo, pero nadie parece ser capaz de anclarlo en términos concretos”. Para ellos, este vacío se explica por las exigencias políticas y los cambios de rumbo a los que se ven sometidos los planes de desarrollo y el mundo industrial:

Suspendido en un tiempo/espacio que se altera constantemente de novedosas maneras, el desarrollo no puede ser un punto fijo que se desplaza majestuosamente a lo largo de su trayectoria predeterminada sin preocuparse de las turbulencias y la conmoción a su alrededor. La consecuencia de la incidencia de todas estas fuerzas en la ideología del desarrollo es que seguirá estando mal definida (si es que lo está) en cuanto a su fin último. Al mismo tiempo, esta plasticidad garantiza su continua viabilidad. Siempre está en proceso de transformarse, de realizar las promesas hechas (DAS, s/d: 5).

Uno de los presupuestos de este trabajo es que los diversos cambios en las formas de reproducción de la vida política, económica, social y cultural en la contemporaneidad, han conducido a una reformulación/reforma de la noción de desarrollo, que hasta hace poco estaba muy marcada por las teorías creadas a partir de los reajustes experimentados por el sistema mundial inmediatamente después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.<sup>4</sup> En realidad, las tentativas de reforma de esta ideología/utopía central del mundo moderno (heredera incuestionada de la idea de progreso) prácticamente han coexistido con su aparición en el primer plano de la escena, en el siglo XIX, a partir de desdoblamiento políticos, sociales, económicos y filosóficos del siglo XVIII. Recordemos las formulaciones de Owen, de Fourier y de Saint-Simon. Las variaciones de las apropiaciones de la idea de desarrollo, así como los intentos de reformarla, acaban expresándose en adjetivaciones que forman parte de su historia: desarrollo industrial, capitalista, socialista, hacia adentro, hacia afuera, comunitario, desigual y combinado, dependiente y, en el presente, autosostenido o simplemente sustentable. En rigor, estas variaciones y tensiones son representativas de la lógica de un campo de poder político y económico en el que los actores colectivos procuran establecer, como las más correctas, sus perspectivas particulares relativas a cómo se debe proceder en relación al desarrollo.

La tensión que subyace al conflicto interpretativo y político propio del campo en el que se mueven las cuestiones del desarrollo, puede remitirse a una doble faz del propio Iluminismo, un momento fundamental para el desdoblamiento de los nuevos pactos económicos, políticos y sociales de la modernidad y sus ideologías asociadas (progreso, industrialismo, secularización, racionalización, individualismo, por ejemplo). Una doble faz expresa en el conflicto entre los defensores de un proyecto vinculado a una razón instrumental, que alimenta procesos de crecimiento económico y acumulación basados en relaciones de explotación entre clases desiguales; y aquellos defensores de una razón histórica preocupada fundamentalmente con la justicia social (Quijano, 1988). Evidentemente, y por diversas razones, el momento actual tiene características, actores y discursos diferentes.

En el presente, acontecen cambios dramáticos en la organización y flujos de poder político y económico al interior del sistema mundial. No se trata de unirse al coro (que ya no es tan nuevo como algunos quisieran creer) que canta la muerte de la historia, del industrialismo, de la razón instrumental, del Iluminismo, del Positivismo, del Marxismo, etc. Pero es claro que hacia el final del siglo XX se asiste a una decadencia relativa de algunas

3 Sobre la modernidad, véase, por ejemplo, la polémica Berman/Anderson (Berman, 1987 y 1989; Anderson, 1989), artículos como los de Habermas (1989) y libros como los de Rouanet (1987). En uno de los mejores trabajos sobre la relación entre antropología/desarrollo/planificación, A.F. Robertson (1984) señala la mistificación que rodea a la planificación del desarrollo y afirma que, en la disyuntiva entre conocimiento popular y racionalidad estatal-tecnocrática, marcada por relaciones de poder asimétricas, en realidad “nadie tiene una comprensión adecuada del desarrollo planificado” (1984: 305).

4 En las Ciencias Sociales, el desarrollo es un tema sobre el que se ha producido una vasta literatura. En la actualidad, es cada vez más frecuente leer a autores de distintas disciplinas y nacionalidades que afirman la existencia de una crisis en las formas de pensar el “desarrollo”. Para interpretaciones de los cambios en la realidad contemporánea y sus efectos en la teoría del desarrollo, véanse, por ejemplo, Harvey (1989), Szentes (1988), Dube (1988) y Frankel (1987). Véase también Binder (1986).

de las más fuertes ideologías y utopías enraizadas en el siglo XIX. En Occidente, el Marxismo, por ejemplo, ha sido por muchas décadas un discurso proveedor de una matriz alternativa, sistemática y organizada al sistema predominante de relaciones sociales, económicas y políticas. Una alternativa que también apela a la legitimidad científica, tributaria de las nociones de desarrollo como crecimiento y que asigna un papel central a la industria en el destino de la humanidad, un marco de comprensión propio del siglo XIX. La historia del Marxismo es un claro ejemplo de las diversas apropiaciones vinculadas a contextos históricos y geográficos variados. En la actualidad, aunque se delinee más claramente los límites del marxismo-leninismo como ideología político-partidaria, el estatuto interpretativo de la teoría y del método elaborados por Marx (que no podían dejar de estar influidos por los acontecimientos políticos) sigue siendo objeto de gran debate. Nadie duda, por ejemplo, de la genial interpretación de Marx sobre el desdoblamiento del capitalismo industrial, ni de la importancia de su pensamiento para entender la historia económica y las desigualdades de poder político al interior de la sociedad. Plusvalía, fetiche de la mercancía, clases sociales, modos de producción, etc., –aceptadas o no por autores individuales– son contribuciones fundamentales del pensamiento marxista. Hoy, incluso desde una perspectiva eminentemente influida por el marxismo, lo que está en juego es cómo interpretar, en un momento diferente de la historia capitalista, las formas de reproducción de la vida que están experimentando cambios radicales.

Para los objetivos centrales de este trabajo, es útil recordar que durante mucho tiempo, e incluso hasta el presente, muchos marxistas entendieron la utopía sólo en su sentido negativo, como una articulación de ilusiones, una expresión de deseos vacíos, carentes de “valor científico”. Al fin de cuentas, fue Friedrich Engels, en su empeño por encontrar su propia distinción para el marxismo, quien calificó de *socialismo utópico* la producción de pensadores como Saint-Simon, fundamentales para entender las ideologías asociadas al “desarrollo”. En efecto, la crítica al discurso saint-simoniano puede entenderse mejor si consideramos que los pensamientos de Saint-Simon y sus seguidores fueron muy influyentes entre la élite intelectual, política y administrativa de Europa del siglo XIX, con su fuerte apelación al desarrollo tecnológico y a la racionalidad tecnocrática.<sup>5</sup> El periódico saint-simoniano *Le Globe* era leído por representantes de la élite europea. Goethe, por ejemplo, se entusiasmaba con las posibilidades de realización de grandes obras a escala planetaria, como los canales de Suez o de Panamá, que provocarían modificaciones enormes en el flujo mundial de riquezas. De hecho, seguidores de Saint-Simon, fervorosos creyentes de los grandes poderes desatados por la industria, estuvieron umbilicalmente vinculados a obras importantes como la de los mencionados canales, que transformaron en pasado la necesidad de rodear África y América del Sur para llegar al Asia y al Océano Pacífico. El ahorro de tiempo y energía que suponían estas obras, además de su evidente importancia geopolítica, fueron las principales razones de las complejas articulaciones que promovieron entre los intereses capitalistas y los distintos Estados. La predilección por los grandes proyectos puede haber sido lo que llevó, en el siglo XIX, a los saint-simonianos a abogar por la existencia de un banco que operara a escala mundial para reunir los complejos paquetes financieros necesarios para el financiamiento de obras excepcionales.

En realidad, un banco así, el Banco Mundial, sólo sería creado luego de los acuerdos de Bretton Woods en 1944, dados los cambios en la economía política internacional provocados por la Segunda Guerra Mundial. El periodo inmediatamente posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial sigue siendo fundamental para el debate sobre el desarrollo, por varias razones. Además de redefinir el peso de los distintos Estados-nación dentro de la división internacional del trabajo, se crearon nuevos mecanismos para operar a nivel global, como el Banco Mundial (Banco Internacional de Reconstrucción y Desarrollo), el Fondo Monetario Internacional, el GATT (*General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs*) y las Naciones Unidas (ONU). Truman, desde las alturas del poder del Estado nación más poderoso después de la Gran Guerra, en un famoso discurso estableció el desarrollo como

<sup>5</sup> Cabe recordar aquí que Auguste Comte, fundador del Positivismo, filosofía de suma importancia para la consolidación de una cosmovisión y una perspectiva de la historia ajustadas a la consolidación de la razón técnico-científica inherente al industrialismo y sus aparatos burocrático-administrativos, fue discípulo de Saint-Simon. Para lo que sigue, véanse, por ejemplo, Berman (1987: 71-72), Durkheim (1958 [1896]) y Perroux (1965).

la gran salida civilizatoria para la humanidad. Se establecen como universales indicadores “objetivos” para medir performances de desarrollo, como el Producto Interno Bruto.<sup>6</sup>

En un mundo congelado por la Guerra Fría, las principales teorías sobre el desarrollo, conservadoras o no, empiezan a gestarse. América Latina no sería inmune a estas tendencias. En el seno de la propia Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL), creada por la ONU en 1948, el desarrollo por vía de industrialización y sustitución de importaciones se transforma en una consigna. De hecho, los lineamientos generales de la discusión sólo se reordenarían unas décadas más tarde con los grandes cambios en el orden económico y político internacional, y con la introducción de nuevas voces en el debate, asociadas a proyectos ideológicos y utópicos que no habían encontrado antes espacio para desarrollarse con mayor intensidad.

### **Nuevas presencias: posmodernidad y ambientalismo**

La actual retracción del Marxismo como discurso capaz de galvanizar visiones alternativas de la sociedad se entiende aquí dentro del complejo marco de confrontación entre los portadores de diferentes ideologías y utopías.<sup>7</sup> Esta lucha, a su vez, está relacionada con los procesos en curso que están cambiando la configuración del sistema mundial. Las principales causas subyacentes de esta situación son la evolución de las industrias del transporte, la comunicación y la información, así como el progresivo aumento de la transnacionalización de los mercados financieros y los procesos productivos (Harvey, 1989). El ambientalismo y el posmodernismo son dos discursos que entran en esta arena y adquieren fuerza ante el relativo retroceso, tanto simbólico como concreto, del marxismo y del “socialismo real” como alternativa a las visiones clásicas de los sistemas de vida capitalistas. Considerando que la discusión sobre la posmodernidad está, al menos hasta ahora, muy restringida a las élites intelectuales y artísticas, tocando tangencialmente la cuestión del desarrollo, no me detendré en ella detalladamente para privilegiar el ambientalismo.

Sin aceptar, por supuesto, interpretaciones mecánicas de la relación entre los sistemas ideacionales y las realidades económicas, sociales y políticas, es interesante observar que dentro del debate sobre la posmodernidad, que para muchos refleja las condiciones contemporáneas del capitalismo transnacional (Jameson, 1984; Harvey, 1989; por ejemplo), se decreta el fin de la historia, el fin de la utopía. En este sentido, el discurso posmoderno, crítico con los grandes relatos de la Ilustración, puede verse como un discurso anti-utópico: “Si el pensamiento utópico ha sido considerado, a lo largo de la modernidad y desde el humanismo renacentista, como un ejercicio de la libertad del espíritu, en la posmodernidad aparece como un recurso autoritario para imponer orientaciones a la sociedad” (Hopenhayn, 1988: 63). Sin duda, la recepción negativa de la discusión sobre la posmodernidad por parte de muchos marxistas se debe, parcialmente, a la presencia de este tono anti-utópico.<sup>8</sup>

Sin embargo, comparto la opinión de Norbert Lechner (1988) de que si el elogio del presente por parte de la crítica posmoderna es, por un lado, inmovilizador, por otro tiene un aspecto positivo en la medida en

6 Al criticar el economicismo de los indicadores económicos y los rubros más comúnmente aceptados en los sistemas de contabilidad nacional, Henderson (1990) afirma: “Estas estadísticas per cápita no sólo ocultan las crecientes diferencias entre ricos y pobres en muchos países, sino que también ignoran por completo el 50% estimado de todas las actividades productivas, incluso en los países industrializados, que son no remuneradas e informales. Éstos y otros errores de las cuentas nacionales devienen de que se diseñaron en la Segunda Guerra Mundial con fines militares y estratégicos, y no con objetivos de desarrollo humano y social” (1990: 69).

7 Volveré sobre esta cuestión más adelante.

8 La contemporaneidad de los comentarios de Manheim (1972), publicados originalmente en 1929, también en un contexto de muchos desencantos, es provocadora: “En esta fase madura y avanzada del desarrollo, la perspectiva total tiende a desaparecer en proporción a la desaparición de la utopía. Sólo los grupos de extrema izquierda y extrema derecha de la vida moderna creen que existe una unidad en el proceso de desarrollo (...) Cada vez que desaparece la utopía, la historia deja de ser un proceso que conduce a un fin último. El marco de referencia según el cual evaluamos los acontecimientos deja de existir, y nos queda una serie de acontecimientos, todos idénticos en cuanto a su significado interno. El concepto de tiempo histórico, que conducía a épocas cualitativamente diferentes, desaparece, y la historia se asemeja cada vez más a un espacio indiferenciado. Todos los elementos de pensamiento arraigados en las utopías se ven ahora desde un punto de vista escéptico y relativista” (1972: 275-276).

que rechaza los aspectos salvíficos de la ideología del progreso, relativizando el futuro como solución, como «huída adelante» (Lechner, 1988: 135).<sup>9</sup> De este modo, el presente es visto como el momento adecuado para postular cambios. Sin embargo, es curioso que el ambientalismo, tanto en sus versiones fundamentalistas más conservadoras (como el conservacionismo) como en las versiones que negocian con la idea de desarrollo, tenga al futuro como elemento central de su arquitectura interpretativa. En una vertiente, por la amenaza del fin de la vida y del planeta, lo que ya le ha valido el nombre de eco-apocalipticismo (Zencey, 1989); en otro, por la esperanza de reformar la lógica del desarrollo.

En resumen: en un momento en el que asistimos a la pérdida de la eficacia relativa de algunas de las principales ideologías/utopías ancladas en el siglo XIX, asistimos a la penetración, por un lado, del posmodernismo, discurso anti-utópico y contrario a categorías, interpretaciones y propuestas totalizadoras; y, por otro, a la del ambientalismo, de características utópicas y totalizadoras. Al mismo tiempo, la importancia del ambientalismo se refleja en su transformación en movimientos sociales y su visible penetración en los sistemas contemporáneos de toma de decisiones. Hoy en día, es un interlocutor aceptado por los principales participantes (Estados, organismos multilaterales y bilaterales, empresarios, organizaciones no gubernamentales, movimientos sociales) en el campo de la discusión sobre el desarrollo.

En este sentido, me interesa una interpretación centrada en el ambientalismo como ideología/utopía, lo que nos lleva inmediatamente al plano de la comprensión del papel y la eficacia de las representaciones en determinados momentos históricos.

## Breves consideraciones conceptuales

Acaso una de las discusiones más entrecortadas por diferentes posturas e interpretaciones sea la vinculada al análisis ideológico. Para evitar las connotaciones que, desde su aparición, han asociado casi exclusivamente el término “ideología” con el discurso de los adversarios políticos, a la ocultación y el escamoteo de la realidad para su manipulación pragmática, prefiero utilizar la expresión “sistemas ideacionales”. Sin embargo, la ocultación, el escamoteo y la manipulación también se expresan a través de medios simbólicos y discursivos. Por ello, admitiré que la(s) ideología(s) ya apunta(n) a una articulación selectiva con fines interpretativos, manipulativos o no. Con el único fin de diferenciar entre ideologías y utopías, de acuerdo con las tendencias clásicas de la literatura, voy a entender a las primeras como orientadas principalmente hacia el pasado, y a las segundas, hacia el futuro.

Una de las principales características de los sistemas ideacionales es que están constituidos por diferentes apelaciones a la legitimidad sobre distintas cuestiones que se perciben como centrales para la reproducción de la vida social. Más allá de las funciones integradoras-simbólicas, que son una de las facetas de todo sistema ideacional, podemos acordar, como dije, que las ideologías remiten a un conjunto de referentes del pasado que se construyen con el propósito de interpretar y, muchas veces, manipular el presente.

Aunque a un alto nivel de abstracción, precisamente en lo que se refiere a las llamadas funciones integradoras, se puede hablar de ideología en general (a este nivel “sistemas ideacionales” me parece una terminología más adecuada), está claro que en realidad no existe *una* ideología, sino muchas, que son portadas por diferentes actores colectivos. Estas ideologías suelen estar en contradicción u oposición entre sí. Los actores colectivos luchan por imponer sus visiones particulares como las verdaderas y más legítimas para la sociedad como un todo.

9 “Abandonando una perspectiva futurista que enfoca los problemas exclusivamente a través de algún modelo de sociedad futura, nos abrimos a las tensiones y contradicciones existentes. Ellas pierden su connotación peyorativa. Ya vimos la revalorización de la heterogeneidad por parte de la cultura postmoderna; ella permite enfrentar la complejidad social sin pretender reducirla de inmediato. Hoy ya no se trata tanto de tolerar el discurso (que remite a un sentido común o mayoritario) como de fomentar una multiplicidad de sentidos, sin presuponer una instancia última. Desde este punto de vista, la incertidumbre es un rasgo distintivo de la postmodernidad. No obstante esa nueva disposición por asumir la ausencia de certezas, ello tiene un límite. Más allá de cierto punto, el desencanto deja de ser una benéfica pérdida de ilusiones y se transforma en una peligrosa pérdida de sentido” (Lechner, 1988: 135).

Me referiré, aunque de manera rápida y simplificada, a la discusión sobre la utopía, en vista de su carácter complementario.<sup>10</sup> De hecho, sólo por razones analíticas puede establecerse una distinción entre utopía e ideología. La tensión ideología/utopía anima, en el seno de los sistemas ideacionales, un campo polarizado que, para Paul Ricoeur (1986), constituye la *imaginación* cultural y social. Resumiendo su problemática, Ricoeur se pregunta:

¿La función excéntrica de la imaginación como posibilidad de un lugar vacío (*un no lugar*) no implica todas las paradojas de la utopía? Además, ¿no es esta excentricidad de la imaginación utópica, al mismo tiempo, la cura de la patología del pensamiento ideológico, que tiene su ceguera y su estrechez precisamente en su incapacidad para concebir un lugar vacío? (1986: 17).

Todos los sistemas ideacionales hacen referencia al pasado, al presente y al futuro. Pero las utopías, como conjunto de intenciones a menudo unidas por una autoría reconocible (como la *Utopía* clásica de Tomás Moro, o la *Nueva Atlántida* de Francis Bacon), están fundamentalmente orientadas al futuro. En efecto, las utopías proporcionan una alteridad para que los actores sociales propongan, basándose en sus lecturas de las condiciones pasadas y presentes, cómo consideran que debería ser la realidad social, política y económica. Para Robertson (1984), por ejemplo,

... la especulación utópica se ocupa fundamentalmente de la naturaleza del tiempo, de la racionalización del pasado y del presente, y pretende controlar el futuro. Los movimientos sociales que inspira están igualmente preocupados por el tiempo y su manipulación (1984: 195).

Existe también una diversidad de discursos utópicos, portados por diferentes actores colectivos que se enfrentan o cooperan en términos de lo que debería ser el futuro de la humanidad. En este sentido, al igual que las ideologías, las utopías tienen un notable poder de reverberación política, que en mayor o menor medida, orienta interpretaciones, proyectos e iniciativas, individuales o colectivas.

En suma, es como si, en varios planos, las ideologías operasen preferentemente con manipulaciones del pasado en el presente, y las utopías con manipulaciones del futuro en el presente, tanto para los fines interpretativos de una búsqueda de congruencia en un mundo incongruente, como para los fines pragmáticos de establecer y legitimar diferentes niveles de acceso al poder. Así, los sistemas ideacionales, dentro de los cuales se sitúan todas las ideologías y utopías, son el universo en el que tiene lugar una lucha por la hegemonía, tanto en términos de ideologías como de utopías. Los distintos actores colectivos intentan constantemente convencer a los demás, por medios simbólicos o materiales, de que sus concepciones e interpretaciones son universales.

## El desarrollo como ideología/utopía organizativa

Hay dos aspectos macro integrativos de la noción de desarrollo que conviene subrayar. En primer lugar, desde el siglo XIX, el ritmo creciente de integración del sistema mundial ha requerido una ideología/utopía que pudiera, tanto dar sentido a las posiciones desiguales al interior del sistema –sin requerir una dominación abierta, como en la época colonial–, como proporcionar una explicación a través de la cual los pueblos situados en los niveles inferiores pudieran “entender” sus posiciones y creer que había una salida a la situación de atraso. No casualmente la terminología del desarrollo implica por lo común el uso de metáforas que se refieren al espacio o al orden de forma jerárquica: desarrollado/subdesarrollado, avanzado/atrasado, Primer Mundo/Tercer Mundo, etc. Esta jerarquía es funcional a la creencia de que existe un punto al que se puede llegar siguiendo una especie de receta mantenida, en secreto o no, por los Estados-nación que lideran la “carrera” hacia un futuro mejor. Para Celso Furtado,

<sup>10</sup> Mis propias concepciones sobre esta cuestión se basan en el clásico de Karl Mannheim (1972 [1929]) y en la obra de Paul Ricoeur (1986).

... puesto que el 'desarrollo' es concebido como una *performance* internacional –ignorando el costo de la acumulación en términos de valores culturales– la historia de los pueblos pasa a ser vista como una competición para parecerse a las naciones que lideran el proceso acumulativo (1978: 77).

Y sin embargo,

... la ideología del desarrollo se distingue de la del progreso por un economicismo más estrecho, inscrito en el marco de la dependencia exterior. La idea de progreso se utilizó principalmente para favorecer un pacto social entre grupos y clases que se sabía tenían intereses antagónicos (...) La idea de desarrollo como actuación internacional se disocia de las estructuras sociales, siendo simplemente la expresión de un pacto entre grupos internos y externos interesados en acelerar la acumulación. Ignorando las aspiraciones -contrarias o no- de los grupos que componen la sociedad, apunta al simple trasplante de la civilización industrial, concebida como un modo de vida material que se originó fuera del contexto histórico del país en cuestión (Furtado, 1978: 78).

El segundo aspecto macro integrativo a destacar es el siguiente: el desarrollo como noción universalmente deseada proporciona una etiqueta neutra para referirse al proceso de acumulación a escala mundial. Al utilizar "desarrollo" en lugar de acumulación o expansión, se evita una connotación indeseable: la diferencia de poder entre las unidades del sistema (intra o inter Estados-naciones) en términos económicos, políticos y militares. Esta característica ha sido la causa de una tautología, un tipo de razonamiento que asigna la culpa a la víctima, que puede ejemplificarse con una afirmación arquetípica como la siguiente: "son subdesarrollados porque no creen en el desarrollo".

El desarrollo tiene varias otras connotaciones asociadas a su matriz principal, la idea de progreso, un concepto que, según historiadores y filósofos, se remonta a la Antigua Grecia (Delvaille, 1969; Dodds, 1973). Es interesante señalar, sin entrar en la compleja discusión sobre el estatus del "progreso" como idea matriz civilizatoria, que la idea de progreso se basa, en un primer nivel, en la percepción –y la posterior extensión analógica de esta percepción– de que los seres vivos experimentan un crecimiento para madurar. Por esta razón, la idea de progreso va acompañada, explícitamente o no, de su opuesta y complementaria, la de decadencia. Es como si la humanidad se encontrara en un dilema permanente, entre crecer o perecer. En este sentido, cabe destacar también la generación de la creencia de que el futuro será mejor que el presente y el pasado, a través de una serie de mejoras e innovaciones que los hombres serán capaces de inventar. Que el presente constituya algún tipo de mejora con respecto al pasado es una cuestión compleja que requiere un examen sistemático e histórico que abarque diversas dimensiones de la vida social. Sin embargo, no cabe duda de que, en un campo como el de la tecnología, se han producido una serie de mejoras a lo largo del tiempo. Quizá sea ésta una de las principales razones por las que la creencia en la redención de la humanidad, a través de la mejora tecnológica, constituye la columna vertebral del desarrollo como ideología y utopía.

El notable poder del desarrollo como ideología/utopía organizativa se refleja en su centralidad en los discursos que informan dos visiones predominantemente opuestas de la sociedad: el discurso capitalista liberal y el discurso socialista. Es necesaria una breve caracterización de éstos antes de introducirnos a cómo se relaciona el ambientalismo con este campo político e ideológico.

El discurso capitalista sobre el desarrollo se centra en las fuerzas del mercado, una entidad con poderes para corregir y regular las acciones de los agentes económicos y cuya labor recompensará a los individuos más capaces, permitiéndoles progresar a ellos y, por extensión, al conjunto de la sociedad. El desarrollo es un objetivo que debe alcanzarse con el menor grado de intervención del Estado. Si se deja interactuar a las fuerzas del libre mercado, la "mano invisible" organizará los factores de producción, aportando un mayor bienestar para todos. Aquí, el poder y el acceso diferenciado a los recursos naturales y humanos no se tienen en cuenta. En cambio, estos últimos factores se consideran cuestiones fundamentales en la vertiente socialista. Las sociedades se dividen en clases que tienen diferente acceso a los medios de producción. El libre mercado es una ilusión. Las

fuerzas del mercado deben ser reguladas por el Estado para alcanzar la justicia social. El desarrollo sólo puede existir mediante una organización orquestada del poder político y económico que tenga en cuenta un objetivo redistributivo. A pesar de sus evidentes diferencias, no deja de ser correcto considerar que

... en tanto constructos ideológicos, socialismo y capitalismo representan la misma y fundamental visión ‘economicista’ del mundo (...) En cuanto al desarrollo, la mayoría de los países socialistas tienen políticas que implican un fuerte compromiso con el significado dominante del concepto, basado en el crecimiento, la innovación tecnológica, la modernización y una supuesta relación directa entre estos procesos y el bienestar humano. Las ideas de autonomía local o de satisfacción de las necesidades humanas no materiales pueden inscribirse en ‘modelos alternativos de desarrollo’, tanto en los países capitalistas como en los socialistas, pero rara vez cuentan con el mismo apoyo poderoso que se da a los otros componentes del significado, y se sitúan bajo el eje principal del pensamiento sobre el desarrollo apenas como una corriente opositora (Dahl & Hjort, 1984: 176).

La última observación de Gudrun Dahl y Anders Hjort conduce directamente a la lucha por la hegemonía entre utopías e ideologías de desarrollo. El ambientalismo lleva mucho tiempo asociado a “modelos de desarrollo alternativos”, pero sólo recientemente se ha convertido en interlocutor de los principales actores del campo desarrollista. Además de la propia dinámica interna del ambientalismo y de la apropiación parcial de algunas de sus proposiciones, creo que en esta transformación jugó un papel fundamental el abandono, en mayor o menor grado, de la asunción radical de un carácter “alternativo”, que progresivamente se fue convirtiendo en un indeseable foco de disputa con distintas voces del campo en cuestión. Aunque todavía es difícil, en términos sustantivos, diferenciar el ambientalismo como un campo político e ideológico en el que se desarrolla una lucha interna por la hegemonía, se pueden hacer algunas puntualizaciones iniciales sobre sus características básicas. De hecho, existen muchas versiones/variedades del discurso ambientalista y de los movimientos sociales asociados a él. El espectro de alianzas se extiende desde las grandes corporaciones multinacionales hasta los movimientos popular y sindical. En una época caracterizada por la “transfertilización ideológica” (Frankel, 1987), no es de extrañar una amplitud cuya variabilidad acabe engendrando rótulos como ecofascismo y ecosocialismo.<sup>11</sup>

Podría argumentarse que una de las razones del relativo éxito del ambientalismo en su conjunto es que tiende a ser percibido y divulgado, incluso por los medios de comunicación de masas, como una ideología ciega a las contradicciones de clase. A pesar de que el ambientalismo no comparte un cuerpo central y claramente definido de categorías interpretativas, puede decirse que el conjunto principal de sus referentes forma una matriz, la relación hombre/naturaleza, que se difunde o apropia de forma más neutra que otras que parten de la relación hombre/hombre, enfatizándola o asignándole un lugar central en sus arquitecturas teóricas e interpretativas. Ésta puede ser una de las razones por las que políticos de todo signo se adhieren a los discursos ambientalistas y por las que las llamadas “inversiones verdes” están generando un mercado propio en países como Estados Unidos.

Desde el punto de vista organizacional, el ambientalismo es tal vez una de las formas más contemporáneas de movimiento social, que articula constantemente burocracias centrales (una sede nacional o internacional), conocimientos científicos de distintos campos (ecología, antropología, biología, ingeniería agronómica y civil, física, etc.), redes de información (redes informáticas, *mailing lists* nacionales e internacionales), intenso *lobby* ante instituciones políticas y económicas, iniciativas legales, creación de eventos en medios electrónicos, reclutamiento de *superstars* y manifestaciones masivas y simultáneas en varios países como forma de hacer frente a la internacionalización de la cuestión medioambiental.

Desde un punto de vista ideológico, el ambientalismo internacional no es un movimiento tan contemporáneo y algunas de sus versiones pueden considerarse conservadoras. Para Anna Bramwell (1989), el movimiento

11 Para una historia del ambientalismo en el Brasil contemporáneo, donde se exploran sus diferencias, véase Viola (1987; 1991). Anna Bramwell (1989), en su libro sobre la historia del ambientalismo internacional, muestra la complejidad político-ideológica del movimiento ecologista.



ecologista lleva luchando por la visibilidad política desde el último cuarto del siglo XIX. En su historia, ha mantenido diferentes relaciones con distintos movimientos políticos y sociales. Basándose en numerosos datos historiográficos, Bramwell (1989) destaca la relación entre la ecología y la cultura alemanas, y la espinosa cuestión de la estrecha relación entre el nazismo alemán y las ideas ecologistas.<sup>12</sup> Más recientemente, en el ambientalismo estadounidense, por ejemplo, ha habido diferentes organizaciones, incluidas algunas abiertamente progresistas.<sup>13</sup> Sin embargo, no es muy común, por razones tácticas o no, leer un *folder* o informe anual de una ONG internacional que establezca, clara y críticamente, los vínculos entre la destrucción medioambiental y las interpretaciones que tienen en cuenta las contradicciones de clase, la expansión de la economía capitalista y el imperialismo.

Ya he mencionado que, como movimiento social plural, el espectro ideológico del ambientalismo es muy complicado. Sin embargo, no se puede eludir el hecho de que, al igual que otras ideologías/utopías relacionadas con el desarrollo, el ambientalismo se genera en el centro del sistema mundial y lleva consigo componentes culturales marcados por sus orígenes.<sup>14</sup> A este nivel, potencialmente interfieren desde una cosmología amplia, incluida, por supuesto, la religión, hasta los derechos de ciudadanía históricamente conquistados, en los que se garantiza a los individuos su derecho a cuestionar y exigir (la noción norteamericana de *accountability* es ejemplar en este sentido) que las autoridades cumplan con sus responsabilidades, y –lo que quizá sea más importante– que realmente lo hagan. Según Bramwell (1989: 5),

(...) los países donde las teorías ecológicas han sido más importantes son Gran Bretaña, Alemania y Estados Unidos. Aunque la comunidad intelectual responsable de difundir y provocar la elaboración de estas teorías incluye a científicos, y activistas políticos, franceses y rusos, Gran Bretaña y Alemania presentan hoy la imagen más evidente de grupos ambientalistas movilizados. Estados Unidos inspiró ideas radicales y alternativas tanto como las recibió..., alteradas en alguna medida, desde Europa (1989: 5).

La autora señala como “raíces culturales” comunes a estos tres países una fuerte cultura liberal y protestante en el seno de una clase media numerosa y culta. Su énfasis acaba recayendo en la importancia de Alemania.

La influencia de las ideologías románticas puede identificarse en el ambientalismo. Es ampliamente conocido el importante lugar que ocupa la naturaleza en la construcción del romanticismo en la literatura. La contemplación de la belleza natural, de la que se han escrito tantos poemas, es fuertemente incompatible con el espíritu emprendedor del arquetípico agente capitalista (Berman, 1987). Aquí merece la pena centrarse en el ejemplo más reciente de interfaz formal del ambientalismo con el sistema de partidos políticos, el Partido Verde alemán, que entró en la escena política en 1979. Sin lugar a dudas, los Verdes alemanes también representan un universo ideológico complicado, pero claramente más radical que el estadounidense. Un segmento de los Verdes

12 Según esta autora “... había apoyo al más alto nivel del poder nazi para las ideas ecológicas –especialmente si se incorpora la postura de Hitler y Himmler sobre el vegetarianismo y los derechos de los animales–” (Bramwell, 1989:196); “había dos niveles de apoyo ecológico en el Tercer Reich. El primero a nivel ministerial, el segundo a nivel administrativo y de planificación” (1989: 197). Bramwell cita la presencia de altos funcionarios, algunos tan famosos como Rudolf Hess, y, en un contexto diseminado de ideas naturistas y antroposóficas, hechos como la preocupación por la “retención de plantas silvestres para formar un banco de genes y con potencial de resistencia”; posiciones contrarias a los fertilizantes artificiales, a favor de una agricultura natural, sencilla, más campesina, independiente del capital. Además, “la Alemania nazi fue el primer país de Europa en crear reservas naturales” (1989: 199), creó leyes para proteger el hábitat de la fauna, leyes contra la vivisección y emprendió una intensa acción para proteger los bosques.

13 Para una selección de algunos de los más importantes, véase la Tabla I al final del texto. De hecho, existen grupos con orígenes y actividades radicales en Estados Unidos. Me gustaría dar las gracias a Eduardo Viola por plantear esta cuestión, así como por informarme de que “la investigación empírica apunta a vínculos entre las culturas ambientalista, liberal y (en menor medida) radical en Estados Unidos” (comunicación personal).

14 En relación con otro paradigma influyente en el debate sobre el desarrollo, Leonard Binder (1986) afirma lo siguiente: “Muchos críticos de la teoría liberal del desarrollo han argumentado que la mejor forma de entenderla es como un reflejo ideológico de los intereses capitalistas e imperialistas estadounidenses en el Tercer Mundo. Aunque esto no es del todo incorrecto, creo que el origen de la teoría liberal del desarrollo reside en una extensión bastante natural del paradigma dominante (ideológico, por supuesto) a este nuevo campo, de la aspiración, si no de la convicción, de que el pluralismo pragmático podría ser la base de una ciencia universal de la política, tanto como una explicación y justificación del sistema político estadounidense” (1986: 10). Y añade: “Esta teoría liberal del desarrollo fue virtualmente ubicua a finales de los años 50 y principios de los 60. Su defecto no radica en subordinar los intereses de las naciones en desarrollo a la clase gobernante de Estados Unidos, sino en extender una imagen de nosotros mismos, tal y como a algunos liberales les gustaría que fuéramos, a las potencialidades de otros países muy diferentes» (Binder, 1986: 11-12).

también es marxista, al menos en sus orígenes, y el partido se debate en una contradicción interna entre *Fundis* y *Realos*. Los primeros son *fundamentalistas*, partidarios de las relaciones con el *establishment*. Los segundos, *realistas* “interesados en cambiar el sistema desde dentro”, estableciendo alianzas con los socialdemócratas (Lynton, 1989: 5). Para Nandani Lynton, “la ideología verde... intenta equilibrar el igualitarismo típico del individualismo moderno con una visión orgánica holística de la naturaleza y de la comunidad humana” (Lynton, 1989: 3). Al mismo tiempo, esta autora ancla firmemente las ideologías y dilemas verdes en el universo del romanticismo alemán:

Los primeros románticos hicieron hincapié en la revitalización cultural y establecieron un estilo de vida que encarnaba sus ideales teóricos (...) Los románticos propagaron un ideal de unidad orgánica, igualdad y celebración del *Volk* como matriz de la naturaleza, la cultura y el lenguaje. Su filosofía social equilibraba las nuevas nociones de individualismo, originalidad e igualdad entre hombres y sexos con las estructuras jerárquicas heredadas. Los románticos situaban la igualdad y la solidaridad mecánica internamente en cada nivel social, al tiempo que afirmaban un orden jerárquico y, por tanto, la solidaridad orgánica entre las partes de un todo; trataban la contradicción conteniéndola en una clase abarcadora a un nivel diferente (Lynton, 1989: 6).

De hecho, tanto la existencia del Partido Verde como su eficacia están relacionadas con cuestiones históricamente fundamentales para la cultura alemana en su conjunto. Si bien pueden establecerse los vínculos del ambientalismo con el romanticismo, su relación con la “ética protestante” debe delimitarse más sólidamente. Algunas de las posturas ecologistas pueden dialogar eficazmente con este universo. En un *folder* de la *Conservation International* (1989), donde se esboza el programa de la ONG, se pueden encontrar frases como las siguientes: “La angustiada víspera de un nuevo milenio puede que algún día sea recordada no tanto por su sucesión de crisis como por su conciencia de las fuerzas que configuran el futuro de la Tierra” (1989:1); “No sólo nos encontramos en el umbral de un nuevo milenio, sino ante un tipo de mundo muy diferente”. Eric Zencey, un ambientalista estadounidense, en un artículo en el que relaciona el movimiento ecologista con el milenarismo protestante, afirma:

Es irónico que el movimiento ecologista, al ofrecer la visión de una sociedad sostenible, haya extraído parte de su fuerza de una mentalidad que, por su propia naturaleza, no era sustentable<sup>15</sup> (...) Seguramente el movimiento ecologista estaría mejor –y funcionaría mejor en el futuro– si sus participantes extrajeran su imagen del tiempo no de la noción romántica de la historia con su redención apocalíptica, sino de la naturaleza, donde no hay apocalipsis en absoluto, sólo adaptación y cambio continuos, y a veces, dramáticos» (Zencey, 1989: 93).

Es interesante observar que en un libro, escrito por un economista del Banco Mundial y un teólogo (Daly & Cobb, 1989), la importante noción de biosfera (definida en última instancia como la conciencia de pertenecer a una “comunidad de comunidades”) está explícitamente vinculada a una cosmovisión religiosa, cristiana y protestante. Para Herman E. Daly y John B. Cobb Jr., en este influyente trabajo con el público norteamericano, el intento de reformar las visiones religiosas, éticas, económicas y políticas implica una fusión de estos diferentes planos, guiada básicamente por la discusión ambientalista, y con la Biblia como parámetro último. El camino a seguir es superar la Ilustración y el resultante protestantismo moderno individualista, volviendo a la tradición profética de la Biblia. Desde esta perspectiva, el objetivo último de una visión biocéntrica es encontrar a Dios y no al planeta o a la biosfera. En efecto,

...sea lo que sea Dios, Dios es también totalidad inclusiva. La diversidad de las partes interconectadas de la biosfera da riqueza al todo, que es la vida divina. La extinción de las especies y la simplificación de los ecosistemas empobrecen a Dios incluso cuando no amenazan la capacidad de la biosfera para sostener la continuidad de la vida humana.

<sup>15</sup> Un *apocalipticismo* que para Zencey “satisface el deseo de escapar al flujo del tiempo real y ordinario, de fijar el flujo de la historia en un único momento de importancia aplastante”.

Así pues, ¡el peligro de colapso del sistema vital no es en absoluto la única razón para oponerse a la destrucción de las selvas tropicales! (Daly & Cobb, 1989: 387).

Otra razón de la rápida difusión del ambientalismo es el hecho de que varios de sus temas y formas organizativas le permiten acercarse a un problema cada vez más candente, generado en el seno del llamado “nuevo orden económico internacional”; un orden que promueve una intensa transnacionalización económica, política y cultural que amenaza una noción cara a los Estados nación: la de soberanía. A pesar de que es posible debatir si los Estados nación (una forma de organización sociopolítica que se desarrolló en gran medida a partir del siglo XIX) sobrevivirán a un mundo cada vez más transnacionalizado, siguen funcionando en los escenarios políticos y económicos actuales. Por un lado, cuando los Estados nación entran en guerra, la soberanía y la ideología correlativa del nacionalismo han proporcionado históricamente una poderosa legitimación para la pérdida de vidas humanas. Por otro lado, en el mundo contemporáneo, los Estados nación siguen muy interesados en la industrialización y el uso intensivo de los recursos naturales, para reforzar sus poderes en un contexto competitivo dominado por los actores transnacionales. Por tanto, existe una contradicción, derivada de la creciente internacionalización de la economía política mundial, entre el concepto de soberanía y el de medio ambiente global:

La soberanía absoluta ya no es un concepto aplicable. Así como la economía mundial está cada vez más integrada, también lo están los ciclos ecológicos de las distintas regiones e incluso continentes. Sin una “diplomacia medioambiental” eficaz que dé lugar a acuerdos bilaterales o multilaterales para limitar o prohibir la producción de sustancias perjudiciales para la integridad del medio ambiente, cada país quedará a merced de las acciones de los demás. Así pues, la seguridad medioambiental depende fundamentalmente de la coordinación y la cooperación transnacionales (Pianta & Renner, 1989: 16).

Con estas últimas consideraciones en mente, no sorprende ver una incipiente tendencia entre los segmentos conservadores de las élites políticas y administrativas a construir –con el fin del *peligro rojo*– otro fantasma, el *peligro verde*. En 1990, por ejemplo, un documento de la Escuela Superior de Guerra de Brasil se refería al ambientalismo como una amenaza a la soberanía nacional. Por supuesto, la cuestión es compleja. La injerencia de la opinión pública o de organizaciones internacionales –especialmente en un contexto en el que persisten evidentes relaciones de desigualdad– en los asuntos de un Estado nación casi nunca es bienvenida. Por otra parte, las presiones ambientalistas han provocado una retracción del flujo de capitales hacia Brasil, especialmente hacia su sector eléctrico, que prevé, a medio plazo, explotar el potencial hidroeléctrico de la Amazonia. Las consecuencias de la construcción de grandes presas con sus inmensos embalses han demostrado ser perjudiciales tanto para el medio ambiente como para las poblaciones locales, beneficiando generalmente a grandes conglomerados políticos y económicos. Al mismo tiempo, con los rápidos avances de la biotecnología y la ingeniería genética, no está claro cuáles serían las repercusiones políticas y económicas de las propuestas que combinan el conocimiento científico, la manipulación tecnológica del material genético y las patentes, otorgando a los titulares de estas últimas derechos a nichos monopolísticos en el mercado internacional. Se trata, sin duda, de una cuestión crucial para un país como Brasil, que posee la mayor biodiversidad del planeta, gran parte de ella en la Amazonia.

Pero la complejidad de la cuestión nos obliga a un doble movimiento. En primer lugar, evitar una posición que se asemeje a un enfoque colonialista o dependiente de la cuestión de la soberanía. Aquí hay que reconocer que, en un mundo en el que prevalecen claramente las relaciones jerárquicas entre los distintos Estados-nación, cuestiones como la que nos ocupa pueden ser manipuladas para reproducir y ampliar la desigualdad en el sistema. Al mismo tiempo, es necesario reconocer que la realidad medioambiental no conoce fronteras, creando efectivamente fenómenos transnacionales. ¿Cómo abordar cuestiones como la lluvia ácida, el agujero de la capa de ozono o los accidentes nucleares, por ejemplo, si no es en el marco de la cooperación internacional? De este modo, es tan legítimo que las élites políticas del hemisferio norte propongan una acción inmediata contra la destrucción de los bosques tropicales como que las élites políticas del hemisferio sur propongan una

acción inmediata contra, por ejemplo, el complejo militar-industrial que alimenta constantemente guerras y tiene en sus manos el mayor peligro para el futuro del planeta: el arsenal nuclear.

### **Desarrollo sustentable: el núcleo duro de la reforma utópica medioambiental**

Con su creciente influencia en la escena institucional –véase, por ejemplo, la enorme movilización de recursos humanos y económicos para la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo, celebrada en Río de Janeiro en 1992–, el ambientalismo ha necesitado un término medio, pasando del punto extremo del espectro que argumenta (o solía argumentar) en términos de crecimiento cero o no crecimiento, a una noción que aún no está totalmente construida, ni es plenamente operativa: el desarrollo sustentable. Este es el núcleo duro en torno al cual se intenta situar el ambientalismo cada vez con más fuerza dentro del campo más amplio de las luchas económicas, ideológicas y políticas en torno al desarrollo. Según un activo defensor del ambientalismo estadounidense, en 1989, el “desarrollo sustentable” no era más que otro *slogan* “recitado como un *mantra* en Washington y en los círculos multilaterales de desarrollo” (Rich, 1989). Sin embargo, ya se está intentando construir una categoría con una diferenciación interna que le permita convertirse en el principio organizador de una nueva visión del desarrollo.<sup>16</sup> De hecho, el desarrollo sustentable tomó forma e impulso en el marco de los debates multilaterales y se extendió rápidamente a otros segmentos vinculados a las ideologías ambientalistas. Al involucrarse con la propia noción de desarrollo –una noción que, como señaló Marshall Berman (1987), implica una dialéctica de destrucción/construcción–, el ambientalismo ha ganado un importante espacio institucional, pero puede perder –¿o ha perdido ya?– su carácter de visión alternativa radical.

Antes de continuar por esta línea argumental, cabe plantear la cuestión de qué es el desarrollo sostenido. Hay que partir del hecho de que se trata de un concepto en elaboración, ya que no empezó a circular realmente como idea hasta finales de los años ochenta, sobre todo cuando se presentó ante la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, el 31 de diciembre de 1987, el Informe Nuestro Futuro Común, o Informe Brundtland, de la Comisión Mundial de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo de las Naciones Unidas. El énfasis en el “desarrollo sustentable” de este documento popularizó la expresión, a pesar de que no avanzó demasiado en la sistematización conceptual. La búsqueda de una definición de lo que sería este tipo de desarrollo, además de estar marcada por la propia polisemia de la noción de desarrollo, que permite su apropiación selectiva por segmentos con orientaciones político-ideológicas diversas, ha sido llevada a cabo más por los interesados en este ámbito político que por los especialistas académicos en el desarrollo. ONGs, organismos gubernamentales, agencias multilaterales y empresarios se mueven activamente en este campo.

Podría argumentarse que propuestas como el *etnodesarrollo* (por ejemplo, Stavenhagen, 1985) y, sobre todo, el *ecodesarrollo*, tal como se expresa en las obras de autores como Sachs (1986), son más elaboradas. Aunque evidentemente forman parte de la genealogía que informa, en mayor o menor medida, la noción de *desarrollo sustentable*, han quedado subsumidas en ésta o han tendido a ser ignoradas en el debate político actual en términos más amplios.<sup>17</sup> Las relaciones entre ecologistas e indigenistas, aunque cada vez más situadas bajo el mismo paraguas, también forman un campo político diferenciado. Evidentemente, el entendimiento común de que las poblaciones indígenas tienen un conocimiento armonioso y no destructivo de la naturaleza otorga un gran peso a la elección del indio genérico como modelo.

16 El trabajo más avanzado en este sentido es el del economista David Pearce y sus colaboradores (Pearce et al., 1989). El libro de Daly & Cobb (1989) también apunta en esta dirección. El Departamento de Medio Ambiente del Banco Mundial ha elaborado varios trabajos desde una perspectiva similar (véanse, por ejemplo, Dixon & Fallon, 1989; Constanza et al., 1990).

17 Sobre el *etnodesarrollo*, véanse también Davis (1988), UNESCO (1981) y el libro *Autodesarrollo Indígena en las Américas* (IWGIA, 1989), donde *etnodesarrollo* ha sido sustituido por “autodesarrollo indígena”, aparentemente porque a los participantes indígenas del simposio organizado por el Grupo Internacional de Trabajo sobre Asuntos Indígenas “no les gustaba el concepto ‘etnodesarrollo’, y preferían ver cualquier desarrollo en forma de auto-determinación” (IWGIA, 1989: 10).

Aparentemente, el nivel relativamente bajo de debate académico sobre la *sustentabilidad* refleja una cautela ante las modas a menudo asociadas a la construcción de utopías, o bien la propia novedad del tema (al menos en la intensidad con que se presenta en la actualidad). Aunque desde hace algunos años se viene planteando el carácter reformista de las ideologías ambientalistas (véase, por ejemplo, Cardoso, 1981), no es frecuente encontrar un teórico del desarrollo que se haya dedicado a dialogar frontalmente con la definición de sostenibilidad. Osvaldo Sunkel (1990), por ejemplo, cuando lo hace, parece ceñirse a la tautología insinuada en el propio término, es decir, asegurar básicamente la continuidad de la base natural de la producción económica:

...reinvertir en el medio ambiente natural para garantizar su conservación, recuperación, su mejor conocimiento, expansión y reposición es una condición esencial para garantizar la sustentabilidad del desarrollo. Para ello se necesitan recursos humanos, técnicos, financieros, institucionales y legales. Todo ello requiere obtener fondos adicionales que permitan movilizar estos recursos y aplicarlos al cuidado del medio ambiente, que es capital y patrimonio ambiental de la sociedad. Para ello, es necesario revalorizar las prioridades con las que se asignan los recursos económicos, una revalorización que privilegie el cuidado del medio ambiente por encima de otras prioridades (Sunkel, 1990: 52).

Sunkel ha sido un autor influyente en las discusiones latinoamericanas sobre el desarrollo, especialmente durante el florecimiento de las interpretaciones cepalina y *dependentista*, a menudo categorizadas respectivamente como desarrollistas y críticas de izquierda (Blomstrom & Hettne, 1988). Es curioso que la búsqueda de una definición de desarrollo sustentable se acerque tanto a una perspectiva armoniosa y no conflictiva de los procesos económicos, políticos y sociales implicados en el drama desarrollista. De hecho, es más bien en esta dirección en la que los científicos sociales han criticado justificadamente el ambientalismo en general y la idea de desarrollo sustentable en particular. Quizá las facetas más inmediatamente criticables se refieran a un ámbito clásico en el análisis del desarrollo y la expansión de los sistemas económicos: la desigual distribución del poder político y económico entre las clases, segmentos y poblaciones que participan en el drama del desarrollo.

La economía política que subyace a la discusión sobre la sustentabilidad de un nuevo modelo de desarrollo es –deliberadamente o no, estratégicamente o no– poco elaborada, por no decir ingenua u omisa. Los últimos párrafos de un documento informativo sobre el escenario probable de una “sociedad sustentable” en el año 2030 contienen pasajes como el siguiente:

(...) A medida que la acumulación de riqueza personal y nacional deje de ser un objetivo, la brecha entre los que tienen y los que no, se irá cerrando gradualmente, eliminando muchas tensiones sociales. Las diferencias ideológicas también desaparecerán gradualmente a medida que las naciones adopten la sustentabilidad como causa común (...). Con las tareas cooperativas que implica restaurar la Tierra de tantas maneras y tan ampliamente, la idea de hacer la guerra puede volverse un anacronismo (Brown, Flavin & Postel, 1990: 238).<sup>18</sup>

No se trata de no aceptar los aspectos reformistas de las propuestas, sino de no desconocer las contradicciones fundamentales del universo construido por la expansión capitalista. Una de ellas, importante sobre todo para países como Brasil y el llamado Tercer Mundo, es que uno de los elementos centrales del nuevo modelo sería el respeto a las categorías culturales locales tomadas, no como un impedimento al crecimiento económico, sino como parte central de su sustentabilidad. La “Declaración de Manila sobre Participación Popular y Desarrollo Sustentable” (1990) ofrece un buen ejemplo.<sup>19</sup> En ella, al tiempo que se critica el modelo imperante, se hace un enfático llamamiento a un modelo de desarrollo alternativo, basado en la comunidad y

<sup>18</sup> El libro *Salve o planeta. Qualidade de vida* (1990), del World Watch Institute, es el séptimo volumen de una serie que ha sido ampliamente consumida en todo el mundo, incluso en más de 800 cursos en colegios y universidades de Estados Unidos. Además de en portugués, se ha publicado en español, árabe, chino, japonés, indonesio, alemán, italiano, polaco, francés, ruso e inglés, y próximamente se publicará en noruego, sueco, neerlandés, húngaro y coreano.

<sup>19</sup> Esta declaración fue el resultado de una reunión de 31 asociaciones de dirigentes de África, el Sudeste Asiático, Asia Meridional, el Pacífico Sur, América Latina, el Caribe, América del Norte y Europa, celebrada en Manila, Filipinas, del 6 al 10 de junio de 1989 (Declaración de Manila, 1990: 45).

(...) entendido como un proceso de cambio económico, político y social que no tiene por qué implicar necesariamente crecimiento. Las comunidades humanas sustentables sólo pueden lograrse mediante un desarrollo centrado en las personas ... [que] pretende devolver el control sobre los recursos a las personas y sus comunidades, para que los utilicen para satisfacer sus propias necesidades (Declaración de Manila, 1990:46).

Entre otras cosas, se menciona que este tipo de desarrollo se “construye sobre los valores y la cultura del pueblo” (1990). Sin duda, se trata de una aspiración legítima e importante, pero que transita por la fina y –en este contexto– paradójica línea de aceptar el *desarrollo* como una categoría universal. En cualquier caso, el dilema político aquí es central y difícil de resolver para quienes se sitúan críticamente fuera del centro del sistema mundial:

Si el desarrollo se asocia a un movimiento histórico que comenzó a desarrollarse en Europa hace siglos, imponiendo sus concepciones y necesidades en todas partes, ¿estamos condenados a un ‘eterno retorno’ a preguntas como qué tipo de desarrollo queremos? ¿Queremos algún tipo de desarrollo? (Ribeiro, 1990: 293).

Sin querer caer en un sociologismo exacerbado, pero considerando el carácter a menudo abrumador y el funcionamiento “desigual y combinado” del desarrollo, ¿es posible optar efectivamente por términos localistas radicales? El pragmatismo histórico nos llevaría a creer que no. La historia de la expansión del sistema político-económico capitalista –y los antropólogos lo saben mejor que nadie–, es sinónimo de desconsideración por las formas de relaciones sociales, económicas, políticas y culturales de las poblaciones autóctonas. Además, la economía de mercado, especialmente en un mundo cada vez más integrado transnacionalmente, hace altamente problemáticas, si no imposibles, pretensiones autárquicas que no estén en sintonía con algún nicho diferencial de integración con la economía global (Harvey, 1989). La posibilidad de autonomía, en cualquier caso, hace necesario, como mínimo, volver a una vieja discusión en la teoría del desarrollo sobre el grado y las formas de integración en un sistema político-económico más amplio.<sup>20</sup>

La propia idea básica de un crecimiento económico compatible con la preservación de la naturaleza es susceptible de duras críticas, dada la realidad de la historia económica mundial. Es más, el desarrollo sustentable presupone una fe en la racionalidad de agentes económicos articulados en rigurosas acciones de planificación (ideología central del modelo de desarrollo y de las formas transnacionales de expansión del capitalismo vigentes) que concilien intereses tan diversos como el afán de lucro del empresario, la lógica del mercado, la preservación de la naturaleza y, quién sabe, hasta la justicia social, ya que la pobreza es una de las mayores causas de degradación ambiental. Si la explotación de un segmento social por otro no es problematizada de modo frontal, se resuelve aparentemente como un subproducto más de la instauración de un modelo racional, adaptado a las realidades de nuestro tiempo, especialmente en lo que se refiere al control de la eficacia del proceso productivo y del crecimiento poblacional. ¿No es debido a las dificultades inherentes a la conciliación de un abanico tan amplio de contradicciones, sin una teoría social que les dé sentido, por lo que la idea de desarrollo sustentable ha sido recibida a menudo como una contradicción por los científicos sociales? (véase, por ejemplo, Santos, 1991). Isabel C. M. Carvalho (1991) afirma que

(...) para comprender mejor de dónde procede y a quién atiende el concepto de desarrollo sustentable, debemos examinar su genealogía, reconstituyendo las relaciones de poder que lo produjeron. Su matriz es el proyecto desarrollista liberal aplicado al medio ambiente. Desde la Conferencia de Estocolmo de 1972, quedó claro que la preocupación de las organizaciones internacionales en relación con el medio ambiente era elaborar una estrategia de gestión de ese medio ambiente, a escala mundial, que garantizara su preservación dentro de un proyecto desarrollista. Desde esta perspectiva productivista, lo que realmente se quería preservar era un modelo de acumulación de riqueza en el que el patrimonio natural se convertía en una mercancía. La apelación a la humanidad

20 También plantea interesantes cuestiones sobre el lugar y la eficacia de la resistencia, indígena y popular, a la destrucción de sus repertorios culturales.

y al bienestar de los pueblos se utilizó como coartada, siempre citada junto a los objetivos de crecimiento económico, prestando una preocupación humanista a intenciones no tan nobles (Carvalho, 1991: 11).

Sin duda, el Informe Brundtland y otros documentos sobre el desarrollo sustentable, lejos de impugnar el crecimiento económico, lo presentan como una solución, al tiempo que enarbolan la bandera de un “futuro común” mejor si se sigue este camino:<sup>21</sup>

El desarrollo sustentable se define como aquel que ‘satisface las necesidades del presente sin comprometer la capacidad de las *generaciones futuras para satisfacer las suyas*’ (p. 9); ‘es un proceso de cambio en el que la explotación de los recursos, la orientación de las inversiones, la dirección del desarrollo tecnológico y el cambio institucional están en consonancia con las necesidades actuales y futuras’ (p. 10); ‘es un desarrollo que mantiene las *opciones futuras posibles*’ (p. 46); ‘es una corrección, una reanudación del crecimiento alterando la calidad del desarrollo’ (p. 53); ‘es un cambio en el tenor del crecimiento, para hacerlo menos intensivo en materias primas y más equitativo en su impacto’ (p.56) (Santos, 1991:3).<sup>22</sup>

El desarrollo sustentable pretende satisfacer las necesidades y aspiraciones del presente sin poner en peligro la posibilidad de satisfacerlas *en el futuro*. Lejos de querer que cese el crecimiento económico, reconoce que los problemas ligados a la pobreza y al subdesarrollo sólo pueden resolverse si hay una nueva era de crecimiento en la que los países en desarrollo desempeñen un papel importante y obtengan grandes beneficios (p.44) (Carvalho, 1991: 12).

En esencia, el desarrollo sustentable es un proceso de transformación en el que la explotación de los recursos, la dirección de las inversiones, la orientación del desarrollo tecnológico y el cambio institucional se armonizan y refuerzan el *potencial, presente y futuro*, para satisfacer las necesidades y aspiraciones humanas (p. 49) (Carvalho, 1991: 12).

El desarrollo sustentable exige que se satisfagan las necesidades básicas de todos y que se les den oportunidades para realizar sus aspiraciones a una vida mejor. (...) Una gran actividad productiva puede coexistir con una pobreza generalizada, y esto supone un riesgo para el medio ambiente. Por eso el desarrollo sostenible exige que las sociedades satisfagan las necesidades humanas tanto aumentando el potencial de producción como garantizando que todos tengan las mismas oportunidades de vivir una vida mejor (p. 46) (...). La valoración global de la Comisión es que la economía internacional debe acelerar el crecimiento mundial respetando las limitaciones ecológicas (p. 97) (Carvalho, 1991).

De hecho, tratándose de un proceso en curso en el que la amplitud de su espectro ideológico, así como la variabilidad y el conflicto de interpretaciones, están aún sujetos a oscilaciones y apropiaciones múltiples, la discusión sobre el desarrollo sustentable apunta también a un esfuerzo por “re-moralizar” el capital, fundamentalmente incorporando a sus cálculos la preocupación por las generaciones futuras, el “concepto de equidad intergeneracional, de carácter profundamente moral” (Brown, Flavin & Postel, 1990: 218).<sup>23</sup> Igualmente importantes son las propuestas de reformas y problematizaciones relativas al fin de la “obsolescencia programada”, el uso eficiente de los recursos energéticos, de los recursos renovables y no renovables, el uso de fuentes de energía alternativas como la solar y la eólica, el reciclaje de productos y el control de los residuos, en

21 Las citas del Informe “Nuestro Futuro Común” (1987), o Informe Brundtland, están tomadas de Carvalho (1991) y Santos (1991). También se utilizan las definiciones que figuran en la Versión Preliminar de los “Subsidios Técnicos para la Elaboración del Informe Nacional de Brasil a la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo” (CIMA, 1991).

22 Las citas de Santos y Carvalho proceden de CMMAD (1988). El énfasis en itálica me pertenece.

23 Quisiera dar las gracias a Luís Eduardo Soares y Rubem César Fernandes por llamar la atención sobre este importante aspecto.

la producción y el consumo, la aparición de una nueva ética del consumo, la conversión del gasto en la carrera armamentística en gastos de alcance social (véase, por ejemplo, Brown, Flavin & Postel 1990). En este sentido, quizá uno de los esfuerzos más interesantes que se están realizando es el de cambiar los criterios contables del crecimiento, el progreso y la riqueza, modificando los indicadores utilizados, especialmente los vinculados al cálculo macro del desarrollo, el Producto Nacional Bruto (PNB):

... los indicadores económicos son defectuosos en un aspecto fundamental: no distinguen entre el uso de los recursos que sostienen el progreso y el de los recursos que lo socavan. (...) El PNB incluye la depreciación de la maquinaria y el equipo, pero no tiene en cuenta la depreciación del capital natural, que incluye recursos no renovables, como el petróleo, y recursos renovables como los bosques (Brown, 1990: 21).

[El cálculo del PNB de un país como Indonesia que incorporara] el “agotamiento del capital natural”, considerando únicamente el consumo de petróleo, la erosión del suelo y la deforestación ... [mostraría] que la tasa de crecimiento económico de Indonesia entre 1971 y 1984, estimada inicialmente en un 7%, fue en realidad sólo del 4%». El sistema convencional no sólo sobreestima a veces el progreso, sino que también puede indicar que se está progresando cuando en realidad se está retrocediendo (Brown, 1990: 21).

Hazel Henderson (1990) llama la atención sobre el hecho de que tanto el PNB como otras estadísticas per cápita para medir el crecimiento económico se elaboraron en la Segunda Guerra Mundial (véase la nota al pie nº6), convirtiéndose en la *lingua franca* que define el debate mundial sobre el desarrollo económico; y son utilizadas preferentemente por los operadores de divisas y los especuladores de los mercados de capitales (Henderson, 1990: 70). Admitiendo que es imposible encontrar “algoritmos de desarrollo que se adapten a todos los países, ya que ese fue el error al intentar extender la conformidad industrial a todo el planeta en nombre del ‘crecimiento económico’” (1990: 72), Henderson propone la utilización de estadísticas, algunas ya fácilmente disponibles, sobre un amplio conjunto de aspectos del progreso social de múltiples dimensiones, para orientar la contabilidad y la planificación gubernamentales: indicadores de inversión en recursos humanos; habilidades humanas y productividad; comparaciones entre presupuestos civiles y militares; existencias de capital de infraestructuras desplegadas menos depreciación; existencias de capital de recursos naturales, parques, diversidad genética de especies, etc.; calidad medioambiental; eficiencia energética; estadísticas de renta per cápita reformuladas para mostrar las distancias entre ricos y pobres; equivalentes de paridad de poder adquisitivo (Henderson, 1990: 73-74).<sup>24</sup>

El movimiento ambientalista brasileño, en su vertiente más a la izquierda, que incluye movimientos sociales populares y de defensa de minorías étnicas, ha intentado asociar los problemas ambientales a la realidad social.<sup>25</sup> Sin entrar en la polémica sobre el estatuto del documento preliminar del gobierno brasileño para la

24 No se puede ignorar que, en muchos aspectos, este debate es similar a las críticas que la sociología del desarrollo lanzó, en los años 1960s y 1970s, contra el economicismo reduccionista que oculta las diferencias sociales de los principales indicadores de desarrollo, como la renta per cápita.

25 La influencia del llamado socioambientalismo en Brasil es evidente. En el V Encuentro del Foro de ONGs Brasileñas, que tuvo lugar entre el 31 de mayo y el 2 de junio de 1991 como preparación para la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo, se creó la nueva Coordinación Nacional del Foro, que entonces contaba con casi mil miembros. Era la siguiente: “ONGs - SOS Mata Atlántica; CEDI - Centro Ecueménico de Documentación e Información; FASE Nacional - Federación de Entidades de Asistencia y Educación Social; AS-PTA - Proyectos de Asesoría y Servicios en Agricultura Alternativa; IBASE - Instituto Brasileño de Análisis Sociales y Económicos; ISER - Instituto Superior de Estudios de la Religión. MOVIMIENTOS SINDICALES: Central Única de los Trabajadores - CUT Nacional; CNS-Consejo Nacional de los Caucheros; Movimiento de Mujeres; Movimiento Negro; Movimiento de Jóvenes; Movimiento Indígena; CRAB-Comisión Nacional de Afectados por Represas; FAMERJ-Federación de Asociaciones de Residentes de Río de Janeiro. REPRESENTACIÓN REGIONAL: en el sur, UPAN (RS), Unión Protectora del Ambiente Natural, Fórum Estadual (SC); en el norte, Fórum Permanente de Debates de la Amazônia (AM); en el nordeste, SEAN-Secretaría de Entidades Ambientalistas del Nordeste, CAATINGA (Pe), Fórum Estadual (Ba), Fórum Rio Parnaíba (Pi); en el sudeste, Fórum de Minas (MG), Apedema (SP), Fórum Rio (RJ), Apedema (RJ); en el centro-oeste, Viva Alternativa (DF)” (INESC, 1991: 8).



Conferencia del '92 (CIMA, 1991), creo que pasajes como los que siguen reflejan tanto las posiciones del Informe Brundtland como las discusiones en el ámbito del ambientalismo brasileño<sup>26</sup> :

Ya no tiene sentido oponer medio ambiente y desarrollo, porque el primero no es más que el resultado del segundo. Los problemas de la preservación del medio ambiente son los del desarrollo, los problemas de un desarrollo desigual para las sociedades humanas y perjudicial para los sistemas naturales (...) Retomar la senda del desarrollo significa fortalecer la democracia pero, al mismo tiempo, la necesidad de estabilizar la economía, incorporarla a las corrientes del intercambio tecnológico mundial, implantar patrones de consumo más austeros y mejorar la distribución de la renta. Por si esto no fuera ya un desafío sin precedentes para la región [América Latina, GLR] y para Brasil, existe consenso en que cualquier alternativa de desarrollo, si quiere perdurar en el tiempo, tendrá que ser ambiental y socialmente sustentable, es decir, tendrá que priorizar las necesidades básicas de las generaciones actuales y futuras, así como garantizar la renovación de los stocks actuales de recursos (1991: 3-4).

No hay que perder de vista, por tanto, que los problemas medioambientales, además de constituir desafíos tecnológicos o financieros, se ven agravados por situaciones de desigualdad social y de desigualdad en la distribución del poder dentro de los países y entre ellos (1991: 4).

(...) existe el consenso de que “pobreza” y “degradación medioambiental” están estrechamente relacionadas. Sin duda, este consenso tiende a desaparecer cuando salimos del plano del discurso e intentamos precisar empíricamente las relaciones causales entre ambos procesos. Si bien son muchos los que sostienen que la degradación del medio ambiente provoca y agrava las situaciones de pobreza, hay otros tantos que consideran que la pobreza socioeconómica es la principal responsable del mal uso de los recursos naturales y del consiguiente empobrecimiento del medio físico y humano (...) Hay que subrayar que ha prevalecido una relación *circular* entre la pobreza y la degradación del medio ambiente. De hecho, el círculo vicioso de la degradación social y ambiental se establece no como resultado de procesos absolutamente independientes, ni causales entre sí, sino sobre la base de un *estilo de desarrollo* que rige en última instancia las pautas de interacción entre los seres humanos, así como entre éstos y la naturaleza (1991: 5).

El análisis precedente obliga a sustituir los enfoques ingenuos y exclusivamente “conservacionistas” de la relación entre pobreza y sustentabilidad ambiental, por el reconocimiento de que los problemas ecológicos revelan disfunciones sociales y políticas (los patrones de relación entre los seres humanos y la forma en que se organiza la sociedad en su conjunto), así como distorsiones estructurales en el funcionamiento de la economía (los patrones de consumo de la sociedad y la forma en que ésta se organiza para satisfacerlos). Como ya se ha señalado, Brasil se enfrenta no sólo a situaciones de degradación ambiental asociadas al “exceso” de desarrollo (esto es, contaminación y despilfarro de recursos), sino también a situaciones caracterizadas por condiciones de “ausencia” de desarrollo, o de desarrollo deficiente (es decir, pobreza y desigualdad socioeconómica). Un enfoque eco-político o ecosocial de este tipo se basa en la idea de que el origen de los problemas ambientales no está en la complementariedad, sino en la oposición histórica entre los seres humanos y la naturaleza. En situaciones de extrema pobreza, esto equivale a decir que el ser humano empobrecido, marginado o excluido de la sociedad y de la economía nacional, no tiene ningún compromiso para evitar la degradación del medio ambiente, mientras la sociedad no consiga evitar su propia degradación como persona. En resumen, el hombre sólo protegerá la naturaleza en la medida en que él esté protegido. Por lo tanto, un aspecto central del debate sobre las posibilidades del desarrollo sustentable es concebir formas de diálogo social que permitan resolver el conflicto hombre-naturaleza en el seno de cada sociedad nacional, así como entre estas sociedades y las sociedades del mundo desarrollado (1991: 6).

26 La polémica en torno a este documento preliminar, encargado a unos 80 especialistas en medio ambiente y temas afines, gira entorno a su representatividad. La profusión de autores confiere a estos “Subsidios Técnicos” un carácter desigual, tanto en lo técnico como en lo ideológico, que a menudo da la impresión de estar ante una colcha de retazos. Cabe destacar que varios de los autores son académicos de gran prestigio, algunos con un importante liderazgo, tanto en círculos académicos como de ONGs.

En realidad, incluso las discusiones más sofisticadas sobre medio ambiente/desarrollo sustentable, como las anteriores, que pretenden hacer una sociología de esta relación, apuntan más que a la delineación de un concepto, a una posición programática, a un metarrelato con características utópicas, que establezca un campo discursivo común, posibilitando alianzas entre ambientalistas y agentes sociales interesados en el crecimiento económico. En un momento de crisis de los grandes metarrelatos, utopías e ideologías relacionadas con la Ilustración, el hecho de remitirse a un metarrelato utópico y totalizador dota al ambientalismo en general de una gran eficacia y le permite convertirse en un campo de negociación política.<sup>27</sup> Dicho de otro modo, y reforzando, la crisis de los metarrelatos de la modernidad, con sus categorías interpretativas y normativas trascendentales, abre espacio para el despliegue del ambientalismo como metarrelato de la contemporaneidad que rescata los sueños de la Ilustración, de la razón práctica, de la racionalidad vía la adecuación de los medios a los fines últimos (la planificación y las tecnologías bien articuladas producen desarrollo sustentable) y los funde, en mayor o menor grado en su variabilidad de formulaciones, con una razón contemplativa, histórica, romántica, que apela a la naturaleza como modelo de armonía y posibilidad utópica de supervivencia. En definitiva, considero el desarrollo sustentable como la noción central que articula y neutraliza intereses divergentes dentro del campo político (in)formado por el gran metarrelato ambientalista utópico. Por esta razón, es importante examinar algunas de las formulaciones de empresarios capitalistas sobre el tema.

### **Desarrollo sustentable, su recepción en el mundo empresarial**

En un trabajo anterior (Ribeiro, 1990) subrayé que el ambientalismo, además de ser una ideología/utopía en creciente expansión y de haber convertido palabras como ecología en obligatorias en el léxico de planificadores y políticos, se estaba traduciendo en impactos económicos tangibles. El ejemplo más evidente, a nivel macroeconómico, siguen siendo las medidas adoptadas contra países como Brasil que, tras el eficaz *lobby* del ambientalismo internacional ante el Congreso de los Estados Unidos y organismos multilaterales, vio cómo se cancelaban importantes préstamos del Banco Mundial para su sector eléctrico debido a los problemas medioambientales causados por los enormes proyectos hidroeléctricos previstos en la cuenca del Amazonas. De hecho, el flujo de capital a escala mundial está ahora visiblemente influido y regulado por las acciones de los organismos multilaterales, que han sido presionados eficazmente por los activistas ambientales estadounidenses y europeos (Aufderheide & Rich, 1988). En consecuencia, el ambientalismo se ha convertido en una cuestión importante a tener en cuenta en la planificación del desarrollo a escala mundial.

A continuación, exploraré la idea de que es cada vez mayor la influencia del ambientalismo, no sólo a un nivel más macro. En este apartado, seguiré en la línea de considerar la discusión sobre el desarrollo sustentable como indicativa del establecimiento de un campo de negociación, un intento de encontrar un terreno común entre los ambientalistas, los nuevos interlocutores en este escenario, y los agentes sociales que son (¿o eran?) considerados los mayores degradadores de la naturaleza, los empresarios, especialmente los vinculados a la industria, motor del modelo de expansión y crecimiento de la economía capitalista. Nos basaremos en documentos y artículos expresivos de este esfuerzo de construcción e intentos de definiciones conceptuales (Lorentzen, 1991; Schmidheiny, 1991; Fortes, 1991).

27 “Por metarrelatos entendemos las categorías trascendentales que la modernidad ha forjado para interpretar y regular la realidad. Estas categorías obedecen al proyecto Ilustrado y tienen la función de integrar, bajo una dirección articulada, el proceso de acumulación de conocimientos, el desarrollo de las fuerzas productivas y la organización sociopolítica. Así, categorías como la progresión de la razón, la emancipación del hombre, el autoconocimiento progresivo o la autonomía de la voluntad, se desarrollaron para dar un significado unificado a una amplia gama de fenómenos políticos, procesos sociales y manifestaciones culturales. Todos estos metarrelatos remiten, a su vez, a una glorificación de la idea de progreso, es decir, a la convicción de que la historia avanza en una dirección determinada en la que el futuro es, por definición, una superación del presente. Los metarrelatos son, en definitiva, categorías que hacen inteligible, racional y previsible la realidad (...) En esto, tanto el liberalismo clásico como el marxismo se inspiran en una matriz común de la Ilustración, invocando principios universales que durante mucho tiempo han desplegado una enorme capacidad movilizadora” (Hopenhayn, 1988: 61-62).

En primer lugar, es interesante señalar la iniciativa de las élites empresariales internacionales de elaborar documentos programáticos como la *Business Charter for Sustainable Development* (Carta de Principios para el Desarrollo Sustentable), elaborada en el marco de la Cámara de Comercio Internacional y que “contiene 16 principios sobre la gestión medioambiental en la industria” (Lorentzen, 1991: 6). Igualmente importante fue la creación del *Business Council for Sustainable Development* (Consejo Empresarial para el Desarrollo Sustentable), formado por 50 líderes empresariales de varias naciones y destinado a asesorar al Secretario General de la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo, UNCED '92 (Lorentzen, 1991:6; Fortes, 1991:5).

¿Cómo combinar crecimiento y conservación? Para responder a esta pregunta, formulada por él mismo, Stephan Schmidheiny, Consejero Principal para el Comercio y la Industria del Secretario General de la UNCED '92 y presidente del Consejo Empresarial antes mencionado, en un documento presentado en el “Seminario sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo” de la Confederación Nacional de Comercio y la Confederación Nacional de Industria, celebrado en Río de Janeiro en marzo de 1991, se refiere expresamente al hecho de que el desarrollo sostenible es el resultado de la confrontación/aprendizaje mutuo entre empresarios y ecologistas:

Hasta hace unos años, la protección del medio ambiente era básicamente un concepto defensivo... [que]... estaba destinado a chocar con la cultura empresarial basada en los incentivos y emprendimientos. Es lógico que los ambientalistas y la industria se convirtieran en adversarios. Recientemente, sin embargo, cada grupo ha empezado a aprender del otro. (...) El proceso de aprendizaje mutuo emprendido por ambientalistas y empresarios está conduciendo a una comprensión muy importante de la situación ecológica del planeta. El resultado ha sido lo que considero el mayor avance hasta la fecha en la interacción entre el hombre y la naturaleza: el concepto de Desarrollo Sustentable. Este concepto puede dar continuidad al desarrollo económico y social, para satisfacer las necesidades de quienes viven hoy, sin comprometer la capacidad de las generaciones futuras para satisfacer sus propias necesidades (Schmidheiny, 1991: 8-9).

Stephan Schmidheiny es un líder reconocido entre los empresarios y ejecutivos que participan en este campo de debates. Tanto Erling Lorentzen, Presidente del Consejo de Administración de Aracruz Celulose S.A., como Márcio Fortes –el primero, miembro del Consejo Empresarial para el Desarrollo Sostenible, y el segundo, su coordinador ejecutivo en Brasil– mencionan a Schmidheiny en sus artículos, aquí citados (Lorentzen, 1991; Fortes, 1991).<sup>28</sup> Este empresario suizo ha intentado desarrollar una lectura “positiva” del ambientalismo que incorpore elementos centrales del mundo empresarial como el crecimiento, el mercado, los costos y los beneficios traducibles en contabilidad:

(...) la sociedad aún está lejos de ser sustentable, en gran parte porque... el valor del medio ambiente aún no se refleja en los precios por los que empresarios y consumidores hacen sus elecciones en el mercado. (...) La verdadera cuestión es cómo pueden los empresarios incluir realmente el valor del medio ambiente en sus operaciones y, a partir de ahí, conservar el mundo natural para las generaciones futuras (Schmidheiny, 1991: 9).

Desde una perspectiva empresarial, el desarrollo sostenible tiene cuatro implicaciones básicas: 1 - Un cambio hacia una economía de oportunidades que facilite el acceso de las empresas a los mercados y a la capacidad tecnológica. Esto incluye un mejor acceso al crédito, a los mercados y a la tecnología apropiada. 2 - Un cambio hacia una economía de conservación que fomente la inclusión de valores medioambientales en las prácticas empresariales. Esto significa una economía de reciclaje, reutilización y reparación en la que el mundo en desarrollo disfrutaría de muchas ventajas. 3 - Un cambio hacia una economía que promueva la inversión a largo plazo y beneficios reales, en lugar de la maximización de los beneficios a corto plazo. 4 - Un cambio hacia una cultura del ahorro, en lugar de una basada en el consumo inmediato. Esto se aplica por igual a individuos, empresas y gobiernos (Schmidheiny, 1991: 9-10).

28 Eliezer Batista, Presidente de Rio Doce International, es otro de los miembros brasileños de este Consejo (Lorentzen, 1991: 7).

Schmidheiny hace una serie de llamamientos, entre ellos que los gobiernos eviten utilizar una legislación meramente restrictiva, sino que intenten “desarrollar un marco legal que cambie las reglas del mercado para proporcionar incentivos financieros a la actividad industrial sustentable” (1991: 10). Termina con una afirmación que, a pesar de que el tono de su artículo es de cooperación, si se llevara a cabo dentro de las reglas imperantes de las relaciones económicas, congelaría las relaciones de poder entre los Estados-Nación: “Es responsabilidad del Norte liderar el establecimiento de estructuras económicas y nuevas tecnologías que fomenten el desarrollo sustentable a escala mundial. Sólo así podrán países como Brasil evitar los mismos errores que ya hemos cometido en el Norte” (1991: 11).

Márcio Fortes (1991), en un artículo representativo de sus posiciones en un simposio denominado “Desarrollo Sustentable en América Latina: la visión empresarial”, además de elogiar el nuevo modelo de desarrollo emergente y sus ventajas, en términos de legado para el futuro y de correcciones a las evidentes distorsiones de la contemporaneidad, se ocupa de resumir un conjunto de criterios, “desde la perspectiva y la experiencia empresarial”, que “deberían caracterizar... la era del desarrollo sustentable”. Se enumeran y desarrollan en mayor o menor medida los siguientes puntos: utilización moderada de los recursos no renovables, utilización sustentable de los recursos renovables; mejora de la calidad del medio ambiente; conservación de la biodiversidad; búsqueda del equilibrio económico y social. Este último tendría que considerar “la reducción de la pobreza; la mejora de la distribución de la renta entre individuos y regiones; y la aceleración de la industrialización igualadora de los países en desarrollo” (Fortes, 1991).

Las definiciones de desarrollo sustentable de los empresarios son un índice de la recepción de los debates ambientalistas entre los industriales “esclarecidos”, y de cómo éstos intentan armonizar la idea de sustentabilidad con varias de sus preocupaciones, sobre todo con una de las esencias de la noción de desarrollo para los empresarios: el crecimiento. Schmidheiny (1991: 9), por ejemplo, afirma que “el crecimiento es esencial para promover mejoras en la calidad de la existencia humana”. Para Fortes (1991) “sólo la aceleración del desarrollo puede engendrar soluciones a los problemas medioambientales. En definitiva, crecer en el presente garantizando el futuro”. Para Lorentzen (1991),

(...) gran parte de los problemas ambientales que afronta el país sólo se superará mediante un proceso continuo de desarrollo. Pero este proceso sólo tendrá sustentabilidad futura, y sólo garantizará la plena integración de Brasil en la comunidad internacional si se protege adecuadamente el medio ambiente. Para ello, el modelo de desarrollo de Brasil debe basarse en el concepto de desarrollo sustentable. Según este concepto, el desarrollo económico y la protección del medio ambiente no están en conflicto, sino que se complementan, dependiendo el uno del otro. El crecimiento económico crea las condiciones necesarias para la protección del medio ambiente. Por otra parte, la protección del medio ambiente, en equilibrio con otras necesidades humanas, es fundamental para el crecimiento sustentable (1991: 5-6).

Pareciera que al eludir la consideración de la diferencia de poder político y económico entre los “sujetos” y los “objetos” del desarrollo, estas interpretaciones acaban alineándose con un tipo de explicación según la cual los problemas de la miseria y las desigualdades socioeconómicas se resolverán haciendo crecer la torta, lo que se considera un requisito previo para una distribución más equitativa de la riqueza social.

Es más, la inserción de Brasil en el “nuevo orden económico internacional”, por ejemplo, se sitúa prácticamente (o pragmáticamente) en la misma posición dependiente que prevalece. Como señaló Isabel C. M. Carvalho en relación con la noción de desarrollo sustentable del Informe Brundtland, “en esta concepción, permanecen los que financian y los que son financiados. Aunque cambie la calidad del desarrollo, se mantiene la distinción entre quién debe guiar y quién debe ser guiado por el camino de la transición” (Carvalho, 1991: 13). Esta autora también señala el carácter esencialmente reformista de esta “nueva” propuesta:

El desarrollo sustentable reafirma el modelo de desarrollo actual, al tiempo que lo mejora, en la medida en que propone una mejor gestión de sus costes sociales y medioambientales. El hecho de que propugne una sociedad más productiva con un menor coste socioambiental no implica necesariamente una opción por un orden más justo y participativo. Se puede alcanzar un alto nivel de eficiencia, con tecnologías nuevas y 'limpias', e incluso una reducción de los índices de pobreza absoluta, sin alterar significativamente el grado de participación política y la ética de las relaciones sociales (Carvalho, 1991: 13).

## A modo de conclusión

En 1979, ya dentro del período que anunciaba y maduraba la crisis de las formulaciones ideológico-utópicas del siglo XIX que aún seguían vigentes en el siglo actual, Alvin Gouldner pretendía, en el marco de la asunción de la existencia de un gran sujeto transformador de la realidad social, definir la existencia de una nueva clase formada por una alianza de intelectuales y técnicos fundada en la posesión y manipulación del conocimiento.

Esta idea de que los hombres que detentan el saber o la información son los que detentarán o deberán detentar el poder tiene una larga genealogía, desde la República de Platón hasta Lyotard (1990), pasando por Saint-Simon (1965). El filósofo francés Lyotard, para muchos el primer filósofo del postmodernismo, considera lo siguiente:

Sabemos que en las últimas décadas el conocimiento se ha convertido en la principal fuerza de producción, lo que ya ha modificado significativamente la composición de la población activa en los países más desarrollados y constituye el principal cuello de botella para los países en desarrollo. En la era postindustrial y postmoderna, la ciencia conservará y, sin duda, reforzará aún más, su importancia en la disputa por las capacidades productivas de los Estados nacionales. Esta situación es incluso una de las razones para pensar que la brecha con los países en desarrollo seguirá aumentando en el futuro. (...) Bajo la forma de mercancía de información, indispensable para el poder productivo, el conocimiento ya es y será un reto importante, quizás el más importante, en la competencia mundial por el poder (Lyotard, 1990 [1979]: 5).

Uno de los principales autores del debate sobre el posmodernismo, el arquitecto Charles Jencks, va en la misma dirección e incluso ha acuñado un nombre para la nueva clase, el cognitariado (en obvia alusión al término proletariado):

En un mundo posmoderno, el hecho social fundamental es el crecimiento revolucionario de quienes crean y transmiten información o, dicho de otro modo, la aparición repentina de lo que parece ser una nueva clase, la sustitución del proletariado por el cognitariado. Pero, por supuesto, estos nuevos trabajadores no son clase obrera, ni exactamente clase media, sino una para-clase. Estadísticamente, la mayoría de ellos son oficinistas, secretarías, gente de la industria de seguros, mercados de capitales, profesores, gerentes, burócratas del gobierno, abogados, escritores, banqueros, técnicos, programadores y contadores. Sus salarios difieren tanto como su modo de vida y su estatus, y suponiendo que se pudiera subdividir este gran grupo en capas, finamente graduadas desde los cognícratas en la cima hasta los cogni-proletarios en la base, las distinciones serían en gran medida ilusorias porque las divisiones internas están siempre cambiando unas en relación con otras, ya que hay un cambio constante en los puestos de trabajo y sus especificidades. Los individuos se mueven internamente dentro del grupo general. Tiene más sentido contrastar esta para-clase con grupos históricos anteriores para comprender los cambios en el poder y la producción (Jencks, 1989: 44).

Si algo tiene de estimulante la crítica posmoderna es su afán por interpretar el presente sin miedo a romper con los cánones recibidos. Al procurar posicionarse ante los poderosos cambios en curso, los posmodernos se vuelven muy sensibles a los vientos actuales y se atreven a formular alternativas interpretativas. Merece la pena destacar un aspecto. A la hora de buscar un "nuevo sujeto de la historia", o dónde anclar las relaciones

de poder político y de transformación, algunos autores posmodernos no dejan de moverse en un universo de preocupaciones próximo al marxismo clásico. Con la exuberante y arrolladora emergencia del capitalismo industrial en el siglo XIX, que hizo que todo lo sólido se deshiciera por los aires, Marx propuso la existencia de dos clases fundamentales vinculadas a la dinámica de la gran industria. A finales del siglo XX, con el capitalismo transnacional y planetario, en la era de la inmediatez y la simultaneidad, cuando la industria textil y la propia metalurgia dejaron de ser (en un caso durante más tiempo, en el otro más recientemente) sectores punteros de la acumulación, y las industrias de la electrónica, la información y la comunicación tomaron la delantera en todos los sentidos, se produjeron cambios, por ejemplo, en las relaciones laborales, las ideologías de gestión, la distribución geográfica y la organización del proceso de producción, la importancia del capital financiero unificado globalmente vía satélite y las posiciones internas del sistema mundial. En este clima de transformaciones, en el que se establecen perplejidades e incertidumbres, no parece extraño que se intente interpretar una “nueva clase”, una “para-clase”, en relación con el conjunto más evidente de factores que adquieren un peso cada vez mayor en la determinación de la reproducción de la vida social contemporánea.

En este sentido, la obra de Alvin Gouldner, sin dudas controvertida, representa el esfuerzo más diferenciado por delinear esta “nueva clase”. En este texto, es interesante señalar que, para Gouldner, incluso antes de que el ambientalismo tuviera la visibilidad que tiene, la “ecología ambientalista” y la teoría de sistemas eran algunas de las ideologías centrales de esta “nueva clase”. La “nueva ideología ecológica” propiciaría una mayor iniciativa para la acción y se caracterizaría por ser “multicientífica”, lo que permitiría una amplia gama de alianzas entre “varios tipos de *intelligentsia* técnica” y –mediante el rechazo de la dominación sobre la naturaleza– “intelectuales humanistas” (Gouldner, 1980: 65). Gouldner menciona los antecedentes románticos de la ecología, y el hecho de que se basa en una metáfora orgánica, para diferenciarla de la teoría de sistemas (que “apela a una metáfora mecanicista más afín a la conciencia tecnocrática”, 1980: 65). Así,

Si la ecología tiene un fuerte matiz populista, la teoría de sistemas está imbuida de un elitismo más fuerte... Pero ambas ideologías apuntan tácitamente al problema de la desunión de la Nueva Clase, y pueden ser interpretadas como diferentes esfuerzos para tender un puente entre sus diversas facciones rivales y divergentes. Sin embargo, el elitismo de la teoría de sistemas circunscribe la solidaridad social que puede promover, limitándola –a lo sumo– a la *intelligentsia* técnica; la capacidad de la ecología para promover la unidad, aunque también en una visión multicientífica, es, al menos en algunas de sus versiones, accesible para un público más vasto y puede engendrar una solidaridad más amplia, que incluye a los humanistas tanto como a la *intelligentsia* técnica (Gouldner, 1980: 66).

Además de estas características planteadas por Gouldner y que se refieren a aspectos generales del ambientalismo, cabe destacar las características de utopía presentes en la idea de desarrollo sustentable y que se mueven en parámetros de racionalidad próximos, si no idénticos, a los del proyecto de la Ilustración: manipulación del futuro; suspensión de conflictos y corrección de deficiencias mediante la puesta en práctica de una solución óptima; apelación a la posibilidad de establecer un estadio más avanzado que el anterior, si se establece y sigue un determinado modelo; concepción de la humanidad como una y con un mismo destino *universal* (organizándola bajo el mismo eje temporal que ocurre con la idea de progreso, siendo aquí el destino una categoría fundamental del *futuro* común); la recuperación de una noción de totalidad centrada en la relación entre el hombre y la naturaleza y en la construcción de una visión holística de la realidad; y mantener la planificación como requisito fundamental, ya que el desarrollo sustentable requiere una nueva y compleja síntesis de planificación racional, adaptada a las nuevas tecnologías y contratos sociales.

Traducción al castellano: Federico Lavezzo

## Apéndice

TABLA 1 <sup>29</sup>

<b>CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL</b>
<p>Dirección: 1015 18th St. N.W. - Washington, D.C. 20036 Teléfono: (202) 429-5660 Fecha de fundación: 1987. Número de afiliados: 2.700. Personal administrativo: 42, en EE.UU. Presupuesto anual: 3,8 millones de dólares. Política brasileña: Probablemente esté interesada en crear y mantener una reserva biológica, pero su política brasileña aún se está formulando.</p>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND</b>
<p>Dirección: 1616 P St. N.W. - Washington, D.C. 20036 Teléfono: (202) 387-2100 Fecha de fundación: 1968. Afiliados: 100.000. Personal administrativo: 80, más 16 abogados. Presupuesto anual: 5,8 millones de dólares en 1987. Política brasileña: presionar al Banco Mundial y al BID cuando no se cumplen las condiciones medioambientales de los préstamos; estrecho contacto con los recolectores de caucho de Acre.</p>
<b>GREENPEACE FOUNDATION</b>
<p>Dirección: 1436 U St. N.W. - Washington, D.C. 20009 Teléfono: (202) 462-1177 Fecha de fundación: 1971. Afiliados: 2,5 millones en todo el mundo. Personal administrativo: 200 en EE.UU. Presupuesto: 22 millones de dólares en 1987. Política brasileña: principalmente interesada en la conservación de la selva tropical; probablemente abrirá pronto una oficina en Brasil.</p>
<b>NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION</b>
<p>Dirección: 1400 16th St. N.W. - Washington, D.C. 20036 Teléfono: (202) 797-6602 Fecha de fundación: 1936. Afiliados: 5,8 millones en todo el mundo. Personal administrativo: 650 en EE.UU. Presupuesto anual: 70 millones de dólares. Política brasileña: colabora con EDF, presionando a los bancos multilaterales; trabaja en Brasil con SOS Mata Atlântica, Funatura, Instituto de Estudos Amazônicos.</p>
<b>NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL</b>
<p>Dirección: 1350 New York Ave., N.W. - Washington, D.C. 20005 Teléfono: (202) 783-7800 Fecha de fundación: 1970. Afiliados: 104.000. Personal administrativo: 135. Presupuesto anual: 11 millones de dólares. Política brasileña: presiona al Banco Mundial junto con otros grupos para garantizar la conservación de la selva tropical.</p>
<b>NATURE CONSERVANCY</b>
<p>Dirección: 1815 North Lynn St. - Arlington, Va 22209 Teléfono: (703) 841-5300 Fecha de fundación: 1951. Afiliados: 1 millón. Personal administrativo: 1.000. Presupuesto anual: 58 millones de dólares en 1988. Política brasileña: asesora gratuitamente a los grupos que desean comprar grandes extensiones de terreno para reservas naturales.</p>

<sup>29</sup> Gracias al Boletín *Brasil Watch* por permitimos reproducir estos datos. La información es de 1989.

<b>WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE</b>
Dirección: 1709 New York Ave., N.W. - Washington, D.C. 20006 Teléfono: (202) 638-6300 Fecha de fundación: 1982. Miembros: no es una organización de este tipo. Personal administrativo: 85 personas. Presupuesto anual: 4,2 millones de dólares. Política brasileña: principalmente organización de investigación y grupo de reflexión, no ofrece subvenciones ni administra programas; celebró un seminario en Brasil en 1988 sobre canje de deuda por inversiones medioambientales.
<b>WORLD WILDLIFE FUND</b>
Dirección: 1250 24th St., N.W. - Washington, D.C. 20037 Teléfono: (202) 293-4800 Fecha de fundación: 1961. Afiliados: 600.000. Personal administrativo: 150 en EE.UU. Presupuesto anual: 35 millones de dólares en 1990. Política brasileña: concede subvenciones a ONG brasileñas que realizan investigación ecológica, educación medioambiental y formación de conservacionistas; ha trabajado con SOS Mata Atlântica, Funatura, Jardim Botânico, Fundação Brasileira para a Conservação da Natureza, Museu Goeldi.
TOTAL: US\$ 209.800.000,00 / PERSONAL: 2358 / MIEMBROS: 10,2 millones.



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# Más allá del trabajo técnico: Conflictos, derecho y política entre los Tupiniquim y Guarani-Mbyá en Espírito Santo (Brasil)

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## Resumen

Este artículo busca reflexionar, retrospectivamente, sobre experiencias de consultoría ambiental para la producción de trabajos técnicos, informes y relatos antropológicos sobre tierras y poblaciones indígenas (Tupiniquim y Guarani-Mbyá) en el municipio de Aracruz, en Espírito Santo (Brasil), en un contexto de proximidad y conflictos territoriales con grandes proyectos de desarrollo. La ocasión oportuna de celebración de la “fiesta de la victoria” en 2007 permite al antropólogo regresar al campo un año después de la aprobación y publicación en audiencias públicas de estos documentos en un proceso de licenciamiento ambiental – esta vez, sin embargo, liberado de su cargo de consultor contratado. Observar los cuadros de la acción política en situación permite comprender los resultados de las luchas indígenas en las *arenas públicas* y, al mismo tiempo, atribuir nuevos significados al trabajo técnico desarrollado, reflexionando sobre sus posibles aportes a la ampliación de las tierras indígenas demarcadas en la región.

**Palabras clave:** trabajos técnicos; conflictos ambientales; activismo indígena; Tupiniquim; Guarani-Mbyá; Espírito Santo (Brasil).

# Depois dos relatórios: Conflitos, direito e política entre os Tupiniquim e Guarani-Mbyá no Espírito Santo

## Resumo

Este artigo busca refletir, de modo retrospectivo, sobre experiências de consultoria ambiental para a produção de trabalhos técnicos, laudos e relatórios antropológicos sobre terras e populações indígenas (Tupiniquim e Guarani-Mbyá) no município de Aracruz, no Espírito Santo, em um contexto de proximidade e conflitos territoriais com grandes projetos de desenvolvimento. A ocasião oportuna de celebração da “festa da vitória” em 2007 possibilita ao antropólogo retornar a campo um ano após a aprovação e divulgação em audiências públicas desses documentos em um processo de licenciamento ambiental – dessa vez, contudo, desembaraçado de sua posição de consultor contratado. Observar os quadros da ação política em situação permitem compreender os resultados das lutas indígenas nas *arenas públicas* e, ao mesmo tempo, atribuir novos sentidos ao próprio trabalho técnico desenvolvido, refletindo sobre suas possíveis contribuições para a ampliação das terras indígenas demarcadas na região.

**Palavras-chave:** trabalhos técnicos; conflitos ambientais; ativismo indígena; Tupiniquim; Guarani-Mbyá; Espírito Santo (Brasil).

# Más allá del trabajo técnico: Conflictos, derecho y política entre los Tupiniquim y Guarani-Mbyá en Espirito Santo (Brasil)<sup>1</sup>

Felipe Berocan Veiga

“Los árboles son poemas  
que la tierra le escribe al cielo.  
Nosotros los derrumbamos y los transformamos  
en papel para registrar todo nuestro vacío.”  
(Khalil Gibran)

## Finalmente, la demarcación

Era el 7 de septiembre de 2007, se celebraba el hecho de que hace 185 años Brasil, excolonia portuguesa, conquistaba la soberanía de su inmenso territorio en América del Sur. Yo repetía nuevamente antiguos viajes en el litoral del norte del estado de Espirito Santo: entraba a la plantación de eucaliptos que hoy cubre gran parte de la superficie del territorio, expandiéndose por los estados vecinos de Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais y Bahía.

En la paradoja de un bosque artificial, recuerdo haber comentado con mi amiga y compañera de viaje, la antropóloga Celeste Ciccarone, que recorrer aquella infinita monotonía de un paisaje sin referencias, en dónde la ventana del carro parecía apenas la alineación de los troncos de eucalipto en diferentes ángulos, era como hojear mil páginas de un libro en blanco. Como si allí hubiera una historia borrada, o, quién sabe, una historia por ser escrita. Todavía más si en cada una de las breves visitas como aquella consideráramos todos los matices e implicaciones que el análisis de un ritual político puede proporcionarnos, siguiendo la perspectiva de los estudios de caso detallados (Gluckman, 1987; Van Velsen, 1987).

El escenario homogéneo del inmenso cultivo de eucaliptos (Figura 1) escondía el destino final de nuestro viaje: la aldea indígena Pau Brasil, habitada por la etnia Tupiniquim. Entre las siete aldeas existentes en el municipio de Aracruz, esta es la más cercana al conjunto de fábricas de papel de la multinacional *Aracruz Celulose*, considerada por los indígenas, su archirrival<sup>2</sup>. La pequeña aldea de 300 habitantes sobrevivió a la presión territorial de *grileiros*<sup>3</sup> en las décadas de 1960 y 1970 - durante el periodo de implementación de la

1 Para la producción de este texto, agradezco la cordial invitación y el incentivo de Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, el constante estímulo de Marco Antonio da Silva Mello, además de los ricos comentarios de Eliane Cantarino O'Dwyer y de Celeste Ciccarone, con quien tuve el placer de disfrutar de la hospitalidad en las aldeas indígenas de Espirito Santo y de retornar al campo en la ocasión de la “Fiesta de la victoria”. La primera versión de este artículo fue publicada en Bélgica como capítulo de libro en francés (2011a) a partir de una invitación hecha por Daniel Cefaï, a quien le soy grato por el reconocimiento, la amistad y el diálogo durante la revisión técnica de la traducción francesa. Finalmente, le agradezco a Daniela Velásquez Peláez por esta traducción al español.

2 Para tener una idea del porte empresarial, en aquel momento, *Aracruz Celulose* aparecía como responsable por la producción del 23% de todo el papel blanqueado del mundo. La unidad de Barra do Riacho, localizada a 5km de la aldea Pau Brasil, era el más grande complejo industrial de celulosa del planeta, con la capacidad para producir 2,3 millones de toneladas anuales del producto (*Aracruz Celulose*, 2007). En 2009 la empresa Aracruz fue comprada por el grupo Votorantim, dando origen a Fibria, la cual, a partir del 2019, se fusionó con Suzano Papel e Celulose pasando a integrar Suzano S/A. Con esta fusión la megaempresa se estableció como la mayor productora mundial de celulosa. Con 11 fábricas en Brasil, alcanzó la capacidad de producción de 11 millones de toneladas de celulosa por año y 37mil trabajadores directos e indirectos (Rizério, 2019).

3 [N.T] Optamos por mantener el término *grileiro* en portugués puesto que determina la acción nefasta de la usurpación de tierras (*grilagem*) a través de la falsificación de documentos. Fue así bautizada por los artificios de envejecimiento forzado de títulos de propiedad a partir de la utilización de grillos (*grilos* en portugués) dentro de cajas cerradas para que, a partir de la acción de los animales, los papeles adquirieran una apariencia envejecida, en búsqueda de credibilidad frente a los procesos burocráticos de legitimación de tierras.

empresa – y era para los propios indígenas un símbolo de su resistencia en la región, frente al proceso de disputa territorial que llevó cuatro décadas para obtener, finalmente, una solución definitiva<sup>4</sup>.

**Figura 1:** Recolección de eucalipto alrededor de la Tierra Indígena Pau Brasil.



F. B. Veiga, 25. mar. 2004.

Por lo tanto, coincidiendo con la fecha nacional, la “fiesta de la demarcación” fue programada en la aldea Pau Brasil, después de que dos esperados documentos de ampliación de las tierras indígenas fueran firmados – en la semana previa – por el ministro de justicia Tarso Genro:

Resolución MJ nº 1463 del 28/08/2007 – Por la presente se declara la posesión permanente de los indios Tupiniquim y Guarani Mbyá de la tierra indígena TUPINIQUIM, localizada en el municipio de Aracruz, en el estado de Espírito Santo; se determina que la FUNAI promueva la demarcación administrativa de la tierra indígena ahora declarada, para posterior homologación por el Presidente de la República.

Resolución MJ nº 1464 del 27/08/2007 – Por la presente se declara la posesión permanente de los indios Tupiniquim de la tierra indígena COMBOIOS, localizada en el municipio de Aracruz en el estado de Espírito Santo; se determina que la FUNAI promueva la demarcación administrativa de la tierra indígena ahora declarada, para posterior homologación por el Presidente de la República (*Diário Oficial da União (D.O.U.)* nº. 166, de 28/08/2007. Seção 1, pp. 30-31).

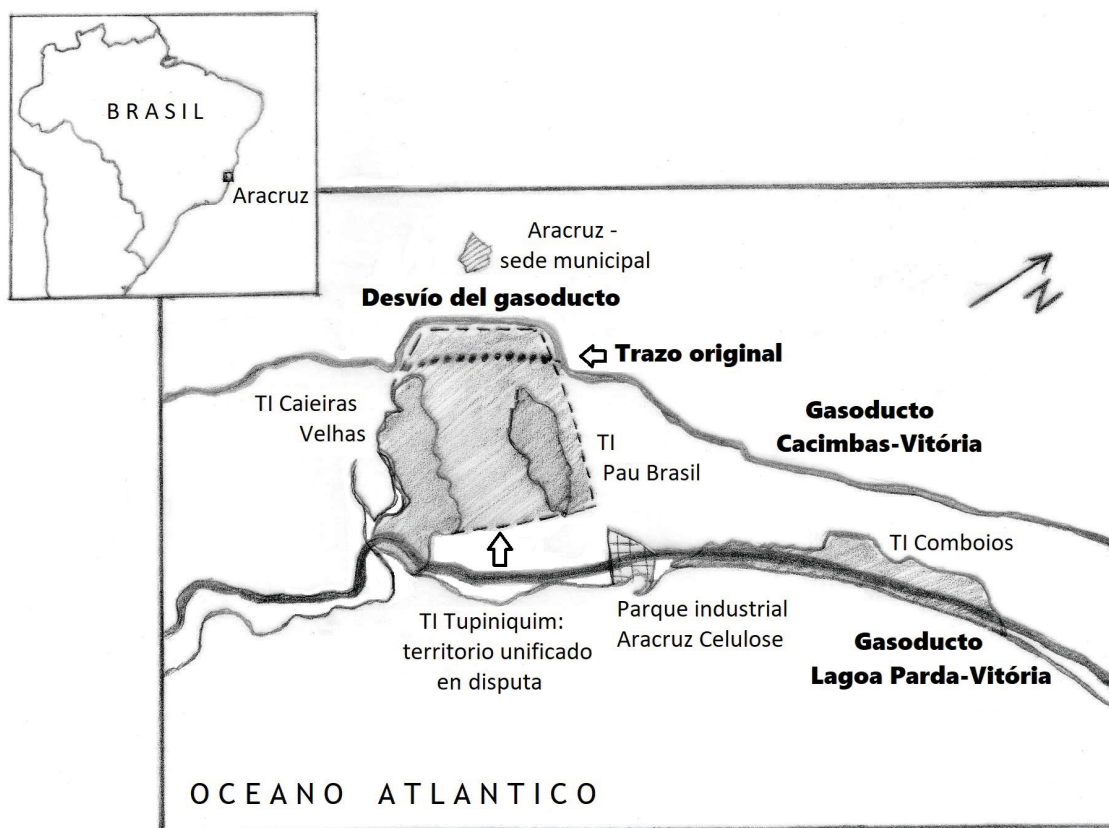
La resolución nº1463 unificó las tierras indígenas Caieiras Velhas y Pau Brasil, en una superficie de 14.227 hectáreas en el municipio de Aracruz, en el litoral norte del Espírito Santo. La resolución nº1464, a su vez, amplió el área de la Tierra Indígena<sup>5</sup> Comboios, de 2.983 para 3.800 hectáreas (Figura 2). Como resultado de las reivindicaciones de los Tupiniquim y conforme diversos estudios antropológicos anteriores se aseguraron finalmente la legitimidad y el reconocimiento del derecho indígena sobre las áreas reivindicadas, donde en el pasado se ubicaban diversas aldeas indígenas que la explotación y presión territorial hicieron desaparecer completamente, dándoles lugar a las plantaciones de eucalipto.

4 El propio nombre de la aldea refuerza, en el plano simbólico, la oposición vegetal entre el Pau Brasil nativo - un árbol de color rojiza que le dio el nombre al país al haber sido el primer recurso natural explorado en el siglo XVI - y el eucalipto - importado de Australia por los europeos y cultivado en masa para la exportación de celulosa.

5 [N.T] Según la legislación brasileña, en la Constitución Federal de 1988 (Artículo 231), Tierra Indígena aparece como una categoría que designa el derecho de los pueblos indígenas a la preservación de los usos, costumbres y tradiciones reconocidos en términos territoriales. En Brasil, existen 672 tierras indígenas que pertenecen a la Unión, abarcando 13% de la superficie total del país. Las áreas más extensas se concentran en la región amazónica, en contraste con Tierras Indígenas bastante reducidas en las regiones nordeste, sudeste y sur de Brasil, como ocurre en el caso presentado.

Transformé la ocasión festiva en motivo de un viaje financiado por recursos propios, para retornar a las aldeas después de haber coordinado estudios antropológicos, informes complementares al EIA-RIMA<sup>6</sup> solicitados por la Fundación Nacional del Indio – FUNAI<sup>7</sup> como estudios condicionantes en el proceso de licencia ambiental de un emprendimiento linear proyectado por Petrobras<sup>8</sup> en el litoral del Espírito Santo: el *Gasoducto Cacimbas-Vitória*<sup>9</sup>. En función de las buenas relaciones establecidas en el transcurso de la investigación en campo, y debido a la acogida como huéspedes en las aldeas, consideré que sería una oportunidad excelente para rendir cuentas públicamente a los indígenas acerca de mi actuación como antropólogo, aunque no estuviera más directamente vinculado a las instituciones involucradas en el proceso. Al final, tendría más libertad para expresar mis opiniones y discutir el despliegue de la investigación, que contaba con el soporte al refuerzo de las pretensiones territoriales del grupo, además, quería también saber cómo el grupo percibió los resultados de la investigación.

**Figura 2:** Tierras indígenas del Espírito Santo, incluyendo el área en disputa con *Aracruz Celulose* y los dos Gasoductos de Petrobras



F. B. Veiga, 19. oct. 2023.

6 El Estudio de Impacto Ambiental – EIA y el Informe de Impacto Ambiental – RIMA son los primeros estudios técnicos que integran los procesos de licencia ambiental en Brasil y que, además de todas las especificaciones técnicas en las áreas de ingeniería y en la caracterización de los ambientes físico, biótico y socioeconómico, abren las discusiones sobre impactos negativos. De acuerdo a la extensión y los límites del emprendimiento, los EIA-RIMA son evaluados en conjunto por órganos federales, estaduais y municipales de medio ambiente, responsables por la solicitud y la evaluación de los estudios y por la posterior emisión de licencias para la construcción y la operación de proyectos de desarrollo.

7 La FUNAI es el órgano del gobierno brasileño responsable por la implementación de las políticas indigenistas desde su creación en 1967. Subordinada al Ministerio de la Justicia llegó con el objetivo de sustituir el antiguo Servicio de Protección al Indio (SPI), creado por Rondón en 1910. El órgano interviene en el proceso de licencia ambiental caso haya proximidad o solapamiento de los emprendimientos en las Tierras Indígenas. Para un análisis de las políticas indigenistas en Brasil y de la antropología aplicada en relación a los procesos de identificación, ver Souza Lima & Barreto Filho (2005).

8 Petrobras, una gran empresa brasileña de energía, fue creada bajo la política nacionalista de Getúlio Vargas en 1953. Su alta producción en aguas profundas llevó a Brasil a la autosuficiencia en petróleo en 2006 y a la posición de octava mayor empresa mundial. Por su capital Simbólico y sus inversiones en el área ambiental es considerada patrimonio nacional y es una de las marcas más confiables del mundo.

9 De 2003 a 2005, coordiné estudios antropológicos referentes a los impactos de dos emprendimientos de Petrobras sobre las Tierras indígenas de Espírito Santo: el *Gasoducto Cacimbas-Vitória*, entonces en proceso de licencia ambiental; y el *Gasoducto Lagoa Parda-Vitória*, construido durante el régimen militar (1981-1983). Fui contratado por Petrobras por medio de la empresa de consultoría ambiental Biodinâmica. Fruto de esto, los informes fueron presentados, discutidos y aprobados por la FUNAI, por el Instituto Estadual del Medio Ambiente (IEMA) del estado de Espírito Santo y por los representantes indígenas (Veiga, 2004; 2005). Sobre conflictos socio ambientales y la relación entre la etnicidad y el asociativismo entre los Tupiniquim y Guarani, ver también Veiga (2011b).



## Tatarapé, el “camino del fuego”

Fue en un ambiente de efervescencia que, cinco años antes, habían comenzado los estudios ambientales para la instalación de un nuevo emprendimiento en la región: el *Gasoducto Cacimbas-Vitória* de Petrobras. En el 2003, los Tupiniquim y Guarani estaban a punto de romper el acuerdo hecho con *Aracruz Celulose*. En la primera reunión para discutir el proyecto en la AITG, el secretario Ervaldo nos explicó lo que ocurría: desde que los indígenas habían firmado un Término de ajuste de Conducta (TAC) con *Aracruz Celulose* en 1998 se sometieron a un régimen de fomento para el cultivo de eucalipto en áreas indígenas. En el acuerdo se estableció que los indígenas - para obtener la transferencia de recursos financieros de los proyectos subsidiados por *Aracruz Celulose* - deberían acatar límites de demarcación que no coincidían con la recomendación del estudio antropológico de la FUNAI, renunciando por veinte años a sus pretensiones territoriales y, además, debían darle a la empresa todo el eucalipto que ya había sido plantado.

Con el paso del tiempo los indígenas fueron dándose cuenta de que los habían engañado con falsas promesas y que vivían bajo un régimen de explotación, lo que hizo que creciera en las asambleas un sentimiento contra la empresa productora y exportadora de papel. Convertidos en eucaliptocultures que lidiaban diariamente con motosierras y agrotóxicos, en esta actividad se movilizaban cerca de 80 personas de la asociación indígena en contra de sus propios principios políticos, había entre ellos una fuerte percepción de la explotación económica a través del llamado “régimen de fomento”, pasando a asociarlo directamente a la palabra “hambre”. Fundamentados en el conocimiento financiero adquirido por las asociaciones indígenas, acusaban a la empresa de no realizar correctamente la transferencia de recursos prevista, puesto que habían sido fijados en dólares y los estaban pagando sin el debido reajuste de cambio en reales, lo que componía un incumplimiento del acuerdo.

Fue entonces en medio de este debate que los indígenas se enteraron del nuevo proyecto de Petrobras, el cual atravesaría el área indicada para la ampliación del Territorio Indígena en 7,5km con el comienzo de las discusiones públicas para la ampliación del área indígena de acuerdo con la legislación ambiental brasileña. En la audiencia pública que ocurrió en la Cámara Municipal de Aracruz el 18 de noviembre de 2003, liderazgos<sup>10</sup> indígenas participaron en peso con la reivindicación de la inclusión indígena en el proceso de licencia ambiental. Sin embargo, solo dejaron al antropólogo de la FUNAI, Jorge Luís de Paula, manifestarse en la mesa, quedándose el grupo atentamente en silencio, observando los discursos e informándose sobre las características del proyecto. En una reunión posterior el grupo se posicionó con relación al nuevo proyecto económico que era presentado en el auditorio.

Frente a la cercanía del trazo inicial del gasoducto a las cuatro Tierras Indígenas demarcadas en Espírito Santo, atravesando áreas en disputa con *Aracruz Celulose*, el representante de la FUNAI manifestó en público la necesidad de elaborar un estudio antropológico en el proceso de licencia, al considerar específicamente los impactos del futuro proyecto sobre las tierras y las poblaciones indígenas de Aracruz. El argumento de la distancia era fundamental, puesto que el nuevo gasoducto se situaría a menos de 10 km de los límites ya establecidos para las Tierras Indígenas. El representante de Petrobras aceptó la demanda y se comprometió públicamente a realizarlo. Cabe decir que ésta había sido la resolución de una reunión realizada la víspera, en donde la FUNAI convocó a caciques de las siete aldeas y el IEMA - órgano ambiental estadual responsable por la licencia de la obra - para que hubiera más información y tiempo para la discusión entre los indígenas y Petrobras.

Como consultor en antropología, ya había participado anteriormente en la elaboración de Estudios de Impacto Ambiental - EIA - del *Gasoducto Cacimbas-Vitória*, habiendo hecho una investigación previa en la FUNAI y la caracterización general de las tierras y poblaciones indígenas de Espírito Santo. En marzo de 2003 realicé

10 “Liderazgo” o “liderazgos” indígenas y no “líderes” es la categoría nativa utilizada para referirse a sus representantes políticos. Se trata de una metonimia interesante puesto que se definen por el sustantivo, o sea, por el espíritu de liderazgo y no por el adjetivo que expresa la calidad del líder, es decir, del jefe involucrado en el comando y en el ejercicio del poder.

el levantamiento preliminar de los documentos disponibles sobre los grupos, habiendo visitado los archivos de la Administración Regional de la FUNAI en la ciudad de Governador Valadares, la cual es responsable por los pueblos y tierras indígenas de Minas Gerais e Espírito Santo, además del Museo del Indio en Rio de Janeiro.

Frente al pedido de Petrobras de una visita técnica a las aldeas hubo, al comienzo, una negativa de la FUNAI debido al recelo de la recepción indígena al nuevo proyecto en detrimento de las relaciones conturbadas con *Aracruz Celulose*. En víspera a la audiencia pública los caciques se enteraron de eso y discordaron de las posiciones del antiguo administrador regional del órgano indigenista al retrasar el proceso de discusión en las aldeas con esa medida. Por ese motivo pidieron a Petrobras en seguida que realizara una reunión específica en el área indígena para discutir el nuevo gasoducto como también con el objetivo de rediscutir un gasoducto antiguo: el de *Lagoa Parda-Vitória*, el cual atravesó las Tierras Indígenas Comboios y Caieiras Velhas al comienzo de la década de 1980.

Altos funcionarios de Petrobras, responsables por el nuevo proyecto, sabían que estaban entrando a un campo minado e intentaron conducir las negociaciones de forma que no se dejaran confundir con *Aracruz Celulose*, buscando garantizar al máximo la participación de los liderazgos indígenas. Los ingenieros José Bernardino y Valter Shimura, que eran responsables por la red de gasoductos en construcción en las regiones del sudeste y sur de Brasil, tenían experiencias anteriores de negociación con los pueblos indígenas Guarani y Terena puesto que habían participado de este tipo de reuniones durante la implementación del *Gasoducto Bolivia-Brasil*, por lo tanto, ellos sabían cuánto las negociaciones exigían tiempo y cuidado. Las características de Petrobras, en su posición de empresa pública de capital mixto vinculada al sector estratégico y orientada por ideales nacionalistas, colocaban la cuestión indígena entre las más altas preocupaciones. Fue en este contexto que Petrobras concuerda de inmediato con la realización de la reunión en las aldeas.

Menos de un mes después de la Audiencia Pública de Aracruz, fue hecha la primera gran reunión en la aldea Tupiniquim de Irajá el 09 de diciembre de 2003, contando con la presencia de Petrobras, de representantes de áreas indígenas, de la FUNAI, el IEMA, el Ministerio Público Federal y de activistas de Organizaciones no gubernamentales locales (ONG) locales como la Asociación de los Amigos del Rio Piraquê-Açu. En la maloca de la aldea - después de las presentaciones de PowerPoint de Petrobras y de la empresa de consultoría ambiental - al analizar los mapas con el trazo propuesto para el nuevo gasoducto que se iniciaba, reconocieron que este cruzaba el área en disputa con *Aracruz Celulose* causando la manifestación de los caciques frente a la presencia de otro proyecto en la misma región. Durante esta reunión, le dejaron claro a Petrobras que a pesar del acuerdo firmado con la industria de papel no abandonarían sus pretensiones territoriales sobre el área en disputa. El Cacique Guarani Toninho fue bastante categórico: “nosotros no queremos atrasar el desarrollo, pero queremos que las personas afectadas sean oídas. ¡Nuestro derecho está en juego! Estamos acorralados por *Aracruz Celulose* y vamos a estar todavía más acorralados entre dos gasoductos”.

Como consecuencia de la restitución de Petrobras a la región, más de dos décadas después de su construcción, el *Gasoducto Lagoa Parda-Vitória* volvía a ser tema de debate en las aldeas, frente al proyecto de construcción de otro gasoducto en la región. Según los indígenas, ningún técnico de ninguna empresa les había explicado lo que es un gasoducto ni sus impactos reales. Bautizado *Tatarapé* por los Guarani, que significa “el camino del fuego en su lengua, el antiguo gasoducto era visto como un ser maléfico”, un ente desconocido que “cortó nuestra tierra por la mitad” y sobre el cual pensaban que nada podría prosperar, a no ser el miedo y la idea de peligro. Los indígenas oían chillidos fuertes y ruidos de las válvulas de despresurización y sentían miedo, sin saber si aquello podría explotar en algún momento. Luís Barbosa, joven liderazgo de Comboios resumió bien la percepción indígena sobre el *Tatarapé* en una de nuestras primeras reuniones:

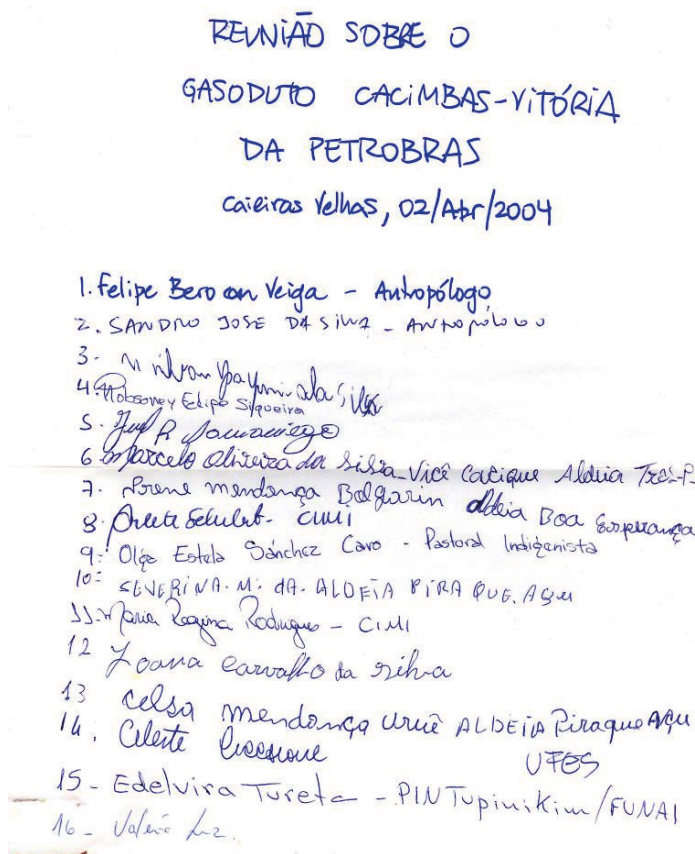
11 Varios estudios destacan la importancia religiosa del nombre para los Guarani-Mbyá, desde los mitos llamados *divinas palabras*, o *ayu rapyta*, hasta el ritual de nombramiento y bautismo colectivo de los niños en las aldeas o *nemongarai* (Cadogan, 1992; Litaiff, 1996).

Aquello es peor que un guepardo, porque el indio no sabe lo que hay allí dentro. Petrobras dice que no es ninguna bestia de siete cabezas<sup>12</sup>, pero para nosotros lo es. Sabemos los riesgos de los animales salvajes y de los guepardos de la mata, pero de tuberías no sabemos. Nadie sabe si se explota y nosotros vamos a estar entre dos gasoductos (Veiga, 2004).

Varias reuniones en las aldeas fueron registradas por anotaciones de campo y listas de presencia (Figura 3), en ellas, los indígenas reforzaban la idea de que no había como medir los impactos de apenas el emprendimiento que estaba siendo estudiado, como lo define la propia legislación ambiental. Puesto que allí, en una región del litoral disputada, marcada por la inmigración italiana, por la ideología desarrollista y por la transformación del paisaje natural había para ellos una acumulación de impactos que deberían ser considerados. Pasamos a crear una lista de los proyectos locales de desarrollo con sus respectivos impactos sobre áreas indígenas y descubrimos que efectivamente eran numerosos. EL cacique *Peru*, de la aldea Guarani de Piraquê-Açu, resumió bien esa percepción en uno de nuestros encuentros:

Antes los blancos atacaban con armas, hoy con el conocimiento. Pasan tuberías de agua, desagüe, energía y gas por dentro de la aldea y no tenemos ningún beneficio.

**Figura 3:** Lista de asistencia de una de las reuniones técnicas para discutir los impactos del nuevo gasoducto con los indígenas, los funcionarios de la FUNAI y los representantes de movimientos sociales.



F. B. Veiga, 02. abr. 2004.

Las imágenes de satélite de la faja de 10km de ancho, al ser presentadas por el equipo técnico contratado por Petrobras como “área de influencia directa – AID” del gasoducto planeado para tener 126,5km de extensión,

<sup>12</sup> [N.T] Bestia de siete cabezas aparece aquí como la traducción literal de una expresión brasileña común, *bicho de sete cabeças*. Con ella, se hace referencia a algo difícil, que equivaldría a “no es ninguna ciencia”, “ningún rompecabezas” o a algo que designe un destino tenebroso, por ser difícil e incontrolable. Cabe notar que la expresión popular deriva del bestiario apocalíptico del Juicio Final. Optamos por mantener la traducción literal por su potencia descriptiva y por la multiplicidad de significados que evoca con su utilización, más aún dentro del contexto en que es empleada en este caso.

confirmaban la opinión común en las siete aldeas de que los indígenas vivían “acorralados” por grandes proyectos de desarrollo lo que a su vez alimentaba la convicción por la necesidad de expansión del territorio demarcado. La habilidad de los Tupiniquim y Guarani en lectura e interpretación de mapas e imágenes de satélite para la georreferenciación local era sofisticada, no apenas por el conocimiento topográfico de la región, como también por el aprendizaje en años de colaboración y seguimiento de grupos técnicos de la FUNAI durante la elaboración de estudios para la demarcación de sus territorios. Frente a los mapas, los indígenas reivindicaban una visita técnica con los ingenieros al lugar en el que sería construido el gasoducto y Petrobras cumplió con diligencia tal reivindicación (Figura 4).

**Figura 4:** Inspección de los indígenas con los técnicos de Petrobras en el lugar de la construcción de un nuevo gasoducto.



F. B. Veiga, o8. En. 2005.

Como resultado del primer estudio, recomendamos a Petrobras que solo decidiera el trazo del nuevo gasoducto después de una consulta a las poblaciones indígenas. La cuestión era muy delicada, no solo debido a las tensiones de los indígenas con proyectos anteriores, como también porque todavía no tenían una posición consensual sobre cuál sería la proximidad aceptable de la nueva obra. Si el *Gasoducto Cacimbas-Vitória* pasara por el área en litigio con *Aracruz Celulose* tendrían más poder de negociación para conseguir una indemnización mejor de Petrobras. Por otro lado, si fuera realizado un desvío fuera del área pretendida sería un emprendimiento a menos involucrado en la ya complicada disputa territorial. Las asociaciones indígenas defendían evidentemente la primera alternativa frente a la grave reducción de presupuesto con el fin de las transferencias de la industria del papel. Sin embargo, con fundamento en experiencias previas los caciques dieron un no rotundo. Desde el acuerdo con *Aracruz Celulose* se dieron cuenta de que “el dinero se acaba, pero la tierra nunca acaba” y pasaron a repetir la frase en sus reuniones internas, fortaleciendo esta convicción.

En la víspera de la inspección *in loco* exigida por los indígenas a Petrobras hubo una reunión muy cargada de tensión en Comboios el día 6 de enero de 2005, justo en la tierra indígena más afectada directamente por el gasoducto antiguo, cuyo acceso solo se daba por barcos controlados por los Tupiniquim. Con la presencia de más de veinte técnicos de Petrobras, incluyendo la autoridad máxima del gerente de la red de gasoductos del Sudeste de Brasil, uno de los líderes indígenas se levantó en una reunión y se dirigió en voz alta al negociador: “si ustedes no cumplen su promesa, que es negociar el paso de esta tubería de gas que está aquí hace 22 años en nuestra tierra sin ninguna indemnización, ¡vamos a incendiar el gasoducto!”. Los aplausos y gritos exaltados del público indígena se notaban en contraste con el visible incomodo de los visitantes, ya dudando de la tranquilidad del retorno programado para el mismo día.

No confiaban más en falsas promesas, pasando a exigir el protocolo de las cláusulas por escrito como garantía en cada paso de la negociación con las empresas. Al usar marcas de etnicidad – como tocados y pinturas corporales que hoy se usan apenas en reuniones, protestas políticas y fiestas en aldeas – los Tupiniquim y Guarani acudieron en masa a este largo encuentro, en el que se mantuvieron con firmeza en sus decisiones colectivas. En esa reunión, caciques indígenas e ingenieros de Petrobras firmaron un acuerdo estableciendo términos y plazos mínimos para la realización de un nuevo estudio específico solicitado por la FUNAI. El interés del órgano indigenista entonces era verificar el histórico, los impactos y la situación del gasoducto anterior para proceder con una acción de indemnización retroactiva, incluyendo también la zonificación ambiental de las cuatro Tierras Indígenas ya demarcadas.

Tal nuevo informe inauguró la serie de *Estudios Etnoecológicos* requeridos por el órgano indigenista para las empresas involucradas en procesos de licencia en proximidad (y hasta mismo dentro) de áreas indígenas en todo Brasil (Veiga, 2005). Tenía como base una metodología nueva y compleja que consideraba, entre otras cosas, la participación efectiva de los indígenas en los equipos técnicos de trabajo, subsidiándolas en la recolección de informaciones en campo y en la movilización de otros liderazgos que participaban en reuniones y entrevistas.

Finalmente, en un documento enviado a la FUNAI el 18 de enero de 2005 los indígenas decidieron a favor del desvío utilizando argumentos que reforzaban la “lucha por la tierra”. Frente a esta posición, Petrobras inmediatamente concordó con la decisión y propuso un nuevo trazo fuera del área en disputa antes del comienzo de los trabajos para el nuevo estudio. Pronto fue posible comprender que el reconocimiento de la pretensión indígena sobre el territorio por parte de una grande empresa de energía, alterando el trazo de uno de sus emprendimientos lineares, constituía algo más valioso para los Tupiniquim y Guarani que cualquier indemnización inmediata.


Al mes siguiente, al adoptar la nueva metodología, incorporamos al equipo técnico los “investigadores indígenas” – o los “indios-investigadores”, como también eran llamados en la ocasión, quienes fueron indicados por las propias aldeas y cuyo trabajo, así como el de los demás miembros del equipo, fue remunerado por una empresa de consultoría contratada por el emprendedor. El resultado final fue sorprendente: además de la habilidad de los indígenas para recibir los diversos grupos técnicos al dividirse según sus “especialidades” y al revelar la intimidad con la rutina de investigación de antropólogos, biólogos, hidrólogos y agrónomos, también se consolidaba un involucramiento efectivo y directo de indígenas en todas las fases del trabajo de campo.

Diferente de las demás aldeas, en las que optaron por indicar jóvenes liderazgos indígenas, los representantes de Caieiras Velhas indicaron a un señor de edad avanzada, Otaciano Domungos Pajehú, como su “investigador indígena” y miembro del equipo técnico. Aunque nos sorprendimos con la elección, pronto descubrimos que había sido una sabia decisión. Al fin de cuentas Otaciano había sido cacique de aquella aldea que entre 1987 y 1988 había recibido la negociación del paso del antiguo gasoducto de Petrobras por la Tierra Indígena que lleva su nombre.

Para nuestra sorpresa, en el mostrador de su tienda de comestibles *Pajehú*, Otaciano nos presentó el recuerdo detallado del acuerdo anterior, no solo con las narraciones que presentaban las bambalinas de la negociación; como también con un cuidadoso dossier que reunía, en una carpeta, papeles que ni Petrobras, ni la FUNAI habían organizado o tenían disponibles en sus propios archivos. Los datos técnicos, las actas de reunión, las formas de aplicación de los recursos, las listas de familias beneficiadas, los balances para compras, las notas fiscales, todo eso había sido cuidadosamente documentado por él en una carpeta conservada en su casa localizada en la parte posterior de la tienda de comestibles. En uno de los documentos, verificamos que la mayor parte de los recursos fue distribuida por los indígenas entre ellos y el resto se invirtió en máquinas para la producción agrícola, indicando los insumos del comienzo de la mecanización de la producción que vendría a pronunciarse más en la década siguiente (Figura 5). Un proceso semejante fue vivido por otras poblaciones indígenas en otras épocas, como es el caso de los Terena en Mato Grosso do Sul, en la dirección política de la

integración de los indígenas a la sociedad nacional a través del modelo político de asimilación de la agricultura mecanizada (Cardoso de Oliveira, 1976).

Figura 5. Resultado de la aplicación de los recursos de la indemnización del gasoducto antiguo en la aldea de Caieiras Velhas



**RESUMO DAS APLICAÇÕES**

AQUISIÇÕES	QUANTIDADE	VALOR
- Pneu para Carreta	02	54.000,00
- Motor Elétrico p/casa farinha	02	78.000,00
- Balança 200kg	01	77.000,00
- Acessórios trator	-	75.000,00
- Combustíveis e Lubrificantes	-	104.800,00
- Trator novo com implementos	01	57620.000,00
- Carroceria para Carreta	01	167.305,10
- Isca Formicida	-	30.000,00
- Revisão Trator	-	94.715,00
- Dinheiro rateado e/ comunidade	-	9.611.024,15
- Despesas Bancária	-	549,00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>16.151.993,55</b>

POSTO INDÍGENA TUPINIQUIM, 19 DE DEZEMBRO DE 1988.

José Sizenando  
Cacique

Otacíano Domingos Pajehú  
Cacique

Ronaldo Pereira Batista  
Chefe do Posto

MOD. 128 - 210x297

Arquivo pessoal O. Pajehú, feb. 2005.

Frente a la abundante documentación guardada por el antiguo ex cacique, pudimos realmente comprobar que la Tierra Indígena Comboios, justo en el área más afectada por el gasoducto había sido excluida de las negociaciones, además de reconstituir paso a paso el acuerdo hecho con los Tupiniquim de Caieiras Velhas y todo el histórico del paso del emprendimiento por la región.

Poco después del fin del segundo informe técnico, la entrega a Petrobras, la aprobación de la FUNAI y la presentación a los indígenas, comenzó una ronda de discusiones entre los ingenieros y liderazgos indígenas para decidir sobre la indemnización del *Gasoducto Lagoa Parda-Vitória*. No pude acompañar directamente este proceso hasta el final, pero fui informado de sus acontecimientos por mis colegas, los antropólogos de la FUNAI. Pasados 22 años desde su construcción, los Tupiniquim de Comboios finalmente fueron beneficiados con lo equivalente a 1,5 millón de dólares, parte de ellos fueron colocados en proyectos y otra parte fue destinada a ochenta familias, este proceso incluyó una alianza entre la FUNAI y el Banco do Brasil en la orientación para el buen uso del dinero en inversiones. Además, esta vez los proyectos no estaban dirigidos a la mecanización agrícola y si a la recuperación ambiental de áreas degradadas por la devastación y por el mal uso del suelo, sobre todo después de que poseros que habían ocupado zonas de restinga abrieron grandes secciones de pastoreo de ganado. En el *Balanço Social e Ambiental [Balance social y ambiental]* 2005 de la empresa brasileña más grande, se informa que “como algunos gasoductos están instalados en fajas de tierra pertenecientes a comunidades indígenas, Petrobras adopta una política de negociación y de reconocimiento del derecho de estas comunidades” (Petrobras, 2006: 39).

Además de la generosa indemnización conquistada, el desvío del gasoducto también les otorgó fuerza política a los Tupiniquim y Guarani fortaleciendo sus reivindicaciones territoriales frente a *Aracruz Celulose*

y al propio gobierno federal. Simbólicamente, ese fue el primer reconocimiento oficial de una gran empresa de que la tierra en disputa era indígena. Los informes técnicos reencendieron la discusión sobre las tierras en la FUNAI, reabriendo el proceso de demarcación y reforzando las demandas indígenas por la expansión y unificación de las Tierras Indígenas en Espírito Santo.

Después del suceso de la relación con la Petrobras los indígenas se sintieron victoriosos. Los informes reactivaron la discusión sobre la tierra y el debate acabó situando las dos empresas involucradas en polos opuestos, de un lado la proveedora de gas y una de sus mayores clientes causando bochorno en la negociación del paso por la zona de desvío la cual era propiedad de *Aracruz Celulose*. Las habilidades adquiridas por los Tupiniquim y Guarani como excelentes negociadores, al internalizar la lógica de las reuniones, de los documentos y de los acuerdos, bien como al incorporar acciones y prácticas de militancia católica de izquierda, constituyeron un paso fundamental para complementar sus demandas de reconocimiento del derecho a la identidad diferenciada y a un territorio propio.

### La “fiesta de la victoria”

Para celebrar la victoria política, hubo una fiesta programada por los representantes indígenas en alianza con las ONGs que apoyaron sus reivindicaciones tales como la Federación de Órganos para Asistencia Social y Educacional de Espírito Santo – FASE-ES y el Consejo Indigenista Misionario – CIMI. Este gran encuentro reunió a los Tupiniquim de aldeas vecinas de Caieiras Velhas, Irajá y Comboios y los Guarani-Mbyá de las aldeas de Boa Esperança, Piraquê-Açu y Tres Palmeiras. Aunque vivan en aldeas diferentes las dos etnias se hermanaron en la llamada “lucha por la tierra” desde la década de 1960 con una forma de alianza estratégica en la diferencia, pasando a compartir las mismas áreas y luchando juntas por la demarcación.

En el centro de la aldea Pau Brasil había una gran *Maloca* construida en paja y madera sobre el campo de fútbol especialmente para abrigar la reunión. La estructura recibía a los indígenas de todas las aldeas y sus aliados de movimientos sociales y ambientales. Entre ellos, algunas personas que participaron en los conturbados procesos de auto demarcación que, en su auge, resultaban en prisiones, destrucciones de casas y en la agresión física de los llamados “líderes indígenas” del lado de fuerzas policiales represivas.

Al llegar acompañado de la antropóloga Celeste Ciccarone que desarrolla investigaciones con los Guarani-Mbyá hace años (Ciccarone, 2001; 2004) y que también participó del equipo técnico del primer estudio antropológico para Petrobras, fui pronto notado y saludado por algunos Tupiniquim y Guarani que acompañaban más de cerca la ejecución de estos trabajos técnicos y contribuyeron más intensamente para sus resultados. Un grupo de activistas de la FASE-ES - ONG que hace parte del *Movimiento Alerta contra el Desierto Verde* contrario a la expansión de la eucaliptocultura – inmediatamente trató de registrar mi presencia en una lista informal producida en el acto para registro de las instituciones y personas presentes en la gran asamblea de la *Maloca*.

Evidentemente el registro de los nombres hecho por los representantes de las ONGs al llegar en la mañana era la forma más eficaz de control. La pregunta “¿Quién mismo es usted?” formulada por una nueva integrante indicaba una acción característica de las reuniones entre los no-indígenas en las aldeas en las cuales se miden recíprocamente las filiaciones institucionales y, consecuentemente, la pertenencia ideológica y los niveles de involucramiento político. Así, pequeños roces aparecían en las entrelíneas de la lista de asistencia.

Entre acuerdos y desacuerdos fue a partir de la compleja relación de los Tupiniquim y los Guarani con las acciones desarrollistas de *Aracruz Celulose* que las ONGs pasaron a actuar más intensamente en las aldeas indígenas de la región, buscando orientar sus acciones en el campo político con la rutinización de las reuniones y defendiendo una postura más combativa. En ese aspecto fue fundamental la actuación de CIMI y de la Pastoral Indigenista, organizaciones de la izquierda católica defensoras de la causa indígena. Una vez establecida la

relación de confianza los aliados no-indios pasaron a ser denominados “apoyadores” y así lo eran anunciado en la asamblea que, de cierta forma, procuraban dirigir al formular y controlar tal lista.

En función de las negociaciones ni siempre amigables de los indígenas con las empresas y con el Estado nacional, la práctica de reuniones se volvió una dinámica constante en las aldeas, sobre todo desde que firmaron un acuerdo con *Aracruz Celulose* en 1998. A lo largo del proceso, por determinación de la FUNAI y del Ministerio Público Federal (MPF), los liderazgos constituyeron dos asociaciones indígenas en las aldeas para recibir la transferencia regular de los recursos bajo la forma de “proyectos socioeconómicos” orientados al monocultivo de eucalipto: La Asociación Indígena Tupiniquim y Guarani – AITG, en Caieiras Velhas, y la Asociación Tupiniquim de Comboios – AITC. Sin embargo, después de darse cuenta de que se habían convertido en mano de obra explotada por la propia industria del papel que tanto criticaban y combatían, decidieron quebrar el acuerdo en febrero de 2005, lo que causó rigidez en las posiciones y contribuyó para una decisión favorable en relación a las tierras para las aldeas después de luchas intensas.

No había ningún script previo a la reunión, había una rápida negociación improvisada y casi secreta entre una “apoyadora” y un “liderazgo” indígena, con base en la lista de asistencia. Solo por indicación de las ONGs y sus lecciones de asociativismo habría una concentración de la mayoría de la palabra en los representantes indígenas y del apoyo en la retaguardia de los “apoyadores”, cuyos discursos serían dejados de propósito para el final limitándolos a dos o tres intervenciones. Así se estableció la jerarquía entre los participantes, comenzando por los caciques, a los “liderazgos” y terminando con los “apoyadores”, quienes podrían o no tener el derecho a la palabra, pues ni todos pudieron manifestarse sin pasar por el filtro de las ONGs.

Aunque la grande estructura de la *Maloca*, construida especialmente para la reunión, pudiera abrigar a todos los presentes, la distribución del espacio indicó una separación nítida: solo los indígenas ocupaban los asientos en la mesa y en el público, mientras que los “apoyadores” de las ONGs y universidades se mantuvieron de pie, fuera de la cubierta de paja, la mayoría atrás de la mesa donde los representantes indígenas de cada una de las aldeas ocupaban las posiciones de destaque. En las sillas en frente a la asamblea, liderazgos y caciques más antiguos – que habían participado del histórico de luchas – guardaban los lugares de honor para oír a los jóvenes representantes y, en ocasiones oportunas, realizar sus intervenciones.

Paulo de Oliveira, quien integra la Articulación de los Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas del Nordeste, Minas Gerais y Espírito Santo – APOINME y se volvió el primer líder Tupiniquim con expresión en la política indígena nacional fue el encargado de presidir la reunión. Radicado en Recife, su relación directa con las poblaciones indígenas del Nordeste indica un trayecto común en la lucha por el reconocimiento de la identidad indígena, en un proceso conocido como la *etnogenesis* en la literatura antropológica (Oliveira, 1994; 1998). En la asamblea solo habría intervenciones orales y en forma de discurso, restringiendo las manifestaciones del público, las inscripciones al micrófono y las interposiciones por escrito. Sin embargo, tales reglas no fueron apropiadamente expuestas al comienzo de la asamblea, aunque se hayan tornado evidentes a lo largo del tiempo. Por lo tanto, solo habría discursos de los representantes en intervenciones indicadas por Paulo como presidente de la mesa y aún, manifestaciones de los “apoyadores” indicados por las ONGs.

Los caciques y “liderazgos” tomaron asiento en la mesa y con el micrófono en la mano comenzaron el largo ritual político de ritmo lento y continuo que se extendió a lo largo de tres horas de discursos. Los indígenas y sus aliados apostando en la fuerza de la oratoria no utilizaron ningún documento como soporte, ni siquiera las resoluciones demarcatorias del Ministro de Justicia y ni un acta fue elaborada, solo una pequeña lista de asistencia improvisada casi en forma de nota.

Representando la aldea Guarani de Tres Palmeiras estaba Ivanilda Carvalho dos Santos, la única mujer con asiento a la mesa al lado de los Tupiniquim José Sezenando, nuevamente elegido cacique de Caieiras Velhas; de Jonas do Rosario, cacique de la aldea de Irajá; de Valdeir Almeida, cacique de Pau Brasil; de Alcélío Carlos, presidente de la asociación de Comboios; y de Vilson Benedito de Oliveira, ex cacique de Caieiras Velhas durante



el auge de los conflictos con *Aracruz Celulose* de 2005 a 2007. El cacique Antonio Carvalho, de la aldea Guarani de Boa Esperança llegó muy tarde y se integró a la mesa.

Primero los discursos de los dueños de la fiesta, los indígenas, consolidaban la relación entre los dos grupos étnicos, reforzando este vínculo paulatinamente en los discursos: “nosotros los liderazgos Tupiniquim-Guarani” era la frase inicial en común entre todos los caciques. Así ya se presentaban y casi se fundían en una identidad híbrida, construida políticamente a partir de las nuevas formas de movilización colectiva alrededor de una asociación común: la Asociación Indígena Tupiniquim y Guarani – AITG.

Desde la década de 1960, el nuevo colectivo Tupiniquim-Guarani viene construyéndose con el ejercicio de la hospitalidad entre los dos pueblos indígenas en el litoral del Espírito Santo. Considerado por autores clásicos como una busca por la *Tierra sin mal*, es decir, el “paraíso en la tierra” (Clastres, 1975), el *oguatá* o la “caminata” Guarani no solo tiene una inspiración mística-religiosa como también política y eso aparece en el discurso indígena, sea en las aldeas o sea en discusiones públicas (Ciccarone, 2004: 82). De esta manera, cuando los Guarani llegaron a Aracruz los acogieron para que se incorporaran activamente a los esfuerzos de la “lucha por la tierra” de los Tupiniquim.

Del punto de vista político, la inclusión de los Guarani fue estratégica ya que ellos mantenían vivos la lengua y la religión indígena que los Tupiniquim habían perdido en siglos de catequesis y aculturación forzada a la sociedad nacional. Si, por parte de las elites locales, recaía sobre los Guarani la acusación de forasteros, los Tupiniquim garantizaban la ocupación territorial y la pertenencia indígena al lugar desde tiempos inmemorables. Ambos argumentos eran necesarios al proceso de demarcación, al mismo tiempo en el que construían un parámetro real para una reconstrucción de su identidad indígena.

En la asamblea que celebró la demarcación de las tierras, tal intento de construcción de una unidad fue visible en una gramática común utilizada en todos los discursos indígenas, fundamentada en la idea exaltada de la *comunião étnica* (Weber, 1999:270) al situar a los dos pueblos indígenas en la condición de “hermanos de lucha”. Es evidente que existen conflictos y discrepancia de opiniones entre los dos grupos y hasta dentro de una misma aldea, pero esto casi siempre aparece fuera de las visitas de los no-indígenas. Por eso se reservan los momentos de discrepancia para las discusiones internas y, cuando el grupo viene a público, aparece en forma de un bloque indivisible de opiniones en consonancia con una determinada acción, al entender que la exposición de sus divergencias en las asambleas con personas externas debilita su posición y sus alianzas políticas.

Además de la retórica de la unidad que fue consumada sobre todo después de la quiebra del acuerdo con la empresa, estuvo presente en las intervenciones no solo una retrospectiva histórica de los hechos, sino que también una apreciación común entre los jefes indígenas de que “el sufrimiento había valido la pena”. Casi todos se referían así a las consecuencias dramáticas de la quiebra con el acuerdo con *Aracruz Celulose*, después de la radicalización de la posición indígena con la ocupación del área en litigio, cuando los indígenas fueron por la Policía Federal de la zona con disparos de balas de caucho.

Con su conocimiento de la política indigenista nacional, Paulo de Oliveira comenzó la asamblea hablando en nombre de otros pueblos indígenas que, así como los Tupiniquim, vivieron en proceso reciente de tensión territorial de reconocimiento de su identidad indígena:

Estamos celebrando el día de nuestra victoria: 28 de agosto. El Ministro de Justicia Tarso Genro tuvo el coraje de firmar [la resolución de demarcación de las tierras] y sobrepasar todos los intereses [económicos]. Nuestra lucha no es solo la de un cacique, ni solo de los liderazgos, ni solo de un pueblo, es de varios pueblos. ¿Cuántos líderes ya murieron como el cacique Chicão Xukuru en Pernambuco? ¿Cuántos liderazgos indígenas están siendo criminalizados por luchar por sus derechos en una democracia que no sale del papel? Son casi 40 años de lucha aquí y de muchos otros pueblos, especialmente del Nordeste que ya tienen nuestra lucha como referencia.

Ya en el primer discurso estaba evidente que la larga disputa territorial era considerada por los Tupiniquim y Guarani mucho más allá que en la dimensión local en el conflicto con el parque industrial vecino. Al final, la

arena pública de la rivalidad entre ellos y *Aracruz Celulose* fue asumiendo contornos cada vez más expresivos en las esferas nacionales e internacionales frente al aumento de la visibilidad en la exposición mediática y en las reverberaciones que los acontecimientos en Aracruz tuvieron en la política, en la justicia y en los movimientos sociales en los últimos años, expresivamente narrados por los indígenas en un libro didáctico (*Educadores Indios Tupiniquim e Guarani*; Mugrabi, 2001). Acompañado por más de cien indígenas de todas las edades reunidos, Paulo continuó con su discurso retrospectivo, narrando los episodios más importantes de la “lucha por la tierra”:

Antes de la colonización portuguesa, esta faja litoral era toda Tupiniquim. Y hoy luchamos por esas 18.070 hectáreas. ¡Jamás un miembro de la comunidad invadió un palmo de la *Aracruz Celulose*! Esta aquí era nuestra tierra. Guarani y Tupiniquim unieron su fuerza, su espíritu guerrero, con la certeza de que Dios estaba con nosotros durante la batalla y seguimos en frente, haciendo la primera demarcación [en 1981], la segunda [en 1998] y la tercera [de 2005 a 2007]

El 20 de enero de 2006 sufrimos aquella emboscada de la Policía Federal junto a la *Aracruz Celulose*. Trece indios fueron heridos y derramaron su sangre. Nuestros antepasados murieron para que estuviéramos aquí hoy y, si es necesario, moriremos como guerreros. Hoy comenzó la independencia [de Brasil] e hicimos esto también en la asamblea de Comboios el 19 de febrero de 2005, cuando reunimos a 350 indios y decidimos romper el acuerdo con *Aracruz Celulose*. En ese entonces nos preguntamos: ¿vamos a continuar en la dependencia [económica] de Aracruz o vamos a tener autonomía y dignidad?

Si hoy aquí en Espírito Santo o hubiera indios de hecho, como dicen los informes de *Aracruz Celulose*, no habría tierra demarcada. Nunca dudamos de nuestra identidad indígena y hoy les llamamos la boca.

Paulo recibió de las ONGs la lista de los “apoyadores” presentes y pasó a agradecerles “en nombre de los Tupiniquim y Guarani a las personas que enfrentaron esta lucha de frente y nos apoyaron en la causa”. Agradece nombrando a los investigadores académicos presentes: a Celeste Ciccarone, a Adilson Pereira de Oliveira Junior y a mí; a los políticos locales como el concejal de Aracruz Luciano Frigini – PSB/ES,<sup>13</sup> también presente y a la Deputada Federal Iriny Lopes – PT/ES; a los representantes de la FASE/ES, como Fábio Villas, Winnie Overbeek y Arlete Schubert; y al apoyo de la Asociación de Geógrafos Brasileños – AGB, del Sindicato de los Bancarios y al Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin-Tierra – MST.

El anfitrión Valdeir Almeida, cacique de Pau Brasil agradeció la presencia de todos en su aldea y comunicó su satisfacción y emoción por ese momento en el que recordaban todo lo que había pasado. Alcélío Carlos, de la aldea de Comboios, también fue económico en sus palabras, expresó su alegría y felicidad por ese momento. El cacique Jonas do Rosário, de la aldea de Irajá, evidenció su “gran felicidad de celebrar este sueño que teníamos alrededor de esta tierra. Cuando uno tiene un sueño, lo hace realidad. Un sueño para nuestros hijos, porque tenemos mucha gente joven en las aldeas y necesitamos nuestro espacio”. El ejercicio colectivo de memoria y expresión de los sentimientos fue el tono de gran parte de los discursos indígenas, buscando crear un ambiente de emoción compartida.

José Sezenando cacique Tupiniquim de Caieiras Velhas, la aldea más grande de la región, también hizo a su modo una reconstrucción de los episodios de destaque de la larga disputa territorial con la empresa, relacionando la historia, la política y la familia. Para tal, volvió en el tiempo y le dirigió su discurso a su padre en la asamblea. Alexandre Sizenando, en el auge de sus 91 años acentuaba el aspecto generacional de la lucha política que concibió como una herencia, haciendo referencia al trabajo pionero del periodista y ambientalista Rogério Medeiros (1972; 1983) relatando la presencia indígena y sus dramas en la región:

13 [N.T.] En este contexto PSB hace referencia al Partido socialista brasileño, específicamente a su configuración en el estado de Espírito Santo. En secuencia, se encuentra también la sigla PT que significa Partido de los trabajadores, fundado por el presidente Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. La sigla consecutiva también especifica la gestión partidaria en el estado de Espírito Santo.

Me gustaría agradecerle a Rogério Medeiros, que fue el primero a traer un documento de las antiguas sismarías donadas para los Tupiniquim, cuando iniciamos la primera auto demarcación enfrentando a la gigante Aracruz. ¡y hoy los gigantes son los Tupiniquim-Guarani!

¡Fueron destruyendo nuestras *roças*<sup>14</sup>, matas y todo! Mi padre era el 'capitán' [jefe] de la aldea en la época. Y padre, hoy le digo: desde aquel tiempo estamos luchando y hoy lo logramos. Mi madre me daba mucha fuerza y ella ya se fue. En ese entonces sufríamos muchas amenazas no solo de *Aracruz Celulose*, pero también de otros *posseiros*<sup>15</sup>. Y de aquellas aldeas antiguas hoy solo está su nombre por debajo de los eucaliptos. Yo estoy seguro de que Aracruz nos expulsó de aquí, porque mi padre está vivo y puede contar de las amenazas.

Quiero saludar a todos los indios de aquí, porque la lucha es de ustedes, nosotros tenemos que luchar por la dignidad. ¡No hay que tener vergüenza de golpear nuestro pecho y decir que somos indios Tupiniquim! Nuestra lucha continua porque todavía falta la homologación de esta tierra.

El ex cacique Vilson Benedito de Oliveira, llamado Vilson de Jaguaretê no pudo contener la máxima exposición de sus emociones durante la intervención al llorar en público en la asamblea (Figura 6)<sup>16</sup>. Afectado física y moralmente durante los conflictos, en la agresiva acción de la Policía Federal del 20 de enero de 2006, recordó la brutalidad sufrida durante el enfrentamiento que resultó en la destrucción de la aldea *Olho d'agua*, cuando indígenas presionaron la expansión del área indígena construyendo casas en el territorio en litigio:

Vivimos una situación de riesgo muy grande. Me acuerdo de mi sentimiento frente a las personas heridas y de las máquinas destruyendo la casa de reza. Nuestros antepasados fueron cazados, huyendo del desarrollo. Y aún ocurrió eso aquí en nuestra área, fue muy triste y significativo. Todo lo que Aracruz hizo con *Outdoors*, de la página de la empresa en internet y las cartillas en las escuelas, todo esto no fue suficiente, porque nunca nos desanimamos. ¡Tengo mucho orgullo de mi nombre: yo soy *Jaguaretê*!

**Figura 6:** Vilson *Jaguaretê* llorando al recordar los conflictos en la asamblea general que celebró la expansión de las tierras indígenas.



F. B. Veiga, 07. sept. 2007.

14 [N.T] Optamos por mantener la palabra *roça* en portugués, cuyo significado es más amplio que el de *Roza* en español el cual que se limita a designar un tipo de trabajo agrario. En portugués, la palabra, hace también hace referencia al campo dentro de una oposición campo/ciudad; además, es una referencia a un pedazo de tierra trabajado, sea en agricultura o en alguna otra actividad vinculada al campesinado en donde la labor se funde a la composición de un hogar y de un modo de vida (*roceiro*).

15 [N.T] Mantuvimos la palabra *posseiros* para destacar su significado, el cual comprende a los trabajadores rurales que ocupan un pedazo de tierra para allí producir, aunque no tengan el título oficial de la propiedad. Su principal característica es la producción para la subsistencia y la utilización de la mano de obra familiar. Vale destacar que gran parte de los conflictos agrarios en Brasil opone radicalmente *grileiros* y *posseiros*, con el uso del poder y de la violencia por los *grileiros* armados a servicio de los grandes terratenientes.

16 Sobre la obligación moral de llorar en público en ciertas ocasiones rituales, ver Marcel Mauss y la expresión obligatoria de los sentimientos (Mauss, 2005).

Vilson recordó las acciones vehementes de las asociaciones y de las organizaciones sociales y las empresas vinculadas a *Aracruz Celulose*, al estampar *slogans* anti-indígenas en *outdoors* en la ciudad y en los distritos de Aracruz vecinos a las aldeas con las siguientes frases e ideas: “Basta de indios amenazando a los trabajadores”, “Aracruz trajo el progreso. La FUNAI, los indios”, “La FUNAI defiende a los indios, ¿quién defiende a nuestros empleados?” y, todavía, “la agresión a *Aracruz Celulose* afecta también a nuestras empresas”. En la visión más estereotípica invocaban la imagen negativa de los indígenas, en oposición al mundo del trabajo, del progreso y del buen orden. Era nuevamente la vieja imagen formada en siglos anteriores de los “salvajes” y “primitivos” contrarios a la civilización y, por eso mismo, pasibles de exterminio.

Buscando comprobar y difundir en las escuelas locales y en la población la idea de que estos, de hecho, “no eran más indios”, la empresa comenzó una cruzada contra los indígenas y la FUNAI en internet (*ARACRUZ CELULOSE*, 2007) y además confeccionó una cartilla en papel *couché*, la cual sería condenada y prohibida por el Ministerio Público. En ella aparecía la foto del cacique Vilson *Jaguarê* criticando su imagen y su origen indígena como falsificaciones, asimismo como “el nombre que recientemente adoptó” y que “no es un nombre Tupiniquim”, como lo decía el documento. Tras repasar sus adornos, los argumentos de autenticidad eran después direccionados para su *borduna*<sup>17</sup>, vista como la apropiación indebida de los Txucarramãe de la Amazonia; para su tocado y su pintura corporal, presentados como de origen Caiapó; y, finalmente, para su collar, que no era visto como “característico de los Tupiniquim”. Según Celeste Ciccarone y Sandro José da Silva “la cartilla ya condenada por el Ministerio Público como ‘abusiva’ y ‘prejuiciosa’ después de varias manifestaciones de los indios es un resumen de la actuación de la empresa los últimos 30 años” (Ciccarone & Silva, 2007). Todo eso lo impactó no solo a nivel colectivo sino también personal, razón por la cual se vio tomado por las emociones al intervenir en la asamblea.

Después de la participación de los hombres y siguiendo la jerarquía de género establecida por los caciques fue el turno de la manifestación de las mujeres. Al representar la aldea Guarani de Tres Palmeiras, Ivanilda Carvalho dos Santos comenzó su discurso pidiendo la atención de todos pues “la reunión no era un juego” y disculpándose por la ausencia de su hermano y cacique Nelson quién fue al hospital para buscar a un niño enfermo. Después de un largo saludo en Guarani-Mbyá, que tenía una inspiración religiosa evidente por el número de veces en que el dios supremo *Nhanderu tupã* fue mencionado, Ivanilda habló en portugués para que todos la entendieran:

Dios nos ayudará siempre, es nuestra única esperanza. A través del ‘Espíritu de la Luz’, tenemos nuestra fuerza y unión. Los Guarani no son de violencia, ¡somos puro corazón! Nosotros amamos a nuestros hermanos Tupiniquim. Vencimos la lucha juntos, para que nuestros hijos pudieran vivir, para plantar. Agradezco a Sezenando, a quien conozco desde pequeño, él nos daba su harinita para sustentarnos.

Deusédia de Sousa Pêgo, la representante Tupiniquim que más alcanzó visibilidad fuera de las aldeas por su participación en movimientos nacionales de las mujeres indígenas, profirió un discurso exaltado enfatizando, por su entonación en el micrófono, su pertenencia a las iglesias cristianas renovadas de Brasil, en una especie de predicación contra el demonio Aracruz<sup>18</sup> (Figura 7). Con mucho énfasis en los gestos y en el discurso afirmaba en tono de enfrentamiento: “¡somos indios, somos guerreros! ¡Nadie nos va a destruir fácilmente, nuestra lucha está en nuestra sangre!”. Tal como en los himnos nacionales o en los poemas épicos sobre batallas heroicas, la *sangre y la tierra* aparecían en la gramática de las intervenciones como símbolos preferenciales, pues permitían que los oradores se refirieran metafóricamente a temas como la identidad indígena y el derecho al territorio, accionando sus valores centrales.

17 [N.T] *Borduna* es un arma indígena hecha de madera maciza en los moldes de una clava o garrote.

18 La denominación *Aracruz* designa el municipio y la gran empresa. Es la combinación de las palabras *ara* (altar) y *cruz*. También se refiere al símbolo cristiano y al universo religioso. El estado de Espírito Santo carga marcas profundas de devoción cristiana en su nombre, fruto de la marca dejada por la acción misionaria de José de Anchieta y por la colonización jesuítica en el siglo XVI.

**Figura 7:** Deusdêia en voz alta al micrófono representando a las mujeres indígenas.



F. B. Veiga, 07. sept. 2007.

Doña Helena Sezenanda, matriarca Tupiniquim que participa activamente del Congo en Caieiras Velhas usaba ropas de paja, adornos de plumas, la pintura corporal y el *maracá* también se manifestó en la asamblea, reforzando su etnicidad. Otro discurso reforzando la idea de la pertenencia generacional al lugar:

Yo vine vestida de india y traje a mi marido, el mayor indio de aquí. Viniendo de la aldea de Braço Morto, que fue destruida hace tiempos. Los caciques sufrieron, pero nunca desistieron, porque sabían que esta tierra era nuestra. Y hoy él está alegre, aquí hay hijos, nietos y bisnietos.

Una dramática ocasión, dotada de una alta capacidad de síntesis (Turner, 2008), el ritual de la asamblea llevó a liderazgos indígenas a la apreciación de todo el proceso de disputa territorial con *Aracruz Celulose*. En una ocasión marcada por la reflexividad, las intervenciones se complementaban y dejaban claras cuestiones como identidad y diferencia, las representaciones de sí y del otro y las visiones recíprocas entre los Tupiniquim y Guaraní. El ex cacique de Pau Brasil, Antonio dos Santos, más conocido como *Seu Antoninho*,<sup>19</sup> habló con un tono sereno y emotivo, asociando la lucha política a sus convicciones místicas y al ciclo de la vida:

Soy un joven de 71 años. Si me llevan, ya tengo dónde caer. Pues voy a caer de paso a paso en esta tierra. Esta tierra fue aprobada como nuestra en primer lugar por Dios, después por los ‘hombres de la ley’. ¡Hoy es un día de libertad! Fue el día en el que Brasil tuvo la libertad y es el día de nuestra libertad también. Actuaron con violencia en la aldea *Olho d’Água* y no podían hacer eso. Eran ‘hombres de la ley’, pero no tenían autoridad espiritual. Masacraron no solo al cacique, sino a toda la comunidad, porque aquí somos una sangre solamente.

El cacique Antonio Carvalho, o *Toninho* o *Werá Kwaray* en la lengua nativa, fue el último en llegar y pidió disculpas por su retraso a todos los presentes. El representante de la aldea de Boa esperança, la aldea Guaraní más antigua en la región, se integró a la mesa (Figura 8) e hizo un discurso breve que fue aplaudido por todos: “Nuestra lucha de 40 años no es personal es de todos nosotros, de las comunidades indígenas de Espírito Santo. ¡Llegué tarde hoy, pero nunca llegué tarde a la lucha!”

<sup>19</sup> [N.T] Optamos por mantener el pronombre de tratamiento común en Brasil “Seu” (reducción coloquial de la palabra señor), equivalente a “Don” en español por su correspondencia de significado.

Finalizada la serie de discursos indígenas, fue el turno de los no-indígenas o *Juruá* – en Guarani – de manifestarse en nombre de los demás “apoyadores” presentes. Discursaron dos activistas que migraron del CIMI – el Consejo Indigenista Misionario – para la FASE y continuaron ofreciendo apoyo político a los indígenas durante la exacerbada disputa territorial con la industria del papel. Fabio Villas habló sobre el gran número de personas que apoyaron a los Tupiniquim y Guarani que apoyaron la lucha en Brasil y el exterior, además de reconocer especialmente a los liderazgos que estuvieron frente al proceso y obtuvieron a duras penas su victoria política.

**Figura 8:** Mesa de la asamblea reuniendo a los caciques José Sezenando, Jonas do Rosário, Antonio Carvalho y Vilson Oliveira, líderes de la llamada “lucha por la tierra”.



F. B. Veiga, 07. sept. 2007.

Este tema fue reforzado en el siguiente discurso, el de Winfridus Overbeek, un misionario holandés conocido como *Winnie*, quien recibió amenazas de deportación de Brasil durante los episodios de la segunda auto demarcación en 1998. *Winnie* leyó mensajes de felicitaciones que venían de otros países, de movimientos sociales y ecológicos de Alemania hasta India, conectados por el internet. Diferente de los demás representantes municipales y estaduais, el único político presente en la celebración indígena fue Luciano Frigini, concejal del municipio de Aracruz, quien en su breve y tímido discurso manifestó su apoyo a los indígenas.

Relato aquí mi primera oportunidad de retorno al campo sin el vínculo con las empresas contratantes o con órganos gubernamentales. Viajé en la víspera saliendo de Rio de Janeiro para Vitória en avión y, en seguida el mismo día, de la capital del Espírito Santo en dirección a la aldea Pau Brasil en carro, especialmente para estar presente en la fiesta de la demarcación y aprender los significados de esta victoria política conquistada con tantas dificultades para los Tupiniquim y Guarani. Sentía que todavía faltaba algún tipo de encerramiento para la investigación que había llegado a su fin el año anterior por tener una mayor intimidad y relativa confianza con los liderazgos indígenas después de muchas conversaciones y reuniones, además del hecho de que la relación era puesta a prueba en cada retorno al campo y en la presencia de colegas que me antecedieron en él. Desde mi perspectiva, sentía que faltaba una oportunidad de discutir más libremente las consecuencias de los informes técnicos con los propios indígenas y conocer sus impresiones al respecto del trabajo que había hecho<sup>20</sup>. Sabía de la recepción del último informe por la FUNAI en Brasilia, por Petrobras y hasta mismo por *Aracruz*

<sup>20</sup> En la colectánea *When they read what we write* (1993), editada por Caroline B. Brettell, varios autores analizan el carácter multifacético de lecturas nativas de las etnografías y sus múltiples interpretaciones, validaciones, críticas y reservas entre grupos investigados.

*Celulose*, pero no conocía la apreciación indígena y quería compartir con ellos algunas de estas impresiones e informaciones de los bastidores. Ya tenía noticias de que algunos caciques llevaban copias del informe para reuniones externas, buscando fundamentar sus argumentos en discusiones.

Vi en esa ocasión ritual una oportunidad excelente para encontrarme con todos los “liderazgos” y de poder valorar retrospectivamente los trabajos técnicos. Como Petrobras no me invitó a participar de la mesa de negociaciones que resultó en la indemnización para la aldea de Comboios, tal como lo habían hecho los antropólogos de la FUNAI, sentía por mi parte la sensación de un trabajo de campo inconcluso. En esa ocasión, podría situar los resultados de los informes técnicos sobre dos gasoductos de Petrobras en el cuadro de nuevas conquistas indígenas, expresándome con más libertad y agradecerles personalmente a los Tupiniquim y Guarani por la colaboración en los trabajos técnicos. Por la buena acogida de los caciques en mi llegada, conseguí finalmente que mi inscripción para intervenir fuera aceptada por las ONGs, pasando a manifestarme en público junto a los “apoyadores”.

Comencé hablando sobre el papel del antropólogo como mediador de conflictos ambientales, en el centro del juego político entre los indígenas, las empresas y el Estado. Tal mediación es el resultado de una posición intermediaria privilegiada, pues es contratado por las empresas como consultor, pero no hace parte de su cuadro activo de trabajadores; el antropólogo atiende a una demanda oficial y es valorado por instituciones estatales, aunque no sea un representante del gobierno; además presenta las concepciones indígenas en el informe, sin ser necesariamente un militante local o un miembro nativo de las aldeas. Así, por la objetividad de su posición de *extranjero*, sin tener compromiso o particularmente un vínculo con ninguna de las posiciones e intereses en juego (Simmel, 1983: 185), se reúne y dialoga directamente con cada institución involucrada en el proceso, sin pertenecer a los cuadros de ninguna de ellas. Al presentar las demandas indígenas con base en el punto de vista de los sujetos de la investigación y proponer alternativas y soluciones para los conflictos ambientales, los informes antropológicos poseen un papel crucial, forneciendo las bases para la tomada de decisiones relativas a los emprendimientos y a las eventuales medidas de compensación a favor de las áreas y poblaciones afectadas<sup>21</sup>. Empeñado en documentar y acompañar el cuadro de sus demandas políticas, el papel del antropólogo debe ser no necesariamente el de resolver los problemas de los grupos, y si comprender los modos en los que los grupos resuelven sus problemas<sup>22</sup>, registrando, traduciendo y apoyando sus esfuerzos argumentativos en el campo político.

Recordé las primeras idas y venidas a las aldeas en 2003 para los estudios solicitados por la FUNAI a Petrobras, así como la continuidad más intensa de las visitas y reuniones en 2004 y 2005. Presenté una historia breve de los estudios realizados junto a otros colegas a quienes seguramente les hubiera gustado de participar en la fiesta, como los antropólogos Sandro José da Silva, autor de trabajos académicos sobre los Tupiniquim (Silva, 2000), y Márcia Malheiros, quien ya desarrollaba investigaciones con los Guarani-Mbyá; el historiador y educador José Ribamar Bessa Freire y la museóloga Valéria Luz, responsables por los proyectos del Programa de Estudios de los Pueblos Indígenas – PROÍNDIO/UERJ ambos direccionados para la educación y la artesanía Guarani-Mbyá; la bióloga Maria Beatriz Dallari y la socióloga Monica Cavalcanti Lepri, con experiencias diversas en el área ambiental.

En seguida, la acogida en las siete aldeas fue motivo de agradecimientos, dirigidos nominalmente a nuestros anfitriones y colaboradores más constantes, fundamentales para el desarrollo del trabajo. En Comboios, una aldea separada por un río caudaloso, Alcelio abrió las puertas de la asociación indígena de la que era presidente en aquel entonces para que pudiéramos dormir para acompañar las plantaciones durante el amanecer. Luís

21 Para una discusión más profunda sobre el tema, el libro de Eliane Cantarino O'Dwyer (2010) considera el papel social del antropólogo y su posición llave en complejos procesos territoriales a partir de casos emblemáticos analizados y experimentados por la autora en la Amazonia brasileña.

22 Esta noción viene de una comunicación personal de Marco Antonio da Silva Mello, quien se alía a las tesis pragmáticas de John Dewey en su libro *The public and its problems*, originalmente publicado en 1927 (Dewey, 1991).

Barbosa, el barquero, y su padre José Barbosa, guardián de la memoria de la Restinga, fueron nuestros guías hasta el antiguo gasoducto al borde de la playa en Comboios. Todas esas informaciones referentes a las prácticas componían uno de los dieciséis ítems solicitados por la FUNAI para los estudios técnicos en el llamado *Termino de Referencia* emitido por el servicio indigenista.

En Pau Brasil, el cacique *Antoninho* y su hijo Antônio Carlos, *Sinhozinho*, señalaron los lugares de las antiguas aldeas. Don Dovergilio Alexandre nos ayudó a identificar antiguos lugares de caza y pesca, la fauna y la flora que aún existen en la región de los estuarios de los pequeños ríos que atraviesan la zona. Deusdéia también nos recibió en su casa, habló de su actuación política y nos presentó las plantas más importantes para la artesanía Tupiniquim. Estas informaciones referentes a la intersección entre la cultura y el medio ambiente también hacían parte de los pedidos de la FUNAI al equipo del estudio antropológico.

En Caieiras Velhas, Doña Helena nos explicó cómo era vivir en el manglar y el trabajo de su familia en la preservación de la artesanía y la cultura Tupiniquim. Vilson, que era en ese entonces cacique de Caieiras Velhas, su hermano Vilmar Oliveira, presidente de la asociación indígena y secretario general en la época, Ervaldo Santana Almeida, posibilitaron nuestra investigación en la mayor de las aldeas y nos dieron informaciones sobre la producción agrícola y el cotidiano de la *Asociación Indígena Tupiniquim y Guarani*. Otaciano Domingos Pajehú, un antiguo cacique de la aldea, nos ofreció toda la documentación que conservó por más de veinte años – aquella referente al proceso de indemnización del antiguo gasoducto en Caieiras Velhas – esto nos permitió recuperar el histórico del paso de aquel emprendimiento por las tierras indígenas.

En Irajá, Jonas do Rosario fue nuestro guía entre los eucaliptos en la difícil tarea de mapear los lugares donde quedaban las aldeas dentro del área reivindicada por los indígenas. En las aldeas Guarani, los caciques Antonio Carvalho de Boa Esperança, su hermano Jonas y su madre, la *saudosa*<sup>23</sup> doña Aurora, líder espiritual de los Guarani-Mbyá, nos recibieron en la casa de reza (*opy*) y nos entregaron las fotografías de la construcción del antiguo gasoducto pasando por una laguna utilizada por los indígenas que después se secó. Marcelo Oliveira o *Werá Djekupé*, nos acogió en su casa en Três Palmeiras y fue nuestro guía en las zonas de plantío y en la mata que las rodea, presentando su visión para el desarrollo de proyectos culturales en la aldea; y Pedro Silva, el Cacique *Peru* de Piraquê-Açu, nos condujo en barco por el río de mismo nombre, mostrándonos los principales puntos de pesca y explicándonos las diferentes técnicas utilizadas por los Guarani y Tupiniquim.

Atraje la atención al desvío del Gasoducto *Cacimbas-Vitória* al apuntarlo como el oprimer acto de reconocimiento del derecho indígena al territorio pretendido por parte de una grande empresa cuando los “liderazgos” se colocaron contra el paso del ducto por aquella área. El respeto a la decisión indígena por el desvío del gasoducto fue un hecho inédito y muy significativo, pues por la primera vez ellos se sintieron oídos y considerados por una empresa de grande porte. Además, la indemnización retroactiva a la aldea de Comboios por el *gasoducto Lagoa Parta-Vitória*, construida dos décadas antes, también fue un marco en las conquistas de los Tupiniquim, fortaleciendo sus posiciones y demandas políticas junto al gobierno federal.

Comenté que por la primera vez las empresas discordaron sobre el derecho territorial indígena del Espírito Santo, asumiendo posiciones diferentes que generaron una controversia entre *Aracruz Celulose* y Petrobras. Si, por un lado, los conflictos con Aracruz se intensificaron el año pasado, a su vez crearon un hecho político con repercusión en la prensa internacional, lo que obligó a la tomada de una decisión definitiva por parte de las autoridades. Así, asociados a la presión política de los indígenas, los estudios técnicos y las posiciones de Petrobras también fortalecieron sus demandas y contribuyeron para la demarcación de la nueva área. Los Tupiniquim y Guarani concordaron con esta valoración y aplaudieron el último discurso al final. Al recibir las

23 [N.T] Optamos por mantener el adjetivo *saudosa* por su significado, al derivar de la palabra *saudade*. Conocida por ser intraducible de la lengua portuguesa, la palabra nombra un sentimiento social afectuoso de nostalgia. En este caso específico, *saudosa* hace referencia a la falta y la tristeza que quedan después de la muerte de alguien querido, en este caso, doña Aurora.



invitaciones para visitar nuevamente las aldeas cuando quisiera – una medida de hospitalidad y de aceptación que el antropólogo no debe despreciar – tuve finalmente la sensación de deber cumplido.

Al final de la asamblea, a las dos de la tarde, el cacique Valdeir hizo hincapié en la necesidad de alimentarse, refiriéndose sobre todo a los niños y a la gente mayor, que ya estaban impacientes sin comer. Las filas para el almuerzo comenzaron a formarse, atravesando el campo de fútbol central de la aldea y siguiendo diferentes direcciones. Bebida y carne eran distribuidos en dos lados del campo y la carne era asada en gran cantidad sobre parrillas improvisadas.

**Figura 9:** Don Alexandre Sizenando, capitán del *congo* y Doña Helena, exaltando los valores indígenas en versos ritmados.



F. B. Veiga, 07. sept. 2007.

Mientras que muchos Tupiniquim se servían, otros calentaban sus tambores y pasaron a cantar y bailar entonando sus versos de *congo*, un resultado del diálogo cultural intenso con los negros de la región (Figura 9). Sentado sobre los tambores, Vilson *Jaguareté* y José Sezenando, entre otros, daban ritmo animado a la música, acompañados por varios reco-reco llamados *casacas* – instrumentos de madera hechos por los propios indígenas.

Al lado de Don Alexandre que lleva consigo el bastón decorado con cintas, signo de su papel de líder como *capitán del congo*, Doña Helena encabezaba el coro con toda la energía, cantando al micrófono: “¡indio luchó, indio sufrió...entró en la guerra, pero no murió!”. Y después, continuaba con la primera estrofa de la canción: “¡El indio es fuerza, el indio es raza! ¡Tierra del indio es mano en la copa!” siendo estos los versos preferidos para celebrar la “lucha por la tierra”, que finalmente llegaba a su fin.

Aunque después ocurrió algo inesperado: una pelea, con gritos viniendo del otro lado del campo, interrumpió la música y la fiesta animada. La pelea entre dos jóvenes de las aldeas Pau Brasil e Irajá causó afán y acabó anticipando el fin de la celebración. Bastante irritado con la confusión, Paulo Tupiniquim ordenó que acabaran con la música y prendieran el motor de los autobuses escolares que conducirían a los indígenas a otras aldeas de regreso a casa, decretando el melancólico fin de la fiesta anticipadamente, para la tristeza de todos (Figura 10).

**Figura 10:** A media tarde anticiparon el fin de la fiesta. Los Guarani volvieron en autobuses escolares a sus aldeas.



F. B. Veiga, 07. sept. 2007.

Cabe señalar que, curiosamente, en la fiesta de la demarcación las disputas internas emergieron como el último acto en la escena pública. Con el fin de la controversia con el gran enemigo en común, la “gigante” *Aracruz Celulose* habiendo sido derrotada, una pelea entre dos indígenas reveló que, a pesar de la apología a la unión en todos los discursos, las diferencias internas entre las aldeas tienden a evidenciarse. En este sentido, nuevas asociaciones indígenas deben surgir produciendo una especialización de las demandas por aldea y por etnia, habiendo por consecuencia una fragmentación política.

La especialización de las demandas parece algo inevitable revelando las discusiones en curso para la formación de una asociación exclusiva de los Guarani en Aracruz. Así, la atomización de la representación en la escena pública - algo tan evitado por las ONGs que apoyan a los indígenas, al considerar que la separación “debilita la lucha”- debe configurarse como una nueva realidad política entre las aldeas.

## Disputas a orillas del mar

La presión de los proyectos de desarrollo sobre los Tupiniquim y Guarani de Aracruz está lejos de ser un caso aislado. El litoral brasileño, que ha sido intensamente explotado desde el emprendimiento colonial portugués, aparece como una región muy disputada por múltiples intereses económicos, por los recursos naturales disponibles y por su excelente situación geográfica. Obras de saneamiento de lagunas y pantanos, apertura de puertos, construcción de carreteras, ductos, parques industriales, usinas termoeléctricas y nucleares, creación de reservas militares, explotación de petróleo y producción de derivados, megaproyectos inmobiliarios, *resorts* y hoteles de lujo se han intensificado en las últimas décadas en los municipios del litoral como sus nuevos cimientos de la modernidad. Esta tendencia está en aumento desde la creación del Programa de Aceleración de Crecimiento – PAC y frente a nuevas acciones del Gobierno Federal en el plan de desarrollo económico.

Consecuentemente, muchos de esos emprendimientos causan impactos directos o indirectos sobre las llamadas “poblaciones tradicionales”, tales como *pescadores artesanales*, *grupos extractivistas*, *pueblos indígenas* y *quilombolas*<sup>24</sup>, quienes dependen de la calidad ambiental para la manutención de su modo de vida (Almeida, 2006).

24 [N.T] *Quilombo, comunidade quilombola* o *remanescente de quilombo* es una categoría jurídica brasileña, presente en la constitución de 1988 (Artículo 68 del ADCT) que designa los derechos territoriales de grupos que construyen su identidad, memoria e historia asociados a los negros africanos desplazados en la diáspora atlántica que ocurrió durante la colonia y el imperio de Brasil (siglos XVI-XIX), marcados además por procesos de exclusión social y desigualdad a lo largo de la historia.

En la mayoría de los casos la presencia incómoda de estas poblaciones (para los emprendedores) o de los proyectos (para los impactados) deslinda en disputas intensas y en complejas negociaciones que merecen una atención especial por parte de los científicos sociales. La marea del desarrollo produce problemas aún mayores, puesto que afectan el ritmo y la población de ciudades pequeñas generalmente, que pasan a ser internacionalizadas por el capital y a recibir el desplazo de poblaciones atraídas por los nuevos parques industriales y turísticos.

Desde el comienzo de la década de 1950, época de la pionera investigación de Luiz de Castro Faria sobre la implementación de la industria química de la Compañía Nacional de Álcalis en Arraial do Cabo – que en ese entonces era un pequeño pueblo de pescadores – una serie de etnografías políticas de los conflictos ambientales en el litoral brasileño ha sido desarrollada por investigadores que hoy hacen parte del Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Administración de Conflictos – INCT-InEAC y el Laboratorio de Etnografía Metropolitana – LeMetro/IFCS-URJ. Roberto Kant de Lima y Marco Antonio da Silva Mello, los respectivos coordinadores de estos núcleos, desarrollaron investigaciones de campo de larga duración sobre situaciones de conflicto ambiental involucrando pescadores artesanales y los efectos de la especulación inmobiliaria frente a la expansión metropolitana alrededor de la ciudad de Rio de Janeiro.

Roberto Kant de Lima estudió el conocimiento naturalístico, la morfología social y el régimen de producción de los pescadores de Itaipu – una playa de la llamada región oceánica de Niterói, disputada por la presencia conspicua de casas de temporada (Kant & Pereira, 1997). En el caso de Zacarías, un Pueblo de pescadores en la laguna de Maricá estudiado por Mello, la disputa tenía como cerne el fantasma de la construcción de la ciudad de São Bento da Lagoa en la restinga (Mello & Vogel, 2017), ahora rediseñado por empresarios luso-españoles como proyecto de un inmenso *resort*, campos de golf y una marina deportiva en un emprendimiento orientado para el turismo en masa. Al este de la bahía de Guanabara, los municipios de Niterói y Maricá viven además del crecimiento del turismo, la expectativa de la construcción del Polo Petroquímico de Itaboraí, el cual con seguridad interferirá en el cotidiano de la región.

La transformación de lugares del litoral en destinos turísticos populares y las consecuencias graves para la población local fue tema de Patricia de Araújo Brandão Couto en su investigación sobre los conflictos ambientales y territoriales en el municipio de Itacaré, en el litoral del estado de Bahía (Couto, 2007). En el estado de Rio de Janeiro, Arraial do Cabo ha sido un tema revisitado por investigadores el Núcleo Fluminense de Estudios e Investigaciones – NUFEP y por el Núcleo de Investigaciones sobre prácticas e Instituciones Jurídicas – NUPIJ, coordinado por Ronaldo Lobão, quien analizó la construcción de *Reservas Extrativistas Marinas* y el enredo de relaciones y tensiones entre los diferentes grupos sociales organizados en Arraial do Cabo y en Itaipu (Niterói) en la compleja disputa por el uso del mar como espacio público (Lobão, 2010).

Por fin, cuestiones controversiales que relacionan la pertenencia étnica a conflictos ambientales también se revelan en la investigación de Fabio Reis Mota en la isla de la Marambaia, una región habitada por pescadores descendientes de seres humanos esclavizados y administrada por la Marina de Brasil. Una acción judicial de reposición territorial iniciada por los militares llevó al grupo a engallarse en un proceso de reconocimiento como una *comunidade de quilombo*, revindicando el derecho a la permanencia en el lugar y, por años, esperó una solución definitiva (Mota, 2014), finalmente fue decidida en favor de los *quilombolas*. Así, la sucesiva construcción de distintas y diferentes *arenas públicas* (Cefaï, 2002; Cefaï, Veiga, Mota, 2011) con sus conflictos de interés en escena, viene conduciendo a un cuadro diverso de propuestas y políticas para la creación de territorios preservados orientados a la manutención de los modos de vida tradicionales en Brasil, con grandes repercusiones en la prensa, en la política y en la esfera jurídica.

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# Bajo otro nombre: Secretos, complicidades, etnografía<sup>1</sup>

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## Resumen:

¿Cómo han impactado los procesos políticos recientes en la práctica y la ética de la investigación etnográfica, especialmente dado el creciente interés antropológico en estudiar la extrema derecha? Basándome en mi propia experiencia como investigador bajo un nombre falso, en este artículo reconsidero los imperativos éticos de la transparencia total y el consentimiento informado en el contexto del trabajo de campo etnográfico. Argumento que tales estándares éticos presuponen una noción insostenible del sujeto hablante al otorgar al etnógrafo una fijeza y objetividad que, además, normalmente negamos a nuestros interlocutores. En cambio, me pregunto, ¿cómo involucramos a nuestros interlocutores en redes de complicidad mientras retenemos u ofuscamos información en nuestros intercambios con ellos? ¿Cómo, a su vez, ellos nos exigen que correspondamos al mantener sus propias disimulaciones? En particular, examino cuatro problemas de identidad y transparencia en el trabajo de campo etnográfico, a los que llamo coherencia, performatividad, secrecía y complicidad. Mientras que realizar investigación etnográfica bajo un seudónimo resalta de manera excepcionalmente aguda el intenso trabajo metapragmático que implica posicionarse en el campo, sostengo que las preguntas que plantea son de una naturaleza más general para la investigación etnográfica. De hecho, tales preguntas impregnan la vida social en general y, por ende, necesariamente, también los enfoques etnográficos para su estudio.

**Palabras clave:** Etnografía oscura; Complicidad; Secreto/engaño en la investigación; Ética de la investigación; Consentimiento informado; Investigación sobre la extrema derecha.

<sup>1</sup> Este artículo es una traducción del texto original en inglés que se publicó en la revista *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (véase 2021).

# Under a different name: Secrecy, complicity, ethnography

## **Abstract:**

How have recent political developments impacted the practice and ethics of ethnographic research, especially given the growing anthropological interest in studying the far right? Drawing on my own experience as a researcher under a false name, in this article I reconsider the ethical imperatives of full disclosure and informed consent in the context of ethnographic fieldwork. I argue that such ethical standards presume an untenable notion of the speaking subject by granting the ethnographer a fixity and objectivity that, furthermore, we ordinarily deny our interlocutors. Instead, I ask, how do we draw our interlocutors into webs of complicity as we withhold or obfuscate information in our transactions with them? How, in turn, do they call upon us to reciprocate by upholding their own dissimulations? In particular, I look at four problems of identity and transparency in ethnographic fieldwork, which I call coherence, performativity, secrecy, and complicity. While conducting ethnographic research under a pseudonym brings into exceptionally sharp relief the intensive metapragmatic labor entailed in positioning oneself in the field, I argue that the questions it raises are of a more general nature for ethnographic research. Indeed, such questions saturate social life at large and hence, necessarily, ethnographic approaches to its study.

**Keywords:** Dark ethnography; Complicity; Secrecy/deception in research; Research ethics; Informed consent; far right research



# Bajo otro nombre: Secretos, complicidades, etnografía

*Nitzan Shoshan*

El reciente y, según algunos, tardío aumento del interés antropológico en el estudio de los movimientos de extrema derecha ha respondido a procesos políticos preocupantes en todo el mundo que, entre otros efectos aún peores, expusieron lo poco que tenía que decir la disciplina sobre uno de los temas más importantes de nuestra época. Al mismo tiempo, dicho aumento de los estudios de la extrema derecha, que anteriormente la antropología había en gran medida evitado y evadido, ha generado todo tipo de problemas epistemológicos y éticos. En este artículo, me baso en mi propio trabajo de campo etnográfico con jóvenes extremistas de derecha en Berlín oriental para examinar algunas de las preguntas centrales que han surgido en torno al interés antropológico contemporáneo en la extrema derecha y a la reubicación de ese subcampo de los márgenes de la disciplina al corazón de sus agendas de investigación. Específicamente, examino los dilemas éticos que surgen de la práctica de la investigación etnográfica bajo un nombre falso, como fue mi caso. Argumento que los principios éticos que son tan comunes en nuestro oficio, como la transparencia total, el consentimiento informado y la producción de conocimiento colaborativo, no pueden ser abordados como imperativos absolutos. Por el contrario, la investigación etnográfica siempre debe navegar a través de un terreno turbio entre la honestidad y el ocultamiento, la verdad y las mentiras, la transparencia y la opacidad. Si bien la experiencia ciertamente atípica y particularmente problemática de un israelí judío haciéndose pasar por estadounidense con un nombre diferente orienta en gran medida mi análisis, sugiero que las preguntas que plantea no se circunscriben a los casos límite, sino que son relevantes para la práctica etnográfica de manera más general.

Ya a principios de los años 2000 había signos incipientes del creciente interés disciplinario en la extrema derecha, que se aceleró rápidamente durante la década de 2010. Mi propio trabajo de campo tomó forma en un contexto histórico que había sido testigo de un preocupante aumento de los movimientos de extrema derecha en la Europa post-socialista, a menudo atribuido en Alemania y en otros lugares a las huellas de regímenes autoritarios.<sup>2</sup> Sin embargo, esos mismos años vieron procesos políticos igualmente preocupantes en Europa Occidental, donde los partidos de extrema derecha obtuvieron aumentos sin precedentes en varios países (especialmente Francia, los Países Bajos, Austria e Italia), lo que puso en duda las teorías de la excepcionalidad post-socialista.

Esta transición de enfoque ha sido todo menos fluida. El desafío de buscar comprender mejor a la extrema derecha desde una perspectiva etnográfica, que ha sido objeto de intensos debates en revistas y conferencias disciplinarias en los últimos años, ha puesto de relieve un conjunto de obstáculos metodológicos interconectados. Los investigadores han tenido que lidiar repetidamente con importantes dificultades para acceder a interlocutores, establecer relaciones íntimas en el campo y sostener compromisos de investigación a largo plazo, todos ellos ampliamente considerados como estándares de oro de los métodos etnográficos. La confrontación con esos obstáculos metodológicos, que ya ha trastocado ciertos parámetros bien establecidos en la antropología, a su vez ha tenido lugar en el contexto de intentos contemporáneos más amplios de reimaginar la etnografía como un esfuerzo colaborativo y horizontal. En las últimas décadas, voces críticas dentro de la disciplina han cuestionado la sabiduría recibida sobre los tipos de relaciones que los antropólogos deben consolidar en su trabajo de campo y han instado a los investigadores a desarrollar o adoptar marcos metodológicos colaborativos para la investigación etnográfica. Por mencionar solo un ejemplo notable, en el

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<sup>2</sup> Para una evaluación crítica de este argumento, que se mantiene dominante en debates sobre la extrema derecha europea, véase (Kalmar & Shoshan 2020; Kalmar 2020).

primer número de la revista *Collaborative Ethnographies*, Douglas Holmes y George Marcus argumentaron a favor de una antropología que incorpore a los informantes en el diseño de la investigación como lo que ellos llaman «socios epistémicos» (2008). Instando a la antropología a superar las aproximaciones tradicionales a la colaboración, Holmes y Marcus insisten en que debemos repensarla «más allá de la comprensión anterior de que el sujeto responde, coopera y tolera las agendas más o menos explícitas del etnógrafo» (2008: 85). En su lugar, proponen que «debemos reaprender nuestro método desde nuestros sujetos como socios epistémicos, a través de una evaluación cuidadosa de cómo ellos se involucran intelectualmente con nuestro mundo y nuestro tiempo. Esto supone motivación, intención, propósito, curiosidad y, por lo tanto, apropiación intelectual por parte de los sujetos que aceptan formar parte o cooperar con la investigación etnográfica» (2008: 84). En diversos contextos académicos, me han pedido que explique cómo, a los ojos de mi audiencia y colegas, mi investigación ha violado varios principios tanto tradicionales como recientes y emergentes. Y sin embargo, en mi trabajo etnográfico, la consolidación de relaciones de colaboración horizontal parecía imposible.

Desde otra perspectiva, la investigación etnográfica con extremistas de derecha ha significado para mí alejarme de la posibilidad, correctamente celebrada, que abre la antropología (muchos dirían, la responsabilidad ética que necesariamente conlleva) de combinar la investigación con la defensa de las personas que estudiamos. Lo cierto es que la potencialidad de abrir nuevos espacios de enunciación para mis interlocutores, apoyar sus proyectos emergentes, hablar en su nombre y en su favor cuando están ausentes, o nutrir un compromiso político disciplinado con su causa parecían inaccesibles o poco aconsejables en mi caso.<sup>3</sup> Para muchos que estudian a aquellos con quienes se identifican, sin embargo, esas formas de practicar la antropología se han convertido en un *sine qua non* de nuestra vocación. Consideremos, por ejemplo, el llamado de Charles Hale a una reconciliación intradisciplinaria entre dos modos diferentes de investigación antropológica. Por un lado, la investigación activista «afirma una alineación política con un grupo organizado de personas en lucha y permite que el diálogo con ellos moldee cada fase del proceso», aprovechando a lo largo del camino una variedad de conocimientos significativos para esas personas. La crítica cultural, por otro lado, se propone «defender a los pueblos subalternos y deconstruir a los poderosos» sin una «transformación sustantiva en los métodos convencionales de investigación» y «a través del contenido del conocimiento producido» (2006: 97-98). Nótese que ningún modo de ejercer una antropología políticamente comprometida acomoda bien el tipo de investigación etnográfica que yo llevé a cabo, en la que no busqué ni defender ni unirme a las luchas de las personas que estudié (véase también Goodale 2020).<sup>4</sup>

En un sentido relacionado, mi trabajo ha sido criticado por lo que los lectores y oyentes consideran una reproducción acrítica de los modos coloniales de producción de conocimiento. Desde principios de los años noventa (Harrison 1991), la crítica decolonial de la antropología ha llamado a la transformación de la disciplina a través del compromiso con principios como la colaboración y la solidaridad política. Apoyándose en perspectivas diversas, varios autores han presentado visiones convincentes de una disciplina decolonizada, avanzando al mismo tiempo en múltiples frentes, ya sean éticos, metodológicos o epistemológicos. Sin embargo, las investigaciones como la mía pueden solo parcialmente acomodar el énfasis decolonial en la etnografía participativa y en desestabilizar la distinción entre investigador e investigado (West 2016).<sup>5</sup>

El grado en que los etnógrafos de la extrema derecha con frecuencia se encuentran contraviniendo las demandas contemporáneas de renovación ética y política de la antropología refleja, a su vez, una marginación de más larga data dentro de la disciplina de ciertos temas considerados incómodos. Pero ¿por qué los antropólogos en general

3 Para una perspectiva diferente, véase (Teitelbaum 2019) y las respuestas a él en el mismo dossier.

4 Sin duda, la ausencia de una crítica o un compromiso políticos es típica de la antropología convencional, hoy como en el pasado. Mi punto, sin embargo, es que ciertas investigaciones etnográficas se prestan mejor que otras para incorporar modos activistas, colaborativos y decoloniales de producción de conocimiento.

5 Mientras una discusión más amplia de la crítica decolonial y sus implicaciones para la antropología queda fuera del alcance de este artículo, me permito afirmar que la veo como una intervención bienvenida, junto con y no siempre en sintonía con otros compromisos éticos que como investigadores tenemos.

han evitado los encuentros etnográficos desagradables? En otro artículo (2015), he sugerido que esta omisión estructural tiene tres dimensiones. Sin reproducir esos argumentos con detalle aquí, los describiré brevemente antes de desarrollar mi argumento sobre la complicidad. La primera dimensión se refiere a los estándares convencionales, las posibilidades y las limitaciones de la producción de conocimiento antropológico, desde los principios éticos de nuestra praxis hasta la política de nuestra escritura. De hecho, este es el nivel en el que ha procedido gran parte de la discusión sobre los desafíos que enfrentan los etnógrafos de la extrema derecha: en mi caso, por ejemplo, el uso de un nombre falso o la ausencia, tanto en el campo como en mi escritura, de solidaridad política con mis interlocutores. La segunda dimensión está orientada hacia las restricciones externas impuestas a la producción de conocimiento antropológico por su ubicación específica dentro de una economía mayor del conocimiento, que define y delimita su dominio a lo que Michel Rolph-Trouillot llamó acertadamente el «nicho del salvaje» (2003). Una tercera y última dimensión, relacionada pero no exactamente idéntica a la primera, incluye todas las formas diferentes en que la investigación etnográfica nos confronta y nos obliga a negociar e intervenir en los campos discursivos disputados en los que trabajamos y de los que gradualmente nos volvemos cómplices.

En lo que resta del artículo, me enfocaré en ésta última dimensión. Me pregunto: ¿qué podemos aprender de nuestro compromiso con la política del ocultamiento, la revelación y la complicidad en nuestros sitios de campo? ¿Cómo pueden estas formas de compromiso ayudarnos a reconsiderar algunos de los desafíos éticos y epistemológicos que son internos a nuestra disciplina? Para examinar estas preguntas, en lo que sigue, primero discutiré brevemente las circunstancias particulares de mi propia investigación con jóvenes extremistas de derecha en Berlín Oriental y el lugar del secreto y la complicidad en la realización de mi trabajo, así como en establecer límites a lo que podía y no podía hacer.<sup>6</sup> Basándome en esta investigación, luego ofreceré una discusión crítica de tres dimensiones del imperativo de transparencia total, a saber, los problemas de coherencia, performatividad y secrecía. Finalmente, examinaré la noción de complicidad en el trabajo de campo etnográfico y mostraré cómo sus ambivalencias nos invitan a reconsiderar los marcos éticos en los que operamos.

## Algunos antecedentes

Entre los diversos desafíos a los que me enfrenté, la cuestión del acceso destacó como uno de los más difíciles. Un equipo de trabajadores sociales que atendía a grupos de jóvenes extremistas de derecha resultó ser el único punto de entrada posible que pude identificar para lograr la etnografía inmersiva que esperaba realizar. Aunque lejos de ser homogéneos, esos grupos difusos y dinámicos estaban compuestos principalmente por personas socialmente marginadas entre las edades de quince y veinticinco años, de géneros mixtos, que provenían de familias de Alemania Oriental y que pasaban gran parte de su tiempo al aire libre en áreas afectadas por la desindustrialización y la recesión económica después de la reunificación. Algunos, aunque no todos, también participaban en fraternidades de derecha locales y en filiales de partidos políticos. Obtener la cooperación de los trabajadores sociales era, por lo tanto, esencial para mi investigación. El equipo de trabajo social al que me acerqué se entusiasmó con mi proyecto y estuvo dispuesto a ayudarme, permitiéndome incrustarme con ellos para conocer a sus «clientes». Después de que consideraron y aprobaron mi solicitud, nos reunimos para decidir los términos de nuestra colaboración. Comenzaron presentándome los principios éticos que rigen sus relaciones con sus jóvenes clientes. Estos incluyen tratarlos como agentes capaces de tomar decisiones sobre sus vidas por su cuenta y responsabilizarse por esas decisiones, mantenerse proclives a sus clientes y a sus necesidades, proteger su confidencialidad tanto como sea posible y mantener una relación con ellos basada en la sinceridad y la transparencia.

Acto seguido, me anunciaron que, para unirme a ellos y llevar a cabo mi investigación, necesitaría cambiar mi nombre hebreo para ocultar mi identidad judía israelí. En su lugar, dijeron, me presentaría como un

<sup>6</sup> Para una discusión más extendida, véase (Shoshan 2016).

estadounidense llamado Nate a todos los que conociera, jóvenes neonazis o no. A los trabajadores sociales no les preocupaba tanto la violencia o la hostilidad de los jóvenes extremistas de derecha con los que trabajaban, a quienes confiaban en aceptarme como parte de su equipo, sino la de otros en sus entornos sociales inmediatos. Desde ese día en adelante, ellos y todos los demás en Treptow se referían a mí como Nate, un estudiante de doctorado en antropología de Chicago. Ahora, el trabajo de campo puede ser una experiencia abrumadoramente compleja: emocionante, aburrida, emocionalmente agotadora o generadora de varias inseguridades personales. Para muchos, también puede inducir miedo. Durante mi primer período en el campo, sentí una paranoia aguda acerca de mi identidad y revisé obsesivamente mi ropa, mochila, bolsillos y pertenencias en busca de rastros que pudieran delatar mi verdadero nombre. Con el tiempo y a medida que me integraba en los grupos que había planeado estudiar, esas preocupaciones disminuyeron y dieron paso a la familiaridad y la rutina. Y sin embargo, a lo largo de mi trabajo de campo, sufrí una pesadilla repetitiva en la que una banda de skinheads que había descubierto mi engaño me perseguía y que, inusualmente para mí, recordaba vívidamente la mañana siguiente.

Más allá de las turbas furiosas de neonazis que me perseguían en mis sueños y episodios de paranoia obsesiva, mi seudónimo presentaba preocupaciones más reales, concretas y, podríamos decir, racionalmente motivadas. Cuando mis jóvenes interlocutores se iban de viaje por la frontera polaca, donde los productos que estaban prohibidos o eran difíciles de conseguir en Alemania estaban fácilmente disponibles, los trabajadores sociales me aconsejaban no acompañarlos por temor a que nos pidieran identificación al regresar. Durante una marcha neonazi, cuando unos policías acordonaron nuestra zona y anunciaron que tendríamos que presentar nuestras identificaciones, mi corazón se saltó varios latidos; finalmente, nos dejaron ir a todos. En otra ocasión, acompañé a uno de mis interlocutores más cercanos, un joven neonazi que ya había sido condenado por varios asaltos, a una reunión clandestina con el representante de una organización que ayudaba a los jóvenes extremistas de derecha a dejar la escena. Temblé al darme cuenta de que ya había conocido al representante un año antes, bajo mi verdadero nombre, en un contexto diferente. Para mi alivio, éste parecía haber olvidado nuestro encuentro anterior.

De ese modo, realizar trabajo de campo etnográfico bajo un nombre falso me confrontó con una serie de desafíos, riesgos y obstáculos. Requirió que elaborara estrategias para minimizar dichos riesgos y poder llevar a cabo mi investigación a pesar de los obstáculos que enfrentaba. La gestión de este secreto requirió un juicio cuidadoso sobre los tipos de actividades en las que participaba. Pero igualmente, requirió que habitara mi personaje y lo representara en cada interacción cotidiana y en respuesta a cualquier solicitud de información sobre, por ejemplo, mi presunto país de origen. En parte, entonces, evadir el descubrimiento y la revelación era una cuestión de planificación y de tomar medidas preventivas adecuadas, de conocer mis límites y de mantener mis dos vidas en Berlín lo más separadas posible. En parte, se trataba de dejarme interpelar por mi seudónimo cada vez que alguien lo usaba, de habitar mi nuevo nombre. Pero a pesar de toda mi precaución, siempre fue también una cuestión de simple suerte, de momentos que podrían ir en una u otra dirección, de situaciones peligrosas que no llegaron a nada, de pesadillas que no se convirtieron en realidad gracias al azar, más que gracias a mi astucia estratégica.

Además, los riesgos asociados con mi posible exposición eran no sólo reales sino múltiples. En primer lugar, si mi identidad hubiera sido descubierta, su revelación habría tenido consecuencias significativas para los trabajadores sociales y su relación con sus jóvenes clientes. Si bien fueron ellos quienes insistieron en mi cambio de nombre, al hacerlo priorizaron mi seguridad—por la cual, sin duda, se sintieron responsables, dado que me habían acogido bajo su protección—sobre la seguridad de su propio trabajo y las relaciones de confianza que habían consolidado. Dudo que hubieran enfrentado amenazas a su bienestar personal, y sin embargo, me resulta difícil imaginar que no hubieran sufrido un revés serio en sus largos y arduos esfuerzos por ganar la confianza de aquellos a quienes estaban engañando. En segundo lugar, la exposición podría haber significado un peligro concreto para mí. Después de todo, si los trabajadores sociales consideraron que mi nombre hebreo podría resultar en riesgos potenciales para mi seguridad personal, ocultarlo y adoptar uno falso sin duda habría aumentado considerablemente esos riesgos. Como ya era conocido por muchos en el campo,

podía esperar que la noticia de mi exposición llegara rápidamente a prácticamente todos mis interlocutores, lo que, en el mejor de los casos, hubiera dificultado cualquier potencial esfuerzo de controlar el daño. Hubiera sido imposible, por lo tanto, visitar a Treptow sin exponerme al peligro. En resumen, e independientemente de si los trabajadores sociales podrían reparar sus relaciones o si yo experimentarían o no daño personal, la revelación de mi verdadera identidad casi con seguridad habría puesto fin a mi investigación.

Incluso si todo salía bien (como de hecho sucedió) y ninguno de los escenarios que acabo de mencionar llegaba a producirse (lo que no pasó), la adopción de un seudónimo implicaba también un alejamiento de la tradición antropológica en otro sentido. El especial valor epistemológico que tiene la investigación etnográfica en la antropología se atribuye convencionalmente a largas estancias de investigación, durante las cuales los investigadores desarrollan relaciones íntimas con las personas que estudian y acceden a conocimientos que de otro modo estarían fuera de su alcance, quedarían tras bambalinas, o serían simplemente demasiado ordinarios para ser notados sin suficiente tiempo. A menudo, los etnógrafos se basan en un compromiso sostenido con sus lugares de trabajo y sus interlocutores, logrado a través de múltiples viajes de investigación, para elaborar una comprensión profunda de los procesos que observan, comprensión que se beneficia, a su vez, de un marco temporal de análisis a largo plazo. El cambio de nombre, en mi caso, implicaba disminuir las posibilidades de continuar con mi investigación posteriormente. Estaba claro que mantener oculta mi identidad se volvería cada vez más difícil y probablemente inviable a medida que pasaran los años. Las publicaciones, charlas públicas, una mayor presencia digital y otras formas de exposición prometían revelar eventualmente quién era. Para llevar a cabo mi investigación, entonces, tuve que sacrificar de antemano la posibilidad de seguirla en el futuro.

El tipo de preocupaciones metodológicas y éticas que saturaron mi trabajo de campo han surgido una y otra vez en los distintos foros en los que he presentado los resultados de mi investigación. De hecho, las cuestiones de identidad, acceso y los dilemas tanto éticos como prácticos que conllevaban han tendido a eclipsar la discusión sobre mis argumentos de fondo acerca del nacionalismo y la política de derecha. Este interés sostenido refleja, en mi opinión, el encuentro cada vez más intenso de la antropología actual con cuestiones de método. En mi caso, surge tanto de las dificultades de la praxis del trabajo de campo como de los problemas posteriores que se presentaron durante el proceso de escritura. Dado que comparto la preocupación de la mayoría de los antropólogos por la autorreflexividad sobre la ética de nuestra investigación y nuestras relaciones en el campo, revelar desde el principio y de manera explícita los términos problemáticos de la relación con mis interlocutores parecía ser el único camino correcto. En consecuencia, la primera oración del libro que publiqué sobre esta investigación anuncia el problema de mi identidad falsa, y la discusión que sigue explica algunas de las tensiones metodológicas y éticas que ésta implicó. Cualquier otra cosa se habría probablemente leído como un intento de minimizar, suavizar u oscurecer estas dificultades fundamentales. En cierto sentido, entonces, el hecho de que las discusiones académicas sobre mi trabajo se centren en la cuestión de mi falsa identidad y sus ambigüedades éticas -a veces, quizá, a costa de otras dimensiones más «sustantivas»—se debe, al menos en parte, a la prioridad que les di en mi escritura.

### **Coherencia, Performatividad, Secrecía: Problemas de Identidad y Transparencia**

Esos debates a veces enmarcan el uso de un nombre falso como algo excepcional (de manera similar a la declaración de ética de la Comisión Europea; véase 2018) y en otras ocasiones como algo perverso (más en línea con la declaración de ética de la Asociación Americana de Antropología; véase 2012). De hecho, la literatura disciplinaria sobre este tema—o sobre la investigación antropológica bajo un seudónimo—son difíciles de encontrar. Varios académicos han abordado preguntas similares, aunque rara vez desde la antropología. Algunos se han enfocado en la legitimidad no solo del uso de un nombre falso, sino también de la investigación encubierta en sí misma, especialmente en un contexto histórico que ha visto un aumento del interés en ideologías políticas radicales bajo

el signo de la llamada guerra contra el terror. Por ejemplo, algunos investigadores de la religión han argumentado que la investigación encubierta es una estrategia legítima tanto metodológica como éticamente en ciertos casos especiales, como el estudio de grupos radicales o comunidades «desviadas» (Lauder 2003).

Más ampliamente, y más allá del interés específico en el desvío religioso (o político) y la investigación encubierta, los sociólogos han argumentado que el secreto forma parte esencial de toda acción social y debe ser considerado, además, como «parte integral de la investigación en ciencias sociales» (Mitchell 1993: 2). Para Mitchell, la polarización binaria entre secreto y transparencia y su comprensión como elección voluntaria reproduce enfoques metodológicos positivistas que buscan obtener una verdad objetiva a través de la observación empírica. Si bien el secreto puede plantear riesgos tanto para los investigadores como, a veces, para sus colaboradores, Mitchell lo ve como necesario para la producción de conocimiento y, quizás de manera igualmente importante, como una dimensión común de la vida de aquellos que estudiamos. Mientras tanto, el sociólogo John McKenzie argumenta que la investigación encubierta y la abierta o transparente forman un continuum, en lugar de ser opuestas (2009). Según él, esta perspectiva cuestiona la superioridad moral generalmente concedida a los métodos abiertos, en parte porque la mayoría de la investigación abierta implica prácticas encubiertas, aunque a menudo se enmascaren o se oculten. Estas prácticas encubiertas se revelan, por ejemplo, cada vez que un etnógrafo finge ignorancia para obtener explicaciones de sus interlocutores. Se plantean ambigüedades similares en relación con el consentimiento, tanto porque los interlocutores a menudo no comprenden completamente cómo están siendo investigados, como porque con frecuencia no están en una posición para retener su consentimiento debido a su lugar en las jerarquías sociales locales. Si bien los discursos éticos que priorizan categóricamente la transparencia suelen centrarse en el bienestar de los informantes, para McKenzie cualquier consideración de los problemas éticos del trabajo de campo debe también incluir no solo al investigador, sino a la disciplina y a la sociedad en general, donde entran en juego otras consideraciones además de la transparencia completa. Si bien algunos de los puntos de Mitchell probablemente generaría perplejidad entre los antropólogos, encuentro que el énfasis en la complejidad y multidimensionalidad de nuestros compromisos éticos como etnógrafos es convincente y una alternativa refrescante a la usual restricción de los debates éticos a la relación entre investigador e investigado.

Dentro de la antropología, las críticas a los estándares éticos básicos y a las suposiciones en las que se basan han sido menos comunes, aunque no han estado del todo ausentes. Haciendo eco de McKenzie, por ejemplo, Kirsten Bell ha apuntado particularmente a lo que describe como la fetichización antropológica de la noción de «consentimiento informado» (2014). Para Bell, durante la década de 1990, la antropología adoptó acríticamente el consentimiento informado de las ciencias biomédicas y conductuales como dogma metodológico porque prometía responder a los dilemas éticos que surgían ante la creciente atención de la disciplina a su pasado colonial y a los contextos poscoloniales. Sin embargo, argumenta, las verdades parciales son esenciales para obtener acceso al trabajo de campo, del mismo modo que la naturaleza espontánea del trabajo de campo se resiste a la elección premeditada y al anuncio explícito de intenciones. La insistencia constante de las organizaciones antropológicas en una dicotomía tajante entre apertura y engaño ha significado que la imposibilidad de obtener un consentimiento plenamente informado se haya utilizado para criticar el método de la etnografía en general, en lugar de la doctrina del consentimiento en sí misma. «El sujeto particular ‘materializado’ en la doctrina del consentimiento informado», concluye Bell, «es uno que debemos rechazar enfáticamente. Al hacerlo, podremos enfrentar más plenamente los complejos dilemas éticos que confrontamos en nuestro trabajo de campo y escritura» (2014: 9).<sup>7</sup>

¿Pero qué significa la investigación encubierta o el consentimiento no informado en el contexto del trabajo de campo etnográfico? Hasta ahora, he considerado algunas de las implicaciones del gran secreto de mi trabajo

<sup>7</sup> Para otras perspectivas críticas sobre la adopción de los principios del consentimiento informado en la antropología, véase también (European Association of Social Anthropologists 2018; Wax 1980; Annechino 2013).

de campo, lo que mis interlocutores no sabían de mí. Pero, ¿qué pasa con todo lo que sí sabían? Sabían, por ejemplo, que yo era estudiante de doctorado en antropología y que había venido a su vecindario a estudiarlos. También sabían que publicaría libros y artículos sobre ellos y, en resonancia con las experiencias de otros etnógrafos (p.e., Bourgois 2003), varios de ellos parecían emocionados por la posibilidad de figurar como personajes principales en una monografía. Aunque, como sostiene Bell, difícilmente se podía esperar que comprendieran plenamente lo que eso significaba, mi investigación era en este sentido encubierta de una forma diferente a la discutida por, por ejemplo, Nancy Scheper-Hughes en relación con su trabajo sobre el tráfico de órganos criminales (2004). Al mismo tiempo, obviamente estaba en tensión con las directrices oficiales como los «Principios de Responsabilidad Profesional» de la Asociación Antropológica Americana (2012), así como con los llamados disciplinarios a una transparencia absoluta (p.e., Berreman 2002). Durante el tiempo que pasamos juntos, mis interlocutores llegaron a conocer una variedad de otras dimensiones de mi participación en su mundo, otras actividades que emprendí además de acompañarlos y otras personas con las que interactué como parte de mi investigación. También llegaron gradualmente a conocerme personalmente, es decir, mis gustos y creencias personales, durante las largas conversaciones que tuvimos en diversos momentos durante mi tiempo en Treptow. Lo más importante en mi opinión, es que eran muy conscientes de que yo no compartía sus convicciones políticas y que no tenía la intención de unirme a su lucha ni de abogar por ellos, como hacen muchos otros antropólogos en sus respectivos campos.

¿Fue entonces mi trabajo de campo encubierto? La respuesta debe ser ni enteramente positiva ni enteramente negativa. Basándome en los autores que he revisado anteriormente, en el resto de este artículo desarrollo aún más el argumento de que la distinción que supuestamente separa la honestidad y la deshonestidad, la verdad y la mentira, el secreto y la divulgación en el trabajo de campo etnográfico se revela bajo escrutinio crítico como mucho más porosa e inestable de lo que las discusiones sobre la ética y la metodología en la investigación antropológica a menudo permiten; de hecho, es tan porosa como la vida social misma.

Hay varias preguntas que podríamos hacer sobre esas distinciones fundamentales. ¿Por ejemplo, en qué supuestos sobre el sujeto hablante de un discurso transparente se basan? ¿Cómo enmarcan la identidad con relación a regímenes específicos de autenticidad? ¿Qué lugar conceden a los interlocutores o a públicos más amplios de actos verbales de revelación o de la indexicalización performativa de la verdad? ¿Cómo trazan la distinción ética a partir de la cual surgen parámetros de responsabilidad y atribuciones de honestidad, y en la que, al mismo tiempo, estos últimos se basan?

El imperativo de transparencia total (por ejemplo, el consentimiento plenamente informado) parece suponer que el portador de la responsabilidad ética constituye una singularidad agentiva. Dado que la verdad que enuncia este agente confesional es reflexiva (concierno al agente hablante mismo), su emisor debe ser un autor auto-identico con pretensiones legítimas de autenticidad. Por lo tanto, el concepto simplificado de identidad que implica el llamamiento a la revelación absoluta parece no encajar del todo con nuestra propia noción de la misma, como etnógrafos, en los contextos que estudiamos. Cuando nos acercamos a nuestros interlocutores, damos por sentado que sus identidades, en la medida en que incluso usamos el término, son multidimensionales, están en flujo y son porosas. ¿Por qué asumiríamos que nuestro caso es diferente?

En este punto quiero considerar brevemente algunos de los problemas—más o menos familiares, creo, para la mayoría de los etnógrafos—con un marco ético que buscaría sus fundamentos en una separación clara y estable entre lo verdadero y lo falso. Un primer problema es lo que podríamos llamar, en términos generales, la cuestión de la coherencia. Como etnógrafos, estamos entrenados para reconocer las diversas dimensiones que se intersecan para definir las posiciones subjetivas específicas de individuos particulares como diferentes, lo que llamamos interseccionalidad. En mi propia etnografía, por ejemplo, mi género masculino, piel blanca, clase media, heterosexualidad, juventud y nacionalidad moldearon todas mis relaciones con mis interlocutores, afectando directamente las posibilidades y límites de mi investigación. Otros investigadores

posicionados de manera diferente, sin duda, habrían recorrido diferentes caminos y enfrentado obstáculos diferentes. Además, al igual que las personas que estudiamos, nosotros también contenemos multitudes que no son necesariamente coherentes. En su lugar, las distintas fuerzas y escalas que nos moldean a nosotros y a ellos a menudo se contraponen entre sí, a veces en flagrante contradicción. Tales disonancias son quizás especialmente evidentes en las etnografías de la extrema derecha, donde, por ejemplo, los conflictos entre los compromisos políticos del etnógrafo, sus compromisos con sus interlocutores en el campo y sus compromisos con su disciplina surgen con regularidad. Sin embargo, nuestros interlocutores luchan con dilemas similares. Consideremos a los trabajadores sociales con quienes me inserté y cómo continuamente se encontraban en medio de compromisos divergentes y contradictorios que debían navegar y, además, que eran parte de los regímenes de bienestar dentro de los cuales trabajaban (Shoshan 2016, especialmente capítulo 6).

Un segundo conjunto de problemas se refiere a la performatividad del discurso. Como es bien sabido, J.L. Austin desarrolló la noción de lo performativo para desplazar la atención desde la distinción entre verdadero y falso como criterio para evaluar el habla cotidiana, hacia las distinciones entre éxito y fracaso, felicidad e infelicidad, o lo adecuado y lo inadecuado como el fundamento de gran parte de lo que sucede en los actos de habla (1975). La noción de performatividad perturba por lo tanto los modos confesionales de producción de verdad, ya que la pregunta que plantea no es si el etnógrafo ha sido transparente, sino que tan efectivamente (qué tan convincente es su discurso «transparente») y con qué fin (para cumplir con los estándares disciplinarios, para obtener acceso, para ganar confianza, etc.) ha performado la transparencia—en otras palabras, lo que Austin llamaría la fuerza ilocucionaria y el efecto perlocucionario de sus (transparentes) actos de habla.

Como nos recuerda Tambiah, de la mano de la fuerza ilocucionaria de las palabras, la performatividad también sugiere una dimensión dramática de la interacción social (1985). No es necesario concluir por lo tanto, como lo sugiere Erving Goffman (1959), que la presentación del yo es una actuación estratégica que se orienta instrumentalmente hacia ciertos fines interaccionales, al menos no siempre y no completamente. Sin embargo, parece no haber nada controvertido en la noción de la máscara social. Tampoco es necesario recordar las múltiples maneras en que interpretamos nuestros diferentes roles sociales, a menudo cambiando entre ellos y entre registros de habla, estilo y comportamiento corporal con poca antelación. Los profesores, por ejemplo, son muy conscientes de que el performance de la profesionalidad -de la condición de profesor- adecuado al contexto del aula universitaria no les haría ganar amigos en el bar, excepto quizá si se empleara eficazmente como auto parodia. Sin embargo, pocos condenarían a los profesores como insinceros o hipócritas por actuar «profesionalmente» en el aula e informalmente en otros lugares.

En el campo, documentamos fácilmente esos performances situados. En otro texto, por ejemplo, discutí cómo los trabajadores sociales con quienes colaboré escenificaban la experticia y la autoridad, la pertenencia local y el conocimiento oculto, o las relaciones jerárquicas dentro de los aparatos de gobernanza a través del cambio de registro performativo entre el alemán estándar y el dialecto berlinés vernáculo (2016: 162–65). O consideremos las formas en que mis jóvenes interlocutores extremistas de derecha expresaban una serie de opiniones políticas que a la vez eran siempre performances situados e inestables dirigidos a públicos específicos en contextos particulares, en lugar de articular un conjunto coherente de creencias. Mientras que algunos de ellos, en algunas situaciones, se dedicaban a cultivar la imagen de militantes radicales, otras personas u otros contextos suscitaban performances de patriotismo más razonable (2016, capítulo 3).

Sin repetir mi descripción de esos cambios y posicionamientos performativos (véase 2016 para una discusión más detallada, especialmente en los capítulos 2, 3 y 6), me gustaría destacar tres puntos sobre los mismos que son particularmente pertinentes para la presente discusión. El primero se refiere a lo que podríamos pensar como la sintaxis de esos performances situados. Ya sea que observemos el cambio de registro lingüístico como práctica metapragmática o los posicionamientos políticos interaccionales con relación a compañeros y otros, los performances cotidianos, en lugar de animar una persona coherente y consistente, incorporan



unos tipos dentro de otros y los ponen en relación, a menudo de forma recursiva (véase Gal 2002). Hacen esto principalmente a través de la apropiación y citación de diferentes voces sociales para crear personajes complejos, en lugar de planos (Bakhtin 1998). En segundo lugar, y como resultado, los personajes que interpretan parecen construcciones flexibles e híbridas que indican ubicaciones en un continuo multidimensional de orientaciones, en lugar de oposiciones binarias. Finalmente, las preguntas sobre la verdad no parecen criterios importantes de evaluación en ninguno de los casos performativos, dando paso a preguntas sobre la acción. Los problemas que plantean no son de sinceridad, sino del encauzamiento efectivo de la interacción social.

Al igual que las personas con las que trabajamos en el campo, también nosotros, como etnógrafos, somos llamados regularmente a responder a distintas situaciones y a configurar activamente nuestras relaciones. No en vano, la gestión consciente de las impresiones (Goffman 1959) durante el trabajo de campo es un tema habitual en los seminarios de posgrado sobre métodos etnográficos de muchos departamentos de antropología. En las aulas, así como en publicaciones académicas, los etnógrafos reflexionan explícitamente sobre su posicionamiento en el campo, sobre cómo nuestros interlocutores nos perciben y sobre cómo esto impacta en nuestra investigación. Y lo que es más importante, debatimos cómo gestionar mejor nuestra imagen mediante un manejo proactivo y actuaciones deliberadas para no ceder el control completo a los demás. Para ello, puede que tengamos que evitar ciertas actividades (en mi caso, por ejemplo, cruzar fronteras nacionales y arriesgar controles de identidad) mientras que buscamos activamente participar en otras (por ejemplo, beber cerveza como algo indispensable para la sociabilidad y la confianza). Puede que tengamos que apropiarnos de distintos lenguajes sociales y jugar con ellos, interpretando, por ejemplo, la informalidad vernácula en un entorno y la autoridad experta en otro. Y puede que tengamos que oponernos enérgicamente a los papeles sociales que otros nos atribuyen; en mi caso, por ejemplo, negando las sospechas de que en realidad era un agente del Mossad y no un antropólogo. O consideremos como, por citar solo uno de los varios textos dedicados a estas cuestiones en la literatura, el sociólogo Sudhir Venkatesh describe sus esfuerzos, a veces vanos, por ejercer cierto control sobre los continuos cambios en la percepción que la gente tenía de él durante su trabajo de campo en una unidad de vivienda social de Chicago mientras luchaba por evitar posibles atribuciones condenatorias de intenciones maliciosas (2002).

Por lo tanto, el problema de la performatividad nos lleva, en tercer lugar, a cuestiones generales sobre el secreto y la revelación. Como han argumentado los autores citados anteriormente, el secreto no puede sino formar parte del proceso de investigación, tanto por razones relacionadas con el trabajo de campo en particular (por ejemplo, el consentimiento informado, el acceso), como porque constituye una dimensión discursiva de la vida social en general (Bell 2014). Otros han admitido que los secretos conllevan el riesgo de ser expuestos, poniendo en peligro la investigación e incluso al investigador (Mitchell 1993), pero se preguntan por qué, si normalmente vivimos con el riesgo de la exposición, no lo haríamos en el trabajo de campo. Además, los secretos son de distintos tipos y operan de diversas maneras y con distintos fines en las interacciones sociales: algunos son pequeños, otros grandes, algunos son íntimos, otros públicos, y algunos son inocentes, mientras que otros están lejos de serlo.

Consideremos, por ejemplo, el caso de Melissa Hackman, quien realizó trabajo de campo etnográfico con miembros de una organización ex-gay neo-pentecostal en Ciudad del Cabo, Sudáfrica (2018). Hackman ajustó cuidadosamente cómo se vestía y se comportaba en el campo y cómo respondía a las declaraciones racistas, sexistas y homofóbicas de sus interlocutores para ganar y mantener su confianza y colaboración. Su meticulosa gestión de las impresiones buscaba facilitar su acceso a un espacio dominado por hombres y evitar posibles sospechas sobre su identidad sexual lesbiana y sus opiniones políticas progresistas. Otro investigador, Arturo Díaz Cruz, realizó trabajo de campo etnográfico en un barrio de la Ciudad de México infame por ser el centro de los mercados ilegales de crimen organizado, narcóticos, armas, trata de personas y otros delitos (2019). Para acceder a los grupos que pretendía estudiar, trabajó lentamente y con paciencia a través de una secuencia de porteros que lo aceptaron y, a su vez, lo avalaron en lo que él ha llamado «una economía de favores». Su intermediario en la calle lo bautizó como su primo y lo presentó de esta manera a grupos de jóvenes vigilantes

que extorsionaban a vendedores informales para protección, así como a una variedad de otros personajes en el barrio que eran relevantes para su investigación.

Ahora bien, Hackman nunca mintió deliberadamente sobre su sexualidad y política. Simplemente evitó divulgar cualquier información no solicitada que pudiera haber revelado su secreto. Sin embargo, decidió mantener activamente esa dimensión de su personalidad fuera de la vista al gestionar escrupulosamente su presentación de género, como muchos etnógrafos hemos hecho con diferentes aspectos de nosotros mismos en situaciones de trabajo de campo. Esa decisión, por supuesto, ya anticipaba y se dirigía a una cierta respuesta entre las personas que esperaba estudiar. Al igual que en mi propio caso, y a pesar de la distinción convencional entre secreto y engaño, temía que la exposición de su secreto pudiera haber puesto en riesgo su investigación. Cuando reveló su sexualidad a algunos de sus interlocutores al final de su trabajo de campo, encontró respuestas mixtas, pero su narración de esas interacciones muestra claramente que la noticia les sorprendió, y en algunos casos, se sintieron traicionados.

Mientras tanto, Díaz fue activamente cómplice en su presentación como primo de su guardián. Y, sin embargo, muchos de sus interlocutores, algunos de los cuales conocían bien al guardián y a su familia, demostraron un escepticismo palpable sobre la veracidad de su designación como pariente real. En lugar de aceptar su supuesta proximidad familiar como verdadera, lo entendieron como un índice pragmático de otras formas de obligaciones socialmente mediadas. La ausencia de cualquier parentesco real entre Díaz y el guardián, y la economía de favores que sirvió de base para su relación, eran un secreto público y uno que, además, a sus interlocutores no parecía importarles. ¿Se trataba entonces de una mentira? Entre estas diferentes formas y grados de secrecía, revelación y engaño surgen muchas posibilidades diferentes, de las cuales nosotros, como etnógrafos comprometidos con regímenes éticos particulares y como seres humanos con compromisos morales específicos, somos más propensos a aceptar unas que otras.

## Complicidad

Los problemas de coherencia, performatividad y secrecía sugieren que la etnografía difícilmente logra encajar los imperativos categóricos que intentan separar un espacio ético transparente y claro para la práctica de la investigación de la turbiedad de la vida cotidiana. Juntos, informan mi discusión de un cuarto tipo de desafío para los criterios éticos básicos de la investigación en ciencias sociales, que, en lo que sigue, llamaré el problema de la complicidad (ver también de Koning 2021). Ahora bien, en un sentido general y bien conocido, el problema de la complicidad es el problema de nuestra continua reconstitución como seres sociales a través de nuestras cambiantes relaciones y obligaciones con los demás; la complicidad, dicho brevemente, es un problema de relacionalidad social. A medida que participamos en la vida social, consolidamos, mantenemos o dejamos que se desvanezcan diferentes redes de compromisos, a veces recíprocos, a veces asimétricos, que nos exigen grados desiguales de complicidad con los demás. Al igual que la noción de colaboración que en los últimos años ha surgido como el dictum para nuevos experimentos en la producción de conocimiento antropológico, la complicidad también se revela como de doble cara, portadora de atribuciones morales ambivalentes y a veces aparentemente contradictorias. La antropología, en particular, ha sido cómplice (ha colaborado) tanto en las luchas de liberación de los oprimidos como en los proyectos de dominación colonial e imperialista.

Aquí, sin embargo, quiero interrogar más específicamente la noción de complicidad en lo que respecta a las redes de relaciones en las que nos vemos inmersos como etnógrafos durante nuestro trabajo de campo y, más particularmente, en la medida en que informa y moldea nuestras decisiones sobre la secrecía y la transparencia; las invitaciones que extendemos a nuestros interlocutores a colaborar en nuestros proyectos y nuestros engaños; y las formas en que, a su vez, se nos llama y se espera que actuemos en colaboración en sus propias disimulaciones.

En mi trabajo de campo, mi nombre falso estaba lejos de ser el único secreto, o más precisamente, engaño en juego. A pesar de su orientación profesional hacia un ideal de relaciones totalmente transparentes con sus clientes, en su trabajo diario los trabajadores sociales se comportaban de hecho de forma más pragmática y ocultaban conscientemente cierta información sobre el alcance de sus actividades, la naturaleza precisa de sus lealtades o los sinuosos caminos de su manejo del conocimiento. Tales disimulaciones nunca estaban exentas de un cierto riesgo y, al igual que mi identidad, su propio manejo de las impresiones también se veía amenazada de vez en cuando. En una ocasión, por ejemplo, para su gran sorpresa, la filial local del Partido Socialdemócrata llegó a un *biergarten* en la estación de tren frecuentado por sus clientes extremistas de derecha para celebrar allí su reunión semanal (Shoshan 2016: 144–49). Fueron los propios trabajadores sociales quienes informaron a los socialdemócratas de la colonia sobre el lugar de encuentro y estos decidieron reunirse allí como forma de intervención. La situación caótica generó una intensa ansiedad entre los trabajadores sociales acerca de la posibilidad de que su complicidad con los adversarios políticos de sus clientes pudiera ser descubierta (al final, no lo fue).

Al mismo tiempo, los trabajadores sociales también eran muy conscientes de que las personas a las que atendían igualmente revelaban verdades parciales y medían cuidadosamente sus discursos. Estaban constantemente ocupados reconstruyendo narrativas coherentes y completas a partir de los fragmentos de conocimiento a los que tenían acceso. Así ocurría, por ejemplo, con el grado de implicación de sus clientes en grupos y actividades extremistas de derecha organizados. En el pasado, la subvención de actividades de ocio, como idas al boliche, películas, fiestas, etc., por parte de los trabajadores sociales había equivalido en ocasiones a un patrocinio estatal de grupos extremistas de derecha, facilitando el reclutamiento de nuevos miembros. En consecuencia, los trabajadores sociales excluían de esas ofertas de ocio a los jóvenes que, según sospechaban, seguían implicados en estructuras organizadas, al tiempo que continuaban ofreciéndoles asesoramiento y asistencia a título individual. Esto a su vez significaba que, como sabían muy bien, sus jóvenes clientes intentaban que su nivel de implicación en dichos grupos organizados fuera lo más opaco posible. Por lo tanto, los trabajadores sociales trataban de penetrar en esas redes de complicidad, buscando datos que, una vez reunidos, pudieran revelarles a qué lado de la línea roja que habían trazado había que situar a cada individuo.

Por lo tanto, en mi trabajo de campo se daban múltiples transacciones de complicidad. A veces, aparecían como el mantenimiento activo y conjunto de la opacidad, por ejemplo, cuando los trabajadores sociales y los aparatos burocráticos y de vigilancia del Estado coordinaban su colaboración para ocultar a sus clientes el grado de su intimidad. En otras ocasiones, implicaban la solidaridad entre mis interlocutores de extrema derecha y la revelación discrecional de información a los trabajadores sociales, por ejemplo, sobre la asistencia a una reunión de una fraternidad neonazi local. En otros momentos, la complicidad se manifestaba en forma de relaciones de confidencialidad entre los trabajadores sociales y sus clientes, en las que, por ejemplo, las evidentes violaciones de ciertos requisitos de libertad condicional se mantenían ocultas a las autoridades estatales. Y, por supuesto, era fundamental para la colaboración entre los trabajadores sociales y yo, para nuestra colusión sobre mi verdadero nombre e identidad. De estas y otras maneras, las relaciones que mis interlocutores en el campo establecían entre ellos y con los demás desafiaban no solo los ideales éticos de la investigación etnográfica sino a menudo también los valores y compromisos morales que ellos mismos profesaban.

No solo nosotros, como etnógrafos, construimos redes de complicidad que facilitan nuestros engaños. También nuestros interlocutores colaboran para engañarnos a nosotros y a los demás, al tiempo que se dejan engañar. Además, si en nuestro comportamiento no transparente arrastramos a algunos de ellos a actos de colusión para avanzar nuestros proyectos, ellos a su vez nos reclutan en actos similares para avanzar los suyos. Consideremos nuevamente la historia de Díaz, quien obtuvo acceso a redes de vigilancia y extorsión como «primo» de su portero local. Sin duda, reclutó a su contacto en el campo para que se coludiera con él en su proyecto de investigación. Al mismo tiempo, sin embargo, él mismo fue reclutado para el papel de primo como parte de una economía de favores en la que ofrecía a su portero una valiosa oportunidad de reciprocidad

y amistad con la persona que los puso en contacto. En esta transacción, la complicidad de Díaz fue solicitada como una instancia en una cadena de favores que se extendía mucho más allá de él y de su investigación. A veces, entonces, determinar quién recluta a quién en la complicidad puede resultar casi imposible.

De manera notable, durante mi trabajo de campo bajo un nombre falso, mi acento, que apenas se acercaba a un acento estadounidense típico en alemán o inglés, no levantó prácticamente ninguna sospecha. Y aunque había preparado una historia de fondo rudimentaria en caso de que me pidieran más detalles biográficos, de hecho nunca tuve que usarla. En solo una ocasión se puso en entredicho mi presentación como estadounidense.<sup>8</sup> Como parte de sus itinerarios diarios por parques, áreas de juegos y estaciones de tren, los trabajadores sociales hacían frecuentes paradas en centros culturales juveniles y comunitarios para saludar a sus colegas. Durante uno de nuestros muchos paseos por un barrio en las afueras del sureste de Berlín, Daniela y yo entramos en las oficinas de un centro de asesoramiento a inmigrantes para saludar a su directora, una mujer de unos treinta años. Tomamos asiento en su oficina y Daniela me presentó, como siempre hacía, como Nate, un estudiante de doctorado en antropología de Chicago. Después de charlar un rato sobre temas relacionados con el trabajo, frunció el ceño hacia Daniela: «¿Es realmente estadounidense? No suena nada como un estadounidense». Por un momento rápido, Daniela y yo intercambiamos miradas, ambos claramente desconcertados por el repentino desafío a nuestro secreto compartido. «Sí, es estadounidense», respondió Daniela, recuperando la compostura. Continuamos charlando, aliviados y aún algo conmocionados. Pero antes de irnos, la directora volvió a expresar su escepticismo: «Realmente no puedo creer que seas estadounidense», dijo, «tienes un acento diferente». En nuestro camino de regreso a su oficina, Daniela y yo repasamos lo que había sucedido. Claramente, ninguno de los dos se sentía seguro acerca de cómo responder mejor a las sospechas de la directora. La insistencia de Daniela en la veracidad de la fachada que habíamos creado buscaba su preservación ante una amenaza evidente. Sin embargo, acordamos que sería mejor mitigar la desconfianza y ser sinceros con la directora. Daniela la llamó y explicó quién era yo y por qué usaba el seudónimo.

Ese breve instante en que nuestras miradas se cruzaron, inmediatamente después de la pregunta de la directora y antes de la respuesta de Daniela, fue el momento de complicidad; fue donde la complicidad se cristalizó, se transaccionó, se reconoció y se reconstituyó. Al girar hacia el otro, ambos tratando de adivinar lo que el otro consideraría una manera adecuada de negociar la situación inesperada a la que nos enfrentábamos, cada uno de nosotros a su vez estaba reclutando y siendo reclutado por el otro. En mi caso, mi falta de familiaridad con la directora del centro y mi incertidumbre sobre la naturaleza de su relación con Daniela, combinadas con mi preocupación general por subordinarme en mi trabajo de campo al mejor juicio de los trabajadores sociales, me llevaron a pensar que era natural que Daniela tomara las decisiones. Por su parte, Daniela aceptó y siguió mi invitación para que ella liderara y tomara la decisión. No obstante, y aunque—después de nuestra deliberación sobre el control de daños, la gestión activa de impresiones y la confianza—el inquietante incidente concluyó en una revelación, terminé implicando a Daniela en la generación de desconfianza con su colega.

Sin embargo, como sugerí anteriormente, el reclutamiento en la complicidad funciona de manera más recíproca de lo que a menudo imaginamos. Al igual que los nodos en la cadena de favores que facilitaron la investigación de Díaz en la Ciudad de México, en mi caso también, los trabajadores sociales tenían sus propias razones para colaborar conmigo, para recibirme y avalarme entre sus clientes, y para engañar a estos últimos sobre mi identidad incluso ante el riesgo de exposición. Solo más tarde llegué a apreciar plenamente esas razones, que tenían que ver con su posición relativamente desfavorecida y aislada dentro de lo que he llamado el manejo del odio y sus esperanzas de que mi autoridad científica pudiera otorgar a su voz y perspectiva un mayor peso.

La complicidad habita en nuestras interacciones en el campo, al igual que en otros entornos no relacionados con la investigación. Se anida en nuestros gestos corporales, nuestras interlocuciones, nuestras obligaciones sociales.

<sup>8</sup> Los trabajadores sociales, sin embargo, sí cuestionaron mi identidad de antropólogo y sospecharon que era un agente del Mossad (Shoshan 2016)

Pero no estamos solos. Como he demostrado en este artículo, nuestros interlocutores también se encuentran envueltos en redes de colusión. Ellos también manejan múltiples compromisos no siempre reconciliables; también se involucran en actuaciones a través de las cuales indexan quiénes son de manera diferente en diferentes situaciones y ante diferentes audiencias; y también ejercen rutinariamente la autocensura y la revelación parcial. Finalmente, también esperan ciertas complicidades de nosotros y nos otorgan otras a cambio.

Silenciar nuestra implicación relacional dentro de esas redes de complicidad e insistir en ideales de plena transparencia corre el riesgo de pasar por alto las complejas ambivalencias de las relaciones sociales, obligaciones y conflictos entre nuestros interlocutores. Quizás aún más importante, hacerlo equivale a defender una postura santurróna, formulada en el lenguaje de la distancia científica y que afirma una relación totalmente agentiva, no recíproca, con aquellos a quienes nos proponemos estudiar. Terminamos entonces con un marco ético que no se vería afectado por su involucramiento con las relaciones sociales que conforman el objeto mismo de la investigación que se espera que respalde. Como etnógrafos, atentos a las tensiones, contradicciones y ambigüedades que las personas con las que trabajamos en el campo enfrentan mientras navegan por incertidumbres y producen significados, debemos resistir la tentación de reclamar unidad y fijeza para nosotros mismos. Del mismo modo, podríamos cuestionar si llegar al campo ya equipados con manuales de ética es más probable que obstaculice, en lugar de avanzar, la investigación antropológica.

## Conclusión

Mi propio trabajo de campo, realizado en gran parte bajo un nombre falso, no me ofreció tales posibilidades. Al contrario, me introdujo profundamente en el turbio terreno de las cambiantes y ambivalentes relaciones sociales, las obligaciones que suscitan y las reciprocidades a las que convocan. En mi opinión, los costos que tales formas de investigación puedan incurrir en términos de nuestra rectitud ética deben evaluarse dentro de un marco amplio que atienda a la multiplicidad de nuestros compromisos. ¿Cómo podemos ser responsables no sólo con nuestros interlocutores en el campo sino también con el público en general? ¿Hasta qué punto deberíamos buscar activamente producir conocimiento sobre preocupaciones urgentes como el auge de la extrema derecha, el nacionalismo y el racismo en el mundo de hoy, incluso cuando ello pueda relativizar o incluso abandonar algunos de los principios dominantes de nuestro oficio? ¿Cuáles serían los costos de abstenerse de producir dicho conocimiento? Algunos pueden argumentar que el precio a pagar por tal conocimiento no podría justificarse. Otros han argumentado que es precisamente nuestra responsabilidad de llevar nuestras perspectivas etnográficas a estos asuntos apremiantes que nos obliga a cultivar relaciones recíprocas de amistad con nuestros interlocutores de extrema derecha, que pueden incluir obligaciones de ayudarles en sus proyectos políticos (Teitelbaum 2019). Ninguna de estas posturas parece necesariamente justificada, aunque sin duda podrían volverse relevantes en casos específicos. Ambas parecen buscar certezas categóricas y puntos de apoyo estables donde, de hecho, a menudo encontramos poco más que ambigüedades y contradicciones. En este artículo, he tratado de destacar algunas de las tensiones irresolubles que se ciernen sobre nuestro trabajo con y sobre los extremistas de derecha.

A un nivel distinto, sin embargo, mi argumento ha sido que, lejos de afectar solo a experiencias de trabajo de campo tan singulares como la mía, tales tensiones y ambivalencias aparecen comúnmente también en otros casos etnográficos más «ordinarios». De hecho, como he tratado de ilustrar a lo largo de este artículo, habitan las relaciones sociales en general. Sus implicaciones para la investigación etnográfica van, en consecuencia, más allá de aquellos casos límite que, debido a alguna flagrante violación de las expectativas disciplinarias, emergen como escándalos de manera especialmente hiper visible. En cambio, las incertidumbres sobre la coherencia de nosotros mismos, la autenticidad y los fines de nuestras actuaciones, la negociación de la transparencia y el secreto, y las entrecruzadas redes de complicidad en nuestro trabajo de campo etnográfico requieren tanto

sutileza como flexibilidad y apertura. Esto, no tanto para resolverlas de manera definitiva, sino más bien para mantener ese precario equilibrio en la cuerda floja que nos permite, a pesar de todo, continuar y practicar la investigación etnográfica y ofrecer sus perspectivas únicas en las conversaciones críticas de nuestro tiempo.

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Neoextractivismo, crisis climática y desastres:  
Miradas desde Argentina, Brasil y Chile

## Nota Introdutoria para el Dosier

Neoextractivismo, crisis climática y desastres:  
Los nuevos imperialismos del “Antropoceno”  
desde Brasil, Argentina y Chile*Andréa Zhouri*

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En las últimas décadas, América Latina ha retomado programas neo-desarrollistas en la formulación de políticas nacionales, frente a la reestructuración económica neoliberal en el contexto de la globalización. Estos programas se han venido implementando en diferentes países, con importantes avances en términos de la construcción de sociedades plurales, del reconocimiento de las diversas identidades culturales y particularidades territoriales. Sin embargo, nuevas regulaciones y cambios en el ámbito del Estado han señalado un movimiento que contradice los avances señalados, revelando las contradicciones inherentes al modelo neodesarrollista en curso.

El mercado globalizado y los intereses económicos en los recursos naturales han incrementado la presión sobre los bosques, el agua, la tierra y el subsuelo. La expansión del sector extractivo de minerales en el continente ha sido identificada como una reprimarización de la economía, proceso caracterizado por la primacía de la exportación de productos con bajo aporte tecnológico agregado, impulsada por gobiernos latinoamericanos bajo diversos matices ideológicos. En todo caso, el papel del Estado está atravesado por ambigüedades: por un lado, actúa como el principal agente de financiación de los denominados grandes proyectos de desarrollo –especialmente el neoextractivismo– y por otro, como agente de fiscalización y protección del medio ambiente, y de los grupos sociales más vulnerables, y sus cuerpos, con específicos marcadores de raza, etnia y género.

Este dossier reúne algunas de las reflexiones que venimos haciendo y compartiendo desde nuestras experiencias investigativas en Argentina, Brasil y Chile, donde analizamos las violencias sobre los cuerpos y territorios, que generan desastres socioambientales provocados por el modelo de explotación intensiva de la naturaleza denominado extractivismo. Los cambios recientes y continuos en la legislación ambiental y de protección de derechos están orientados a simplificar, tanto los procesos de licenciamiento ambiental como el seguimiento y fiscalización de los grandes emprendimientos, lo que ha incrementado la recurrencia

de conflictos y desastres socioambientales, especialmente a lo largo de las cuencas de los ríos, con drásticas consecuencias en cuanto a la disponibilidad de agua, así como la vida de las comunidades, que tienen al medio ambiente como base material y simbólica de su reproducción social. En este sentido, es importante y necesario reflexionar sobre temas como las reconfiguraciones del neoextractivismo y las presiones sobre los bienes comunes naturales; la violencia extractivista sobre las mujeres y otros grupos subalternizados, como indígenas y campesinos, que buscan proteger sus territorios; las falsas soluciones relacionadas a la transición energética que impulsan los estados y organismos multilaterales, y que legitiman un modelo de despojo; la gobernanza, que busca el control sobre la definición y el reconocimiento de los daños, así como los desafíos planteados por los afectados a los mecanismos de gestión de crisis; y las alternativas prácticas de re-existencias que emergen desde los propios territorios.

En un contexto de cambio climático, es importante señalar la recurrencia de los desastres, sus patrones institucionales, económicos y políticos, prestando atención a las diferentes formas de violencia, sea la ejercida lentamente, como la flexibilización de la legislación ambiental; o la violencia desnuda (Zhour, 2022), resultante y causante de diversas formas de desplazamiento (Teixeira, Zhour & Motta, 2021) de los sujetos vulnerabilizados por los proyectos hegemónicos de nación. En este momento de la historia, en que la palabra “Antropoceno” comienza a expresar un oscuro diagnóstico sobre la existencia de la humanidad (Araóz, 2023), cabe preguntarse por el papel de América Latina como zona de saqueo y sacrificio, por las nuevas y reiteradas fronteras extractivas, pero también como una diversidad que comprende innumerables formas de resistir, soñar y proyectar el futuro.

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# Las voces de las mujeres en el desastre de la Samarco: procesos de acuerpamiento y apoderamiento frente al neoextractivismo en Brasil

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**Resumen:** El ascenso del neoextractivismo como fuerza propulsora del desarrollo en los países latinoamericanos ha movilizado la agenda de investigación de las ciencias sociales durante las últimas dos décadas en todo el continente. En Brasil, el neoextractivismo ha estado acompañado de procesos de desregulación ambiental y de violación de derechos consagrados desde la redemocratización del país. En el estado de Minas Gerais, la recurrencia de desastres mineros apunta a procesos sociales eminentemente disruptivos y fragmentadores, que ponen en duda la confianza depositada en las expectativas modernas de control y seguridad. Lo que presenciamos en el presente es el daño, la violencia y el sufrimiento de la experiencia minera. En este contexto, las subjetividades políticas de las personas afectadas por la minería se construyen a través de múltiples caminos, no comúnmente visibles en el repertorio de resistencia. A partir de una investigación etnográfica sobre el desastre de Samarco/Vale/BHP en Rio Doce, Brasil, desde el colapso de la presa de Fundão, en 2015, el artículo analiza la diversidad que compone el universo de las mujeres afectadas para comprender cómo expresan sus experiencias de lucha por reparaciones y, en particular, las consecuencias de su protagonismo en la vida personal, profesional y comunitaria. Tomando como referencia la ecología política ecofeminista y latinoamericana, el análisis señala los límites de la visión masculina que generalmente prevalece en la formulación de mecanismos de gobernanza, que difícilmente se guían por una dimensión interseccional, lo que contribuye a empeorar el daño a las mujeres.

**Palabras clave:** minería, mujeres, resistencia, desastre, Rio Doce, neoextractivismo, Mariana.

# Women's voices in the Samarco disaster: Processes of embodiment and empowerment in the face of neo-extractivism in Brazil

**Abstract:** The rise of neoextractivism as a driving force of development in Latin American countries has mobilized the research agenda over the last two decades across the continent. In Brazil, neoextractivism has been accompanied by processes of environmental deregulation and the violation of rights enshrined since the country's re-democratization. In the state of Minas Gerais, the recurrence of mining disasters points to eminently disruptive and fragmenting social processes, which call into question the trust placed in modern expectations of control and security. What we witness in the present is the damage, violence, and suffering of the many mining experiences. Against this backdrop, the political subjectivities of people affected by mining are constructed through multiple paths, not commonly visible in the repertoire of resistance. Based on ethnographic research into the governance of the Samarco disaster in Rio Doce, Brazil, the paper looks at the diversity that comprises the universe of the women affected to understand how they express their experiences of fighting for reparations and, in particular, the consequences of their protagonism in personal, professional and community lives. Taking ecofeminist and Latin American political ecology as a reference, the analysis points to the limits of the male vision that generally prevails in the formulation of governance mechanisms, which are hardly guided by an intersectional dimension, which contributes to aggravating the damage to women.

**Keywords:** mining, women, resistance, disaster, Rio Doce, neoextractivism, Mariana.

# As vozes das mulheres no desastre da Samarco: Processos de acorpamento e apoderamento frente ao neoextrativismo no Brasil

**Resumo:** O crescimento do neoextrativismo como força motriz do desenvolvimento nos países latino-americanos tem mobilizado a agenda de pesquisa das ciências sociais em todo o continente nas últimas duas décadas. No Brasil, o neoextrativismo tem sido acompanhado por processos de desregulação ambiental e violação de direitos consagrados desde a redemocratização do país. No estado de Minas Gerais, a recorrência de desastres minerários aponta para processos sociais eminentemente disruptivos e fragmentadores, que questionam a confiança depositada nas expectativas de controle e segurança da modernidade. O que testemunhamos no presente são os danos, a violência e o sofrimento de inúmeras experiências concretas. Neste contexto, as subjetividades políticas das pessoas atingidas pela mineração são construídas através de múltiplos caminhos, normalmente não identificadas pelo repertório da resistência. Com base em pesquisa etnográfica sobre o desastre da Samarco/Vale/BHP no Rio Doce, Brasil, desde o rompimento da barragem de Fundão em 2015, o artigo analisa a diversidade que compõe o universo das mulheres atingidas para compreender como elas expressam suas experiências de luta pelas reparações e, em particular, os efeitos causados na vida pessoal, profissional e comunitária. Tendo como referência a ecologia política ecofeminista e latino-americana, a análise aponta os limites da visão masculina que geralmente prevalece na formulação de mecanismos de governança, os quais são dificilmente orientados por uma dimensão interseccional, o que contribui para agravar os danos às mulheres.

**Palavras-chave:** mineração, mulheres, resistência, desastre, Rio Doce, neoextrativismo, Mariana.

# Las voces de las mujeres en el desastre de la Samarco: procesos de acuerpamiento y apoderamiento frente al neoextractivismo en Brasil<sup>1</sup>

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## Introducción

En sus publicaciones en redes sociales, ML siempre está muy arreglada, con una sonrisa amplia y ojos alegres. Ella transmite sus mensajes al ritmo de alguna canción escogida caprichosamente, como en esos versos del cantor Amado Batista: “No quiero pensar en tristezas ni en maldades, sólo quiero tener felicidades”. El tema de la felicidad es recurrente en sus publicaciones, y parece expresar una especie de obstinada disposición para quien vive los dramas personales potenciados por la cotidianidad del desastre de la Samarco hace ocho años.<sup>2</sup> En fin, en el decurso de su lucha, ML se separó y se encontró sin casa y sin el debido reconocimiento, como persona afectada por el desastre. Así como ella, otras mujeres vieron súbitamente alteradas sus rutinas como trabajadoras, madres, hijas, hermanas, esposas y miembros de la comunidad, por el evento crítico desencadenado por el desgastante proceso del desastre.

En una perspectiva interseccional, en el ámbito de los abordajes de la antropología y de la ecología política del neoextractivismo y de desastres, este artículo procura reflexionar sobre algunas experiencias de mujeres afectadas por el colapso de la Represa de Fundão, desde noviembre de 2015. Para ello, nos hemos basado en nuestras observaciones etnográficas en la localidad de Mariana, Minas Gerais, que implicaron interlocuciones con diferentes grupos de mujeres, así como el registro de sus testimonios en diferentes situaciones sociales, como los actos públicos organizados por el Grupo de Estudio de Temas Ambientales, de la Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais (GESTA-UFGM, por sus siglas en portugués). Más específicamente, los análisis se concentran en charlas públicas de mujeres que son miembros de la Comisión de Afectados por la Represa de Fundão (CABF, sigla en portugués) y de una líder en el municipio de Barra Longa. Hemos buscado comprender las formas cómo expresan sus experiencias de lucha por una reparación, en el contexto del desastre y, especialmente, los despliegues de su protagonismo como mujeres, en lo que refiere a sus vidas personales, profesionales y comunitarias. Además de escuchar a las mujeres, analizamos una amplia gama de documentos elaborados

1 Parte de los análisis de este texto fueron presentados en la *Conferencia Internacional Ecología Política Feminista desde los Territorios*, Mendoza, Argentina, en 2021. Disponible en: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5X3D6yGVQmM>. Última consulta: 17/11/2023. Las autoras agradecen el apoyo a los proyectos de investigación *El Desastre y la Política de las Afectaciones: comprensión y movilización en un contexto de crisis* (FAPEMIG APQ<sub>1598-16</sub>) y *Gobernanza y control socioambiental en proyectos mineros: interfaces entre Minas-Río y el desastre del Río Doce* (CNPq 421726/2018-0 y FAPEMIG APQ<sub>01887-18</sub>).

2 En noviembre de 2015, la presa de relaves mineros de hierro llamada Fundão, propiedad de la empresa Samarco Mining, Inc –una *joint venture* en la que participan Vale S. A. y BHP Billiton Brasil Ltda– se derrumbó en Mariana, estado de Minas Gerais, al sureste de Brasil. Aproximadamente cincuenta millones de metros cúbicos de relaves se vertieron al río Doce, recorriendo unos 600 km hasta su desembocadura en el océano Atlántico. Diecinueve personas murieron en el acto, y otras tantas a lo largo del proceso, mientras que miles de residentes siguen desplazados, enfrentándose a la pérdida de sus hogares, tierras, plantas, animales, vecinos, amigos, comunidad... Más de ocho años después, el desastre persiste y se desarrolla más allá del acontecimiento que dio lugar a su criticidad. Los residentes de los distritos rurales destruidos se han visto obligados a vivir en casas alquiladas dispersas por la ciudad de Mariana. Viven aislados de sus vecinos y familiares, atrapados en negociaciones diarias que les son desfavorables, a la espera de reasentamientos y/o indemnizaciones, amargamente inseguros sobre su futuro e indignados por la impunidad de los agentes empresariales y estatales. Aquellos cuyas viviendas no fueron completamente destruidas permanecen en su lugar de origen como desplazados *in situ* (Feldman, Geisler & Silberling, 2004), conviviendo con el barro contaminado y la desconfianza permanente hacia los alimentos y el agua que consumen. Las enfermedades físicas y mentales se convirtieron en una constante entre las familias afectadas. Para más detalles, véase Zhouri et al. (2018) y el dossier *Minería, violencia y resistencia*, *Vibrant*, vol.14, n° 2, mayo a agosto, 2017.



en el contexto de las políticas de reparación de desastres. Como fuente de información, estos documentos también operan como dispositivos que rigen las relaciones entre las empresas, las instituciones de justicia y los afectados. Para ello, se movilizaron informes técnicos producidos por consultoras vinculadas a órganos como el Ministerio Público Federal, como Ramboll y la Fundación Getúlio Vargas, como así también informes producidos por la Fundación Renova, institución privada creada para gestionar el desastre (Melendi & Lopo, 2021), siempre teniendo en cuenta los enfoques sobre cuestiones de género.

De hecho, si el término *afectado* (*atingido*, en portugués) remite a una construcción política siempre en disputa (Vainer, 2008), el universo de aquellos y aquellas que se reconocen como tales está lejos de ser indistinto o uniforme. En un nivel, hay un colectivo que se organiza frente a fuerzas antagónicas que amenazan su existencia, ya sean aquellas representadas por una represa hidroeléctrica o una explotación minera (Zhouri & Oliveira, 2010), o el colapso de una represa de residuos mineros (Zhouri et al., 2018; Zhouri, 2023). Mientras tanto, desde otra mirada, ese colectivo también es diverso en su composición sociodemográfica y étnico-racial. Hombres, mujeres, jóvenes, ancianos y niños, así como propietarios, arrendatarios y medieros, en zonas rurales, colectivos negros o indígenas, configuran la diversidad del universo que se ha convenido llamar *afectado*.

En efecto, así como no hablamos de un movimiento feminista o ambientalista de manera unitaria o totalizante (Zhouri & Oliveira, 2010), advertimos la diversidad que comprende el universo de las mujeres afectadas y sus diversas inserciones y actuaciones en el contexto de los desastres (Wisner et al., 2004; Kadetz & Mock, 2018; Zaidi & Fordham, 2021). Las experiencias de las mujeres se diferencian a partir de las categorías sociales que las comprenden y que, por su parte, las posicionan diferencialmente en el campo de las relaciones de poder. Al fin y al cabo, como advirtiera Brah (2006: 341), “el signo ‘mujer’ tiene su propia especificidad, constituida dentro y a través de configuraciones históricamente específicas de relaciones de género”. Partimos, así, del recorte de género, en la comprensión de que ese es un elemento constitutivo de relaciones sociales –que se basan, entre otros factores, en las diferencias percibidas entre los sexos–, además de ser una forma primaria de dar significado a las relaciones de poder (Scott, 1995: 86). Por lo tanto, comprendemos que las experiencias de las mujeres en el desastre, por muy singulares que sean en el contexto, son también efectos de la macroestructura patriarcal en la que están insertas y que las somete, entre otras cosas, a la opresión de género (Federici, 2017; Cabnal, 2010; Santos Souza & Rodrigues, 2019).

Asimismo, si consideramos que los desastres son, al mismo tiempo, acontecimiento crítico y proceso, es importante señalar, respecto a este último aspecto, su prolongación en el tiempo y en el espacio; en definitiva, las consecuencias duraderas de la crisis social (Zhouri, 2023), no pocas veces amplificada por los propios instrumentos institucionales creados para repararla. Diseñados generalmente desde una perspectiva masculina, estos instrumentos están poco orientados hacia una dimensión interseccional y responden menos a las cuestiones de género, que quedan relegadas a los márgenes de las políticas de gobernanza de catástrofes. El análisis de la política del tiempo de reparación (Teixeira & Da Silva, 2022) permite identificar mecanismo de sometimiento, agravamiento de situaciones, así como la emergencia de resistencias. Las mujeres el tiempo vivido desde el colapso de la presa marcado en “etapas”, definidas por diferentes momentos del proceso de reparación y frecuentemente delimitadas por ellas, por sus esfuerzos y conquistas. Así, preocupaciones, demandas, subjetividades y hasta la disposición de afectados y afectadas se alteran con la cronicidad de la crisis (Vigh, 2008; Teixeira & Da Silva, 2022). Frente a estos aspectos, cabe contextualizar las situaciones específicas que han suscitado las condiciones de producción de las narrativas más directamente movilizadas en los análisis contenidos en este artículo.

Transcurridos más de tres años desde el colapso de Fundão, en Mariana, investigadoras e investigadores del Grupo de Estudios en Temáticas Ambientales (GESTA-UFMG) habían ya establecido vínculos de pesquisa y extensión con las personas afectadas por el desastre, cuando una nueva ruptura de represa, en enero de 2019 –esta vez, correspondiente a las estructuras de la mina Córrego do Feijão, perteneciente a Vale S.A.,

en Brumadinho– tomó a todos por sorpresa. A partir de sus experiencias en Mariana, el GESTA organizó entonces un ciclo de debates sobre el tema del colapso de represas, denominado *UFMG Debate: más allá del colapso* (Gesta, 2019).<sup>3</sup> Estructurado en torno de cinco mesas, tuvo como propósito reunir especialistas, representantes de movimientos ambientalistas, y afectados y afectadas en Mariana, para debatir el escenario de la explotación minera en el país, enfocado en los riesgos y los daños ambientales y sociales causados reiteradamente por dicha actividad económica. De hecho, la ocurrencia de una nueva ruptura en un intervalo de sólo tres años acarrió una profunda tristeza y rebelión a todos los que sufren los efectos de la minería. Las personas afectadas por el colapso de Fundão fueron particularmente afectadas por ese nuevo acontecimiento en otro municipio de Minas Gerais, como lo evidenciaron en sus exposiciones las mujeres durante la tercera mesa del ciclo, denominada *Lecciones de Mariana*. La mesa contó con la participación de miembros de la Comisión de Afectados por la Represa de Fundão (CABF, por sus iniciales en portugués) –tres mujeres y dos hombres– y un representante de la asesoría técnica a los afectados.<sup>4</sup>

Al año siguiente, en 2020, durante la pandemia de Covid-19 y transcurridos casi cinco años desde el desastre en la cuenca del Rio Doce, en el V Ciclo de Debates del GESTA (un evento anual promovido por el grupo), una de las mesas trajo el tema *Vidas tabuladas: entre las estrategias de cuantificación y las luchas por reparación*.<sup>5</sup> De manera virtual, el GESTA recibió nuevamente a dos de las expositoras que habían participado del evento anterior, y a una tercera integrante de la CABF. En la ocasión, las participantes reflexionaron sobre las luchas y las conquistas, especialmente, sobre el proceso de revisión del registro de los afectados, derecho conquistado en el proceso de reparación en Mariana, en oposición al instrumento registral presentado inicialmente por las empresas (Cunha Oliveira, 2022).

La tercera situación que posibilitó el registro de las reflexiones de las mujeres afectadas remite a su participación como conferencistas en una de las clases virtuales de la materia optativa *Ecología Política Feminista Lationamericana*, ofrecida durante el primer semestre del ciclo lectivo 2021 en la UFMG. Además de la presencia de L., que había participado de los otros eventos, la clase contó con la colaboración de S., vecina de Barra Longa, municipio distante unos 60 km de Mariana y afectado también por el colapso de Fundão.

Las reflexiones de estas mujeres comprometidas en la lucha por una reparación de los daños causados por el desastre posibilitaron la organización de este análisis en torno de cinco ejes temáticos, a saber: 1) apoderamiento y procesos de subjetivación; 2) autonomía secuestrada; 3) jornadas de trabajo múltiple, uso no remunerado del tiempo y violencia epistémica; 4) conflictos familiares y fragmentación; y 5) enfermedades.<sup>6</sup>

## Apoderamiento y procesos de subjetivación

En general, reconocerse como afectada –o afectado– en el contexto de un desastre como el de Fundão implica la toma de conciencia sobre la posición que se ocupa en un proceso social, político e institucional estructurado de forma desigual. Se trata de un recorrido complejo y doloroso, que se inicia con la inserción involuntaria en un contexto de gestión burocrática que exige aprendizajes y disciplinamientos cognitivos impuestos en la extensa jornada de búsqueda por derechos (Zucarelli, 2021). Además del desplazamiento físico y material, la persona afectada pasa por un proceso de desplazamiento social y cultural, durante el cual traba una lucha entre “la objetivación impuesta por la política de las afectaciones y la subjetivación política de actores llevados

3 Disponible en <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pygF-jNM2oE&t=11s>. Última consulta: 16/05/2023.

4 A través del TAC-Gobernanza (en castellano, Acuerdo de Conciliación de Conducta), celebrado en 2018, los afectados conquistaron el derecho de contar con una asesoría técnica independiente. En Mariana, dicha asesoría es realizada por Cáritas Brasileira (véase Cunha Oliveira, 2022).

5 Disponible en: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=it6fBXpzdWU&t=397s>. Última consulta: 16/05/2023. Significativamente, el título de la mesa y su composición por mujeres resultó de una interlocución con L. en aquel momento.

6 Parte de este análisis ya había sido presentado por Zhouri en eventos virtuales, en 2021, como por ejemplo, la Conferencia Internacional *Ecología Política Feminista desde los Territorios*, Mendoza, Argentina. Disponible en: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5X3D6yGVQmM>. Última consulta: 16/05/2023.

compulsivamente a escenarios de lucha en los que disputan el control sobre su propio destino (Zhouri et al., 2018: 31). Como subraya S.,

[...] nosotros no podemos dejar que nadie cuente nuestra historia. Yo soy la que tengo que contar mi historia, y ahora suelo decir: nosotros somos la historia. Nos volvimos la historia. Somos el protagonista de nuestra historia porque aprendemos. Porque, si la Vale cuenta, si la Renova cuenta, la Samarco y la BHP, ustedes van a entrar en el site, y sólo van a ver una linda y maravillosa reparación, maquillaje y más maquillaje. El dinero que es para gastar en la reparación, gastándose en propagandas y en maquillaje (Declaración en una clase de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, 2021).

S. es una mujer negra, de 46 años en la actualidad, afectada por la represa de Fundão, en el municipio de Barra Longa. Oriunda de la comunidad rural de Gesteira, ella trabajaba en el sector de servicios generales de la escuela de la que, posteriormente, se volvió maestra. Militante del Movimiento de Afectados por Represas (MAB, por sus iniciales en portugués), S. lucha por el tratamiento de salud de su hija, principalmente en función de vivir en la polvareda suspendida originada en el barro de desechos de Fundão, que alcanzó el centro de Barra Longa. En sus manifestaciones públicas, S. siempre destaca el *empoderamiento* como un movimiento relevante en su vida luego del colapso de la represa. La palabra *empoderamiento*, propia de la gramática política del movimiento social al que S. se asoció en su proceso como persona afectada, encuentra resonancia en el proceso de *apoderamiento* analizado por Bolados García y Sánchez Cuevas (2017), en referencia a las mujeres afectadas por la contaminación causada por empresas localizadas en la Bahía de Quintero y Puchuncaví, en Chile. Las autoras llaman la atención a la importancia del proceso de *apoderarse* de instrumentos como el habla, y de las narrativas sobre su propia historia y condición, como forma de lucha y resistencia frente al poder de enunciación de las empresas, es decir, el poder de conferir sentido a la situación, y comunicarlo. La necesidad obligó a S. a romper con su timidez y presentarse en público:

[...] ahora sé decir que la S. de antes del 5 de noviembre de 2015 sólo existe en los recuerdos y en algunas fotografías que quedaron después del colapso, después del crimen. Sacando eso, aquella S. ya no existe. ¿Por qué digo esto? Yo era una persona [...] muy tímida. Tenía mucha vergüenza... si necesitaba conversar con alguien, tenía que ir otra persona conmigo, porque yo no me animaba, me quedaba con la cabeza baja, tapándome la boca para conversar con otros. Hoy no, hoy tengo que pelear conmigo misma para soltar el micrófono [risas] porque... el empoderamiento... porque... me volví una militante del MAB después del crimen, empecé a participar de las luchas, empecé a ir a las reuniones [...] hoy se terminó, porque me obligaron, por que tengo una hija. Mi hija va a cumplir siete años a fin de año, ¡ella tenía nueve meses! ¡Nueve meses! (Declaración en una clase de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, 2021).

Esta declaración reverbera narrativas de otras mujeres que se vieron compelidas a entrar en la lucha por las circunstancias impuestas por el desastre, sobre todo, las amenazas y los efectos sobre sus hijos y su familia.<sup>7</sup> Este contexto, más ampliamente observado en otros países de América Latina, llevó a autoras como Svampa (2015) a identificar un proceso de feminización de las luchas en el campo ambiental. Dicho proceso configuraría la emergencia de cierto ecofeminismo popular, en moldes similares al proceso de ambientalización de las luchas sociales, ocurrido en el Sur Global. En tal sentido, la autora mencionada afirma:

En nuestros trabajos previos de investigación, hemos constatado que muy poca gente se reconoce inicialmente como «ambientalista» o «ecologista». *Tampoco se deviene ambientalista por elección, sino por obligación, a partir de la asunción de la lucha por la defensa de la vida y el territorio.* Podríamos decir lo mismo respecto del feminismo popular (Svampa, 2015: 128. Las itálicas me pertenecen).

<sup>7</sup> Para narrativas de mujeres en el contexto del desastre de Barcarena, en el estado de Pará, puede consultarse Santos Souza & Rodrigues (2019).

Aunque no haya una autoidentificación como feministas o ecofeministas, por cierto, las mujeres que luchan con –y como– afectadas en el contexto del desastre, para conseguir dedicar parte de su tiempo a las cuestiones de la reparación y representar a los/as afectados/as en comisiones, reuniones, audiencias y manifestaciones, así como en declaraciones a la prensa, tuvieron que producir desplazamientos en sus subjetividades. Frecuentemente, ellas evalúan este proceso como un aprendizaje que implicó el *apoderarse* de herramientas (en ese sentido, el micrófono es simbólico) para un *empoderamiento* que superase las subjetivaciones marcadas por sentimientos de inseguridad y miedo. Observamos, así, un movimiento doble e interrelacionado, a saber: esfuerzos en procesos de *apoderamiento* y *acuerpamiento*. Este doble movimiento es considerado por las mujeres en resistencia en la zona de sacrificio de la Bahía de Quintero y Puchuncaví, un desafío político relevante, al referirse a las “mujeres que aún no se animan a ocupar espacios públicos y las apoyan desde las ventanas saludándolas cuando las mujeres pasan en sus protestas”: es preciso *apoderarse* y *acuerparse* (Bolados García & Sánchez Cuevas, 2017). Apoderarse como sujetos de derecho y, en el caso de las afectadas de Fundão, ubicar sus cuerpos en espacios de reivindicación de la vida en sus territorios, por el derecho a un ambiente libre de contaminación, por el derecho a la salud y a la justicia.

Mientras S. encontró su camino de lucha en el MAB, otras afectadas en el municipio de Mariana, como L., M. y ML., transitaron otros caminos cuando decidieron apoderarse del curso de promotoras populares ofrecido por el Ministerio Público de Minas Gerais a las afectadas. Ellas dicen:

Y ahora yo también tuve que capacitarme, yo, ML. y MM somos promotoras populares... Sólo con lo que hemos aprendido podemos liderar nuestras comunidades, somos todavía un poco tutoras de cada pueblo nuestro (declaración de L. en el *III UFMG Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

Como decíamos, me gusta mucho usar el ejemplo de Pokémon, que entonces una iba evolucionando con el tiempo, que tengo un sobrino nieto de corazón, que adora el Pokémon y se dio vuelta y me dijo: “Abu, tienes que hacer como Pokémon, usa todas las fuerzas del trueno y los pone a todos a correr”. Y eso es lo que hacemos, entonces nos fuimos volviendo Pokémon (declaración de L. en el *V Ciclo*, Gesta, 2020).

L. es una mujer de 60 años. Madre y abuela, trabajaba en una tienda de vestidos de novia en la ciudad de Mariana, mientras su marido se dedicaba a la agricultura en la comunidad rural de Paracatu de Baixo que, al igual que Bento Rodrigues, fue prácticamente destruida por el “barro”. Ella utiliza la metáfora de los Pokémon, personajes de animación y videojuegos que pasan por estadios evolutivos, para indicar su proceso de aprendizaje y actuación a lo largo del desastre. Para estas mujeres, el “aprender a ser afectado” (Zhouri et al., 2018) implicó, sobre todo, el desarrollo de habilidades específicas para la navegación social en medio de las turbulencias de la crisis vivida desde el colapso (Vigh, 2008).

Las etapas atravesadas, tal como sucede en el videojuego, también refieren a las “fases” de la propia reparación, principalmente en lo que respecta a las conquistas de afectados y afectadas en Mariana. Para ello, L. identifica que “los afectados pasaron por varias fases desde 2015”. Sus dichos de 2019 subrayan las experiencias en la reformulación del registro de afectados y en la elaboración de la matriz de daños, procesos ambos contrapunto con los instrumentos equivalentes producidos por la Fundación Renova, institución privada creada para gestionar el desastre (Melendi & Lopo, 2021). En este punto, vale comentar que los productos y espacios de negociación extrajudicial creados por la gobernanza de la reparación por intermedio del Acta de Transacción y Ajuste de Conducta y Acuerdo de Ajuste de Conducta/Gobernanza (TTAC y TAC-Gov, respectivamente, por sus iniciales en portugués) (Melendi & Lopo, 2021), en general, conceden a las propias empresas los dispositivos de definición de las personas y colectivos “elegibles” para la reparación e indemnización, además de los montos a recibir, que son establecidos por medio de parámetros patrimonialistas, criterios y cálculos reduccionistas,

basados en una determinada economía de visibilidades. El subdimensionamiento de los daños y de los colectivos afectados (Teixeira, Zhouri & Motta, 2021; Zhouri, 2023) es también una forma de subestimación cognitiva y de violencia epistémica (Oliveira et al., 2020), lo que explica el título propuesto para el V Ciclo de Debates del Gesta, en 2020, a partir de conversaciones con L.: *Vidas tabuladas: entre las estrategias de cuantificación y las luchas por reparación*.

En 2019, al analizar el proceso de reparación en Mariana frente al desastre ocurrido en Brumadinho, L. rebatía eventuales críticas al puntuar el valor de la lucha y acentuar lo inédito de la situación. En sus palabras, Mariana habría sido un campo experimental, una especie de “borrador”, incluso para las instituciones judiciales:

La sorpresa de ellos [de las empresas] fue que: “no, de ahí para abajo sólo hay personas de pocos conocimientos, poca cultura... es gente que llega un dinero, y ya, lo agarro y me voy...” Se equivocaron. Ahí fue su sorpresa. Porque no aceptamos, nos juntamos en un colectivo, nosotros tuvimos una justicia a nuestro favor. [...] Igual, muchos dicen que no supe hacer, que hice mal, que así, que asá. Oigan, de toda obra hay un borrador. Infelizmente nosotros fuimos el borrador. Todo lo que se usó en el borrador, de ese borrador logramos conquistas, de ese borrador conseguimos directrices, derechos, premisas (L. en el *III UFMG Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

Me parece extraño que nos hayan pasado muchas cosas y que, cuando ocurrió la tragedia en Brumadinho, muchas de las cosas que nos aplicaron en Mariana, recogieron todo y lo aplicaron en Brumadinho, porque era más práctico y más cómodo. Yo dije: “y por qué ahora no copian todo lo demás?”, que ellos saben que fue real y que estuvo bien hecho. Una vez escuché, no recuerdo quién, que decía que Mariana hizo todo mal. Todo mal un carajo. Mariana hizo todo bien, en el momento justo, porque si no hubiese actuado de la forma que actuó, yo creo que había gente viviendo hasta en la calle, o tirados en la calle, o viviendo quién sabe adónde [...] aceptar nuestra matriz y aplicarla en todo el mundo (L. en el *V Ciclo*, Gesta, 2020).

En opinión de L., las conquistas se obtuvieron y podrían servir de parámetro para situaciones semejantes en otros contextos. Lo que dice expresa, además, la conciencia sobre los prejuicios y la violencia epistémica que subyacen al campo de poder en el proceso, específicamente en lo que se refiere a la imagen de que los afectados y afectadas serían necesariamente personas ingenuas y simples, cuyos conocimientos no ofrecerían resistencia a las propuestas (ínfimas) de indemnización. Esa es una visión que se traduce, además, en la imposición de instrumentos de reparación ajenos a la realidad y saberes de los afectados, como se analiza en Oliveira et al. (2020).

L. y S. reconocen la contribución de los compañeros en el transcurso de su aprendizaje en la lucha. S., en particular, ha participado activamente en el MAB y moviliza algunos de los temas que componen su repertorio, como el racismo, la lucha de clases y el feminismo. La afectada, al subrayar las dificultades halladas para la inserción en los espacios de gobernanza del desastre, se autoidentifica como una mujer negra y de lo “alto del morro”. En ese sentido, S. es explícita al evocar marcadores sociales y raciales de la diferencia en medio de la lucha de personas y colectivos afectados:

[...] Digamos la verdad, en todos los territorios afectados por la minería son las mujeres [quienes están al frente de la lucha]. Y cuando las mujeres van a la lucha son putas, vagas, sin nada que hacer, sin ropa que lavar, ni cocina que acomodar, es todo un proceso de prejuicio, un racismo que nadie merece. [...] Ahora, imaginen todo ese proceso si sos negra, y vives en lo alto del morro. Junten las piezas para ver lo que significa eso. Y acá en Barra Longa la gente tiene miedo. No tiene coraje para ir a la lucha, y una va. Y cuando una va, no puede, porque una es negra (declaración en una de las clases de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, en 2021).

Al mencionar los prejuicios sufridos al asumir, como mujer negra y de “lo alto del morro”, el protagonismo en la lucha, S. presenta una faceta hasta entonces poco explorada en las reflexiones sobre las experiencias de las mujeres afectadas, y nos lleva a pensar sobre las violencias interseccionales en medio del desastre (Bullard, 1983). Crenshaw (2004) piensa la intersección como la “interacción entre ejes de la subordinación”, y nos hace reflexionar sobre las modulaciones de la vulnerabilidad de las afectadas frente al patriarcalismo, al racismo y al clasismo, estructurales en nuestra sociedad (Wisner et al., 2004). En ese sentido S., al hablar para un público universitario en el contexto de una clase en la UFMG, entrelaza los prejuicios de género, raza y clase:

Ahora yo digo que estoy haciendo doctorado en lo que es ser afectado, ya pasé por la facultad... por el grado, por el post, ya pasé. Estoy haciendo el doctorado, ya puedo recibir el diploma, por que el afectado es: psicólogo, pasa a ser psicólogo, pasa a ser abogado, asistente social, área de salud, pasa a ocupar todas las áreas sin haber ido nunca a estudiar a la universidad. Sin haber tenido ese privilegio. Entonces, miren, ser negro en un espacio de habla no es broma. Y siendo negra, mujer, saben, mucho peor... (Declaración en una clase de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, en 2021).

La afectada compara su trayectoria de lucha a la trayectoria académica, reiterando los procesos de aprendizaje y de transformación implicados en las vivencias del desastre, una *formación* (continua) de las mujeres como afectadas, marcada por etapas, como ella misma revela en la metáfora del grado y del posgrado. Señalar el acceso a la universidad como un privilegio es un modo de denunciar la jerarquización de los saberes, que descalifica el conocimiento social. En la misma dirección, M. subraya otros lugares subalternos de producción de conocimiento, y su desplazamiento forzoso hacia enfrentamientos en esferas de poder: “Nosotros, campesinos, trabajamos en el campo, nunca imaginamos que tendríamos que salir de ese espacio nuestro, nuestra pequeña vida, nuestra cotidianidad, para tener que pelear con gente tan poderosa” (M., en el *III UFMG Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

Ahora bien, si el “aprender a ser afectado” (Zhouri et al., 2018) aparece como un proceso desafiante para quien viene del mundo rural, el movimiento de *apoderamiento* y *acuerpamiento* para la ocupación de espacios y representación exige una transformación de sí experimentada de manera particular por las mujeres, en general, apartadas del espacio público y de lugares de liderazgo por el sistema político patriarcal. Al reflexionar sobre la necesidad de tornarse una persona “politizada”, S. pone énfasis en la habilidad de hacerse oír, aprovechando oportunidades y lugares propicios para el habla, en un contexto elitizado, jerárquico y hostil, identificado por ella como el de una “guerra”. Veamos:

Los afectados tienen hoy las CTs, que son las Cámaras Técnicas, y el CIF [Comité InterFederativo]. Los afectados no eran aceptados en esos espacios por que esos espacios no fueron hechos para nosotros afectados, para personas que no son... que no tienen *canudo* [título], yo digo *canudo*, ¿no? *Encanudados*. Porque esos espacios están hechos para los que tienen título, los doctores y doctorandos; para nosotros no. Para nosotros afectados del territorio, más aún del interior, que no fuimos preparados para esa guerra, porque es una guerra, ¿no? Tonto el que dice que no es una guerra. Es una guerra (Declaración en una clase de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, en 2021).

En el fragmento más arriba, la afectada denuncia la desigualdad existente en la arquitectura de la gobernanza del desastre, donde espacios como las Cámaras Técnicas del Comité Interfederativo (CTF) serían más receptivos a aquellos que tienen una educación formal y académica, en detrimento de los afectados “del territorio, del interior”. Lo mismo sucedería, según S., en otros espacios políticos frecuentados por ella en su condición de afectada, como por ejemplo el Congreso Nacional y las universidades. De esta manera, queda señalada la “guerra” que también se da en el plano epistémico, en la que se imponen saberes pretendidamente técnicos en la implementación de políticas de reparación, ajenas muchas veces a los contextos locales (Zhouri, 2019; Oliveira et al., 2020).

Por otro lado, en una situación de “guerra” igualmente se construyen alianzas:

El aprendizaje que adquirí en estos cinco años fue muy bueno, muy bueno. He sufrido mucho, y el dolor todavía está, todavía viene, porque todavía lloro. Pero el aprendizaje, todo lo que gané en esa lucha ha sido bagaje. Hoy... igualmente digo, fui capacitada para hablar en público pero nunca pensé que iba a llegar tan alto, en lugares tan importantes, que nunca en mi vida soñé que iba a pisar, gente que nunca soñé que conocería. Y ser tratada igual, ¿no, R.?, cuando nosotras fuimos a Santa Catarina, es una de las historias que más me gusta contar. Fuimos para lanzar el “Más allá del barro”, M., yo y R. en la Univale. Dimos una conferencia, nos llevaban de un lado para otro, hotel, almuerzo, entrevista en la radio, estábamos diciendo: “*Nossa Senhora*, estamos haciendo las cosas bien, qué lindo” (L. en el *V Ciclo*, Gesta, 2020).

Si por un lado existe la descalificación de las experiencias y saberes locales por parte de las instancias de reparación del desastre, por otro, esas mismas experiencias posibilitan la apertura de nuevos horizontes de interacción, interlocución y valoración de los saberes situados, lo que eventualmente se refleja en la producción de redes socio-técnicas que interfieren los circuitos de poder y pueden provocar puntos de inflexión (Zhouri, 2019).

### **Autonomía secuestrada**

Para las mujeres del distrito de Paracatu de Baixo, en Mariana, el desastre acarrió un sentimiento de pérdida de autonomía, por haber comprometido su modo de vida, es decir, por la imposibilidad de controlar las *estrategias de vida* (Bebbington, 2007), como relata M.:

Teníamos nuestro modo de vida aquí, teníamos nuestra economía, nadie dependió nunca de la minería... para ser sincera, yo ni sabía que existía esa represa. Vine a saber de la minería el día del colapso... Entonces para nosotros fue una situación muy penosa, mucho sufrimiento... nadie está preparado para algo así. Son personas que vivían aquí en el campo, independientes, que tenían su propio ingreso, como tenía yo, como tenía mi esposo, como muchas personas aquí de nuestra región, de la zona rural, teníamos nuestra economía... La producción de leche aquí estuvo siempre bien estructurada. Y hoy vemos todo eso que se construyó por años de años ahora destruido por esa empresa (M., en el *III UFGM Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

Paracatu era una comunidad familiar... Parientes que llegaron y fueron poblando... allá se casa prima con primo... Entonces eso, ellos saben lo que quieren, saben cómo hacerlo, saben cómo dictar las normas de vida de ellos, cómo hacer, cómo educar, cómo criar, cómo construir... Y hoy no... estamos con la niñera: Vale, Samarco y BHP. Una niñera maldita, de esas que encierran al chico adentro del armario y lo dejan sin comer en todo el día. Entonces estamos mal con los tutores, perdimos la condición de gobernar nuestras vidas, de hacer de la forma que yo quiero, de la forma que voy a construir, la forma en que quiero vivir. Hoy tengo un dictador a mis espaldas que cada vez me empuja más al abismo (L., en el *III UFGM Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

M. es una mujer blanca, en la franja de los 40 años, productora rural y madre de un niño y una adolescente en la época del colapso de la presa. Sus dichos sobre la aflicción por la pérdida de la relativa autonomía campesina se complementan con las reflexiones de L. sobre las acciones de las empresas, que compara con las de una “niñera maldita”, analogía que remite a un contexto de dependencia, infantilización y abuso. La tutela de las empresas es sentida como un cuidado deficiente si se lo compara a la responsabilidad por el cuidado de los hijos, de la familia y de los más viejos, en general a cargo de las mujeres (Bolados, 2018). La autonomía relativa, al amparo de una red de relaciones comunitarias, se pierde, al lo que se agrega el daño de la humillación frente a la “inseguridad en relación al sustento financiero” de la familia.

Viviendo todavía en la ciudad de Mariana, en casas alquiladas por la Renova, apartados de sus antiguos vecinos, los afectados y afectadas de Paracatu de Baixo y de Bento Rodrigues cuyas casas fueron destruidas se sienten “en pausa” desde el colapso de la represa; en palabras de R., no logran “darle *play* a su vida”.

Una situación vivida por muchos puede efectivamente describirse como un “empobrecimiento forzado”, como es el caso de los afectados de la “zona rural”. Por ejemplo, a diferencia de aquellos residentes del núcleo del poblado denominado Paracatu de Baixo, los habitantes de la llamada Paracatu de Cima son sitieros, que vivían en un sector más alto del territorio y, por tanto, sus casas, como estructuras físicas, no fueron derribadas por la lama, o fueron parcialmente destruidas. Así, algunos están en terrenos alquilados por la Renova, y la mayoría permaneció en sus residencias, reformadas por esta Fundación. En ambos casos, han visto comprometida su capacidad productiva y viven una situación de desplazamiento *in situ* (Teixeira, Zhouri & Motta, 2021). Ello ocurre debido a la pérdida de las condiciones socioecológicas que garantizaban la manutención de su modo de vida. Los ríos Doce y Gualaxo, que eran usados para bebida de animales, pesca, entretenimiento y otras actividades, están comprometidos por desechos de la minería, así como el suelo de cultivo. Muchas personas continúan viviendo “sobre el barro” y, además de encontrar dificultad en el cultivo de pastos como alimento de animales, enfrentan incertidumbres en cuanto a los efectos sobre la salud. De hecho, las mujeres relatan que la Renova incentiva a los afectados a optar por la reconstrucción de las casas parcialmente destruidas, o a construir nuevas viviendas en el mismo terreno, opciones más fáciles y baratas para las empresas que el reasentamiento familiar. Además, el desplazamiento *in situ* también se da en función de la pérdida de la red de vecindad y de las relaciones comunitarias: muchos de los que permanecieron quedaron aislados. Para los sitieros arrendatarios, el tamaño limitado del terreno impide la provisión adecuada y suficiente para la cría. La alimentación complementaria comprometida por la Renova es insuficiente y de calidad inferior, lo que viene produciendo enfermedades y hasta muerte de animales, de acuerdo a la observación etnográfica.

El Auxilio de Emergencia (Cunha Oliveira, 2022; Rosa, 2019) pagado a los afectados desde el colapso de Fundão, además de insuficiente para mantener la misma calidad de vida que tenían en sus comunidades, funciona como una especie de estigma en el comercio de la ciudad. Como lamenta R., habitante de Paracatu de Baixo, pequeña productora y abogada, de unos 50 años de edad: “Estamos viviendo en una casa alquilada y [la Renova] está dando la tarjeta? Si, pero es como si fuese una limosna, en un a situación en la que teníamos condiciones para vivir plenamente a costa nuestra, felices y sin depender de nadie” (R., en el *V Ciclo*, Gesta, 2020).

El empobrecimiento forzado y la pérdida de autonomía es también reflejado por L., quien tuvo que abandonar su empleo para dedicarse a la lucha de los afectados:

Yo misma tenía unas condiciones de vida que me permitían salir a la calle y decir: entré ahí, me gustó eso, lo compré, me lo llevé, con la cabeza en algo... todo en marcha y tranquilo, tenía empleo, tenía trabajo, tenía extras... hoy, si todo sigue así, no llego a honrar los compromisos básicos para la supervivencia (L., en el *III UFMG Debate*, Gesta, 2020).

No se puede afirmar que los hombres de la Comisión, en general, consigan tanto trabajar cuanto luchar por los afectados; tampoco podemos afirmar que L. no tendría que abandonar el empleo si fuese un hombre. La cuestión es que las mujeres, en su mayoría, enfrentan una doble jornada de trabajo debido al cuidado doméstico, lo que implica un uso adicional de tiempo más allá de la jornada laboral.

La temática principal que aparece en los “relatos de mujeres” reunidos en la Auditoría de la Renova, de acuerdo a lo definido por un relevamiento de la Fundación Getulio Vargas (FGV) en 2019<sup>8</sup>, es *Actividad Económica y de Subsistencia*. Los relatos más destacados son los de las mujeres pescadoras, que perdieron la

<sup>8</sup> La categoría “mujeres” fue organizada por el equipo de la FGV a partir de los relatos recogidos por la auditoría de la Fundación Renova, cuyo papel, según lo define el website de la Fundación, es el de “recibir, registrar e investigar denuncias y reclamos relacionados a las comunidades afectadas por el colapso de la Represa de Fundão”. Disponible en: <<https://www.canalconfidencial.com.br/fundacaorenova/>>. Última consulta: 18/08/2023. El Informe de la FGV destaca que, en relación a la “base de referencia”, el porcentual de relatos codificados como “Mulheres” alcanza el 30% (FGV, 2019:42).



fuente de sustento y su modo de vida y, en buena medida, fueron registradas como “ayudantes de pesca”: por no haber sido reconocidas como pescadoras, no recibieron indemnización. Más allá de eso, el informe de la consultoría Ramboll señala que “las mujeres son, proporcionalmente, las principales denunciadas de supuestas concesiones de auxilio que podrían estar en manos equivocadas” (Gomes & Correa, 2018: 32), hecho íntimamente vinculado a la ocurrencia de conflictos familiares.<sup>9</sup>

Asimismo, el informe registra que algunos de los pedidos de división del Auxilio Financiero de Emergencia (AFE) devienen de separaciones conyugales sucedidas luego del colapso de la represa. Incluidas durante el proceso de registro como dependientes de sus ex maridos, esas mujeres relatan estar sin ninguna asistencia financiera por parte de sus ex cónyuges luego de su separación, a cargo de cuidar solas de los hijos de la pareja. En consecuencia, solicitan a la Fundación Renova la división del AFE o modificación del registro, de modo de ya no ser consideradas dependientes y volverse titulares de la ayuda (FGV, 2019). Considerando que en más de dos tercios de los casos los hombres son los poseedores de la tarjeta de ayuda de emergencia (Rosa, 2019), y el hecho de que se atribuye socialmente a las mujeres el cuidado de los hijos –y por lo tanto, luego de la separación, los hijos se encuentran, la mayor parte de las veces, bajo su guarda– hay mujeres afectadas que se encuentran en un total desamparo financiero, impedidas de cuidar de sí, de sus hijos y, muy posiblemente, de los familiares más ancianos. También es posible imaginar casos de mujeres que no se separan de sus cónyuges, o postergan la separación, para no perder algún acceso a la AFE, permaneciendo así en un ambiente domiciliario conflictivo, que puede contribuir al deterioro de su salud mental, o incluso, sujetarlas a violencias domésticas. El informe de la FGV, de hecho, identifica “en los relatos recogidos en la Auditoría, una relación destacada entre el pago del auxilio financiero y violencia doméstica” (FGV, 2019: 77). El informe, además, nos lleva a pensar que el proceso de división del AFE no sería un proceso simple y/o rápido, conforme al análisis del caso de una afectada anónima, pescadora y que pasó por una separación:

Cabe descartar además que, en 2019 –los relatos analizados van de julio de 2016 a octubre de 2019– la afectada permanece pleiteando ante la Fundación Renova las mismas demandas, y declara también que, a pesar de haber recibido la indemnización por cuenta de la pesca –reconocida luego de dos años de manifestaciones y potencial división del Registro de Emergencia dirigido a su ex– permanece sin asistencia en cuanto a la elegibilidad del AFE, y la confirmación de su conclusión registral por vía documental. Además, en la investigación se pudo constatar que la afectada recibió dictamen de impacto directo por daños a la cadena de la pesca, pero permanece con dificultades en el reconocimiento de su auxilio financiero, panorama aparentemente vinculado aún a su condición de dependiente de su ex marido durante el proceso de Registro de la Emergencia (FGV, 2019: 80).

Hay todavía sobre los pedidos de división del AFE una cuestión que destaca en el informe de la FGV(2019), y que se refiere a la desconsideración de las actividades productivas de las mujeres, encuadradas en el registro de los afectados como “dependientes” del responsable del grupo familiar (Rosa, 2019). En ese sentido, la pérdida del ingreso de muchas mujeres viene siendo invisibilizada, o incorrectamente registrada –como en el caso de las mujeres pescadoras, registradas como “ayudantes de pesca”– lo que resulta en indemnizaciones subdimensionadas o simplemente no concedidas. De acuerdo con el informe de la FGV (2019), este fenómeno puede sociarse a dos factores principales:

(i) por un lado, los compañeros de las afectadas (o supieron informar, al momento de la entrevista de registro, los ingresos de su compañera, que se encontraba ausente [...] y (ii) por otro lado, la Fundación Renova no consideró la actividad declarada (y comprobada con la presentación de documentación válida) por la afectada al momento de realizar la conclusión del registro o carta de impacto (FGV, 2019: 82).

9 De acuerdo con el relevamiento de la Fundación Getúlio Vargas, “del total de los relatos que reclaman la división del Auxilio Financiero de Emergencia (AFE), el 44% relatan la existencia de conflictos familiares. La mayor parte de estos conflictos deviene del hecho de que un único miembro del núcleo familiar recibe el auxilio financiero, y no distribuye a los demás integrantes del núcleo familiar el valor correspondiente” (FGV, 2019: 69).

Cabe destacar que el mismo informe indica que las mujeres componen apenas el 39% de los presentes durante la entrevista de registro. Es posible aún considerar una tercera hipótesis, planteada ahora por el relatorio Ramboll (Gomes & Correa, 2018): que las mujeres obtenían más ingreso de manera informal antes del desastre, siendo dichas actividades informales difíciles de ser comprobadas ante Renova. En esa línea, también se puede ponderar que algunas de las mujeres registradas como “del hogar”, en verdad, obtenían sus propios ingresos realizando actividades informales que no fueron relatadas por sus maridos durante el proceso de registro. En este contexto, es posible que las mujeres que trabajaban en la agricultura familiar (muy probablemente junto a sus compañeros) fueran registradas como “del hogar” y no en la categoría “Productor(a) rural/agricultor(a) familiar/trabajador(a) rural.”<sup>10</sup>

Como destacan Godoi y Porto Aguiar (2018), basándose en las políticas de la Dirección de Políticas para Mujeres Rurales (DPMR) –creada en 2010 en el ámbito del Ministerio de Desarrollo Agrario– el lugar atribuido a las mujeres en la agricultura familiar sería fruto de una división sexual del trabajo que se expresa en su responsabilización casi exclusiva por el trabajo doméstico (y de cuidados); y en la concentración en actividades de la esfera productiva orientadas al autoconsumo familiar –la cría de aves y pequeños animales, la horticultura y la floricultura–, a pesar de que también es significativa la participación de la mujer en la labranza. Butto (2010) destaca:

La forma de inserción económica de las mujeres produce una representación de su trabajo como actividad secundaria y marginal, aunque sin su trabajo no sea posible garantizar la reproducción física y social de la agricultura familiar (Butto, 2010: 218 *apud* Godoi & Porto Aguiar, 2018).

De todos modos, considerando el entendimiento del oficio de algunas mujeres como una extensión del trabajo de sus maridos –situación ejemplificada por las pescadoras registradas como “ayudantes de pesca”– y la invisibilización de las actividades económicas de las afectadas encuadradas como dependientes del responsable del núcleo familiar, es importante cotejar las políticas de reparación del desastre a la luz de las reflexiones sobre el fenómeno histórico descrito por Federici (2017) como desvalorización (y consecuente devaluación) del trabajo realizado por las mujeres en la transición de Occidente hacia el sistema capitalista, a partir del siglo XV:

En la nueva organización del trabajo, todas las mujeres (excepto las que habían sido privatizadas por los hombres burgueses) se volvieron bienes comunes, pues una vez que las actividades de las mujeres fueron definidas como no trabajo, el trabajo de las mujeres comenzó a parecerse a un recurso natural, disponible para todos, así como el aire que respiramos y el agua que bebemos. Esta fue una derrota histórica para las mujeres. Con su expulsión de los oficios y la desvalorización del trabajo reproductivo, se feminizó la pobreza. Para poner en práctica la “apropiación originaria” de los hombres sobre el trabajo femenino, se construyó un nuevo orden patriarcal, reduciendo a las mujeres a una doble dependencia: de sus empleadores y de sus hombres (Federici, 2017:191).

Obviamente, las dinámicas concernientes a la inserción de las mujeres en el mercado del trabajo han cambiado desde entonces, con la reconquista del acceso a la tierra y el desempeño de oficios generadores de renta. Con todo, la desvalorización del trabajo femenino se mantiene en diversas esferas, principalmente en lo que concierne al trabajo reproductivo y, especialmente, a la invisibilización de actividades económicas productivas, como los ejemplos lo demuestran.

<sup>10</sup> Categoría ocupacional presente en el registro de Mariana. 97 hombres y 50 mujeres, de acuerdo con el informe de la consultora Ramboll (Gomes & Correa, 2018).

## Jornadas múltiples de trabajo, uso no remunerado del tiempo y violencia epistémica

Las situaciones de dependencia y empobrecimiento forzoso generadas por la pérdida repentina e involuntaria de los modos de vida y de los medios para reconstruirlos se ven reforzadas por otras formas de violencia impuestas a las mujeres por la gobernanza del desastre. Se trata de tipos de sufrimiento social (Das, Kleinman & Lock, 1996) derivados del aumento de las jornadas laborales múltiples, del no reconocimiento del trabajo reproductivo y del trabajo informal, así como de la negación o descalificación de los conocimientos locales.

ML., de unos 40 años, relata su experiencia de participación en la lucha por los derechos ante el desastre, ya fuera por el reconocimiento de su trabajo informal o como representante de su madre, cuya casa quedó destruida por el lodo.

Y yo... largué todo, saben lo que es todo? Asistiendo a reuniones, llegaba muy tarde, yo y la L., andaba con miedo en la calle... y a la noche salíamos y llegábamos a media noche, o un poco más, ¿no, L.? Para reuniones... el matrimonio, ¿viste? Tenía que salir a una reunión, me levantaba temprano a la mañana.. y mi hijo también me reclamaba, mi marido, y lo fui llevando, llevando, en fin, yo iba siempre a las reuniones, y la gente de la Samarco siempre me decía ¿qué estaba haciendo ahí? ¿Qué había perdido yo? Porque yo tenía casa en Mariana, ¿no? Entonces para ellos es así: “¿Qué estás haciendo aquí? ¿Qué perdiste?”. Pero sabían que mi madre había perdido todo, mi madre había quedado sin casa (ML, en el *III UFMG Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

ML. estaba casada y ejercía el oficio de manicura en su casa cuando estalló la presa. Perdió la tranquilidad, se alteró el ritmo de su día a día, y se arriesgó para participar de las reuniones nocturnas en defensa de los derechos de su madre, anciana, moradora de la zona rural. Así, ML. relata haber sido desconsiderada como afectada por la Fundación Renova, y su participación es menospreciada en los espacios de la reparación. Como se ha dicho, la categoría de *impacto* presente en el discurso y en el instrumento registral de la Fundación Renova reafirma el sentido patrimonialista del “impactado”, omitiendo daños, pérdidas, expropiaciones y demás efectos impuestos a los afectados. El trabajo informal, así como el exigido durante la reparación, que se arrastra en negociaciones hasta la actualidad, no es reconocido.

En Barra Longa, S. cuenta que por vivir “en lo alto del morro”, donde el barro de desechos en principio no llegó a destruir su casa, con frecuencia es desconsiderada como afectada. Sin embargo, durante la “limpieza” de Barra Longa, las empresas y sus tercerizadas retiraron el barro del centro de la ciudad, la parte “noble”, y lo depositaron “encima del morro”, “en la puerta de casa”. Poco después de estos acontecimientos, su hija, apenas una bebé en aquel momento, se enfermó y atraviesa, desde entonces, problemas de salud que se manifiestan en la piel y en dificultades respiratorias. En ese contexto, la vida de S. cambió completamente, en función del cuidado de su hija enferma y en la búsqueda del reconocimiento de esa afección. En el transcurso del proceso, tal como lo expresaran otras mujeres, ella ha enfrentado una carga excedente de trabajo y rutinas desgastantes.

Trabajaba de auxiliar aquí en la escuela, empecé a estudiar como en agosto... al final de agosto de 2015. Cursé toda la facultad en medio de ese caos, del caos, porque todo el mundo sabe que a partir del momento en que te conviertes en militante ya no tienes más vida. Una vez que pones el pie en la trinchera, que te calzas la camiseta, levantas la bandera, tu vida se acabó, infelizmente. Es una elección que una tiene que hacer. Tu vida, así... ya no tienes más vida social, vida familiar... tu vida pasa a quedar del lado del pasado. Dejas de existir (Declaración en una clase de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, en 2021).

Como se ha subrayado, todavía es norma en la sociedad occidental atribuir a las mujeres los servicios domésticos y el cuidado de la casa, y de los hijos, trabajo de reproducción social frecuentemente desvalorizado (Svampa, 2015). No es exagerado destacar que dichas responsabilidades familiares y domésticas, vinculadas a la división de roles de género históricamente construida, se reproducen en el contexto del desastre (Rosa, 2019).

Para las mujeres que protagonizan la lucha por los afectados, no es posible ni siquiera hablar de una jornada doble, porque las jornadas son múltiples y no remuneradas. El trabajo que exige integrar las comisiones es constante, sin horario definido, como horarios de almuerzo, o de descanso los fines de semana, vacaciones y feriados. Más allá de las demandas exigidas en la lucha por reparación, las mujeres se ven presionadas por las exigencias y obligaciones familiares y domésticas, sin mencionar eventuales empleos. Como advierte Federici (2017), el trabajo que se exige de las mujeres para ejercer las funciones de cuidadoras de la casa y de la familia es mistificado por el sistema social capitalista como “un recurso natural o un servicio personal”, es decir, no es algo reconocido como trabajo. Así, aunque algunas afectadas mencionen el abandono de oficios para su dedicación integral a la lucha de los afectados, como se ha visto, la posibilidad de renuncia a las responsabilidades domésticas y familiares no existe.

Entonces puedo decir, con todas las letras, que terminaron con mi vida, porque opté por *abandonar todo y marchar con la comunidad*, porque si no ellos iban a hacer una masacre. [...] Porque nuestro día no termina a las seis de la tarde, a la hora en que agarra sus cosas y se va para casa. Nuestro día es de 24 horas, si tuviera más, era más; no tenemos sábado, ni domingo ni feriado. Si estás comiendo y pasa algo grave, dejas el plato y vas (L., en el *III UFMG Debate*, GESTA, 2019).

La inseguridad financiera enfrentada por gran parte de los afectados y afectadas, como se ha destacado, conduce a la fragilización de su capacidad para el cuidado adecuado de las necesidades domésticas –el hogar, los hijos–, situación que impone gran sufrimiento a las mujeres. Algunas de las principales preocupaciones y problemas que enfrentan las afectadas nos llevan a remarcar el carácter procesal del desastre, por el desgaste progresivo a medida que se extienden los procesos reparatorios. Se destaca la temática del cuidado –con el hogar, con los familiares y los enfermos– como una responsabilidad femenina que pesa cada vez más en medio de la inseguridad financiera y las incertidumbres del desastre. En efecto, el desastre desencadenado por el colapso de la represa de Fundão exacerba los efectos de la economía neo-extractivista, legitimando desigualdades de género, clase, raza, y naturalizando las violencias sobre los cuerpos y vidas de las mujeres. La minería opera, al fin, la naturalización del trabajo no valorizado del cuidado. Como reflexiona Bolados (2018) a propósito del caso chileno,

la economía extractivista [...] profundiza la precarización de los sistemas de vida ecológicos y sociales y sus posibilidades de reproducción en las zonas rurales indígenas y campesinas de nuestro país, perpetuando un modelo de sobreexplotación del trabajo no asalariado y relegándonos como mujeres al cuidado de los afectados por este modelo económico. Un modelo que como bien sostiene Federici se construyó gracias a este trabajo no valorizado ni cuantificado pero fundamental para el proceso de acumulación precapitalista que transformó los modos de relación y producción de la vida y sus bienes naturales. (Bolados, 2018: 9-10).

En el desastre de Fundão, las mujeres que asumieron el liderazgo extienden el cuidado que ejercen en relación a sus familias hacia el cuidado con los afectados de manera general:

Nosotros nos tenemos que preservar trabajando (R., en el *V Ciclo*, Gesta, 2020).

Como suelo decir ahora, la comisión hoy se volvió niñera. Entonces, tomamos y vemos las cosas que pasan, con cuidado para que el bebé no se caiga, darle la mamadera a la hora justa, hay también que llamar la atención, hay que llamar y siempre vas hablando con las personas, porque creo mucho en la red “patrona”, somos muy buenas. Entonces, uno va pasando a otro, yo tengo grupos de Facebook, de Whatsapp, que ustedes ya los conocen un poquito. Estos días estoy sin enviar mensajes, pero cuando mande, van a ver, va ser mucha cosa (L. en el *V Ciclo*, Gesta, 2020).

Es interesante cómo L. retoma la imagen de la niñera –figura femenina cuyo trabajo consiste en cuidar– para referirse a la Comisión de Afectados. Sin embargo, a diferencia de la “niñera maldita” que representan las empresas o la Fundación Renova, más que a la tutela sobre la vida de los afectados, la imagen de la niñera alude a la responsabilidad de la Comisión de Afectados por la colectividad, ya sea en el acompañamiento de los procesos o en la transmisión de las informaciones. Al contrario de la “niñera maldita” que “encierra al niño en el ropero el día entero y lo deja sin comer”, la niñera-comisión cuida, es atenta y orienta.

Además de las múltiples horas de trabajo y la falta de reconocimiento del tiempo dedicado por las mujeres como cuidadoras y representantes de la comunidad en los procesos de reparación del desastre, otro aspecto asociado es la devaluación de los conocimientos y saberes locales. Como se ha observado en el contexto de la concesión de licencias ambientales para grandes proyectos, se trata de una forma de violencia epistémica (Zhouri, 2019), instrumental a la expropiación, que también está presente en el contexto del desastre. Como S. señalara anteriormente, los espacios institucionales de la gobernanza de desastres son elitistas, jerárquicos y hostiles, y los identifica como entornos de “guerra”. Si en los espacios de toma de decisiones representados por el CIF, las audiencias judiciales o incluso el Congreso Nacional, se privilegia el conocimiento de quienes “tienen diploma” sobre el conocimiento de quienes conforman los territorios, en los procedimientos de construcción de parámetros y lineamientos para el reconocimiento de las pérdidas y daños de los afectados, como la elaboración del registro de afectados por parte de la Fundación Renova, muchas veces se exige el conocimiento local para atender la cuestión político-democrática de la participación, pero no se reconoce como conocimiento válido.

Los relatos de las mujeres destacan el trabajo ejercido por la Comisión de Afectados para la reformulación del registro, proceso que también evidenció la violencia epistémica ejercida por la Fundación Renova y las empresas:

Para reformular el registro, fue un sufrimiento de más de 6 meses [...] Ese trabajo lo hicimos de lunes a viernes, eso era de las 8 a las 17 hs, y al llegar a casa teníamos que ver los niños, ver todo el trabajo de la casa, hacer todo corriendo, dormirse casi a media noche para levantarse temprano al otro día y salir corriendo, para no perder el horario y trabajar para reelaborar el registro que ellos [las empresas y sus consultoras] tendrían que haberlo hecho bien, para que no tuviéramos que hacer este trabajo. Cuando nosotros fuimos e hicimos el planteo del uso de nuestro tiempo, con la ayuda de los profesionales que estaban ayudándonos a reelaborar el registro, ellos dijeron que eso era nuestra elección. Y ellos nos dijeron eso en la cara, con la mayor frialdad, que nosotros habíamos trabajado allí porque queríamos, porque si los hubiéramos dejado a ellos, ya estaría listo. Y un trabajo pésimo, de pésima calidad, que yo se los digo a ellos que ellos erran por gusto, porque los errores de ellos son indignantes (M. en el *III UFMG Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

En el *III UFMG Debate*, M. y L. expresaron su indignación por la no remuneración en cuanto al trabajo y al tiempo dedicados por las comisiones en los procesos de reparación. Al intentar reivindicarlas, sus demandas fue negada por las empresas, alegando que esta actuación sería algo optativo. Es significativo que hayan sido las mujeres quienes trajeran a colación el no reconocimiento de su trabajo y del tiempo invertido en la reformulación del registro. Sus reivindicaciones, muy posiblemente, se relacionan con el hecho de que, más allá de los empleos y/o estudios, las mujeres precisan conciliar el tiempo dedicado a la comisión con los cuidados de la casa y de los hijos, un trabajo doméstico igualmente no remunerado. M., por ejemplo, menciona cómo el cuidado de los hijos y del hogar extendían su jornada de trabajo hasta la medianoche. En fin, ante innumerables fallas presentes en el instrumento propuesto para el registro de los afectados (Gesta, 2016), la actuación de las comisiones junto a la asesoría técnica se volvió, de hecho, imprescindible para la defensa de los derechos, así como para las tentativas de reducción de las asimetrías de poder y desigualdades inherentes al proceso de reparación. Además, la atención dividida entre los trabajos de la comisión y el trabajo

doméstico –normalizado socialmente como obligación de las mujeres, y mistificado como obligación natural– no raras veces hizo emerger conflictos y divisiones incluso en el ámbito familiar, como comparte L.:

Entonces puedo decir, con todas las letras, que terminaron con mi vida, porque opté por abandonar todo y marchar con la comunidad, porque si no ellos iban a hacer una masacre, y hay varias personas esclarecidas en nuestra comunidad, hay mucha gente que entiende todo y entiendo que ellos tienen un mayor potencial, que es el potencial de saber hacer. Simplemente bastaba con que ellos vinieran y preguntaran cómo era, y trabajar encima de lo que estaba, no venir dando órdenes de que buscó fuera del país, que buscó en los mejores libros, así hay que hacer... hoy es un proyecto, ustedes tienen que seguir esta rienda como si fuésemos animales desbocados en el pasto. Los que necesitan riendas son ellos, que nosotros sabemos caminar. Nosotros no necesitábamos de la empresa para sobrevivir. Eran pocos los que trabajaban en la empresa, la mayoría no precisaba de ninguna empresa. Y la empresa hoy nos necesita a nosotros para entender todo, para probar para ellos allá... “Ah, nosotros hicimos el trabajo, fue el mejor trabajo, el mejor mapa, la mejor relocalización...” ¡MENTIRA! Hoy nosotros somos consultores, ¿cuál es el precio de un consultor? ¿Cuánto cuesta una secretaria administrativa? Eso fue lo que nosotros cambiamos. Y ellos vienen y nos dicen que nosotros somos optativos. En mi interpretación, a grosso modo, ellos nos dicen que estamos ahí porque somos unos sinvergüenzas que nos gusta sufrir, que nos hubiéramos quedado en casa dejándolos resolver a ellos y después, entregar la llavecita y felicitaciones, vamos a inaugurar, fuegos artificiales. No es así. No camina así. Hay que aprender a respetar a la gente, hay que aprender a respetar la voluntad de la gente y hay que aprender, sí, aprender a hacer... (L., no III UFMG DEBATE, GESTA, 2019).

La metáfora de los animales desbocados en el pasto traduce la visión que las empresas tendrían de los afectados, en la interpretación de L.: gente de escaso conocimiento, perdidos, que necesitan de tutela (Cunha Oliveira, 2022; Zucarelli, 2021). Esta interpretación es corroborada por la forma cómo la Renova elaboró sus instrumentos y programas de reparación, el registro por ejemplo, construido sin la participación de los afectados, a partir de parámetros y referencias externas, e incompatibles con la realidad del ambiente y de las comunidades afectadas, además de cargar, como se dijo, una visión restrictiva y patrimonialista de los “impactos” (Gesta, 2016). En cierto momento, al referirse al registro y a la matriz de daños de la Renova como dispositivos de gobernanza del desastre, M. los identifica como “totalmente fuera de la realidad de nuestro mundo”. L. refuerza esa denuncia, al referirse a la “sabiduría de la tierra”, obliterada en la construcción de los parámetros de la reparación. La violencia epistémica rebalsa la esfera de las empresas y se hace presente en otras esferas del proceso del desastre, como las instituciones de justicia (Zhouri, 2019). En las audiencias judiciales realizadas en la Comarca de Mariana, posiciones pretendidamente técnicas, emitidas por parte de Renova o por representantes de las empresas parecían tener, muchas veces, mayor receptividad que aquellas que presentaba la asesoría técnica de los afectados, y más todavía que las presentadas por los propios afectados, sectores ambos puestos frecuentemente bajo sospecha.

### **Conflictos familiares y fragmentación**

Protagonizar la lucha por los afectados y afectadas resulta en una exposición pública que coloca a quienes se disponen a hacerlo como blanco de escrutinio y críticas, incluso por parte de vecinos locales y parientes, como muestra este relato:

Sin salud, sin empleo, la familia rota, amistades rotas, lazos rotos, hoy mi familia es toda esa gente que camina con una, porque las propias familias, la mayoría, entendió que yo le di prioridad a la represa. Entonces hoy, mi nombre, ellos me llaman Represa. Tengo esa marca y la voy a llevar para el resto de la vida, adonde sea que vaya. [...] Cada vez que aparezco en los medios, cada vez que hago un pronunciamiento, el ataque es muy agresivo (L., en el III UFMG Debate, Gesta, 2019).

Como lo han relatado afectados y afectadas en diferentes momentos, en muchas ocasiones los miembros de la comisión de afectados son vistos como personas que buscarían beneficios personales en el proceso de reparación del desastre. Una de las consecuencias más dolorosas de *apoderarse y acuerparse* en la lucha por reparación está representada por la crítica de los propios parientes. Las mujeres, en particular, relatan no sólo conflictos familiares como consecuencia de su dedicación a cuestiones de la reparación, sino también el enfrentamiento de acusaciones sobre su supuesta negligencia en los cuidados para con la familia. Dicha situación acarrea desgastes de las relaciones y puede provocar rupturas, como lo expresa L., a quien algunos familiares llaman “represa”, y también por ML., traicionada por su marido y expulsada de su casa:

Y mi vida cambió completamente, porque mi marido se consiguió otra mujer en ese instante y la metió en la casa. Imagínense, la trajo a casa, entonces... por así decirlo, me cambió, me tiró para afuera, ¿no? Y mis cosas están en el garage de mi mamá, lo que pude sacar, mi ropa, ¿no? (ML., en el *III UFMG Debate*, GESTA, 2019).

Igualmente, S. narra haber sufrido el abandono, indicando su compromiso con la militante como probable disparador:

Yo, por ejemplo, en el momento que más necesité de mi marido, él huyó de casa con una amante. ¿Entiende eso? En el momento en que recibí el resultado de ese examen que les estaba contando, de contaminación de SF. de cerebro, de intestino, ese fue el momento en que él huyó de casa con una amante. Ustedes me entienden, como que es un proceso... pero “S. no es una afectada”, “S. no es una afectada”. En el momento en que más necesité de ayuda, de apoyo para poder seguir luchando por el derecho a la salud de mi hija, me quedé sola. sola, porque la mujer que va a la lucha no sirve, ella no sirve (Declaración en una clase de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, en 2021).

Imposibilitadas de delegar en otros el cuidado de los hijos, y en muchas situaciones, el de familiares ancianos, las mujeres enfrentan las divergencias que emergen de sus esfuerzos para garantizar el bienestar de los familiares. Consciente del peligro respecto a la posible toxicidad del barro, y teniendo un amplio conocimiento sobre las opciones de reparación, M. procura orientar a los miembros de su familia, pero las discordancias en medio de esos procesos tensionaron las relaciones entre los hermanos:

Mi madre, yo luché mucho para que no pasara eso, tuve muchas diferencias con mis hermanos, mi familia quedó toda desestructurada. Hoy, cada uno para su lado y a ninguno le gusta ni oírme hablar, pero mi madre se está muriendo sobre el barro (M., en el *III UFMG Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

De hecho, los cursos institucionales del desastre, principalmente a partir de las categorías que fragmentan la realidad, generan conflictos, tensiones y fisuras comunitarias y familiares para los afectados en general, yendo más allá del universo de aquellos que están en las comisiones de afectados (Zhouri et al., 2018).

## Enfermedad

Sabemos de las contaminaciones, del riesgo para la salud humana, que es muy triste, y ellos no toman ninguna disposición. Una empresa de Rio Grande do Sul, la Ambios, hizo un análisis del polvo, del suelo y del agua, y nos lo presentó en el el Centro de Convenciones de Mariana esos resultados, y son resultados alarmantes Las cantidades de cadmio, titanio, plomo, torio y otros tipos de metales son cosas aeu se encuentran también en las baterías de los autos. Esa concentración está en el polvo, dentro de las casas que están a las márgenes del río. Entonces, ese profesional nos dijo, todo el mundo lo oyó, que la gente está siendo contaminada durmiendo en sus casas, porque respirando ese polvo lleno de cadmio, el resultado, nosotros sabemos, que va a ser... no es hoy, no va a pasar

nada hoy con la persona, pero en términos de futuro van a pasar cosas muy graves. Ya tuvimos allá casos de piel, personas que quedan con la piel muy irritada, se rascan y rascan, y se lastima, salen unas ampollas enormes en las piernas, en los pies, y esa persona después, le queda una mancha grande, que no sale, y un tiempo después le vuelve la picazón. Nosotros tenemos un índice alto de endoscopías en nuestra región, la gente tiene mucho dolor de estómago. Y ahí las empresas se callan, peleamos, gritamos, denunciemos y ellos de nuevo hacen la misma cosa: no dicen nada (M., en el *III UFMG Debate*, Gesta, 2019).

M. se refiere al Estudio de Evaluación de Riesgos para la Salud Humana (ARSH, por sus iniciales en portugués), realizado por la empresa Ambios, contratada a partir del acuerdo entre la Cámara Técnica de Salud (CT-Saúde) y la Fundación Renova. Los datos producidos por Ambios, en base a las directrices del Ministerio de Salud, apuntan a la clasificación de los lugares examinados –en Mariana y Barra Longa– como *Categoría A: Peligro urgente para la Salud Pública*, e indican que hay riesgos para la salud derivados de “exposiciones pasadas, presentes y futuras, de corto o largo plazo, a sustancias químicas peligrosas” (Ambios, 2019: 331). En ambas ciudades, la polvareda domiciliaria analizada a partir de los estudios ambientales está contaminada por cadmio, plomo, níquel, cobre y cinc. De este modo, el estudio indica que las poblaciones expuestas a metales pesados, por medio de su “ingestión, inhalación u absorción dérmica de las partículas del suelo superficial y/o de polvo domiciliario contaminado” están en riesgo de sufrir efectos lesivos sobre su salud, inmediatos o de largo plazo.

En Barra Longa, la salud es un asunto que causa gran preocupación, debido a que la población permanece en contacto con el polvo de los desechos. Como se ha dicho, S. se involucró con el tema de la salud de los afectados principalmente debido a la dolencia de su hija, en la que los síntomas –picazón, diarrea, vómitos– comenzaron a aparecer muy rápidamente.

Empieza la limpieza de la ciudad, ¿no? En la limpieza de la ciudad, qué es lo que hacen ellos? Racismo ambiental. Miren lo que digo, aprendí hasta lo que es el racismo ambiental, presten atención, como es que va siendo el empoderamiento, el conocimiento. [...] Entonces, ese barro es retirado de la parte noble, de la postal de Barra Longa, y ¿adónde lo traen? A los altos del morro, donde viven los pobres, las personas en situación vulnerable, donde vive S. Entonces el barro llega a la puerta de mi casa en camiones, porque en Barra Longa el barro sube el morro, infelizmente. [...] Entonces, el barro está en la puerta de mi [casa] y a partir del momento que ese barro llega a la puerta de mi casa, ¿para dónde voy a disparar con S.? No hay caso, ahí se agrava el problema de salud de ella, ella permanece internada en Ponte Nova con insuficiencia respiratoria. Hoy tiene una inflamación en el cerebro y en el intestino gravísima, que si no hace el tratamiento, corre serio riesgo de tener cáncer, lamentablemente. Los médicos me han dicho que tengo que, como se dice, tengo que asegurar su tratamiento, porque infelizmente ella es una seria candidata a no llegar a la fase adulta debido a las contaminaciones en ese problema que ella tiene [...] ¿Si S. tiene derecho a tratamiento? No tiene (Declaración en una clase de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, en 2021).

Al ser consultada sobre su compromiso con la temática de la salud antes del desastre, S. respondió:

No, nunca trabajé con el tema salud. No entendía lo que era salud, no entendía bien la salud, lo que era el SUS [Sistema Único de Salud] principalmente... Pero después de un crimen de esas proporciones... [...] Entonces, cuando la Andréa [Zhouri] me pregunta si yo entendía de salud, si era del área de la salud, hoy si me preguntan cómo funciona el sistema de salud de Barra Longa yo sé decirles más que la misma gente que trabaja ahí, hasta más que la secretaria de salud. Si me preguntan, sé cuáles son los problemas de salud, cuántos contaminados hay, porque cuando empezamos a construir el plan de acción en salud fue así.

Por su parte, ML es quien se encarga de los cuidados de su madre que, así como sus dos hermanos, tiene problemas de salud. Según ella, el hermano que está con la madre tiene “problemas de la cabeza”, mientras que el otro toma medicamentos para la presión y “casi no para en casa”. “Hoy yo estoy aquí, pero también



estoy preocupada allá, en casa, pensando en mi mamá, en que él [el hermano] no está bien” (III UFGM Debate, Gesta, 2019).

En relación a los problemas de salud en el desastre, los informes Ramboll (Gomes & Correa, 2018) y FGV (2019) señalan cuestiones específicas de las mujeres. Según el primer informe, tanto el registro de Mariana como el registro integrado de la cuenca del Rio Doce indican un mayor sufrimiento de las mujeres con cuestiones de enfermedades luego del colapso de la represa de Fundão. “En una rápida percepción de esa comparación, de lo global de ambos registros, las mujeres sufren más la aparición y el empeoramiento de enfermedades preexistentes y la necesidad de tomar más medicación (registro de Mariana)” (Gomes & Correa, 2018: 17). El informe señala, además, que de acuerdo con el registro de Mariana, 48 hombres y 75 mujeres han enfrentado problemas con la provisión de medicamentos con la llegada del desastre, y que 63 hombres y 101 mujeres continúan enfrentando restricciones en el acceso a sus medicamentos en la actual situación (Gomes *et al.*, 2018: 19), información que coincide con lo constatado por el informe de la Fundación Getulio Vargas:

[...] los relatos que abordan el cáncer apuntan también hacia problemáticas en cuanto al acceso a la salud y al tratamiento de dicha condición crónica. Así, la situación de vulnerabilidad se muestra como una faceta importante en el contenido de tales relatos, cuyas demandas se direccionan a cuestiones sobre la necesidad económica y las dificultad para afrontar costos de salud (FGV, 2019: 56).

En este aspecto, es necesario considerar la inseguridad económica que viven los afectados, así como el estrés y el desgaste mental experimentado por las mujeres –cuidadoras– al no contar con condiciones de tratamiento adecuadas a los enfermos. Así como hay un deterioro de la salud física de muchos afectados, también hay un deterioro de la salud mental. Muchos perdieron sus casas –no sólo como estructuras físicas, sino como memorias, como proyectos de vida– perdieron la vida que llevaban y las rutinas a las que estaban acostumbrados; perdieron la vecindad y las dinámicas comunitarias, atravesaron rupturas familiares y el apartamiento de amigos, además de enfrentar la incertidumbre y la espera por una reparación. El registro de Mariana revela que, entre las enfermedades adquiridas luego del colapso, se destacan la depresión, trastornos de ansiedad e insomnio (Gomes & Correa, 2018), dolencias que vienen agravándose con el paso del tiempo:

[...] al analizar tales subtemas a partir de su distribución temporal, puede percibirse que, en todos los casos, hay un aumento porcentual de relatos en relación al total de cada año, con dinámicas que apuntan a una acentuación de los problemas de salud a lo largo del tiempo. Aquí se destaca, principalmente, la categoría Salud Mental, que aumentó del 1,2% del total de base del año 2016 al 12,8% del total de base del año 2019. [...] El ‘Acceso a la salud’ –que versa sobre relatos que contienen descripciones sobre dificultades en la compra de medicamentos, acceso a tratamientos, etc.– presenta también una dinámica semejante, que arranca del 1,7% de incidencia en 2016 al 18,6% en 2019 (FGV, 2019: 54).

El informe de la FGV (2019), aunque esté basado en los relatos de las mujeres, demuestra un cuadro agravado que se aplica a los afectados de modo general. Sería prudente, pues, ponderar si, de hecho, las mujeres estarían sufriendo más con problemas de salud física y mental, o si, como cuidadoras, estarían más atentas a esas cuestiones, al punto de referirlas con mayor frecuencia.

S. cuenta que su tío y su abuela, que vivían juntos antes del colapso y fueron separados posteriormente, tuvieron un drástico deterioro de su salud a lo largo del desastre. Para ella, su tío se estaba “secando”, y ambos habrían muerto “de tristeza”, uno después del otro:

¿Cuánta gente está depresiva? ¿Cuántas personas están enfermas, muriéndose? Soy de la comunidad de Gesteira, es una comunidad bien pequeñita [...] Fue destruida com bento y Paracatu, sólo que nadie lo dice. ¡Nadie habla! Y allá en Gesteira vivía mi abuela y mi tío. ¿Y saben lo que pasó? Ellos no murieron el 5 de noviembre de 2015, lograron escapar del barro, pero se murieron. Tristeza, depresión y angustia. ¿Por qué? Mi tío y mi abuela vivían juntos y, en el colapso, los separaron. Ella vino a vivir en Barra Longa, y el otro fue a vivir a un campo donde no tenía ni un perro que le ladre. Se fue deprimiendo, deprimiendo... y se enfermó mucho. Ahí un día mi hermano me llama y me dice: “El tío N. está muy enfermo, podrás venir a ver lo que le está pasando? Yo fui. [...] Cuando llegué y vi la situación de mi tío, dios mío, mi tío... el era delgado, pero había quedado finito como un fósforo. Empecé a llevarlo al psicólogo, al médico [...] y en una de esas veces que estábamos por entrar a la psicóloga, él me agarró la mano, me apretó la mano: “S., me estoy muriendo. ¿Por qué nadie ve que me estoy muriendo? Me estoy muriendo”. Y se fue yendo, yendo [...] falleció mi tío. [...] Tristeza. Tristeza. Ahí mi abuela no aguantó la depresión, la tristeza. La pérdida [...] Mi abuela se fue enfermando, fui a su casa justamente ese día. Llegué, ella me dijo así: “¿Ha visto, m’hija, lo que pasó en Brumadinho? La cantidad de gente que murió, peor que mi situación”. ¡Y miren que ella había perdido todo! Todo [...] Eran, qué, las diez de la noche y me volví. Como a las once y media mi tía me llamó: “Mamá está muy mal, estoy llevando a la mamá para la UPA [Unidad de Pronto Atención médica]”. La llevó a la abuelita a la UPA, y como a media noche: “Mamá está muy muy mal, no está pudiendo respirar, la estoy llevando a Ponte Nova”. La llevó a Ponte Nova [...] me devolvieron a mi abuela el 21 de marzo en el cajón. Entonces, en tres meses, perdí a mi abuela y a mi tío (Declaración en una clase de la materia *Ecología Política Feminista Latinoamericana*, en 2021).

Aunque las enfermedades mentales sean experimentadas tanto por hombres como por mujeres, las especificidades del segundo caso merecen considerarse. En primer lugar, el padecimiento de los otros contribuye enormemente al desgaste de la salud mental de las mujeres, en su condición de cuidadoras primarias. Es significativo que el hermano de S., un hombre, la haya llamado, a una mujer, para socorrer y cuidar del tío enfermo. En segundo lugar, está el padecimiento mental ligado a la sobrecarga doméstica, como se ha mencionado. Intrínsecamente relacionado a la inseguridad económica, también abordada, el peso de las dificultades para cuidar del hogar y de los hijos recae de modo especial sobre las mujeres, que no consiguen ejercer sus responsabilidades domésticas adecuadamente, enfrentando así un sufrimiento mental. Está también el hecho de que, particularmente en lo referido a los hijos, las mujeres no tienen opción de resguardarse de situaciones de enfermedad. Los hombres, como principales titulares de la AFE, en caso que decidan desertar en una situación difícil –como ocurrió con S.– privan a las mujeres del debido ampara para el cuidado de los hijos enfermos. Según el informe de la FGV,

[...] la sobrecarga doméstica presenta también una incidencia preocupante en los relatos que tratan la salud mental. Para tener una idea, de los 154 casos con relatos sobre cuestiones de salud mental, el 71,4% informan también problemas de sobrecarga doméstica, muchos de los cuales incluso asociando el desarrollo de determinado padecimiento mental –la depresión, en la mayor parte de los casos– a las dificultades asociadas a los cuidados y quehaceres domésticos. Entre éstos, los costos de mantenimiento del hogar (60,4%) y el cuidado de hijos y nietos (33%) aparecen también como principales temas asociados a las reivindicaciones relacionadas a la salud mental. [...] Se advierte que las angustias como consecuencia de la imposibilidad de alimentar o cuidar de los hijos, así como la tristeza frente al descontrol y la inestabilidad domésticos (derivados, por ejemplo, de desalojos reiterados, deudas y cuentas atrasadas) son las principales causas asociadas por las afectadas al desarrollo o agravamiento de problemas de salud mental (FGV, 2019: 66).

El desgaste mental vivido por las mujeres activas en la Comisión de Afectados se evidencia en las declaraciones. De este modo, reflejan su transformación en el proceso del desastre, no sólo por vía del “empoderamiento”, sino también por las violaciones y violencia, las pérdidas, el desgaste en las relaciones familiares, el sufrimiento y el peso de las responsabilidades. Viven una especie de luto, no sólo por las personas que murieron, sino por la vida que tenían, por el territorio en ruinas, por relaciones deshechas y la familia deshecha, como se afirma a seguir:

Entonces, igual dije, es mucho sufrimiento, muchos no aceptan el psicólogo. Otros, los padres no los llevan porque lamentablemente la mayoría piensa que el psicólogo es para los locos. Yo misma hago terapia, tengo dos psicólogas, fue lo que me volvió a la senda. Un día ví una entrevista mía, y dije “no soy yo la que está ahí”, estaba con los ojos vidriosos, igual que las locas, parecía salida del manicomio, dije, “no soy esa ahí, no”. Ahí volví a controlar mi mirada, volví a L., porque hoy soy una L. modificada (L., en el V Ciclo, Gesta, 2020).

[...] nosotros los afectados sufrimos daños a la salud física y mental. Sí, la depresión es una muy triste realidad en todos los hogares de todos los afectados, cuesta encontrar una casa que no tenga alguien tomando antidepresivos. Con todo este desastre, esta destrucción del mundo, ver todo perdido, la vida, la raíz, todo nuestro mundo se fue. Entonces, cuando empecé a darme cuenta que estaba deprimida ya estaba en un nivel muy elevado de depresión, muy alto, lloraba solamente, fue que descubrí que ya estaba llegando a la fase del trastorno de pánico. Fue muy difícil para mí entenderlo y buscar tratamiento, creo que todas las personas que están pasando por lo mismo entienden lo que estoy diciendo, estuve muy deprimida durante mucho tiempo, sin entender lo que me pasaba. Mi familia prácticamente se destruyó, el mundo en el que yo vivía antes ya no existía más, mi Paracatu, mi iglesia, mis amigos, mis vecinos... fue como si me despertara al otro día y hubiese vivido en la luna. No tenía... no existía nadie. Y darse con tanta destrucción y descubrir que hay tanta gente aprovechándose de eso, de tanto sufrimiento, la gente no logra estar lúcida (M., en el V Ciclo, Gesta, 2020).

Como advierte Butler (2019), nuestras relaciones nos constituyen, y al perderlas, perdemos una parte de nosotros mismos: “[...] el vínculo con ese “tú” forma parte de lo que constituye mi “yo”. Si bajo estas condiciones llegara a perderte, lo que me duele no es sólo la pérdida, sino volverme inescrutable para mí” (2019: 42).

## Consideraciones finales

En la perspectiva de algunos análisis constitutivos del campo de la ecología política latinoamericana, el neoextractivismo –que se consolida en el continente a partir de los años 1990s y alcanza su *boom* a partir de los 2000– sería algo más allá de un modelo técnico de producción. En su escala global, se trata de la expresión de un patrón civilizatorio antropocéntrico, patriarcal y colonial de destrucción de la vida (Svampa, 2013; Lander, 2017; Bolados, 2018; Aráoz, 2023). En ese sentido, más que el mero régimen productivo, pasible de ser replicado en cualquier contexto histórico y societario, el neoextractivismo comprendería una matriz de poder que constituye un determinado tipo de sociedad. Sería, entonces, una matriz que forja instituciones, patrones políticos y hasta subjetividades, al promover agentes sociales implicados en procesos de mineralización de la vida (Aráoz, 2023).

Este abordaje de fondo permite comprender los desastres de la minería en Minas Gerais en sus dimensiones críticas y crónicas. El análisis de sus condiciones de producción apunta a patrones económicos, políticos e institucionales que subyacen a su recurrencia en una dimensión estructural (Zhouri, 2023). Por lo tanto, más que eventos circunscriptos a fracciones de tiempo y espacio, medidos por un “antes” –tiempo de la normalidad– y un “después” –el “post desastre”–, una visión que sugiere la reanudación de una condición supuestamente normal que habría sido interrumpida, los desastres merecen ser comprendidos como procesos que se extienden más allá de la criticidad de la manifestación repentina y catastrófica, la violencia desnuda (Zhouri, 2022) representada por el colapso de una represa. Como se ha visto, los desastres comprenden procesos que se

prolongan en el tiempo social de la experiencia vivida por las personas afectadas, incluso como resultado de acciones reparadoras e indemnizatorias ineficaces y/o insuficientes. En el contexto del desastre causado por Samarco/Vale y por BHP Billiton, observamos un proceso continuado de producción de sufrimiento social. Atentas a una cierta naturalización del término, hemos procurado dar un contenido a la vez etnográfico y conceptual a los análisis. Como Veena Das et. al. (1996:IX) ponen en evidencia, el sufrimiento social refiere a una modalidad de sufrimiento resultante del poder político, económico e institucional sobre determinados grupos sociales, así como, en sentido inverso, remite a la manera cómo dicho poder modula igualmente las respuestas a los problemas sociales generados. Como advierten Yadav et al. (2021), numerosos arreglos institucionales diseñados en el ámbito de la reparación o de la indemnización de los desastres, en realidad, resultan de perspectivas masculinas y políticamente conservadoras, es decir, indiferentes a las cuestiones interseccionales, algo que acaba relegando las dimensiones de género (Kadetz & Mock 2018; Zaidi & Fordham 2021), así como las de raza y clase, hacia los márgenes del proceso de reparación.

Ahora bien, mujeres y hombres componen el universo diverso de personas afectadas, e interpelan de maneras distintas y complejas las desigualdades constitutivas de las dimensiones crónicas y críticas de la crisis. Esta reflexión ha buscado reflexionar sobre dicha dimensión todavía poco explorada en la literatura, especialmente en aquella que trata de los desastres de la minería en Brasil, al traer las voces de las mujeres en lucha por la reparación en el contexto del desastre producido por el colapso de la represa de Fundão. Hemos abordado los dispositivos de violencia física, material, mental, epistémica y simbólica contra los cuales las mujeres se manifiestan y organizan. Al elegir temas como apoderamiento y procesos de subjetivación, autonomía secuestrada, jornadas múltiples de trabajo y violencia epistémica, así como conflictos familiares y enfermedades, el análisis tuvo como foco los procesos políticos de la construcción de las mujeres como afectadas, y los desafíos inherentes a su condición femenina en el contexto de la gobernanza del desastre y de las acciones de reparación. Así, mientras los testimonios muestran, por un lado, un proceso de apoderamiento por parte de las mujeres al erigirse como defensoras populares o representantes de sus comunidades en el proceso de reparación, en el que alcanzaron cierto éxito, por otro revelan que, a medida que ganaban fuerza política, multiplicaban aún más sus ya agotadoras jornadas de trabajo y se enfrentaban a diversos conflictos domésticos, como rupturas matrimoniales y tensiones entre hermanos. La falta de reconocimiento por parte de las empresas de las relaciones derivadas de sus posiciones de trabajo reproductivo, y de su trabajo informal, sigue siendo objeto de importantes enfrentamientos entre las mujeres y las empresas.

Finalmente, cabe destacar que las formas de organización de las mujeres no siguen patrones de algún tipo de feminismo institucionalizado (Morales, 2018; Merlinsky, 2017; Federici, 2017), sino que se basan en conocimientos adquiridos en el proceso, los cuales son frecuentemente reconocidos por ellas como *aprendizajes*. En ese trayecto, dispositivos de acciones –como el *apoderarse* o el *acorparse*– fueron conquistas relevantes para enfrentamiento de las desigualdades y violencias diversas (como la invisibilidad de género y de raza), así como para alimentar las redes de colaboración y solidaridad existentes, en los territorios y fuera de los mismos.

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Neoextractivismo, crisis climática y desastres:  
Miradas desde Argentina, Brasil y Chile

# Potosí y las nacientes del Agua Moderna. *Sobre los orígenes del Capitaloceno hídrico*

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## Resumen

Correlativamente a su carácter absolutamente imprescindible en los procesos biofísicos, geológicos y atmosféricos de gestación y sostenimiento de la vida en la Tierra, las aguas son entidades que, al atravesar lo humano, adquieren -junto a sus usos materiales específicos- una vasta complejidad de configuraciones semióticas, axiológicas, espirituales y religiosas. Una inconmensurable diversidad de valores y modos de uso, de sentidos y simbolismos, caracterizan a los diferentes sistemas sociohidrológicos histórico-concretos que fueran emergiendo, acompañando y delineando la trayectoria pluriversal de la aventura humana en la Tierra. Pese a semejante diversidad y complejidad, habitamos un tiempo geológico y antropológicamente signado por la gravosa hegemonía del Agua Moderna; un tiempo de crisis sistémica y de emergencia de la sintomatología más cruda de los trastornos geosociometabólicos del Capitaloceno. La actual crisis hídrica mundial es una resultante del ahogamiento de aquella vasta historia pluriversal de sistemas hidrosociales por cuenta y cargo del Agua Moderna.

En este contexto, el presente texto ofrece una exploración genealógica sobre la emergencia del Agua Moderna. Apoyándonos en la historia ambiental latinoamericana y en los recursos de la ecología política del Sur, proponemos indagar el Cerro Rico del Potosí como la zona hidro-geopolítica donde tuviera lugar las nacientes de las aguas capitalocénicas que hoy inundan nuestro tiempo-espacio-de-crisis.

**Palabras clave:** Capitaloceno hídrico; AguaMetal; Agua Moderna; Hidrogenocidio; Caída del cielo.

# Potosí and the emergences of Modern Water.

## *On the origins of the hydric Capitalocene*

### **Abstract**

Correlatively to their absolutely essential character in the biophysical, geological and atmospheric processes of gestation and sustenance of life on Earth, water is an entity that, as it crosses the human being, acquires - together with its specific material uses - a vast complexity of semiotic, axiological, spiritual and religious configurations. An immeasurable diversity of values and modes of use, of meanings and symbolisms, characterise the different socio-hydrological historical-concrete systems that have emerged, accompanying and delineating the pluriversal trajectory of the human adventure on Earth.

Despite such diversity and complexity, we inhabit a time geologically and anthropologically marked by the burdensome hegemony of Modern Water; a time of systemic crisis and the emergence of the crudest symptomatology of the geosociometabolic upheavals of the Capitalocene. The current global water crisis is a result of the drowning of that vast pluriversal history of hydro-social systems by Modern Water.

In this context, the present text offers a genealogical exploration of the emergence of Modern Water. Drawing on Latin American environmental history and the resources of the political ecology of the South, we propose to investigate the Cerro Rico del Potosí as the hydro-geopolitical zone where the sources of the capitalocenic waters that today flood our time-space-of-crisis took place.

**Keywords:** Hydric Capitalocene; MetalWater; Modern Water; Hydrogenocide; Skyfall.

# Potosí e as nascentes da Água Moderna.

## *Sobre as origens do Capitaloceno hídrico*

### **Resumo**

Correlativamente ao seu caráter absolutamente essencial nos processos biofísicos, geológicos e atmosféricos de gestação e sustentação da vida na Terra, a água é uma entidade que, ao atravessar o ser humano, adquire - juntamente com seus usos materiais específicos - uma vasta complexidade de configurações semióticas, axiológicas, espirituais e religiosas. Uma diversidade imensurável de valores e modos de uso, de significados e simbolismos, caracteriza os diferentes sistemas sócio-hidrológicos histórico-concretos que surgiram, acompanhando e delineando a trajetória pluriversal da aventura humana na Terra.

Apesar dessa diversidade e complexidade, habitamos um tempo geológica e antropologicamente marcado pela pesada hegemonia da Água Moderna; um tempo de crise sistêmica e de emergência da mais crua sintomatologia das convulsões geosociometabólicas do Capitaloceno. A atual crise hídrica global é resultado do afogamento dessa vasta história pluriversal de sistemas hidro-sociais pela Água Moderna.

Nesse contexto, o presente texto oferece uma exploração genealógica do surgimento da Água Moderna. Com base na história ambiental latino-americana e nos recursos da ecologia política do Sul, propomos investigar o Cerro Rico del Potosí como a zona hidro-geopolítica onde ocorreram as fontes das águas capitalocênicas que hoje inundam nosso tempo-espaço de crise.

**Palavras-chave:** Capitaloceno hídrico; ÁguaMetal; Água Moderna; Hidrogenocida; Queda do céu.

# Potosí y las nacientes del Agua Moderna. *Sobre los orígenes del Capitaloceno hídrico*

Horacio Machado Aróz

## **A modo de introducción: Del Agua-Vital... Al “Antropoceno” hídrico**

“El agua es flujo, movimiento, circulación... Por ella y con ella fluye la vida y, así, el ser vivo no se relaciona con el agua: es agua. Es como si la vida misma fuese otro estado de la materia agua, además del líquido, del sólido y del gaseoso, el estado vivo”. (Carlos Walter Porto-Goncalves, “Agua como disputa epistémica y política más allá de los tres estados del agua”, 2020).

Pese a tratarse de un saber absolutamente elemental y obvio, parece necesario partir del reconocimiento del carácter estrictamente vital, esencial que reviste el agua como entidad imprescindible para la ocurrencia de la vida terráquea en general, incluida la específicamente humana.

Hablar de agua es aludir a la vida misma. Es referir al atributo único, exclusivo y propiamente distintivo que tiene el planeta Tierra en el marco de todo el universo conocido. Si dentro de la totalidad de cuerpos y entidades que componen, la Tierra es el único planeta con capacidad de gestar y albergar seres vivientes, ello se debe, eminentemente, a que es un planeta azul-hídrico (Herrero, 2020); un cuerpo propiamente irrigado (Neimanis, 2017). Es sólo aquí, en este extraordinario y minúsculo rincón del universo, donde las fuentes, los flujos y ciclos de las aguas hacen materialmente posible la vida.

A nivel geológico, las aguas<sup>1</sup> son el soporte y factor de producción determinante de la biósfera toda. Sin su concurrencia, el evento fundamental de la fotosíntesis no sería posible. A través de ella, la energía solar es captada, transformada y puesta disposición por el mundo vegetal para su circulación a través de los ecosistemas y el sustento de todos los seres vivos. Esa energía circula eminentemente a través de los flujos hidrológicos. Las aguas mismas –en sus movimientos y transformaciones- pasan a ser una forma y fuente de energía que anima la vida de la Tierra, a través de sus flujos y de las cadenas tróficas que moviliza.

Junto al aire, al suelo y el sol, las aguas son el *Bien Común* por excelencia de la Tierra: el nodo primordial que conecta todos los estratos de la materia y hace posible la vida de todas las especies. *Los flujos del agua materializan la convivencialidad de la Tierra*, uniendo espacial y temporalmente fenómenos, procesos y seres vivos; ligando a todas las comunidades bióticas, diacrónica y sincrónicamente; a nivel de cada micro-organismo y en la escala planetaria-global. Los seres que habitaron y habitamos la Tierra estamos unidos por los flujos hídricos históricos y presentes que hicieron y hacen posible la vida terrestre toda, en sus más de 4.500 millones de años. Es en virtud de ser y hacer partes de esa *comunidad hídrica* que es la Tierra, que somos seres (con-)vivos.

<sup>1</sup> Agradezco a Aimée Martínez Vega la observación sobre el carácter plural -ontológico, geológico y político- de las aguas.

## Sobre la especificidad de la hidro-dependencia humana. *Las Aguas como fuente de las Culturas*

“El agua tiene una historia cultural increíblemente compleja.  
Ha sido tan vital para nuestras mentes como lo ha sido para nuestros cuerpos”  
(Donald Worster, “El agua en la historia moderna”, 2008).

Si la vida en general es una ocurrencia hídrica, tanto más aún, en el caso específicamente humano. La dependencia humana respecto del agua es absoluta. El vínculo entre la vida humana y el agua es mucho más profundo y complejo que en cualquier otra especie: no sólo es vital para los organismos humanos, sino también fundamental para la constitución de las formaciones culturales y políticas dentro de las cuales se desenvuelve la vida específicamente humana. Se trata de un vínculo primariamente orgánico, imprescindible a nivel biológico, pero también necesariamente semiótico-político, ontogénico a nivel de los pueblos/culturas.

En el plano orgánico, no sólo los cuerpos humanos están constituidos en su mayor proporción por agua, sino que, en su fisiología, hacen parte del ciclo hidrológico general de la Tierra. Para vivir, en el acto mismo de estar vivos, los organismos humanos deben permanecer abiertos a los flujos hídricos y con aptitudes fisiológicas para interactuar con ellos. Más que “tener” o “necesitar”, los humanos “somos agua. El 83% de nuestro cerebro, el 75% del corazón, el 85% de los pulmones y el 95% de los ojos es agua. Si nos escurren, después de eliminar el agua, queda bien poquito. Así visto, podríamos decir que nuestra mirada, pensamiento, respiración y latidos dependen del agua” (Herrero, 2020).

Más allá de los requerimientos endosomáticos, ninguna actividad humana –desde las más básicas, hasta las más complejas- puede hacerse sin agua. Así de radical y determinante es la dependencia hídrica de nuestra especie. En términos socioculturales, los humanos también *somos (material y literalmente) agua*. Todo pueblo supone y se funda sobre un cierto sistema hidrosocial. Desde sus propios orígenes, como condición para subsistir y constituirse como tal, la especie humana ha debido lidiar con el desafío de aprender a desarrollar y gestionar sistemas de captación, aprovisionamiento, conservación, uso y regulación de fuentes de agua apropiados a sus necesidades. Esto significa que el propio proceso de hominización y el posterior despliegue y realización de culturas, pueblos y civilizaciones, son acontecimientos geohistóricos íntegramente *hidro-dependientes e hidro-emergentes*.

Así, ontológicamente, el acontecer humano y su devenir geo-antropológico todo, es propiamente un evento *hidrosocial, hidrológico-político*. Toda cultura nace de las aguas. La humanidad misma –y la historia de la Tierra desde su irrupción- es el resultado manifiesto de toda la compleja trama de experiencias hidrosociales geohistóricamente sedimentadas.

Es clave comprender el carácter fundacional, material y simbólicamente habilitante y políticamente instituyente, que tienen las aguas respecto de las culturas. Toda población humana, no sólo *supone*, sino que es una *cultura del agua*: un modo inseparablemente material y simbólico, de usos, significación y valoración de las aguas, en base a las cuales poblaciones determinadas en territorios concretos, producen sus propios medios, condiciones y formas de existencia.

Los modos de existencia de las poblaciones humanas no se limitan sólo a una captación física y biológica del agua; esas prácticas –mediadas insoslayablemente por las facultades perceptivas, cognitivas, expresivas y socioproductivas específicamente humanas- involucran complejas dimensiones tecnológicas, organizativas, económicas, políticas, simbólicas, cosmológicas y hasta religiosas. Las aguas están en la base de las producciones culturales y atraviesa todas las dimensiones de la vida social (Vargas y Piñeyro, 2005). Dentro de cada cultura, las aguas involucran y adquieren sus propios significados, modos de valoración e interacción; hacen parte clave de sus cosmologías, de sus economías y de sus formas de estructuración política. De tal modo, cada pueblo tiene su propia historia con las aguas; así como las aguas –en sus fuentes, cuerpos y cursos- tienen y trazan sus propias historias. Pues no sólo los pueblos tienen vida; es decir, movimiento, variabilidad y contingencia. También las

aguas son entidades vivas; tienen su propia agencialidad: sus propias reglas, atributos, propiedades, ritmos, dinámicas; incluso más allá del campo de intervención humana y de ciertas pretensiones racionalistas de someterlas a control (Strang, 2011; 2014; 2019; Edgeworth, 2011). La vida humana –su historia, sus culturas- es lo que acontece en la confluencia de esas dinámicas. Las formas que las sociedades humanas adoptan para tratar las aguas se convierten en un aspecto fundamental no sólo de las bases ecológicas de salubridad y sustentabilidad de sus poblaciones/territorios, sino también de la propia constitución política de esas sociedades.

## Sobre la naturaleza (política) de la crisis hídrica contemporánea

*“La máquina a fuego aparece como un microcosmos en relación directa con el macrocosmos que es la Tierra como máquina térmica. (...) Eso significa que, a lo largo del tiempo, la termodinámica industrial va a alterar la termodinámica de la Tierra; la máquina a vapor va a trastornar la máquina climática”* (Joseph Fourier, “Mémoire sur les températures du globe terrestre et des espaces planétaires”, 1827).

La mundialización de Occidente, la irrupción, expansión y globalización hegemónica de la llamada Modernidad, ha coincidido (no casualmente) con la emergencia, profundización y radicalización de la actual crisis hídrica mundial. Sea como fuere que indiquemos sus orígenes y que interpretemos su derrotero, el *modo moderno* de tratar las aguas está indisolublemente ligado tanto a un crecimiento exponencial de su consumo, como a la expansión uniforme de tecnologías e infraestructuras de intervención, disposición y alteración sobre sus fuentes, cursos, flujos y ciclos<sup>2</sup>. El historiador francés Jean-Pierre Goubert asocia e identifica directamente la Modernidad con la “conquista del agua”, momento en el que “el agua, que había sido un regalo de Dios o de la naturaleza... ha pasado a adquirir el estatus de producto industrial<sup>3</sup>” (Goubert, cit. por Worster, 2008: 164).

Esa “conquista del agua” hoy se presenta bajo la forma de una aguda crisis del estado hidrosocial del planeta; un profundo descalabro ecológico, social, económico y político. En un primer plano superficial, el desquicio sociohídrico presente se manifiesta en los grados extremos de *privación, desigualdad, y concentración oligopólico-autocrática* del poder de disposición y usufructo de las aguas.

Pese a que la huella hídrica general de la humanidad no para de crecer, más de 2.200 millones de personas no tiene acceso seguro a agua potable (UNESCO, 2020); más de la mitad de la población mundial (4.200 millones de personas) carece de servicios de saneamiento básico (OMS-UNICEF, 2021); un tercio vive en regiones sometidas a situaciones de “escasez” crónica de agua (UNESCO, 2020). La falta de agua de calidad y/o el consumo de aguas contaminadas provoca la muerte de 1,5 millones de niños al año (OMS-UNICEF, 2021); 450 millones de niños/os en el mundo -18 millones, en América Latina y el Caribe- viven en zonas de extrema vulnerabilidad hídrica (UNICEF, 2021).

La privación se retroalimenta con desigualdades histórico-geopolíticas, sectoriales, raciales, de género y de clase. Las muertes por deshidratación y contaminación se amplifican entre mujeres, poblaciones indígenas, poblaciones urbanas pauperizadas y geografías coloniales. A su vez, coexisten con proyectos hídricos faraónicos y consumos suntuarios magalómanos en zonas y sectores de altos ingresos. Las desigualdades se reproducen y ensanchan con la concentración, las privatizaciones y el incremento del tráfico comercial. Cada vez más,

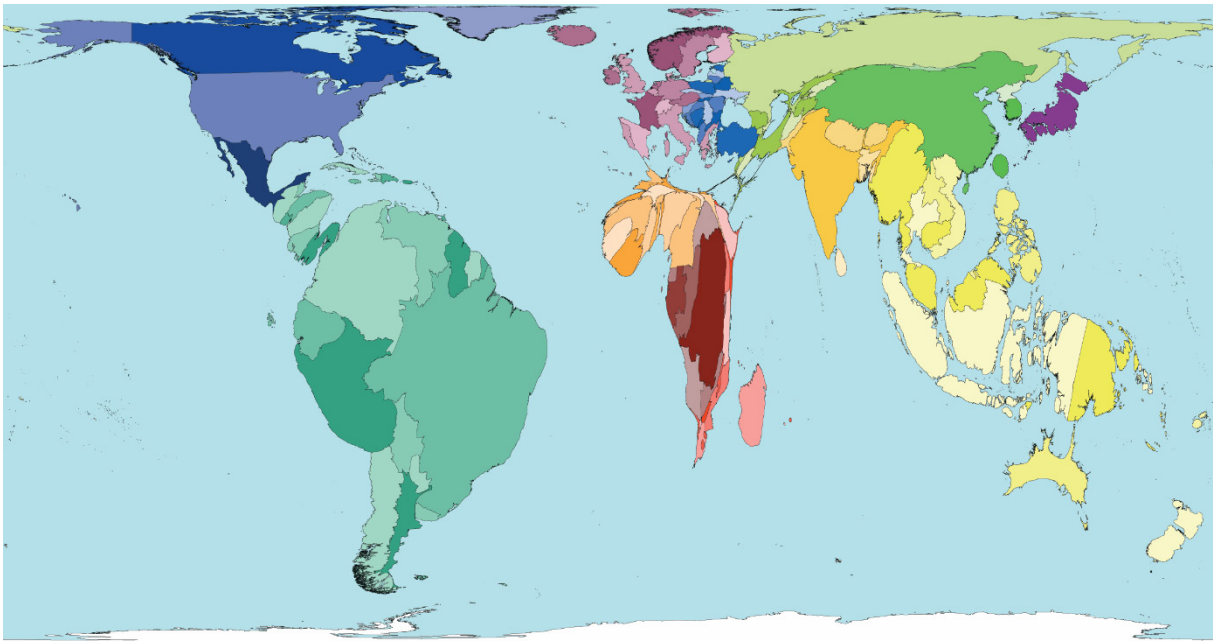
<sup>2</sup> Sólo a modo ilustrativo, cabe señalar que, en los últimos 130 años, se han construido una presa hidráulica por día (Ricart Casadevall, 2016). En los últimos 70 años, son más de 40.000 grandes represas las construidas, quedando sólo un tercio de los 227 grandes ríos del mundo sin ser represado, y habiendo provocado el desplazamiento de más de 80 millones de pobladores de las cuencas intervenidas (Fernández, 2010; Porto-Goncalves, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Esta referencia, no es antojadiza: en los últimos 100 años, mientras que la población humana se multiplicó por un factor de 3,6, el consumo de agua lo hizo por un factor de 6 (UNESCO, 2021); el consumo de agua industrial duplica hoy la de consumo doméstico, representando una media de 700 mil millones de metros cúbicos.

las aguas del mundo están sujetas al control oligopólico de grandes corporaciones transnacionales que concentran la gestión y disposición de las aguas, tanto las de uso doméstico en las zonas urbanas, como las aguas agrícolas e industriales.

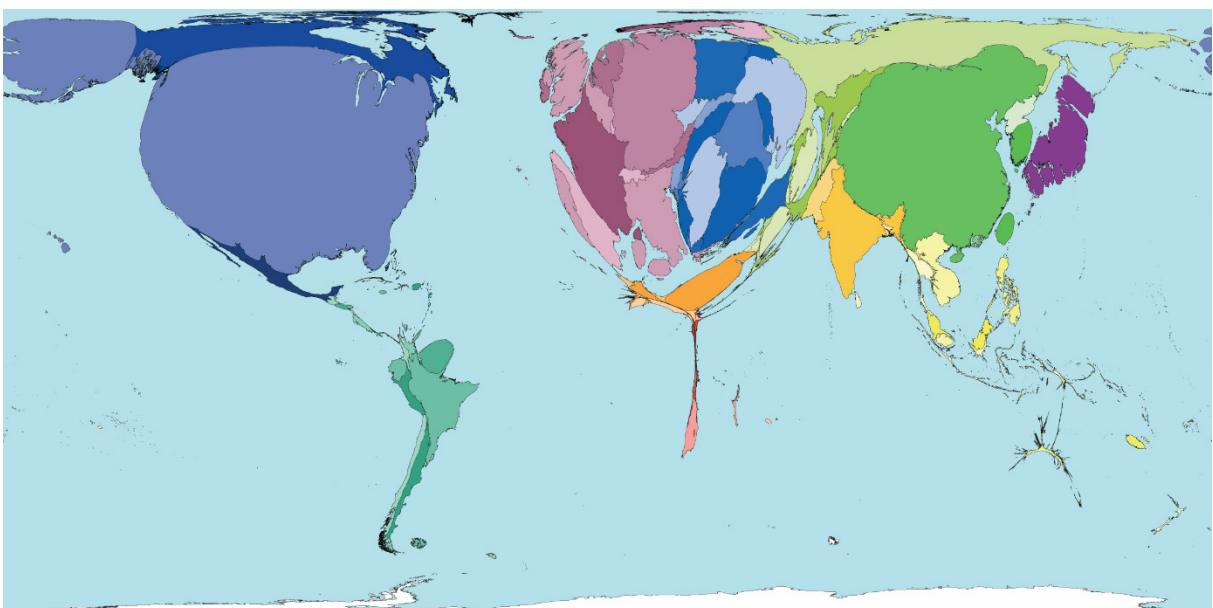
*A medida que disminuyen las aguas en estado vivo –formando parte del mundo de organismos y seres vivientes– se incrementa el agua insumida en el mundo de los objetos.* Los flujos del comercio trazan las rutas del *agua virtual* (Hoekstra, 2003). Por esa vía, las economías y poblaciones más ricas chupan las aguas de territorios remotos. El contraste entre la disposición geográfica de las fuentes hídricas (mapa 1) y el consumo industrial del agua (mapa 2) marca de manera nítida una persistente asimetría colonial.

#### Distribución geográfica de fuentes hídricas por países



Fuente: World Mapper Project, Stanford University.

#### Consumo industrial de agua por países. 2010.



Fuente: World Mapper Project, Stanford University.

Como trasfondo, se erige un discurso global que apunta a la naturalización de las desigualdades como “escasez” (Porto-Gonçalves, 2006). El encubrimiento de las apropiaciones oligárquicas es procesado en términos de políticas corporativas de “Responsabilidad Social Empresaria”. El “consumo responsable de agua”, la moralización individualizante de la “huella hídrica”, es hoy un tópico recurrente en el discurso corporativo de industrias hidro-intensivas. Mientras, la ampliación de la valorización de mercado y de mega-obras de infraestructura reafirman los patrones dominantes de apropiación y consumo, contrariando geografías y sistemas hidrológicos a gran escala.

A través de prolíficas publicaciones y declaraciones, los organismos intergubernamentales certifican estos desquicios con impotencia o cinismo: a 10 años que la ONU declarara el Agua como Derecho Humano, ésta pasó a cotizar en la Bolsa de Valores de Nueva York. Mientras que se reconoce que “el actual estilo de vida es insostenible”, se proyectan “objetivos de desarrollo” que implican la intensificación y aceleración de los mismos patrones vigentes<sup>4</sup>. La huella hídrica del “desarrollo” proyecta un horizonte de crecimiento del consumo y de la “escasez”: por un lado, el Grupo de Recursos Hídricos prevé que el mundo enfrentará un déficit de 40% de agua para el año 2030 (UNESCO, 2021: 14); por otro, la OCDE (2012) proyecta que la demanda mundial de agua crecerá un 55 por ciento para 2050 (400 por ciento, en razón de la demanda industrial).

Como síntoma y parte de este gran desorden hídrico global, de la naturalización de una problemática políticamente producida, el agua ha sido introducida a la agenda pública mundial como tópico de un escenario de conflictos, guerras e ingobernabilidad creciente. Cotidianamente se habla con naturalidad de “las guerras por el agua”. En las agendas de investigación, predominan los enfoques centrados en la conflictividad y la (in) gobernanza, como una cuestión de “seguridad nacional” para los Estados (Tamayo Bleda, Acosta y Carrasco Vintimilla, 2021; Grasa, 2021; Battaleme, 2021; Duarte A., Hoogesteger & Yacoub, 2016; Perreault, 2016; Rodríguez L. & Martínez A., 2016; Keucheyan, 2016).

En un plano más profundo, la crisis involucra la afectación de las propias estructuras y dinámicas geohidrológicas del planeta, no ya sólo los desequilibrios a nivel de apropiación y distribución de los flujos, sino la erosión, degradación y destrucción de biomas acuáticos, acuíferos, cuencas hídricas, humedales y aguas oceánicas<sup>5</sup>. El deterioro de los sistemas hidrológicos y los biomas acuáticos no sólo afectan la disponibilidad futura de aguas dulces y amenazan con su agotamiento, sino que inciden fuertemente en los procesos actuales de pérdida de biodiversidad. La crisis hídrica es una variable significativa y co-detonante del evento de sexta extinción masiva de especies a lo largo de toda la historia de biósfera; ésta –como la propia crisis hídrica- la primera de carácter “antropogénico” (IPBES, 2019; PNUMA-GEO 6, 2019).

Finalmente, la crisis hídrica moderna se manifiesta como desestabilización termodinámica de la Tierra que persistirá por lo menos durante los próximos 50.000 años (Crutzen y Stoermer, 2000). La conquista industrial del agua irrumpe hoy como perturbación de la dinámica hidroenergética estructural del planeta y como factor de desestabilización y desestructuración del propio régimen climático previamente vigente. En este sentido, se justifica enfatizar que el “Antropoceno”<sup>6</sup> designa una *emergencia hidrosocial; un trastorno socio-hidro-energético*. La muerte del Holoceno resulta, propiamente, un acontecimiento hidro-político de carácter catastrófico.

4 <https://www.un.org/es/actnow/facts-and-figures>

5 El estado actual de los ecosistemas relacionados con el agua del mundo, de los cuales la mayoría ya está degradado y contaminado, es alarmante. En los últimos 100 años, se estima que el mundo ha perdido la mitad de sus humedales naturales y con esto un número significativo de especies de agua dulce (ONU 2018; 2019; , 2023). La extensión de los humedales ha disminuido drásticamente (35%) entre 1970 y 2015 (Crump, 2017).

6 El término ha concitado un amplio debate en sí, sobre todo en el campo de las ciencias sociales, debido a lo que se considera un inaceptable pseudo-universalismo en referencia al comportamiento de la “especie humana”, dando lugar a una diversificación de conceptos alternativos –principalmente Capitaloceno- para referir a los concretos y determinados factores socioeconómicos, culturales y políticos que han provocado las alteraciones geológicas señaladas por científicos del Sistema Tierra. Pese a ello, el término original ha adquirido un uso generalizado y extendido, por lo que acá optamos por hacer uso de él mediante comillas. Una problematización general sobre el concepto puede verse en Moore (2016), Fraser (2019), Machado Aráoz (2022).



Sus raíces más evidentes y directas remiten al momento en el que “el capitalismo termo-industrial va a poner el agua al servicio de la potencia del fuego a través de la máquina de vapor, introduciendo así una ruptura en el equilibrio entre los elementos naturales” (Gras, 2009: 73). Lo que fuera una prefiguración aparentemente descabellada en tiempos de Fourier, se ha tornado una dramática realidad. La fractura metabólica a nivel de los ciclos y flujos hidroenergéticos aparece hoy como una catástrofe climática que se cierne como una amenaza generalizada para la vida en la Tierra<sup>7</sup>. La directora general de la UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, planteaba el escenario actual en estos términos:

*El clima está cambiando, y nuestro mundo está en peligro. Alrededor de un millón de especies animales y vegetales se enfrentan a la extinción. Las especies de agua dulce han sufrido el mayor declive, disminuyendo en un 84% desde 1970. Los seres humanos también se han visto afectados: alrededor de 4 mil millones de personas experimentan actualmente una grave escasez física de agua durante por lo menos un mes al año, situación que se ha visto agravada por la crisis climática. A medida que el planeta se calienta, el agua se ha convertido en una de las principales formas como experimentamos el cambio climático. (UNESCO, 2020: iv).*

El “Antropoceno” se plasma así en un paisaje global de profundos trastornos hídricos; por tanto, alimentarios y energéticos; de crecientes y mayores inclemencias climáticas; de deterioro generalizado de la habitabilidad de la Tierra. Detonante de un nuevo régimen climático, la conquista moderna del agua nos muestra su rostro más dramático y ruin. Las aguas –fundamento y medio imprescindible e insustituible de habilitación, producción y despliegue de la vida-, han pasado a operar creciente y extendidamente, como un factor de muerte, vector de proliferación de enfermedades, toxicidades y contaminaciones a gran escala. Las que son fuente de salud y condición indispensable de bienestar de todas las especies y de todas las culturas, han sido *progresivamente* convertidas en una sustancia peligrosa, presuntamente “escasa”, objeto de disputas, de desastres y crímenes socioambientales, que súbitamente ahogan territorialidades milenarias y destruyen hábitats enteros. Cada vez más, con mayor frecuencia, intensidad y peligrosidad, las aguas de la Tierra han pasado a ser una amenaza para la propia vida del planeta. Paradójicamente, siendo el origen y el fundamento de la vida, fungen ahora como medio letal de devastación.

## **El Agua Moderna: régimen sociohidrológico del Capital(oceno).**

*“¿Cómo puede ser que hayamos llamado progreso a un proceso que hace que el agua, inicialmente abundante, se vuelva escasa debido a su uso imprudente, despilfarrador e irracional? ¿Qué es lo que hace que teniendo delante de los ojos el declive y contaminación masiva de las fuentes de agua potable no se planifique u organice la economía con conciencia de la dependencia del agua? El proceso de “desarrollo” y el crecimiento económico se correlacionan con un fuerte incremento en el uso de agua, con la pérdida de sus fuentes y con el deterioro de su calidad. (...) El cambio climático está alterando profundamente el ciclo del agua y agrava la situación.” (Yayo Herrero, Los Cinco Elementos: Agua, 2020).*

Los trastornos contemporáneos del agua no son una eventualidad natural, ni son tampoco exactamente resultantes de genéricos “efectos antropogénicos”. Están dando cuenta, no de “modos universalmente humanos”, sino de formas sociohistóricas concretas de concebir y tratar las aguas. Apartarnos de las naturalizaciones

<sup>7</sup> El 90 por ciento de los desastres climáticos ocurridos en las últimas décadas han estado vinculados al agua (UNISDR, 2015). Durante los últimos 20 años, los dos principales desastres relacionados con el agua -inundaciones y sequías- causaron más de 166.000 muertes anuales, afectaron a otros 3.000 millones de personas y causaron un daño económico total de casi 700 mil millones de dólares (CRED, 2019). Sólo teniendo en cuenta provisiones de sequías agudas, el BM y la ONU estiman que los desplazamientos forzados podrían alcanzar a 700 millones de personas en la presente década (<https://www.bbc.com/mundo/vert-fut-58259908>).

requiere historizar los procesos. En este caso, indagar y esclarecer qué tipo de sujetos sociales, a través de qué prácticas, en qué contexto y con qué fines produjeron las formas sociales y políticas de tratamiento de las aguas que dieron origen al Agua Moderna; qué tipo de formación geosocial gestó la cosmología, las tecnologías y la economía política que provocó semejante irrupción y de qué modo ésta se vincula con la emergencia de un nuevo régimen climático sobre la faz de la Tierra.

La irrupción del Agua Moderna refiere a una *Gran Transformación: un cambio en el estatuto ontológico-político del (de las) Agua(s)*. Un nuevo sistema de prácticas sociales; un nuevo modo de producción social de la existencia; un nuevo modo de percibir, comprender y determinar el sentido de la realidad, de todo lo existente y la propia existencia individual y colectiva de lo humano; un nuevo lenguaje de valoración como regulador de los intercambios y de organización del trabajo social humano, sus herramientas y tecnologías; en fin, una nueva matriz de relaciones de poder que administra la-vida-en-común, la convivencia colectiva. Es todo eso lo que está implicado en la irrupción del Agua Moderna. Estamos hablando de la instauración de un proceso sociohistórico de estructuración de un nuevo sistema sociohidrológico, un nuevo patrón hidro-energético, un nuevo *régimen sociometabólico*, en función del cual se conforma un nuevo tipo de sociedad/cultura; una nueva *formación (hidro-geo-)social* -ésta ya de alcance propiamente global.

Los autores que fueron jalonando este análisis, han puesto énfasis en diferentes aspectos y acontecimientos constitutivos de esta gran transformación. Para Jean-Pierre Goubert (1989) el hecho determinante del surgimiento del Agua Moderna es la transformación capitalista de la ciudad: no sólo la condensación de industrias y de fuerza de trabajo, ambas requeridas de insumos hídricos a gran escala y de forma ininterrumpida para máquinas y humanos, sino también los cambios paisajísticos y socioculturales vinculados a la fractura urbana/rural que se consolida con las nuevas tecnologías de apropiación, re-direccionamiento y disposición de las aguas, cada vez más distantes e indiferentes respecto de todo tipo de agencialidad geográfica (relieves, cuencas, volúmenes y cursos hidrológicos, etc.). Con la concentración de las aguas para el consumo urbano, la ciudad se erige en la topografía por excelencia de la modernidad: lugar no sólo del trabajo y la innovación industrial, las mercancías, el consumo, la moda y el lujo, sino también de la limpieza, la higiene y el aseo personal; en fin, la urbanidad como el polo opuesto de la “tradicición” y el “atraso rural” que van siendo “superados por el progreso”. La conquista del agua para la ciudad moderna hizo de ésta una “subdivisión de la religión del progreso”; culto “que tiene sus sacerdotes (médicos, arquitectos e ingenieros), sus templos y sus altares (acueductos, depuradoras, balnearios) y sus fieles”. El agua que irriga la religión del progreso “todo lo interfiere: las mentalidades, la investigación, la técnica, el poder” (Goubert, 1989: 5).

Alain Gras (2009), por su parte, pone énfasis en las mudanzas hidro-energéticas que conllevó la llamada “Revolución Industrial” europea del Siglo XVIII. El hecho determinante de esa revolución fue la confiscación del agua para su uso prioritario como insumo energético de la maquinaria productiva que se echa a andar, incluso antes que la introducción de la máquina de vapor<sup>8</sup>. El agua “puesta al servicio del fuego” no deja de ser una fuente energética necesariamente concurrente al carbón; su reducción al estado gaseoso dentro de una máquina de hierro, va a ser un paso más en esta conquista moderna del agua, que se inscribe dentro de intencionalidades de una voluntad de poder interesada en someter a control tanto a las fuerzas de la naturaleza en general, como, en particular, a la fuerza natural del trabajo humano. La deslocalización de los *mills* ribereños significa movilidad del capital que se abstrae de las constricciones de la geografía, pero también poder de disposición sobre una

8 Para Gras “es un error vincular la revolución industrial con la máquina de vapor solamente. La primera revolución industrial se llevó a cabo gracias al agua de los ríos que accionaban los telares en los Midlands Ingleses (...) el *mills* inglés (molino francés sinónimo de fábrica en inglés) estaba conectado a un telar, daba energía y se convirtió en el medio de desarrollo del capitalismo” (Gras, 2009: 72). Gras señala que “sólo recién en 1900 la potencia instalada con base en el carbón superará a la hidráulica” (Gras, 2009: 74), pero, por supuesto, la introducción de la máquina de vapor involucra un cambio también crucial, sobre todo por sus implicaciones geotérmicas y climáticas.

masa de trabajadores enclaustrados en las ciudades, desprovistos de medios autónomos de subsistencia (Malm, 2016). La máquina de vapor, también una tecnología hidro-dependiente e hidro-intensiva, no sólo acelera el ritmo de producción, incrementa la escala cuantitativa del aparato de producción de mercancías, sino también la escala espacial del poder de los transportes: “la locomotora, paradigma de la máquina de vapor en tanto que muestra el poderío sobre el espacio y el tiempo, va a establecer una nueva manera de pensar el mundo. La tierra se concebirá entonces como un *territorio* que debe ser controlado”. Así, “el agua puesta al servicio del fuego”, detona una nueva era signada por “la expansión ilimitada de la voluntad de poder tecnocientífico” (Gras, 2009: 73).

Donald Worster señala que no menos trascendente fue “la conquista global del agua para los propósitos de la agricultura [capitalista/*Plantation*] y el transporte [globalizado]” (Worster, 2008: 164). Tan importante como la intensificación del consumo hídrico para fines urbano-industriales fue la expansión de las obras y superficies agrícolas de regadío, como aspecto clave de las transformaciones capitalistas de la agricultura (y de los trastornos geometa-bólicos del presente). No cabe pasar por alto que la agricultura moderna (en gran medida, organizada bajo la matriz colonial-capitalista de la *Plantation*<sup>9</sup>) concentra el 70 % del consumo de agua fresca y se extiende por más de 300 millones de hectáreas a nivel mundial. Además, con los usos agrícolas y de transporte a gran escala, la conquista moderna del agua hace de ésta “un instrumento del imperio” (Worster, 2008: 165). “La irrigación no era común en Europa (...) pero se hizo común y esencial en otras partes del mundo donde los europeos fueron a gobernar –en las áridas regiones de Asia, Australia, África y las Américas. El objetivo de los europeos era entregar esas tierras a sus imperios, y al hacerlo, mantener su nuevo estándar metropolitano de vida” (Worster, 2008: 164-165). Con ese objetivo, proliferaron por el mundo presas y obras hidráulicas y represas de concreto, “el símbolo más destacado de esta conquista del agua; ícono del progreso. (...) Hacia 1878, las naciones europeas controlaban el 67 % de la superficie terrestre del mundo; hacia 1914, el 84 %. (...) En gran medida, el imperialismo europeo descansaba en la transferencia de ingeniería hidráulica y estructuras de control de agua hacia el resto del mundo –esparciendo los “instrumentos del imperio”, como los califica Headrick, con profundas consecuencias para el ambiente natural y la comunidad humana” (Worster, 2008: 165).

Del siglo XIX al XX, Worster marca una continuidad política estructural, cambios tecnológicos y un gran salto de escala, al tornarse Norteamérica el nuevo núcleo geopolítico de las conquistas<sup>10</sup>. El salto de escala, que Worster halla decisivo en las tecnologías de intervención sobre las aguas, fue la construcción del canal de Panamá (1903-1914). Esto no sólo le otorgó la supremacía marítima comercial y militar a la nueva potencia, sino que le dotó “de un campo de pruebas para proyectos hidráulicos posteriores (...) todos, parte de una misma expansión imperial que vio al agua como instrumento vital de conquista”<sup>11</sup> (Worster, 2008: 167).

Por supuesto, a nadie escapa que estas transformaciones no son sólo tecnológicas, ni económicas, ni geopolíticas, sino que involucran una radical y profunda mudanza en el sustrato cosmológico que las contiene.

9 Diversos estudios han subrayado y profundizado en la centralidad de la *Plantation* como forma geopolítica y tecnología de poder clave para la transformación capitalista de la agricultura; una cuestión que remite a los orígenes agrarios del capitalismo señalado por el propio Marx (1867) y enfatizado por Meiksins Wood (1998). Donna Haraway (2015) ha sido quien en primer término propuso considerar los impactos geológicos de la *Plantation*. Wendy Wolford (2022) amplía ese enfoque y la analiza en cuanto “sistema social, imperativo político e ideal civilizatorio”. Malcom Ferdinand (2022) ofrece una mirada aguda sobre la articulación de la esclavitud y el régimen de *Plantation* como estructuradora del orden colonial. Rossi (2023) conecta los trastornos geometa-bólicos de los flujos agroalimentarios como una dimensión clave de la expansión capitalista y la mercantilización del mundo de la vida. Todos estos enfoques fortalecen la relevancia del planteo de Worster sobre los específicos impactos hidropolíticos de la monocultura capitalista aquí reseñado.

10 “Los ciudadanos de los Estados Unidos aprendieron a pensar sobre el agua en los mismos términos de conquista que los franceses y británicos. Ellos también aprendieron a construir canales y fábricas que utilizan aguas, reservorios para ciudades y conductos...”. La “Conquista del Oeste” representó un gran desafío que fue afrontado con la misma lógica, pero con un instrumental mucho más poderoso (y, ciertamente peligroso).

11 En 1935 se inauguraba la represa Hoover, la de mayor envergadura de la época, con un muro de más de 220 metros de altura y 37 millones de metros cúbicos de contención, “los ingenieros norteamericanos la consideraron una de las más grandes maravillas tecnológicas de la era”. Tras ella, el gobierno norteamericano “construyó más de 400 grandes represas a lo largo del Oeste, hasta que cada río se convirtió en un artefacto federal” (Worster, 2008: 167).

La irrupción del agua moderna implica una sustancial mudanza en la concepción epistémica y semiótica de la misma. Nuevas prácticas sociales de uso y trato suponen e imponen una nueva cosmología, lo que instituye un sentido del orden y una significación de la existencia; asigna estatutos ónticos, agencialidades y sentidos a cada una de las materialidades y fenómenos perceptibles y concebibles y a la totalidad de ellos como conjunto. Siguiendo la observación weberiana –y la larga tradición sociológica y antropológica que le continuó–, la invención del Agua Moderna implicó su desacralización; hace parte fundamental del proceso de desencantamiento del mundo. El agua como *objeto de conquista* y como *instrumento imperial*, involucró un cambio radical a nivel epistémico, semiótico y ontológico: “se tornó menos un regalo purificado y sagrado de Dios, y más un instrumento de materialismo secular” (Worster, 2008: 165).

La objetualización y desanimación del mundo (Tsing, 2018) tiene en la desacralización de las aguas un nervio central; en gran medida, fue obra de la concurrencia simétrica entre la guerra, el mercado y la ciencia (Bowler, 1998; Pestre, 2005). La ciencia, en particular, operó un papel fundamental no sólo –y quizás, ni principalmente– a través de los hallazgos físico-químicos y biológicos, los descubrimientos e invenciones tecnológicas, sino en la generación de todo un nuevo lenguaje y un universo semiótico que se instituyó como único, “universal”. Según James Linton (2010) éste es el rasgo más decisivo del Agua Moderna; para él, el discurso científico es el responsable de haber vuelto hegemónica la idea moderna de agua. La operación característica y decisiva en esa construcción es la *abstracción*: el discurso científico hace de las aguas un mero compuesto químico (sintetizado en la fórmula H<sub>2</sub>O), uniforme, simple, manipulable y pre-constituido como mero *recurso* cuya asignación racional se define por criterios de eficacia y eficiencia técnico-crematísticos. Bajo esa fórmula, el discurso científico procede a su simplificación, homogeneización, universalización, desterritorialización y desmaterialización (Linton, 2010). No sólo de *las aguas de la Tierra* ahora meramente devaluada a la condición de *agua-recurso*, sino ya también de sus usos sociales válidos.

Con sus matices, estas perspectivas convergen en un entendimiento del Agua Moderna como eje vertebral de las sociedades capitalistas modernas. Ayudan a *des-encubrir-la* como parte generadora y constitutiva del capitalismo como tal. En nuestros términos, el Agua Moderna está en la base de la transformación colonizadora del mundo de la vida operada como condición y efecto de la emergencia y mundialización del capital. Sólo ella pudo dar lugar a la configuración del sociometabolismo urbano-industrial de “Occidente” (como geocultural hegemónica imperial); a la producción capitalista de la existencia, como *patrón de poder* (Quijano, 2000), *Economía-Ecología-Mundo* (Wallerstein, 1974; Moore, 2003), que rige la vida social dominante en los últimos siglos.

Esto significa que el Agua Moderna no es otra cosa que el sistema sociohidrológico/energético del capital. Y que el capitalismo, como régimen geosociometabólico, es el que está en la raíz de los trastornos socioecológicos y climático-políticos que los científicos de la Tierra identifican como una nueva era geológica. El sistema capitalista mundial –modo colonial-moderno de producción social de la existencia– no podría haberse erigido como tal, sin alterar (destruir y recrear) radicalmente los sistemas sociohidrológicos de las sociedades humanas pre-existentes, para adaptarlos, uniformizarlos y reconfigurarlos en función de su lógica, de sus principios y requerimientos estructurales.

La emergencia y expansión histórico-geográfica del capitalismo aconteció de modo inseparablemente convergente con el propio proceso de *modernización del Agua*, la muerte de las aguas sagradas y la imposición uniforme y presuntamente universal del agua científica: el agua-recurso, el agua insumo y medio de producción de mercancías; en última instancia, el agua-mercancía. El capitalismo es impensable sin semejante cambio en el estatuto ontológico-político del agua (de la Naturaleza/Tierra en general). La modernización del agua –su objetualización, cientifización, mercantilización-militarización–, está en la base de la estructuración de la *Sociedad de la Mercancía* (sensu Davi Kopenawa, 2021). Y es tal sociedad –su modo de vida, su cosmología,

su tecnología y su economía política-, la que ha provocado los trastornos climáticos, hidroenergéticos y sociopolíticos de la presente Era.

Es el capital, como nuevo régimen geosociometabólico, el que ha detonado esta crucial crisis de la habitabilidad de la Tierra y la convivencialidad en la Tierra. Por eso mismo, este nuevo des-orden geológico-político no puede nombrarse genéricamente (encubridoramente) como “Antropoceno”. Como señala Donna Haraway:

*Si tan solo debiéramos tener una palabra para estos tiempos, debería ser, sin duda alguna, Capitaloceno. La Especie Hombre no dio forma a las condiciones para la Tercera Era del Carbono o la Era Nuclear. La historia de la Especie Hombre como agente del Antropoceno es una repetición casi ridícula de la gran aventura fálica, humanizadora y modernizadora, en la que el hombre, hecho a imagen de un dios desvanecido, adquiere superpoderes en su ascensión sagrado-secular, sólo para acabar en una trágica detumescencia, una vez más (Haraway, 2019: 84-85).*

Ahora bien, efectivamente el Capitaloceno hídrico puede comprenderse como una *emergencia geológico-política* resultante de la imposición y mundialización hegemónica del régimen sociohidrológico del *Agua-Moderna-del-Capital*; de la mercantilización del agua como *Gran Transformación* cosmológica, tecnológica y política que está en la raíz de los trastornos contemporáneos del Sistema-de-Vida-Tierra. Pero, ¿cómo, cuándo y dónde se inició exactamente ese proceso? ¿Qué fue lo que lo desencadenó? ¿Quiénes, a través de qué prácticas, con qué motivaciones, intereses, presupuestos y fines?

Ciertamente, el Agua Moderna es hija de la urbanización y la gran metrópoli imperial; de los *mills* textiles y la máquina de vapor; del gran represamiento de las aguas; de su canalización como insumo clave de las mercancías agrícolas, como fuente de energía y transporte del mercado global; del discurso científico tecnocrático que la codificó como mero recurso abstracto, desde su fórmula química a su actual nomenclatura como “activo financiero”. Todos y cada uno de estos grandes eventos constituyentes son claves para comprender el proceso de modernización del agua. Pero esta comprensión quedaría trunca –atrapada en las trampas de la colonialidad; de la Razón Imperial y sus creencias eurocéntricas- si ignoráramos o pasáramos por alto el gran acontecimiento catastrófico de 1492 y las *descomunales transformaciones* desencadenadas a partir de la invasión, conquista y explotación colonial de los territorios-poblaciones (las hidroculturas) del llamado continente “americano”.

A nuestro entender, el proceso de modernización/mercantilización de las aguas tiene un antecedente clave, fundacional, en la “Conquista de América” y luego, propiamente instituyente, en el “descubrimiento” y puesta en explotación del Cerro Rico del Potosí. Vistos retrospectivamente, tales eventos conforman el primer eslabón de una cadena procesual de acontecimientos –contingentes, dialécticos, intencionados, pero no planificados, provistos de una performatividad imprevista-, imbricados en la *emergencia catastrófica del Agua-Capital*. Indagar, revisar, analizar las transformaciones sociohidrológicas –sus impactos, efectos e implicaciones- desencadenadas a partir de semejantes acontecimientos resulta necesario no ya sólo para desnaturalizar el “Antropoceno”, sino también para una descolonización del Capitaloceno.

### **La Conquista: el Pico Orbis y el hidrogenocidio originario**

*“Durante la conquista de América, el etnocidio ha estado siempre acompañado por el ecocidio. La destrucción de pueblos y culturas ha ido acompañada de la destrucción de los ecosistemas que los sustentaron. Pero además, los cambios en la cultura y en las relaciones de poder implican cambios en las relaciones sociales con la naturaleza. En pocas oportunidades en la historia de la humanidad ha habido cambios tan profundos en la relación entre sociedad y naturaleza como en los ocurridos a partir de la conquista”*

(Antonio Elio Brailovsky, *Historia ecológica de Iberoamérica*, 2006).

La imposición del Agua Moderna como único registro cosmológico, epistémico y político válido, la instauración hegemónica del régimen sociohidrológico del capital, involucró no sólo una profunda devaluación ontológica de las aguas en sí, sino también una gravosa, extendida y creciente erosión de la complejidad y diversidad biocultural de la Tierra, en cuanto Gran Comunidad de comunidades bióticas con-vivientes.

Con la progresiva imposición de la fuerza invasiva, conquistadora y expansiva del capital, el Agua Moderna fue concomitantemente corroyendo, inundando y ahogando esas otras ontologías hidro-políticas constitutivas de la trama pluriversal de la vida terráquea. Operó una drástica simplificación y uniformización de la constitución ontológica de la Tierra. No se trató de un proceso ni exclusiva y ni siquiera principalmente intelectual; requirió de una fastuosa operación histórica integral –económica, política, cultural, pero sobre todo militar- de perturbación, desestabilización, destrucción y/o subalternización de una inconmensurable cantidad y diversidad de sistemas sociohidrológicos pre-existentes.

El primer episodio de semejante proceso aconteció en 1492, con la conquista de “América”, que es, en realidad, la *conquista de la Naturaleza*: la creación/invención de América como pura y mera “naturaleza” y la naturalización del capital como única economía-mundo (Machado Aráoz, 2010). Pues es sabido que “la creación de la entidad geosocial América fue el acto constitutivo del moderno sistema mundial” (Quijano y Wallerstein, 1992: 134). Ese Gran Acontecimiento fue el primero de una sucesión de otros eventos catastróficos subsecuentes, en definitiva, configurador de lo que se estructuraría como nuevo patrón de poder mundial (Quijano, 2000) y como nuevo régimen sociosociometabólico (Machado Aráoz, 2022).

Ese nuevo régimen nació bajo las formas, los medios y los efectos de la violencia nuda (Marx, 1867). Se trató de la mayor catástrofe socioecológica y demográfica de toda la historia de la especie humana. La amplia literatura de investigaciones históricas precedentes (Borah, 1970; Wechtel, 1971; Crosby, 1972; 1986; Cook y Borah, 1974; Gligo y Morello, 1980; Cook, 1981; Vitale, 1983; Escudero, 1992; Tudela, 1992) sobre las estimaciones de los “costos de la conquista”, en términos de poblaciones humanas y no humanas; de territorios habitados, diversidad de especies y ecosistemas enteros extinguidos, encuentran recientemente en el hallazgo del *Pico Orbis*<sup>12</sup> (Lewis y Maslin, 2015) una confirmación concluyente. Estamos hablando de la mayor masacre, del mayor desplazamiento y reemplazo de población humana de los últimos 13.000 años, que involucró la extinción del 90 por ciento de la población nativa del continente, equivalente al 10 por ciento de la población mundial de la época, y el “trasvasamiento” de 12 millones de humanos esclavizados procedentes de África (Maslin y Lewis, 2015; 2020). Esa “Gran Mortandad” no fue apenas una gran matanza; fue el hidrogenocidio fundacional, detonante del Capitaloceno hídrico.

En efecto, la “conquista” significó el aplastamiento epistémico, ecológico y político de las “civilizaciones hidráulicas” (Gligo y Morello, 1980; Vitale, 1983) que originariamente construyeran las condiciones de habitabilidad humana del continente americano. Estamos hablando de civilizaciones que surgieron y se desarrollaron “en torno al agua como bien básico”, que tuvieron como pilar fundamental un conocimiento profundo y modos respetuosos de tratamiento de las aguas. En base a ellas, sus cosmovisiones, sus ecuaciones tecnológicas y sus matrices de relacionamientos sociopolíticos lograron construir territorialidades habitables.

12 En el marco de los debates sobre los orígenes del “Antropoceno”, los geógrafos británicos Simon Lewis y Mark Maslin (2015) proponen fecharlo en lo que llaman el *Pico Orbis* (1610), que marca el punto de mayor descenso del dióxido de carbono atmosférico de los últimos 2000 años previos a la Era Industrial, detonante a su vez de la llamada “Pequeña Edad de Hielo”, extendida a lo largo de todo el orbe entre 1570 y 1700. Según los autores, ese descenso (del CO<sub>2</sub> y de la temperatura media mundial) obedece a la “Gran Mortandad” provocada por la conquista: de más de 60 millones estimada antes de la conquista, la población nativa descendió a 6 millones en 1650. Así, “el casi cese de la agricultura y la reducción del uso del fuego dieron lugar a la regeneración de más de 50 millones de hectáreas de bosques, sabanas leñosas y pastizales, con una absorción de carbono por parte de la vegetación y los suelos estimada en 5-40 Pg en unos 100 años. La magnitud y el momento aproximados de la captación de carbono sugieren que este acontecimiento contribuyó significativamente al descenso observado del CO<sub>2</sub> atmosférico de 7-10 p.p.m. (1 p.p.m.CO<sub>2</sub>52,1 Pg de carbono) entre 1570 y 1620 documentado en dos registros de núcleos de hielo antárticos de alta resolución.” (Lewis & Maslin, 2015: 175).

Esa “ecología empírica” milenaria les permitió combinar “su mayor productividad con su conservación” (Gligo, 2001: 57). En función de ese patrón común, Gligo y Morello (1980) identifican tres grandes modelos de “civilizaciones hidráulicas”:

- Las civilizaciones que se desarrollaron en función de sus aprendizajes para manejar los excedentes de agua: las agroculturas de camellones que prosperaron en la Isla de Marajó (Brasil), los pantanos de Moxos (Bolivia), los llanos de San Jorge (Colombia), el delta del río Guayas (Ecuador), en Suriname, y las dos más conocidas y parcialmente subsistentes, el pueblo de los Uros del lago Titicaca (Bolivia) y la chinampa mexicana (Lago Texococo).
- Las civilizaciones que se desarrollaron a partir de la gestión de ambientes áridos, a través de complejos sistemas de regadíos, desplegadas principalmente en la región andina unificada bajo el Incario.
- Las civilizaciones de policultores de selva (pueblos cultivadores de bosques alimentarios), para referir principalmente a la cultura maya de Yucatán y a los pueblos habitantes (criadores) de la gran eco-región amazónica.

Con la conquista, esa compleja trama pluriversal de sistemas sociohidrológicos fue progresivamente siendo fagocitada por la moderna lógica monocultural extractivista. Las cuencas hidrográficas que “hallaron” los conquistadores eran, en realidad, *cuencas hidrocomunitarias*, estructuradas en torno a un régimen sociometabólico prioritariamente orientado al sostenimiento, la crianza y la reproducción de la vida-en-común. En su amplia sociobiodiversidad, los sistemas sociometabólicos de estos pueblos se caracterizaron por ordenar el trabajo social, las aguas y los bienes territoriales hacia la satisfacción colectiva de las necesidades vitales; se centraron en asegurar los circuitos y flujos hidroenergéticos al servicio de la vida en común. Los sistemas hidrológicos fueron así apropiados, transformados y administrados bajo una trama comunitaria de relaciones sociales que hizo de esos modos de uso y significación de las aguas, la base fundamental de sus subsistencias/modos de existencia.

La irrupción del conquistador violentó integralmente esos sistemas de vida. La conquista operó como una *gran fractura* que rompió las tramas hidrocomunitarias, provocando una progresiva degradación no sólo de las cuencas hídricas como tales, sino ya la destrucción y desintegración del tejido comunitario como parte fundamental de esas cuencas, y el deterioro de los ecosistemas en su conjunto como *hábitats*. Es sabido que el móvil que desencadenó todo esto fue llanamente la desenfrenada búsqueda de metales preciosos como medio y forma de riqueza y poder, dentro de una nueva matriz societal que empezaba a girar en torno al dinero.

La *sed de oro* –vale decir, una nueva agencialidad humana, un nuevo régimen perceptivo, cognitivo y emocional, nuevas formas de lo político– desencadenó una *Gran Transformación* geológica y política global: activó una profunda metamorfosis a nivel sociometabólico y geometabólico. En términos hidrológicos y políticos, marcó el pasaje histórico de *mundos de Aguas-Vivas*, de Agua-Vital, al mundo monológico del *Agua-Metal* (*recurso* sólo valorizado en función del *valor*). Territorialidades cuyos circuitos y flujos hidro-energéticos (el trabajo humano incluido) estuvieron prioritariamente diseñados en función de la construcción de *hábitats* y el sostenimiento de espacios-de-vida, fueron destruidas y sustituidas por un nuevo patrón socioterritorial, donde los flujos se dirigen a la maximización del *valor* extraíble.

Es el primer capítulo de la *rentabilidad* aplastando la *habitabilidad*. A lo largo de todo el período colonial “*primó el sentido minero de la explotación. La riqueza ‘visible’ era la minería*”; de modo que “la estrategia extractiva hacia las metrópolis se centró en la actividad minera” (Gligo, 2001: 66-73). El drástico reordenamiento territorial que impuso el conquistador supuso la configuración de cadenas verticales de transferencias de recursos desde los hinterlands hidro-agroalimentarios hacia los centros mineros y de éstos hacia la metrópoli.

En este sentido, el Agua Moderna es inseparable de la territorialidad extractivista (Machado Aróz, 2015; 2023). Como forma concreta, sólo existe dentro de una determinada formación geosocial y de un régimen sociometabólico específico: la que nace de una gran fractura sociometabólica (Marx, 1867; Foster, 2000).

Esa fractura supone no sólo la separación de “los productores” respecto de los “medios de producción”, la desestructuración de los ciclos de nutrientes, sino también, decisivamente, la *des-sacralización* de esos “medios de producción”: un cambio en el estatuto ontológico, epistémico y político de las entidades y seres imbricados en la trama de la vida; las aguas, los suelos, los cuerpos inferiorizados, la biodiversidad toda. Todas, ahora, *fragmentadas*: separadas de sus inter-conexiones; *cosificadas*: denegadas en sus agencialidades específicas.

El hidrogenocidio fundacional acontece primero y de modo fulminante en el Caribe, donde la voracidad extractivista provocó el exterminio de Arawacos, Taínos y Caribes en sólo unas décadas. Allí los cuerpos-sometidos al trabajo esclavizado se agotó antes que el oro mismo. Se trató de una explotación efímera y letal (Wolf, 1987). Ello no detendría la escalada extractivista. Al contrario, se aceleraría y expandiría hacia el tráfico comercial de humanos esclavizados en gran escala y hacia las explotaciones continentales del “Nuevo Mundo”, donde, con el hallazgo del Cerro Rico del Potosí, hallaría las circunstancias para nuevos desarrollos.

### La Revolución Mineral del Potosí y la ontogénesis del Capitaloceno hídrico

*“Nunca antes como en el Siglo XVI ha parecido tan importante el papel de los metales preciosos. Los contemporáneos no vacilan en asignarles el primer puesto y los economistas del siglo XVII son aún más enfáticos. Uno lo considera ‘el caudal del pueblo’; según otro, ‘no vivimos tanto del comercio de mercancías como del oro y la plata’. Y un veneciano llega a decir que el metal precioso, amarillo o blanco, es ‘el sostén de todo Gobierno; le da pulso, movimiento, cerebro y alma; es su ser y su vida... Vence todas las dificultades, pues es el amo y patrón de todo...’” (Fernand Braudel, 1949).*

Hay fundadas evidencias para pensar que la debacle contemporánea del Capitaloceno tiene su *momento instituyente* con el hidrogenocidio de las *comunidades productoras de humus* que hicieron humanamente habitable la vasta región andina integrada bajo la composición cultural incaica. Ese evento catastrófico fue detonado por el “descubrimiento” del Cerro Rico del Potosí por parte del ojo (ya moderno) del Conquistador y la posterior puesta en explotación de aquella fastuosa condensación argentífera. Visto retrospectivamente, entre la Gran Conquista originaria de inicios del Siglo XVI y la irrupción plena del industrialismo fósil a fines del siglo XVIII, aparece como un eslabón clave que –como principio político constituyente– articula el sinuoso proceso histórico y geopolítico, multidimensional y multiescalar, imbricado en la serie contingente de grandes transformaciones socioecológicas y onto-políticas, que van desde la “Gran Mortandad” al “Cambio Climático”, pasando por la industrialización, la urbanización, la mercantilización-militarización del mundo; la compresión de las aguas y de la Tierra toda bajo una racionalidad tecno-científica y de gerenciamiento oligo-burocrático.

A decir verdad, los requerimientos (tecnológicos, económicos y logísticos, políticos, antropológicos y psicológicos) que demandaría la puesta en explotación del Cerro Rico del Potosí involucrarían la creación de las bases epistémicas, ontológico-políticas, la institucionalidad y la subjetividad del Nuevo Mundo, no ya apenas la entidad “América”, sino el Mundo de la Colonial-Modernidad del Capital. Potosí marca la inauguración de lo que Fernand Braudel llamaría “el segundo siglo XVI”, una temporalidad política signada por la centralidad excluyente de los metales preciosos; el siglo de la plata, pues en efecto, los flujos (hidro-)argentíferos producirían entonces la *primera globalización*.

La Revolución Mineral del Potosí antecede y genera las condiciones de posibilidad de la llamada “Revolución Industrial” eurocéntrica (Machado Aráoz, 2014). Antes que ésta, fungió como desencadenante de toda una serie de eventos, fenómenos y procesos que llevarían a la instauración del Agua Moderna y su posterior derrotero aluvional, hasta su actual desembocadura capitalocénica. Antes que al carbón, el Agua Moderna nacería vinculada al servicio de la plata. La inundación del Agua Moderna, sería primero, una inundación de plata que ensancharía hasta los confines del mundo los flujos febriles del comercio de ultramar.



La plata sería la primera gran mercancía de la germinal *sociedad de la mercancía*. Y ésta se edificaría sobre el aplastamiento de las tramas hidrocomunales pre-existentes.

### El mundo andino: *hidrocomunidades productoras de humus*

*“Paradójicamente los incas se consideraban a sí mismos como hijos de la tierra –la Pachamama–, pero su práctica agraria los muestra mucho más como criadores de suelo”* (Brailovsky, Historia ecológica de Iberoamérica, 2006).

*“En el período de la conquista y la colonia, la forma en que América Latina fue ‘ocupada’ por los nuevos dueños se basó en dos falacias fundamentales: la primera, la creencia de que tanto la cultura como la tecnología de los pueblos sometidos eran inferiores y atrasadas con respecto a la europea y, la segunda, que los recursos del nuevo continente eran prácticamente ilimitados. De esta forma se justificó plenamente la destrucción y eliminación de las formas y sistemas preexistentes”.* (Gligo y Morello, 1980)

Dentro de la vasta riqueza de formaciones hidroculturales pre-existentes a la Conquista, el mundo andino se destacó por la extraordinaria complejidad y eficiencia de sus desarrollos organizacionales y tecnológicos para producir habitabilidad en una región, en principio, caracterizada por condiciones ambientales pre-antrópicas extremadamente adversas o desafiantes para los requerimientos básicos de la vida humana. Allí, en torno al eje del gran macizo cordillerano de los Andes, entre la costa del Pacífico y la Amazonía, los más de setenta pueblos congregados en torno a la *hidro-agrocultura incaica* lograron construir condiciones de habitabilidad que se plasmó en una de las territorialidades más extensas y densamente pobladas del “Nuevo Mundo”. (A la postre, esos extraordinarios saberes de subsistencia, la combinación de condensación demográfica y argentífera, configurarían una fatal contingencia para el mundo andino, y más allá).

Semejante formación se desarrolló en base a un complejo de conocimientos hidro-agronómicos construidos durante más de tres milenios de experiencias socioterritoriales, a lo largo de una superficie territorial de 4000 km de longitud N-S, y entre 300 y 400 km de ancho E-O, y en un relieve que comprende desde los 0 m. s/n.m. en las costas, hasta las franjas montañosas de entre 4.500 y 6.000 m.s/n.m., que los incas lograron integrar y llevar a su máxima expresión al momento de la invasión ibérica (Murra, 1975; 1990; Brailovsky, 2006; Mazoyer y Roudart, 2008). Además de ser uno de los epicentros de domesticación de especies vegetales hoy claves para el sustento humano (tales como el maíz, la papa, la mandioca, los frijoles, tomate, quinoa, algodón y tabaco, entre muchos otros), Mazoyer y Roudart señalan que el universo inca constituye un sistema hidroagrícola de regiones áridas único en el mundo, de valor inconmensurable en el acervo agrario de la humanidad (2008: 224).

Se conformó como un sistema complejo de grandes zonas bioclimáticas integradas por un entramado de división regional del trabajo altamente coordinado en el tiempo y el espacio. Sobre la base unidades bioculturales muy diversas, organizadas en base al principio de máxima diversificación local orientada al autoabastecimiento y especialización relativa en ciertos productos destinados a cubrir los requerimientos de otras regiones, el incario articuló “un archipiélago” hidro-agroalimentario altamente eficiente dentro de vastas extensiones extremadamente áridas, frías y/o directamente inhóspitas<sup>13</sup> (Murra, 1975; Gligo y Morello, 1980).

13 El mismo estaba conformado por: sistemas de cultivo irrigado en base a maíz, frijoles y algodón en las planicies costeras; sistemas de cultivo irrigado en base a maíz, frijoles, lupines, habas y quinoa en la zona quechua (valles andinos hasta los 3600 m.s/n.m.); cultivo de papas en la zona *suni* (laderas de montaña entre 3.600 y 4.200 m.s/n.m.); sistema pastoril de la zona puna (altiplanos de 4.200 a 4.500 m de altitud). Esto se complementaba con frutos de colecta, maíz de contra-estación y cultivos de coca de las laderas amazónicas (Mazoyer y Roudart, 2008: 228-232). Cada región bioclimática proveía al sistema productos clave para los balances energéticos y económicos: guano y algodón de las zonas costeras; maíz y quinoa de la zona quechua; papas y hierbas medicinales de las zonas *suni*; sal, lana, carne y animales de transporte de la puna.

Para Antonio Brailovsky, el mundo incaico sobresale por sus excepcionales tecnologías (hidrológicas y edafológicas) de fabricación de suelo agrícola (Brailovsky 2006: 102-104). Gligo y Morello señalan “cuatro espectros sobresalientes del estilo de desarrollo” incaico (1980): la eficiencia energética macro-regional; la dinámica organizativa del trabajo agrícola; la orientación y regulación colectiva de la producción; la tecnología agronómica y los saberes alimentarios<sup>14</sup>. En general, se destaca la solidez, la diversidad y calidad alimentaria integral del mundo andino. La diversidad (biológica, cultural, climática, edafológica, de pisos ecológicos) y la coordinación y planificación económica y política fueron claves para configurar un sistema sociometabólico altamente eficiente y productivo. El manejo integral de las aguas y la fertilidad del suelo fueron la base para los balances energéticos de esa formación geosocial (Murra, 1975; Antúnez de Mayolo y Santiago, 1977; Mazoyer y Roudart, 2008).

A través de su peculiar cosmología, sus tecnologías y sus formas políticas de organización del trabajo y de integración social, lograron construir un *régimen sociometabólico de excedentes energéticos bioacumulativos* (Vitale, 1983). No casualmente, su cosmología tiene en el *Sol*, en las Montañas (origen de las cuencas hidrográficas) y las *Aguas*, sus principales divinidades; una trilogía que expresa las particularidades de la fotosíntesis en la geografía andina. Su tecnología, apoyada en una sofisticada red de ingeniería hidráulica (infraestructura física y organización social), les permitió “garantizar el reparto de las aguas en el tiempo y en el espacio en función de las necesidades de los cultivos irrigados en las diferentes partes de la cuenca” (Mazoyer y Roudart, 2008: 243). Su sistema político –si bien de carácter centralizado, notablemente vertical y jerárquico-, estaba apoyado sobre el principio general de asegurar la cobertura de los requerimientos básicos, comunes, para la subsistencia humana. Por tanto, hacía de la administración de las aguas y los alimentos, el principal servicio social y medio de legitimación de la función política<sup>15</sup>.

Nada de todo esto importó o fue relevante para el conquistador. Bajo su dominio, el interés extractivo se convirtió en el máximo principio político. Sobre esa base, se estructuró toda una nueva matriz de relacionamientos socioecológicos. La vida toda pasó a girar, valer y significar sólo en función y relación al valor metálico extraíble, máximo valor político de la novelísima formación geosocial global emergente. Aunque parezca absurdo –o directamente lo sea- la simple y burda avaricia, el ánimo desmesurado de riqueza-poder movilizado por la plata, fue lo que provocó el colapso del universo hidro-agrocultural andino. La puesta en explotación del Cerro Rico del Potosí significó su definitiva implosión. “Es inimaginable lo que la humanidad perdió con ese cataclismo histórico” (Mazoyer y Roudart, 2008: 251).

14 El primer aspecto refiere a la coordinación de intercambios balanceados entre pisos ecológicos y eco-regiones, para la cual fueron claves los sistemas de riego y la infraestructura de transportes, comunicación y almacenamientos. El segundo, a la sólida disciplina laboral, articulaba “los componentes individuales mínimos (ayllus) con la comunidad compuesta del conjunto” del Tawantinsuyu. El tercer aspecto remite a la base comunal de apropiación de bienes territoriales de base (tierras, aguas, etc.) y la administración y distribución de la producción en función del sostenimiento del conjunto poblacional-territorial. Por último, la tecnología agronómica combinó adecuación físico-química de suelos, fisiología vegetal y selección de semillas y cultivares; técnicas de protección fitosanitarias y de fertilización de suelos; creación de calendario agrícola estacional y astronómico; conocimientos meteorológicos y de previsión climática; el conocimiento de las fuentes alimentarias y los valores nutricionales de la flora y la fauna autóctona (Gligo, 2001: 61-65).

15 Según Mazoyer y Roudart (2008), el rol central del “Estado” inca, era el de llevar adelante “la coordinación hidroagrícola del conjunto” territorial-poblacional bajo su cargo. “Una administración sabia –compuesta de arquitectos, agrónomos, especialistas en ingeniería civil, militar, hidráulica, etc., formados en la universidad de Cuzco garantizaba todas las tareas de concepción y administración de las obras hídricas que sostenían la base económica y la integración política del imperio” (Mazoyer y Roudart, 2008: 243).

## Potosí, las aguas de copajira y la constitución del *Agua Metal*

“Desde las minas de plata del Potosí hasta las plantaciones esclavistas en Santo Domingo, el capitalismo mercantil explotó la tierra [incluidas las aguas] y el trabajo hasta agotarlos sin esforzarse por reponer lo que utilizaba. Escogiendo, por el contrario, devorar nuevos ‘insumos’ humanos y no humanos incorporados por la fuerza desde ‘el exterior’, el capitalismo mercantil dejó rastros de destrucción medioambiental y social a escala de continentes enteros”. (Frazer, “Los climas del capital”, 2021).

El “descubrimiento” del Cerro Rico del Potosí por parte del ojo conquistual moderno detonó una revolución integral (económica, política, cultural; hasta geológica) propiamente de alcance mundial inmediato y con efectos de larga duración, que inclusive son motivo central de preocupación en nuestros días. Entre 1545 y 1650, la Villa Rica no sólo se erigió como el primer centro geopolítico y económico del sistema-mundo, sino que fue el lugar que proveyó la materialidad, el contexto, las condiciones, las agencialidades y el tipo de prácticas sociales dominantes que darían lugar a la *emergencia* (a la conformación, consolidación e institucionalización) de una nueva matriz de relacionamientos sociales, un nuevo patrón de poder y un nuevo régimen geosociometabólico. El mundo colonial moderno del capital nace de la explotación de sus entrañas argentíferas.

Potosí fue la primera explotación moderna; explotación de la minería colonial-moderna. Y se trató de una explotación hidro-intensiva, que puso en marcha el proceso de modernización de las aguas. Es allí, donde el conquistador se apropia de las aguas con el objeto de desviarlas de sus cursos preexistentes, para ponerlas a lavar montañas y extraer mineral. Potosí designa el primer lugar donde las aguas vitales son trasvasadas al “molino satánico” (Polanyi, 1949) de la mercantilización, no como un episodio efímero o circunstancial, sino como un evento constituyente; un sistema de prácticas (perceptivas, cognitivas, valorativas y de poder) que da lugar a un proceso de estructuración social de larga duración. En este sentido, la Gran Transformación referida por Polanyi comienza y consiste en la transformación/malversación de las Aguas-Vidas en Agua-Metal; una transformación perturbadora del mundo de la vida; de la Tierra como totalidad existencial integrada.

En términos de sus impactos inmediatos y directos, la explotación hidro-intensiva del Potosí anticipa y prefigura el carácter energívoro e hidrocida de la minería colonial moderna, cuyo derrotero está signado por la fagocitosis de hidrocomunidades y catástrofes recursivas. Fue la primera y más grande explotación minera a escala industrial. Potosí constituye un salto en la escala de los materiales y los volúmenes movilizados; de las fuerzas y los cuerpos insumidos y consumidos en el proceso extractivo y de valorización. Marca, ante todo, el gran salto energético que requirió “la extensión de las redes comerciales” ya a escala mundial, y “el nacimiento del capitalismo” (Fernández Durán y González Reyes, 2021: 175).

Antes que el régimen energético fósil, el capitalismo mercantilista se fundó en un “régimen somático” (McNeill, 2000), en el que “la producción de energía química en energía mecánica se producía en el cuerpo de los seres vivos” sometidos a procesos de trabajo (Fraser, 2021: 120). Los ingentes volúmenes de energía que demandó la explotación de la mina de Potosí fueron provistos principalmente por seres vivos, en primer término, *músculo animal*: principalmente de humanos sometidos a condiciones de trabajo forzado y/o esclavizado, primero a través del régimen de Encomienda (1540-1570) y luego por el más eficaz de la Mita (1572). A través de ésta, se llegaban a reclutar entre 13.000 y 17.000 mitayos al año para las operaciones generales en el Potosí, 4.600 de ellos, trabajaban diariamente y directamente bajo los socavones (Bakewell, 1990; Dore, 1994; Contreras Carranza, 1994). Más allá de los humanos, la explotación extractiva de plata involucró un sistema de 13.000 carretas movidas por mulares que transportaban el mineral del yacimiento a los molinos de procesamiento y de ahí a los puertos de embarque; un estimado de 350.000 llamas y 100.000 mulares por año (Moore, 2021: 134). A eso, hay que agregar más de 100 toneladas anuales de grasa animal que sólo en la mina se consumían como lubricantes de molinos y máquinas y para fabricar la ingente cantidad de velas necesarias para las labores subterráneas (Moore, 2021: 133).

Otro componente importante de la energía somática consumida en el Potosí fue de seres vegetales, de forma tanto indirecta como directa. Por un lado, la gran cantidad de animales de carga requerida provocó una drástica alteración de paisajes: “bosques y campos fueron transformados en pasto para las mulas que acarrearán el mineral”; por otro, “se talaron bosques para la construcción de pozos y túneles de mina”<sup>16</sup> (Dore, 1994: 56); y sobre todo, para las fundiciones<sup>17</sup>. Así, “todos los recursos forestales cercanos a las fundiciones fueron consumidos. Las minas fueron luego abandonadas no porque se agotaran, sino por problemas vinculados con volúmenes de agua necesarios para concentración y con agotamiento del recurso leña para fundición” (Gligo, 2001: 74). Al consumo directo de la actividad minera, hay que agregar la propia demanda de leña para consumo doméstico, estimada en 25.000 toneladas anuales (Moore, 2021: 128).

Como toda ecuación energética es siempre hidro-energética, en todos y cada uno de estos ítems hay involucradas enormes volúmenes de aguas, extraídos de lugares lejanos para ser finalmente consumidos en el proceso extractivo. Humanos, animales de carga, alimentos para humanos y no humanos, árboles, arbustos y pasturas son, en definitiva, *aguas en “estado vivo”* (Porto Gonçalves, 2020). Las huellas de su tráfico trazaron una nueva y extraña “cuenca hidrográfica” que, partiendo de lugares remotos, fueron absorbidos, desviados y consumidos en la mina. Sistemas sociohidrológicos enteros, con vida propia, fueron siendo erosionados, progresivamente fragmentados y desmembrados para abastecer de agua-viva (en estado vegetal, animal o mineral) los requerimientos de la voluntad extractivista conquistual.

Además, la minería de Potosí fue intensiva de aguas en su primario estado líquido mineral; principalmente, como energía hidráulica que alimentó el sistema de bombas, malacates y molinos, para la extracción, la molienda y el procesamiento del mineral. La actividad minera como tal es absolutamente hidro-dependiente. No hay minería posible sin agua. Fue un “recurso crítico” en una región árida. En el Potosí, su provisión requirió la construcción de “una infraestructura hidráulica faraónica”, con 32 lagos y toda una red de canales que abarcaban una superficie de 65 km<sup>2</sup> (Bakewell, 1990; Dore, 1994; Serrano Bravo, 2004). Estas “represas” –las primeras propiamente modernas– tenían una capacidad de almacenamiento de seis millones de metros cúbicos y estaban localizadas en las alturas de la Cordillera de Cari-Cari, de donde captaban el deshielo de los glaciares y era conducido por La Rivera de Potosí, un canal de 5 km a cuyas márgenes se instalaron las molineras de plata y el propio recinto urbano (Salazar, 2002).

En cuanto a éste, es sabido que “a principios del siglo XVII Potosí era una de las ciudades más grandes [y más fastuosas] del mundo occidental, con un flujo constante de unas 200.000 personas que iban y venían a las minas” (Dore, 1994: 56) y con una población permanente de 160.000 habitantes en 1610. Si bien la gran mayoría de las aguas represadas estaban destinadas a los ingenios, la Villa Imperial contaba con piletones públicos de abastecimiento continuo de agua, así como pilas de reservas en las casas de “notables” (Serrano Bravo, 2004). En muchos sentidos, Potosí condensa los usos, las funciones y los efectos hídricos que Goubert (1989) asigna a la ciudad moderna: la concentración de aguas para consumo urbano que intensifica la fractura social (racista y clasista) rural/urbana – india/blanca; epicentro del consumo, el lujo y la circulación frenética de mercancías. Pero también en el caso específico de la ciudad colonial moderna, Potosí se erige como dispositivo de poder territorial y de control poblacional (Portes, 1977): *como colonialismo* que explota cuerpos y recursos al servicio del privilegio extractivista, y *como colonialidad* que instaura ese privilegio como modelo civilizatorio y horizonte de deseo.

<sup>16</sup> “Las minas de Potosí eran, en efecto, un vasto bosque subterráneo, que debía ser reemplazado cada seis años en promedio” (Moore, 2021: 129).

<sup>17</sup> El proceso de enriquecimiento de la plata demandó intensivamente combustible vegetal, desde la primera etapa (1545-1560) que se usaban las wayras, a la etapa en la que se recurrió a la amalgama con mercurio, cuando la extracción da un salto de escala (más del 600 % entre 1575 y 1590) (Bakewell, 1990). La amalgama, si bien aumentó la eficiencia energética del combustible vegetal, se requirió más biomasa en términos absolutos, haciendo operativa, quizás por primera vez, la paradoja de Jevons. El ingente consumo de leña, llevó a arrasar todo tipo de vegetación: “poco a poco se pasó de combustible de árboles a leña de arbustales, tolares, y aún a usar pastos perennes como el *ichu* (*Stipa ichu*)” (Gligo, 2001: 74).

Además de hidro-intensiva, la explotación del Potosí fue hidro-ecogenocida. Su consumo concentrado, oligárquico, de aguas (en *estado líquido* y en *estado vivo*) se hizo como contracara de la distribución de muerte y destrucción a gran escala espacio-temporal. El hidroecogenocidio que desató la explotación del Cerro Rico del Potosí operó por medio de la *concentración* de aguas, la *contaminación* y la *destrucción* de cuencas sociohidrológicas enteras.

Respecto a la contaminación de aguas, la explotación minera originaria del Potosí dejó dos focos contaminantes a perpetuidad: por un lado, las llamadas “aguas de copajira”, que eran aguas ácidas sulfurosas, saturadas con sales minerales y metales pesados provenientes de las precipitaciones que corrían por las propias bocaminas y zonas de laboreo, de los vertidos de los socavones y, sobre todo, las colas y relaves de los ingenios. Todos estos efluentes corrían por la Rivera de Potosí, contaminando la cuenca del río Sucu Mayu (Serrano Bravo, 2004; López Pardo, 2010). El segundo gran foco de contaminación (de aguas, suelos, aires y seres vivos) y probablemente el de mayor escala e impacto, fue la dispersión de mercurio a lo largo y ancho de toda la geografía extractiva del Potosí, lo que involucra no sólo el área potosina, sino la propia mina de mercurio en Huancavelica, su zona de influencia y todos los circuitos del mercurio hasta el Potosí y los ingenios de plata. La toxicidad del mercurio involucró a cursos y cuerpos de agua, suelos, aire y organismos de toda especie, incluidos los humanos sometidos al trabajo minero.

La “revolución de productividad” provocada por las reformas del virrey Toledo (que implicaron la combinación de la mita como forma de reclutamiento de fuerza de trabajo y la técnica de amalgama con mercurio para la lixiviación de plata) fue letal para las poblaciones que habitaron estos territorios. Fue el principal factor de morbilidad y mortandad directa entre trabajadores; y más aún, “el mayor peligro ecológico” de la minería de la época:

*Extraído en Almadén en España y en Huancavelica en las sierras centrales de Perú, el mercurio era transportado en bolsas de piel por toda América y Europa por mulas, hombres y barcos. Los caminos por los que se transportaba el mercurio se convirtieron en tentáculos envenenados que filtraban y contaminaban el paisaje. Además de matar a los obreros en las minas, dejó tras de sí una estela de muerte y destrucción. Humanos, animales y pájaros consumían el pescado envenenado con mercurio de los ríos, propagando la ola de toxicidad. El elemento se acumula en los tejidos de animales y plantas iniciando así cadenas de cambio biológico de muy larga duración. (Dore, 1994: 56).*

Las estimaciones históricas indican que entre 1580 y 1640 las “pérdidas” anuales de mercurio eran de 300 toneladas. Semejante volumen “representó una poderosa invasión tóxica sobre las ecologías regionales (...) no sólo alteró el ciclo de nutrientes; lo envenenó” (Moore, 2021: 140). Esto pone de relieve la sutil frontera que separa la “contaminación” de la “destrucción” y la “muerte”. Contaminación es una forma de muerte difusa, de efectos no inmediatos, pero de amplio espectro.

En esa frontera ambigua de contaminación y destrucción, cabe mencionar el que constituye el primer evento catastrófico de la minería colonial-moderna: la catástrofe hidráulica del embalse de San Ildelfonso (Serrano y Gioda, 1999). Construido con depósitos morrénicos compactados y finalizado en 1576, el dique hacía parte clave del sistema de aprovisionamiento de aguas y energía hidráulica que motorizaba la población y los ingenios de plata del Potosí. Tras una temporada de intensas lluvias, sin contar con un sistema de desagadero, el descuido del corregidor a cargo del embalse, el viento y la presión de las aguas provocaron el colapso del paredón de endicamiento el 15 de marzo de 1626. La fuerza de las aguas represadas a 4410 mts. de altura arrastró 122 ingenios de la Rivera, destruyó “360 casas de españoles y más de 800 ranchos de indígenas”, provocando 2000 víctimas fatales y dejando más de la mitad de la ciudad bajo aguas contaminadas con “mercurio, plata pura, sal, sulfato de cobre, cal, hierro, estaño, plomo, de minerales a ser tratados y colas o ganga” (Gioda y Serrano, 2000: 60).

Episodios como éste se repetirían crónicamente a lo largo de la historia de la minería colonial-moderna. No son obra de una fatalidad, acontecimientos extraordinarios imprevisibles, sino resultados de la operación de principios sistémicos de organización, decisión y acción que –por diseño político- priorizan la máxima rentabilidad a costa de la seguridad de las vidas y la habitabilidad de los territorios. Así, el hidro-ecogenocidio del Potosí involucra, no apenas factores aislados o esporádicos, sino un efecto *histórico-estructural*. Los desmontes masivos, la tala de los bosques en galería y en las nacientes afectaron y desestabilizaron los ciclos hídricos de recarga y los circuitos superficiales y subterráneos de los ríos y aguadas. Los desplazamientos de poblaciones afectaron los cultivos, el mantenimiento de los sistemas de regadío y las tramas de actividades comunitarias sobre las que reposaban en gran medida las economías nativas. La mina fue el gran altar de la civilización moderna en torno al cual se ofrendó la muerte sacrificial del agua-vida; el agua-metal sólo pudo fluir en ingentes cantidades hacia la metrópoli imperial a través de la explotación, molienda y mineralización de las hidrocomunidades.

La centralidad del Potosí respecto a una genealogía del Capitaloceno hídrico tienen que ver con el tipo de prácticas sociales que allí se conformaron y se instituyeron (produjeron institucionalidades y subjetividades) como modo “normal”, “moderno”, “racional” de tratamiento de las aguas; la reducción de las aguas al Agua Moderna. Su apropiación concentrada y su desvío para ser puestas al servicio de la plata. Todavía hoy, los ciclos sociohidrológicos contemporáneos siguen funcionando dentro de ese mismo patrón; bajo esa misma cosmología primitiva.

### **El principio Potosí: falla hidro-social y devenir capitalocénico del mundo**

El sentido estructural-instituyente de las prácticas humanas (de ciertos humanos) responsables de la explotación del Cerro Rico del Potosí, reside en haber dado lugar a la gestación y sedimentación de una nueva matriz de poder, un nuevo régimen de relacionamientos socioecológicos, entre humanos y entre la sociedad de humanos y el resto de las comunidades bióticas convivientes; con ello, emerge una nueva economía política sobre la faz de la Tierra. Aquellas intencionalidades y creencias originarias, esos fines y los tipos de medios que crearon en pos de ellos, las ambiciones, el sentido y la sensibilidad social que los animó, dieron lugar a una históricamente inédita forma social de concebir, comprender y gestionar los flujos hidroenergéticos y sociales en función de los cuales opera y se organiza la vida de las sociedades humanas modernas.

Con la explotación del Potosí (sus impactos y efectos multiescalares, multidimensionales y de larga duración) tuvo lugar la emergencia de una nueva cosmología, nuevas tecnologías y una nueva política que empezaron a regir las condiciones de existencia y dictar el sentido de la existencia humana sobre la Tierra. Los efectos perennes del Potosí no son sólo los de la contaminación, la miseria y el hambre que signan sus paisajes aún en nuestros días, sino los de un nuevo estatuto ontológico y un nuevo régimen político establecido sobre las aguas. En Potosí se elaboró el protocolo propiamente moderno de tratamiento de las aguas: su apropiación oligárquica y su disposición prioritaria para la máxima extracción de rentabilidad.

Fue en Potosí que tuvo lugar el emplazamiento de la primera gran ciudad moderna, en su cabal sentido sociohidrológico (Goubert); creada *ex nihilo* simplemente concebido como un recinto desmembrado del espacio vital para operar como tecnología de concentración y succión de energías humanas y más que humanas para la extracción de plata/valor-de-cambio; como lugar del consumo, el lujo, la ostentación y la estratificación racista-clasista-genérica de los cuerpos humanos. Fue Potosí el primer lugar donde se apeló de manera masiva y sistemática al uso industrial de energía hidráulica para la fabricación de mercancías (“la mercancía” por excelencia); donde las aguas se pusieron al servicio del fuego (Gras). Allí tuvieron lugar las primeras obras de represamiento de las aguas donde se echó a andar la fiebre ingenieril como manifestación de la voluntad de

poder sobre lo vivo (Worster). Allí se operó la primera germinal racionalización de las aguas como insumo abstracto (Linton) de una economía también ya metafísica, regida por la ley del valor abstracto.

También Potosí es el lugar de la primera gran catástrofe hidráulica, preludio de una larga serie de crímenes socioambientales que jalonarían el “desarrollo de la industria minera mundial”, de San Ildefonso a Mariana y Brumadinho<sup>18</sup>. Inaugura la Era de la contaminación a gran escala espacio-temporal; el envenenamiento de ecosistemas enteros; la alteración y destrucción de cuencas sociohidrográficas; el mar como sumidero de efluentes industriales y como espacio del comercio mundial. Potosí inaugura la era del extractivismo y del “agua virtual” (Allan, 2003; Hoesktra, 2003), de un trasvasamiento sistemático y continuo de cuencas sociohidrográficas ya a escala intercontinental: aguas en formas de cuerpo humanos esclavizados; de llamas y mulares, de bosques consumidos en infraestructuras y molineras, de metal lixiviado usado como mero valor de cambio. Potosí inaugura la Era de los intercambios socioecológicos desiguales; entre humanos y no humanos; entre humanos; entre regiones, países y continentes. Crea la geografía de la desigualdad hídrica global del tiempo que habitamos.

En definitiva, se puede considerar al Potosí como el lugar de la ontogénesis del Capitaloceno hídrico, porque su puesta en explotación involucró un cambio radical en el régimen geosociometabólico del que depende la vida en la Tierra. La fractura sociometabólica que Marx identifica en la raíz del régimen del capital (Marx, 1867; Foster, 2000; Machado Aráoz, 2016) no acontece primero en el modo de tratamiento de los suelos europeos, sino en la forma de tratar las aguas andinas. Es una fractura propiamente hidrosocial. Localmente, inicialmente, significó la devastación de un régimen hidro-energético agrocomunitario para la imposición de otro, de carácter mineral-mercantil; donde la primacía del valor de cambio se impone sobre los valores de uso; la lógica del individuo conquistador, sobre la de la comunidad de vida. En fin, un régimen sociometabólico donde el principio de la habitabilidad es declarado caduco y es sacrificado para habilitar el de la máxima rentabilidad. Finalmente, global y estructuralmente, terminó provocando la emergencia social de un nuevo tiempo geológico-político; un tiempo donde la vida ha sido colocada en estado crítico de precariedad y degradación.

No había ninguna “necesidad” de que ocurriera así; no estaba inscripto en las “leyes de la historia” –que no existen, más allá del devenir contingente y dialéctico de lo con-viviente-, pero sucedió así. La explotación del Potosí detonó un nuevo régimen sociometabólico, el régimen del capital. Su dinámica sociometabólica implica el continuo, constante y sistemático trasvasamiento de las Aguas-Vivas al agua-mercancía. El mundo moderno, el de la valorización del valor, el de la dinámica de la acumulación como imperativo social (geológico y político) está asentado sobre semejante *falla*: falla geológica; falla civilizatoria; falla hidrosocial.

18 Como se ha señalado, desde sus orígenes colonial-modernos, las explotaciones mineras han provocado un innúmero de catástrofes sociohidrológicas, muchas de ellas ocasionadas directamente por fallas y/o rupturas en embalses de abastecimiento y presas de relaves. La ya reseñada de San Ildefonso (1626), caratulada en su momento como “una de las más trágicas en toda la historia de los embalses, que se cobró más de 2000 víctimas” directas (Giody y Serrano, 2000: 60), sería sólo la primera de una larga lista que se extiende hasta el presente. Desde entonces, cabe listar –sólo entre las principales- el derrumbe del dique de relaves de la mina El Soldado (Chile, 1965) que arrasó el pueblo El Cobre, al pie de sus instalaciones; el colapso de la presa de la Planta Otapara (Perú, 1996) cuyos relaves tóxicos cayeron sobre el río Acari afectando a agricultores y ganaderos de la región; el rompimiento de la presa de relaves de Mina Aznalcóllar (España, 1998) que provocó el esparcimiento de más de 5,5 millones de m<sup>3</sup> de barros ácidos sobre más de 40 km aguas abajo del río Agrio; la fractura del tranque de relaves de la mina Cerro Negro (Chile, 2003), ocasionando el derrame de 50 mil m<sup>3</sup> de lodos con metales pesados sobre los cursos de agua de Guayacán (Machado Aráoz, 2012: 455). Hasta inicios de los 2000, la Comisión Internacional de Grandes Presas (INCOLD) y el Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente (PNUMA) REGISTRARON 221 casos de “accidentes” graves con presas de relaves mineros. Sólo entre 1989 y 1999 se reportaron 21 desastres graves (Martínez Casilla, 2003). Sin embargo, las catástrofes más graves de este tipo ocurrieron recientemente, con lo que cabalmente han sido denominados crímenes de Mariana y Brumadinho, sucedidos en 2015 y 2019 respectivamente en el estado brasileño de Minas Gerais y cuyos impactos marcan un vuelco crítico por la envergadura espaciotemporal de sus afectaciones. En el caso de Mariana, el colapso de la *barragem* de Fundão (operada por la minera Samarco, controlada por las empresas Vale SA y BHP Billiton) provocó el desprendimiento violento de más de 50 millones de m<sup>3</sup> de relaves mineros que arrasaron por completo con las localidades de Bento Rodrigues y Paracatú do Baixo, contaminando el Río Doce a lo largo de más de 600 km de recorrido hasta su desembocadura en el Atlántico. En el caso de Brumadinho, a poco más de tres años de Mariana, en enero de 2019, aconteció el rompimiento de la *Barragem de Córrego do Feijão*, también de la minera Vale, con la descarga de 12 millones de m<sup>3</sup> de lodos residuales que ocasionaron la muerte inmediata de 279 personas y la contaminación del río Paraopeba. Una vasta literatura se ha suscitado ya con el objeto de analizar y dar cuenta de los impactos e implicaciones de estos verdaderos crímenes socioambientales (Zhouri et Alt., 2016; Zhouri, 2018; 2023; Acselrad, 2018; Milanez y Losekann, 2016; Zonta y Trocate, 2016; Laschefski, 2020).

## **Coda: Capitaloceno hídrico y la “caída del cielo”**

Potosí está en las nacientes de la mercantilización del agua y la génesis ontológico-política del “*pueblo-mercancía*” (Kopenawa y Albert, 2021). Evoca las raíces más profundas de la “caída del cielo” que aflige nuestras vidas contemporáneas. Así nombra la Era presente el gran sabio yanomami Davi Kopenawa, el “Antropoceno”. Y cabe preguntarse si se puede dar una definición más exacta y esclarecedora. ¿Existe una forma más rigurosamente científica y más profundamente poética de describir y definir el Capitaloceno como el momento geológico y político de la “caída del cielo”?

La máquina de fuego que activó la “civilización industrial” –la sociedad ‘civil’, en realidad, militar-mercantil-, calentó el aire y las aguas; los suelos y los cuerpos. De hecho, antes que la máquina de vapor empezara a calentar la atmósfera, la fiebre de oro y de plata, calentó ciertos cuerpos y forjó con ese calor la subjetividad conquistual protagonista de la convulsión climática del presente.

El calor es velocidad. Acelera los flujos, tanto de las aguas como de los vientos; de las sustancias y los organismos. El calentamiento / aceleración trastorna los flujos y los ritmos hidroenergéticos vitales. El aire y el agua que circulan a mayor velocidad alteran la materialidad de los cuerpos y las interacciones y conexiones entre organismos, los ligamentos de las comunidades bióticas. Hoy, el calor provoca un aumento temporario del agua dulce circulante y, con ella, los procesos y fenómenos meteorológicos que vemos y sufrimos bajo la forma de grandes inundaciones, sequías pronunciadas, tormentas, tornados y ciclones cada vez más frecuentes y violentos.

A una cierta escala, la velocidad es violencia. Más allá de cierto rango, el aumento de la velocidad de circulación –el efecto emblemático del metabolismo industrial del capital-, la aceleración del tiempo / encogimiento del espacio (Harvey, 1998) se torna una fuerza que destruye los lugares habitados; viola los ritmos y flujos que componen la trama de la vida terráquea como totalidad-integrada. La fuerza de la velocidad provoca rupturas en las relaciones; altera las sincronías y quiebra las simbiosis; produce desacoplamientos y destruye complementariedades y circularidades. En suma, al destruir mutualidades y con-vivencialidades, corroe la sociobiodiversidad y la habitabilidad de la Tierra. Tal, nuestro tiempo: calor metálico que erosiona la simpóiesis comunal en la tierra y provoca la caída del cielo.

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# Una aproximación decolonial a las *Zonas de Sacrificio* en Chile

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## Resumen

Proponemos ampliar el debate sobre *zonas de sacrificio* en América Latina a partir del análisis de la lógica colonial que está detrás de las injusticias ambientales, tomando contribuciones desde la ecología política latinoamericana, la geografía crítica y el pensamiento decolonial. Para ello, analizamos el recorrido de este concepto en el continente y en Chile en particular. Desde una metodología mixta, cruzamos datos geográficos y socioeconómicos con información cualitativa obtenida de más de 40 entrevistas a representantes de actores públicos, privados y de la sociedad civil que participan en la política estatal orientada a la recuperación ambiental social de comunidades gravemente afectadas por la contaminación en Chile. Los resultados muestran: la impugnación al término de *zonas de sacrificio* desde quienes utilizándolo para fines de denuncia consideran que legitima la degradación socioambiental e invisibiliza la agencia de las comunidades. Finalmente, damos cuenta de cómo la propia política pública se configura en un dispositivo de violencia ambiental desde el estado y las empresas que desconoce las propuestas de las comunidades para pensar su recuperación e impone sus prioridades que perpetúan el destino de estos territorios al sacrificio.

**Palabras claves:** Zonas de Sacrificio - Chile - Decolonial - Injusticias ambientales

# A decolonial approach to the *Sacrifice Zones* in Chile

## Abstract

We propose to expand the debate on sacrifice zones in Latin America based on the analysis of the colonial logic behind environmental injustices, taking contributions from Latin American political ecology, critical geography and decolonial thought. To do this, we analyze the development of this concept on the continent and in Chile in particular. Using a mixed methodology, we cross-reference geographic and socioeconomic data with qualitative information obtained from more than 40 interviews with representatives of public, private and civil society actors who participate in state policy aimed at the social environmental recovery of communities seriously affected by pollution. in Chile. The results show: the challenge to the end of sacrifice zones from those who use it for complaint purposes consider that it legitimizes socio-environmental degradation and makes the agency of the communities invisible. Finally, we realize how public policy itself is configured into a device of environmental violence from the state and companies that ignores the communities' proposals to think about their recovery and imposes its priorities that perpetuate the destiny of these territories to sacrifice.

**Keywords:** Sacrifice zones - Chile - Decolonial - Environmental injustices

# Uma abordagem decolonial das *Zonas de Sacrifício* no Chile

## Resumo

Propomos alargar o debate sobre as zonas de sacrifício na América Latina, analisando a lógica colonial subjacente às injustiças ambientais, a partir de contributos da ecologia política latino-americana, da geografia crítica e do pensamento decolonial. Para tal, analisamos a trajetória deste conceito no continente e, em particular, no Chile. Utilizando uma metodologia mista, cruzamos dados geográficos e socioeconómicos com informação qualitativa obtida através de mais de 40 entrevistas com representantes de actores públicos, privados e da sociedade civil envolvidos na política estatal de recuperação socioambiental das comunidades gravemente afectadas pela poluição no Chile. Os resultados mostram: a contestação do termo “zonas de sacrifício” por aqueles que o utilizam para fins de denúncia, considerando que ele legitima a degradação socioambiental e invisibiliza a agência das comunidades. Finalmente, mostramos como a própria política pública se configura como um dispositivo de violência ambiental do Estado e das empresas que ignora as propostas das comunidades para pensar sua recuperação e impõe suas prioridades que perpetuam o destino desses territórios ao sacrifício.

**Palavras-chave:** Zonas de Sacrifício - Chile - Injustiça ambiental

# Una aproximación decolonial a las Zonas de Sacrificio en Chile

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## Introducción <sup>1</sup>

La categoría *zonas de sacrificio* toma centralidad como forma de denuncia sobre la degradación ambiental impuesta sobre determinadas comunidades empobrecidas y vulnerables en América Latina y otras partes del mundo en un marco de agudización de la crisis climática y ecológica, y la constatación de los lentos logros ambientales en la agenda global de la última década. El escenario de incumplimientos de acuerdos ambientales internacionales refleja la ausencia de voluntad política para transformar este escenario, mostrando profundas contradicciones entre la evidencia científica sobre el cambio climático y el negacionismo que conlleva la intensificación de las actividades económicas extractivas que agravan la sustentabilidad global.

Algunos hitos considerados como avances a nivel global tales como las reuniones de acuerdo entre las partes (COP) como la Declaración de Río (1992), el Protocolo de Kioto (1997) y el Acuerdo de París (2015), han mostrado ser insuficientes y lentos para revertir los efectos de la crisis y cumplir con los compromisos asociados a la baja de emisiones y la prevención de una desmedida alza de la temperatura a nivel global. Estas medidas inscritas en los objetivos de la Convención Marco de Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático no han resultado exitosas a la hora de frenar la demanda energética (tampoco en su versión verde - energías renovables no convencionales-), generando una serie de conflictos con comunidades, organizaciones campesinas e indígenas en diversas partes del mundo y, en especial, en América Latina.

En el caso de Chile, con el retorno a la democracia en la década de los años 90, y en el marco de acuerdos internacionales se impulsa un proceso de modernización ambiental a través de la Ley de Bases del Medio Ambiente del año 94 (Ley 19.300). Sin embargo, y en un contexto internacional de descarbonización, entre la década de los 90 y el 2000 se autorizó la construcción y funcionamiento de más de 20 termoeléctricas a lo largo del país. En su mayoría termoeléctricas basadas en carbón y petróleo ubicadas en pequeñas bahías, y cuyo funcionamiento estaban asociados a proyectos extractivos mineros. Es durante estas décadas que se comienza a advertir los graves daños y afectaciones a los ecosistemas y con ellos las economías locales de la cual dependían, para luego visibilizarse en los problemas asociados a la salud de las personas aledañas a estos complejos.

El concepto *zonas de sacrificio*, como se analizará a continuación, se convierte en una categoría relevante para comunidades y territorios que denuncian las graves afectaciones generadas por actividades contaminantes y facilitadas por las deficientes normativas ambientales. El término si bien se propone como una categoría descriptiva de lo que sufren determinadas comunidades destinadas a cargar con la contaminación de procesos globales, a nuestro entender también plantea una potencialidad analítica privilegiada para comprender la lógica moderna-colonial que subyace en la producción de espacios/zonas sacrificables por un modelo de desarrollo, crecimiento y progreso nacional-transnacional. En el caso de Chile, se trata de sacrificar a pequeñas bahías-puertos habitadas en su mayoría por pequeñas comunidades dedicadas a la agricultura familiar y campesina

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(Puchuncaví), la olivicultura (Huasco-Región de Atacama) y la pesca artesanal y semi-industrial (Quintero-Región de Valparaíso y Coronel-Región del Bío-Bío). Estas comunidades comparten en las décadas recientes ser víctimas de reiterados desastres nombrados como eventos o accidentes relacionados a intoxicaciones, derrames de hidrocarburos (petróleo, carbón, etc.) y distintas enfermedades y que invisibilizan las graves afectaciones a la vida y su reproducción generadas por actividades asociadas a la producción energética, el funcionamiento de fundiciones y refinerías de minerales, acopio de sustancias tóxicas y peligrosas demandas para estas actividades, así como también las actividades forestales de celulosas. En esta línea seguimos los trabajos de Zhouri respecto a mirar la producción social del desastre, su criticidad y cronicidad. Es decir, como una crisis anunciada cuyos antecedentes científicos y evidencias del deterioro social y ambiental, se presentan como fallas que invisibilizan las negligencias cometidas. De esta forma, se aminora la gravedad de las consecuencias al denominarlos eventos o accidentes, y se desreponsabiliza a las empresas estatales y trasnacionales involucradas en este tipo de desastres. Como sostiene Zhouri, estos conceptos construyen una temporalidad acotada a un antes/después que no hace justicia con el sufrimiento ambiental de estas comunidades y territorios afectados, obstaculizando la comprensión de las dimensiones “críticas y crónicas” del desastre (Zhouri et al., 2023:8; 2018).

En el caso de Chile, las denominadas zonas de sacrificio comparten un patrón similar respecto a concentrar el funcionamiento de termoeléctricas a carbón y petróleo que han generado daños graves a los ecosistemas, las economías locales y la salud de las comunidades que habitan estos territorios. A modo de resumen 27 de las 28 de dichas termoeléctricas se concentran en las 6 comunas denominadas *zonas de sacrificio*<sup>2</sup> (15 de Aes Andes ex Aes Gener, 8 de Engie y 3 de Enel), siendo los responsables de la emisión de 97% de SO<sub>2</sub> (Dióxido de Azufre), 91% de Dióxido de Carbono y Nitrógeno, y del 88% de Material Particulado en estos territorios (Núñez y Aliste, 2020).

Campañas asociadas a las afectaciones de los ecosistemas marinos y terrestres bajo la consigna de “No más zonas de sacrificio” o “Chao Carbón” a principios de la segunda década del siglo XXI el año 2011-2012; así como las posteriores manifestaciones surgidas con los derrames de hidrocarburos (tres grandes derrames generados en la Bahía de Quintero entre 2014-2016), y los continuos varamientos de carbón en la Playa de Ventanas, entre otros; fueron configurando un escenario propicio para protestas y la incorporación del término *zona de sacrificio* en las organizaciones ambientales.

En particular desde finales del 2011, cuando se conocieron en medio de prensa las intoxicaciones de estudiantes y profesores de la Escuela La Greda en la Bahía de Quintero, así como el daño a la pesca artesanal y en particular las mujeres dedicadas a la recolección de algas en Coronel (zona sur-región del Bío Bío), emergerá una serie de estudios toxicológicos y médicos provenientes de diversos campos disciplinares que en los últimos años han sacado a la luz los riesgos exponenciales sobre estas poblaciones y comunidades, principalmente niños y mujeres, vinculando el sacrificio cada vez más a aspectos relacionados a la salud y la calidad de vida de las comunidades.

Cabe señalar que a pesar de la matriz energética común basada en fósiles - carbón y petróleo- asociada al término *zonas de sacrificio*, en la última década el término en Chile se ha extendido para referirse también a otras crisis ambientales y ecológicas como es la crisis hídrica generada por la agroindustria en comunas que han quedado sin agua como el caso de Petorca; los graves impactos contaminación del fondo marino por antibióticos de la industria salmonera en el sur, entre otros casos de comunidades afectadas por actividades extractivas. Son comunidades que comparten no sólo la denuncia al daño ecológico a los ecosistemas y el daño a la salud que generan estos proyectos, sino apuntan a las desigualdades de poder en la toma de decisión entre comunidades, Estado y empresas para trabajar una gobernanza participativa que reconozca mecanismos de participación incidentes sobre el territorio.

2 Entre las primeras comunas incorporadas a estos informes y campañas se cuentan Tocopilla, Mejillones, Huasco, Quintero, Puchuncaví y Coronel. Para un análisis pormenorizado se pueden revisar las páginas de estas fundaciones en <https://chile.oceana.org/>; [www.terram.cl](http://www.terram.cl); [www.chilesustentable.net](http://www.chilesustentable.net). Consultados en 30 de julio de 2024.

Por otro lado, el trabajo de Bolados y Jerez (2019) y Bolados y Sánchez (2017) plantea la idea de *zonas de sacrificio en resistencia*, recogiendo un proceso de acción colectiva desde el que comunidades incorporan el término y a la vez contestan la categoría. Un trabajo que avanza en plantear una perspectiva de género en la denominación *zonas de sacrificio*, mostrando la relación entre violencia ambiental y violencia de género, como dos caras de la misma moneda de un territorio marcado por la división social y sexual del trabajo. Las autoras relevan el papel protagónico, tanto las mujeres y viudas de los “hombres verdes” afectados por la contaminación durante las primeras décadas de la contaminación (ex trabajadores de la fundición y refinería ENAMI), así como de las mujeres adultas y jóvenes que lidian con las enfermedades de sus hijos (durante las intoxicaciones de La Greda el 2011 y de Quintero el 2018), recuperando el término e iniciando una resistencia al mismo (Bolados y Jerez, 2019:149).

Ante estos múltiples desastres en estas pequeñas bahías, el estado chileno implementó el año 2014 un Programa para la Recuperación Ambiental y Social (PRAS) en tres denominadas por la política estatal como comunidades con alta complejidad ambiental<sup>3</sup>. Si bien la normativa ambiental chilena solo reconoce las denominaciones de zona saturada y zona latente para implementar sus planes de descontaminación, el concepto de zonas de sacrificio es recogido por fundaciones y comunidades como una forma de denunciar la gravedad de los daños en sus territorios, pero también para mostrar la complejidad de estos y que no sólo involucran contaminación del aire, principal eje de las acciones de la institucionalidad ambiental chilena. El proceso de construcción de estos programas así como su implementación, fueron objeto de nuestro estudio en tres de las denominadas zonas de sacrificio en Chile. La bahía de Huasco en la región de Atacama en el norte de Chile. La bahía de Quintero, compartida por las comunas de Puchuncaví y Quintero en la zona central y la bahía de Coronel en la Región del Bío Bío, sur de Chile. A partir de una metodología mixta basada en fuentes primarias y secundarias levantadas durante el período 2019-2022, cruzamos datos socio demográficos, geográficos y económicos de cada una de estas comunas con información cualitativa obtenida de más de 40 entrevistas a los miembros de los tres consejos de recuperación ambiental y social.

Los resultados nos permitieron mostrar algunos aspectos centrales asociados a la lógica colonial asociada a las denominadas *zonas de sacrificio*: En primer lugar, la impugnación al término de *zonas de sacrificio* desde quienes utilizándolo para fines de denuncia consideraban que legitimaba la degradación ambiental y social, invisibilizando la agencia de las comunidades y fortaleciendo sus territorios como destino para cargar con la contaminación. La lógica colonial detrás de las injusticias ambientales relevaron que el sacrificio experimentado por estas comunidades les condenaba a un crecimiento de la pobreza basada en la pérdida de sus economías tradicionales y una dependencia progresiva a las actividades económicas informales o subordinadas asociadas a las industrias (trabajos menores, actividades comerciales secundarias, etc.). En particular, la falta de medidas económicas y recursos asociados a hacerse cargo del daño desde lo económico, y la falta de iniciativas para fortalecer las economías locales mostraron una decisión de parte del estado de perpetuar el sacrificio de estas comunidades a una vida tóxica, rodeada de incertidumbres y expuesta a permanentes riesgos.

Un destino, no obstante, resistido por acciones comunitarias de resistencias y estrategias orientadas a la protección del patrimonio cultural y ambiental de sus territorios. En el caso de la Bahía de Huasco, las comunidades comenzaron a resignificar el lugar de la Isla Guacolda donde se instalaron las 5 termoeléctricas y cuyo lugar anteriormente era lugar de peregrinaje. En un contexto de luchas de más de tres décadas, las comunidades buscaron recuperar esta tradición a través del peregrinaje en barcos debido a la imposibilidad

3 El PRAS de Huasco, Quintero-Puchuncaví y Coronel fue aprobado por resoluciones exentas N°1364 del 1 de diciembre de 2017, N° 645 del 10 de julio de 2017 y N°144 del 28 de febrero de 2018 respectivamente, todas ellas del Ministerio del Medio Ambiente. El objetivo principal de esta política pública es “recuperar ambientalmente el territorio y mejorar la calidad de vida de los habitantes de las comunas mediante la identificación, a través de un proceso ampliamente participativo, de los principales problemas sociales y ambientales, planteando opciones de solución que la conviertan, en el mediano y largo plazo, en un área que muestre que es posible la convivencia armónica entre las actividades industriales, el cuidado del medio ambiente y una buena calidad de vida”. Informe Final de Auditoría N° 27/2022 de Contraloría General de la República. Disponible en: <https://www.contraloria.cl/pdfbuscador/auditoria/cf7191025c207057e17fc32e99abe136/html>

Se pueden consultar los PRAS como sus respectivos reglamentos y convenios de los CRAS en la página <https://pras.mma.gob.cl/>

de acceder por tierra. En la Bahía de Quintero compartida por las comunas de Puchuncaví y Quintero, estas buscaron la protección de un geositio relevante como es Quirilluca y donde se pretende instalar un proyecto inmobiliario que duplicaría la población actual de ambas comunas. En la bahía de Coronel y frente a los estragos de las actividades de las termoeléctricas, forestales y pesca industrial; las comunidades y organizaciones se orientan a proteger la deforestación de bosques nativos y a la protección de los humedales.

En segundo lugar, la propia política pública como un dispositivo de violencia estatal ejercida a través de un programa marginal al interior del ministerio de medio ambiente (subsumido en un programa menor orientado a la participación social), sin presupuesto y sin indicadores medibles de las soluciones y medidas que hicieron inviable su ejecución y evaluación a lo largo de su implementación. En este aspecto, tanto la metodología utilizada para levantar estas soluciones y medidas, así como el modelo de participación adoptado por los servicios estatales de medio ambiente dieron cuenta de cómo el espacio era utilizado para imponer la agenda y objetivos del ministerio de medio ambiente, evitando el involucramiento del trabajo interministerial requerido para una recuperación ambiental y social integral.

De este modo, el artículo se estructurará de la siguiente manera. En primer lugar, se describen los distintos usos que ha tenido la categoría zonas de sacrificio en la literatura del Movimiento de Justicia Ambiental estadounidense, así como su difusión en Brasil, Argentina y Chile, con especial énfasis al desarrollo del concepto en este último caso. Posteriormente, desde una perspectiva que retoma estos antecedentes, se dialoga con aportes de la ecología política, la historia ambiental, la geografía crítica y el pensamiento decolonial para proponer un concepto analítico de las zonas de sacrificio ambiental desde las acciones colectivas de recuperación de las comunidades. Finalmente, una última parte recoge los principales resultados asociados a mostrar cómo opera la lógica colonial a través de la política de recuperación ambiental y social, que se configura en el principal mecanismo para perpetuar las desigualdades y las injusticias ambientales. En particular mostrando la lógica colonial del sacrificio que destina a estas comunidades a mantenerse entre las más pobres del país y con mayor evidencia de enfermedades crónicas asociadas a la contaminación. Ante este escenario, las comunidades inician un proceso de impugnación del término de zonas de sacrificio que va desde referirse *zonas de sacrificio en resistencia* y proponer estrategias colectivas para transitar a *zonas en recuperación socioambiental*.

## **El concepto *zonas de sacrificio* en la literatura de la justicia ambiental**

Herederos de los Movimientos de Justicia Ambiental en Estados Unidos y en Brasil en la década de los años 80 y los 90 respectivamente (Bullard y Chavis, 1999; Martínez-Alier, 2004), la literatura actual reconoce aspectos comunes en el concepto *zonas de sacrificio* que lo describen como espacios o lugares donde se concentran daños ambientales producto de contaminación nuclear, petroquímica y/o minera-energética cuyas consecuencias generan graves degradaciones al ecosistema (suelos, agua, calidad del aire, biodiversidad terrestre y marina), así como graves deterioros en la salud y la calidad de vida de los habitantes que viven aledaños a estos polos, parques o complejos. En general, se trata de poblaciones pobres y vulnerables mostrando un importante componente de discriminación racial, étnica y/o de clase, dependiendo las regiones.

En el caso de Estados Unidos, estas zonas tienden a ubicarse principalmente en poblaciones afrolatinas, mientras que, en América Latina en comunidades rurales, campesinas y/o indígenas. Se constituyen en lugares donde se concentran riesgos ambientales producto de proyectos e inversiones que tienden a generar conflictos luego de reiterados desastres ambientales, en gran parte debido a la falta de regulaciones y de fiscalización. En general, se trata de espacios geográficos de alto interés para capitales globales y de interés geopolítico nacional que demanda el emplazamiento de fuerzas militares o policiales que garanticen el control a estos espacios, así como su acceso o control por agentes de seguridad.

La literatura se refiere a estos territorios como aquellos destinados a actividades tóxicas y peligrosas donde las experiencias de vida de las comunidades están permanentemente en riesgo producto de derrames, intoxicaciones, explosiones, radioactividad u otras expresiones de riesgos ambientales que facilitan la generación de desastres de contaminación severos con efectos nocivos al corto, mediano y/o largo plazo (Scott y Smith, 2017; Bolados y Jerez, 2019; Bolados et al., 2021; Juskus, 2023; Svampa y Viale, 2014; Lerner, 2010).

Steve Lerner, a partir del estudio del Movimiento de Justicia Ambiental norteamericano acuña el término para referirse al contexto de postguerra y los primeros efectos de contaminación por radioactividad durante las pruebas nucleares y sus desastres con el uso del uranio en algunas zonas de Estados Unidos. La denominación *zonas de sacrificio nacional* tendrá un componente geopolítico armamentístico importante durante la segunda parte del siglo pasado. Los impactos de los desastres generados por estas contaminaciones químicas provocaron una serie de respuestas de la ciudadanía en Estados Unidos y dan base al Movimiento de Justicia Ambiental a fines de la década de los años 1980, en los que se constata que los lugares donde estos hechos ocurren son habitualmente zonas habitadas por comunidades afroamericanas y empobrecidas. (Lerner, 2010).

La segunda acepción emerge desde contextos latinoamericanos, inicialmente en Brasil y más recientemente en Argentina. Esta acepción es acuñada por Henri Acselrad (2004) define estas zonas como “lugares donde se concentran prácticas ambientalmente agresivas que tienden a afectar en general a la población de mayor vulnerabilidad social” (Acselrad, 2004:4). Esta definición pone de relieve dos aspectos: las decisiones de transformar estos territorios en sede de nuevos proyectos de inversión, y las prácticas de corrupción asociadas a la obtención de autorización o licenciamiento para que estas actividades se instalen.

Las *zonas de sacrificio* entonces, como categoría denunciativa, nos ubican frente a la crítica al modelo de desarrollo o frente a lo que los autores argentinos Svampa y Viale (2014)<sup>4</sup> denominan modelos de *mal desarrollo* (Svampa y Viale, 2014:81). Las decisiones que se tomaron a propósito del desarrollo y el progreso son percibidos y denunciados por comunidades y territorios como la contracara de un modelo de destrucción de sus hábitats; puesto que los indicadores de progreso y crecimiento económico como empleos, mejoras sociales en salud, educación, conectividad y otras propuestas de desarrollo y capacitación desplegadas en estos territorios no son percibidos.

El concepto *zonas de sacrificio* será incorporado en las luchas anti extractivistas para realizar denuncias asociadas a la insustentabilidad del modelo económico centrado en la sobreexplotación intensiva de los bienes naturales comunes, así como la destrucción de los ecosistemas, mostrando las formas extremas de violencia que toman las desigualdades ambientales, no solo entre la división internacional del norte y sur global, sino al interior de los países donde se reproducen estas divisiones. Las zonas de sacrificio serían así los espacios donde se radicalizan las injusticias ambientales. Se trata no sólo de un tipo de espacialización y control territorial (bajo la idea de zona) sino un mecanismo de negación de la posibilidad de reproducción de la vida y la comunidad que habita estos territorios, invisibilizando sus formas de concebir la existencia, la cultura y la economía (Svampa y Viale, 2014: 82-84).

## El concepto de “zonas de sacrificio” en Chile

El concepto *zonas de sacrificio* adquiere protagonismo en Chile durante la segunda década del siglo XXI a partir de su incorporación en las denuncias realizadas por fundaciones y organismos no gubernamentales (Ongs) asociadas a la protección ambiental a través de diferentes informes y campañas mediáticas (entre las principales que podemos nombrar están las fundaciones Chile Sustentable, Terram, Oceana, etc). Los elementos del concepto son incorporados desde la literatura proveniente del Movimiento de Justicia Ambiental de Estados Unidos, reproduciendo en su origen un fuerte componente de contaminación química asociada al daño

4 Ver también el trabajo de Di Risio et al en colaboración con el Observatorio Petrolero Sur (OPSur) (Di Risio et al., 2012).

ambiental de espacios costeros de nuestro país, en particular, contaminación por actividades termoeléctricas basadas en carbón y petróleo.

Como observamos, el desarrollo y difusión del concepto ha estado más cercano a una categoría de carácter reactivo (Folchi, 2020) que ha servido para denunciar e intentar revertir la vulneración extrema de derechos, más que a una categoría técnica, jurídica y/o analítica que permitiese obtener parámetros empíricos para la calificación del tipo, grado y distribución desigual del riesgo ambiental de un territorio en particular. No obstante, como señala Juskus (2023), en el último tiempo el concepto se ha transformado en un “objeto límite”, el cual se ha movido desde el mundo activista para formar parte del lenguaje de académicos, políticos y administradores. A partir de estos trabajos se han observado distintos esfuerzos para dotar a esta categoría de una función explicativa y analítica en torno a las extremas desigualdades socioecológicas que precisan ser analizadas de forma multidimensional e interdisciplinar en el contexto de la actual crisis ecológica.

A efecto de contribuir a profundizar en la dimensión conceptual y analítica del término *zonas de sacrificio*, proponemos una definición preliminar que incorpora una dimensión descriptiva y analítica asociada al potencial de denuncia y visibilización de los graves daños a la salud y una severa degradación ambiental de ecosistemas en comunas costeras del país. En este sentido, esta dimensión del concepto refuerza la crítica a las extremas desigualdades experimentadas en comunas destinadas a concentrar las cargas ambientales de actividades tóxicas y peligrosas que los ponen en permanentes riesgos y los destina a un empobrecimiento progresivo debido a la pérdida de acceso a los bienes naturales que han sustentado sus economías tradicionales (agricultura, olivicultura, pesca). Con un patrón energético común basado en termoeléctricas sustentadas en fósiles contaminantes como carbón y petróleo, -instaladas en la década de los años 90 en Chile-; se trata de territorios con un pasado extractivo en el período desarrollista minero en Chile (años 60), cuyas bahías-puerto se reconfiguran en cuencas de soporte del extractivismo (años 90 en adelante). En particular, el desarrollo portuario de estas comunas les impone un rol geopolítico y económico estratégico para el país, en tanto se configuran en lugares de entrada de sustancias tóxicas y peligrosas requeridas para las actividades minero, energética y forestales.

Desde un punto de vista analítico, la instalación de los complejos o polos minero-energéticos contaminantes en estas bahías-puerto, así como los mecanismos que legitiman su expansión comparten la lógica moderna de un discurso sacrificial sustentado en el desarrollo, el progreso y el crecimiento económico (Reinert, 2018; Bravo, 2021). Aunque en casi todos los casos, la actividad se encuentra asociada a la refinera de cobre (Puchuncaví y Quintero) y hierro (Huasco), gran parte de estos polos están conformados por empresas portuarias, químicas, de gas, pesqueras y/o energéticas cuya actividad considera poco valor agregado a sus procesos. En su mayoría se trata de lugares de acopio de sustancias tóxicas y peligrosas, mientras en Coronel, buena parte de estas actividades son compartidas por actividad comercial en el mismo espacio.

Dichas empresas han ocupado desde su instalación a mediados del siglo XX un lugar importante en el imaginario desarrollista de estas bahías-puerto con discursos sacrificiales que prometen empleo y prosperidad para sus pobladores a cambio de la instalación de actividades contaminantes y peligrosas en sus territorios (Espinoza, 2015)<sup>5</sup>.

En esta definición reconocemos las relevantes contribuciones de los campos de la ecología política, la historia ambiental latinoamericana, así como a los aportes de la geografía crítica y la justicia ambiental, para el análisis de las *zonas de sacrificio* en el continente latinoamericano (Bolados et al., 2021), donde toma especial relevancia el carácter situado de procesos interrelacionados de producción del espacio y de experiencias de sufrimiento ambiental. Sin embargo, el potencial analítico del término que proponemos aquí se nutre de los

5 Paradigmática es la editorial del año 1957 del diario *El Mercurio de Valparaíso* que refleja el discurso sacrificial que antecedió la instalación de la fundición de cobre como primera actividad contaminante en el polo de Quintero-Puchuncaví:

“Los vecinos deben mirar este problema con ánimo patriótico y aceptar algunos sacrificios; de otra manera no se podría instalar la fundición en ninguna parte del país. Las naciones que se han industrializado han aceptado estos sacrificios. Es el precio del progreso. La lluvia es indispensable para la agricultura, pero cuando llueve algunos tienen que mojarse” (*El Mercurio de Valparaíso*, edición de 17 de julio de 1957).

aportes decoloniales y cómo éstos contribuyen a mirar las dimensiones estructurales de las desigualdades que operan en la configuración de espacios cuyos mecanismos impiden que la vida se reproduzca. Ya sea a través de políticas que reproducen la violencia ambiental y agravan el daño a través de la normativa ambiental vigente, es posible comprender las nuevas jerarquías en que el racismo selecciona vidas vivibles y vidas sacrificables. Asimismo, son espacios donde la política pública opera en su mínima expresión y bajo modelos de participación simulados que niegan derechos de participación de las comunidades en la formulación de estrategias de recuperación ambiental y social.

### Una mirada decolonial del término *zonas de sacrificio*

Reconociendo los aportes fundamentales desarrollados por los enfoques de la justicia y el racismo ambiental para analizar el concepto de *zonas de sacrificio* (Bullard y Chavis, 1999; Martínez-Alier, 2004; Acselrad, 2004; Svampa y Viale, 2014), en este artículo proponemos profundizar en una lectura decolonial del término como forma de darle nuevas luces teóricas y conceptuales. En particular, nos interesa mostrar a través de tres casos específicos en Chile, los modos en que se perpetúan las lógicas de dominación histórica bajo la idea de que *sin sacrificio no hay desarrollo*. Concretamente, nos enfocamos en el programa estatal de Recuperación Ambiental y Social que el Estado implementó desde el 2014 en tres comunidades dañadas históricamente por actividades minero-energéticas en el norte, centro y sur del país.

En diálogo con los aportes de la Ecología Política Latinoamericana (Alimonda, 2011, 2017; Martin y Larsimont, 2016), la Geografía Crítica (Raffestin, 2011; Haesbaert, 2013) y del grupo Modernidad/Colonialidad que propone mirar la colonialidad como la configuración de las relaciones subalternas en América Latina desde el hecho colonial (Dussel, 1992; Grosfoguel y Castro-Gomez, 2007), nos interrogamos sobre las formas en que la política estatal posibilita no sólo la invisibilización de las desigualdades socioambientales, sino la subalternidad epistémica y ontológica de estas comunidades costeras gravemente dañadas.

La crítica decolonial contribuye a nuestro parecer a develar las formas de violencia racializada y los mecanismos a través de los cuales se instala un sistema de segregación jerárquico del espacio, y, por ende, de los habitantes de estas comunidades, quienes se ven afectados en sus condiciones para la reproducción de vida, imponiendo una visión geopolítica limitada a la figura de *zona* (Maino et al., 2019). De esta forma se niega e invisibiliza el territorio y se lo restringe exclusivamente a un espacio económico-productivo global (Haesbaert, 2019).

La racialización ocurre como señala Espinoza (2021) a través del no ver, ni asumir los cuerpos que habitan estas comunas, reforzando la idea de parques, complejos o polos que niegan que allí habitan comunidades que se han desarrollado en torno a actividades como la pesca artesanal, la agricultura familiar campesina y el turismo, las cuales se han visto perjudicadas producto de la contaminación de sus ecosistemas y con ello de los recursos que estos proveen. Esto explica que estas zonas no se instalen en cualquier lugar, y si bien busca concentrarse en bahías con muelles, lo que subyace es la negación de esos territorios como espacios del ser, de la vida, de la construcción de hábitat, y de una comunidad con derechos. Se plantea una nueva forma de jerarquizar y marcar cuerpos racializados como superiores y otros como inferiores. Los primeros se asimilan a lo que Fanon (2009) llama la “zona del ser”, aquellos posibilitados de beneficiarse y no afectarse ambiental y socialmente, mientras que aquellos sujetos que viven en el lado inferior de esta línea viven en la “zona del no-ser” proponiéndole como espacios para acumular daños, deterioros y pérdidas producto de la contaminación (Grosfoguel, 2012).

Ninguna de estas zonas es igualmente homogénea, sino que ambas zonas son espacios heterogéneos. Del mismo modo, tampoco poseen necesariamente un lugar específico, sino que existe una posicionalidad de relaciones raciales de poder que ocurre a escala global entre centros y periferias, pero que también ocurre a escala nacional y local contra diversos grupos racialmente inferiorizados, los cuales se encuentran atravesados transversalmente por relaciones de opresión de clase, género, etnia, etc. Es tan profunda la división que la zona

del no-ser desaparece como realidad, se convierte en no existente, y de hecho es producido como no-existente, lo cual significa no existir en ninguna forma relevante o comprensible de ser.

En síntesis, las *zonas de sacrificio*, localizadas en la zona del no-ser, son consideradas como la negación necesaria para la condición de humanidad de cuerpos y territorios privilegiados de la zona del ser. Por lo tanto, los conflictos en estos territorios son administrados y gestionados bajo lógicas distintas, donde la violencia (ecológica, estructural, cultural y epistémica) (Nixon, 2011; Navas et al., 2018) se presenta como regla y solamente en momentos excepcionales se presentan métodos de regulación y emancipación propios de la zona del ser, es decir, métodos no violentos en que se reconocen códigos de derechos humanos/civiles/laborales, relaciones de civilidad, espacios de negociaciones y acciones políticas que reconocen al “Otro” oprimido en su conflicto con el “Yo” imperial (Grosfoguel, 2011, 2012).

Lo anterior se condice con el hecho de que al ubicarse en la zona del no-ser, los saberes y la aplicación del derecho no posee la misma consideración que en otros territorios, siendo negados e invisibilizados por el saber hegemónico (sin formar parte de la construcción y planificación de sus territorios) y el derecho moderno (con fallos judiciales incumplidos y continuas violaciones a derechos humanos fundamentales de la población). Por consiguiente, las *zonas de sacrificio*, al estar epistémica y ontológicamente en la zona del no-ser, son violentadas tanto en el campo de la justicia ambiental, así como en su reconocimiento en tanto persona hombre/mujer/niño/niña digna/digno de reconocimiento epistémico, jurídico y ontológico, lo cual fundamenta (y reproduce) las distintas violencias que sufren estos territorios diariamente (Espinoza, 2021).

## Una aproximación metodológica para el estudio de las *zonas de sacrificio* en Chile

Los resultados que se presentan en este artículo forman parte de un proyecto cuyo objetivo fue analizar las desigualdades socio ambientales de las *zonas de sacrificio* en las bahías-puerto de Quintero, Coronel y Huasco en Chile, a fin de establecer en base a un análisis multicriterio, estrategias e indicadores para su reconversión territorial en zonas de recuperación. Se trabajó con una metodología mixta que integró información cuantitativa, cualitativa, geográfica e histórica con el fin de reconstruir las dimensiones de las desigualdades socioeconómicas, ecológicas, epistémicas y ontológicas para un análisis comparado entre las tres *zonas de sacrificio* ambiental integradas en el Programa para la Recuperación Ambiental y Social (PRAS): Huasco, Quintero-Puchuncaví y Coronel.

Se realizaron un total de 35 entrevistas semiestructuradas a consejeros de la sociedad civil, empresas y representantes del Estado participantes en los PRAS de cada territorio. En total se entrevistaron de forma presencial a 10 consejeros del PRAS de Huasco, 8 consejeros del PRAS de Quintero-Puchuncaví y 17 consejeros del PRAS de Coronel. Además de 2 entrevistas a representantes del programa a nivel nacional. Las entrevistas fueron grabadas y transcritas textualmente.

Por último, se realizó un Análisis Multicriterio basado en el Proceso de Análisis Jerárquico (AHP) junto a consejeros de los PRAS de Quintero-Puchuncaví y Huasco. El mismo ejercicio se realizó junto a organizaciones socioambientales de Huasco, Quintero-Puchuncaví y Coronel (SOS Huasco, CRAS Q-P en Resistencia y Mesa Técnica de Coronel).

Para el AHP se realizó una comparación de pares de forma separada entre las medidas y objetivos integrados en la versión final de cada PRAS, lo cual permite que la priorización resulte de la sumatoria de comparaciones individuales. Esta comparación se realiza mediante la matriz de comparación de Saaty (1997) y que permite, en una escala de 1 a 9 (siendo 1 igualmente preferida y 9 extremadamente preferida) establecer la jerarquía entre las alternativas que, luego de normalizarse, establecen una ponderación de cada dimensión respecto de las demás expresadas porcentualmente.

Producto de la situación de emergencia sanitaria por el COVID-19 para el AHP se diseñó una encuesta remota autoadministrada el año 2020, contando con la capacitación y acompañamiento de integrantes del equipo investigador. Para su ejecución se distribuyó a los consejeros del PRAS en distintos grupos, promoviendo la heterogeneidad interna y representación para cada caso. En el caso de las organizaciones comunitarias la encuesta se realizó al total de sus integrantes, existiendo un acompañamiento del equipo investigador con los referentes de cada organización.

### Dimensiones del análisis. El empobrecimiento social y de la salud invisibilizadas en las zonas de sacrificio

Respecto a la dimensión económica y ecológica que generó la contaminación en estas bahías, los datos de la encuesta socioeconómica CASEN del 2015 y 2017 nos entregan algunos elementos interesantes respecto a los indicadores de pobreza por ingreso y pobreza multidimensional que se contraponen a la idea de desarrollo que traerán las empresas a estas bahías. La pobreza multidimensional que mide dimensiones sociales tales como vivienda y agua sanitizada, seguridad social, educación, entorno y redes, nos plantean que estas comunas se encuentran consideradas como las más pobres al interior de sus respectivas regiones. El caso de Puchuncaví y Quintero resulta ejemplificador, en tanto ella es, de todas las bahías, la que concentra más empresas cuyos capitales nacionales y extranjeros representan un importante porcentaje en el PIB regional y nacional. En contraste a estos datos, la comuna de Puchuncaví alcanza un 27,9% y Quintero de un 26,9% de pobreza multidimensional en su población. Es decir, 1 de cada 3 habitantes es pobre según este último indicador. (ver tabla 1)

**Tabla 1:** Porcentajes de Pobreza por Ingreso y Pobreza Multidimensional regional y comunal según INE 2015 y 2017

Región	Pobreza Ingreso 2015/2017	Pobreza Multidimensional 2015/2017	Comuna	Pobreza Ingreso 2015/2017	Pobreza Multidimensional 2015/2017
III	6,9/7,9	26,3/23,2	Huasco	13/9,7	22,9/17,3
V	10,1/7,1	14/19	Puchuncaví Quintero	15/8,4 15,8/5,3	23,4/27,9 26,7/26,9
VIII	16,2/12,3	16,4/17,4	Coronel	14,5/11,4	15,8/14,5

Fuente: Elaboración propia

En términos cuantitativos, en particular para los períodos de los últimos censos donde ya se estaba implementando el PRAS, los datos muestran que el programa no tuvo mayor impacto sobre la realidad económica de las comunas afectadas. Por el contrario, la pobreza multidimensional (vinculadas a derechos como la salud, la educación, redes, etc). creció, especialmente en la Bahía de Quintero compartida por las comunas de Puchuncaví y Quintero. Uno de los casos más conocidos y de mayor connotación social fueron las intoxicaciones de estudiantes en agosto del 2018, el cual dio lugar a una sentencia inédita de la Corte Suprema.

Desde una perspectiva cualitativa, los consejeros entrevistados constatan transformaciones radicales en las últimas décadas a partir de la instalación y crecimiento desmedido de los polos minero-energéticos en sus territorios. Transformaciones relacionadas con la destrucción del paisaje y sus recursos, de los cuales dependían las economías locales hasta entrados los años 90. Una imagen que surge para representar este cambio es la que recuerda haber sido una zona costera turística tan destacada como la de “Acapulco” en México, la cual debido al daño y la degradación de décadas los convirtió en el “Chernóbil chileno”, refiriéndose al desastre nuclear generado en los años 80 en las cercanías de Ucrania.



“yo viví la parte cuando Puchuncaví aún tenía agricultura, ganadería y vivía, generaba recursos en torno a una agricultura campesina familiar, y mi conexión siempre con el campo fue porque mi papá o mi mamá eran de salir al campo, al cerro, montaña, observar los árboles, les gustaba salir a pillar conejos ...estar dentro del bosque nativo, de la naturaleza, de que te puede proporcionar, de que te cubre, te da abrigo, te da comida, te proporciona agua... Tengo algo en mi cuerpo que yo no pedí tenerlo, entonces ahora resulta que la vida me da tres niños y quiero que se queden aquí, si nosotros somos de aquí, ellos llegaron a destruirnos a nosotros” (E8, consejero de la sociedad civil, Quintero-Puchuncaví).

No obstante, si bien los entrevistados advierten la gravedad de estos daños de parte de las empresas instaladas en sus territorios, en sus imaginarios no está la idea de demandar el cierre de las empresas como tampoco una relocalización de la población circundante. Exceptuando el hecho de estar de acuerdo en la urgencia de sacar las empresas mineras y termoeléctricas a carbón, los consejeros de la sociedad civil del CRAS apelan a buscar mecanismos para compatibilizar las actividades contaminantes y peligrosas con las economías locales a través de mayor inversión en tecnologías limpias que permitan “mejorar o modernizar sus procesos”. En este sentido, se vuelve a observar en el discurso de los consejeros de la sociedad civil cierta lógica sacrificial, la cual justifica un sacrificio por parte de sus comunidades en pos del desarrollo minero-energético del país.

“Es imposible [el cierre de empresas], porque cierras unas empresas como una termoeléctrica ¿cómo le das luz al país? El cobre, cerremos la fundición, pero es el sueldo de Chile. Entonces, no va por ahí yo creo que va por el tema de que las empresas tienen que intervenir sus fuentes de contaminación, encapsularlas” (E3 consejero de la sociedad civil Quintero-Puchuncaví).

Si bien la pérdida de las economías locales era conocida desde los años 80 y 90, ya sea por la afectación de la agricultura por la acidificación de la tierra por SO<sub>2</sub> y Arsénico en Puchuncaví y Quintero; la contaminación del océano en las bahías por los riles lanzados al mar en Huasco y Quintero; o, la contaminación de la pesca industrial con los malos olores y las celulosas en Coronel, este proceso se profundizará a partir de la multiplicidad de nuevos desastres en las bahías, afectando de forma irremediable al turismo (que era una de las principales fuentes económicas que esperan seguir sosteniendo la economía local).

“la gente no quiere venir, o si viene...viene con mucho miedo” (E7, consejero de la sociedad civil, Quintero-Puchuncaví).

La pesca artesanal mostrará bajas sustanciales y la obligación de salir cada vez más lejos a obtener estos recursos marinos, los cuales a su vez estuvieron presionados por la demanda de la industria pesquera de arrastre que solicitó acceder a una mayor cuota de la jibia. Este era el único recurso logrado de mantener en exclusividad por los pescadores artesanales producto de la acción de protesta de un colectivo importante de la Bahía de Quintero (Sindicato de Pescadores S24, el cual nació a raíz de los continuos derrames y del progresivo deterioro ambiental generado del océano), mientras de forma paralela empresas como ENAP contratan a otros pescadores para realizar actividades de limpieza de sustancias tóxicas arrojadas al mar, promoviendo relaciones de dependencia (y división) asociadas a esta actividad de emergencia.

Algo similar ocurrió en la Bahía de Huasco, la cual producto de la minería de hierro y las 5 termoeléctricas instaladas en su territorio, generaron una contaminación del fondo marino por los relaves tirados al mar que diezmó considerablemente la actividad pesquera. Aún más crítico fue la situación de la olivicultura, principal actividad económica en Huasco durante el siglo XX, la cual había generado una movilidad social ascendente reconocida y valorada por las familias que se dedicaban al cultivo y comercialización de aceitunas y aceites.

En el caso de Coronel, sus comunidades fueron testigos de la pérdida del acceso a lo que fueron recursos sociales y recreativos importantes como las playas ahora ocupadas por un paisaje y una infraestructura con dos polos de gran magnitud que les impide tener acceso a la costa.

“Coronel no está resfriado, ...Coronel no tiene pulmonía, Coronel tiene cáncer, ese es el diagnóstico que tenemos hoy en día, y la situación es realmente catastrófica...el principal responsable es el Estado. El año 94 se hizo el cierre definitivo de las minas a carbón. Y acá había que generar trabajo...pero se hizo sin ninguna planificación. Estamos cercados, no tenemos acceso al mar, ha sido un estado ausente en la fiscalización” (E6, consejero de la sociedad civil, Coronel).

Como refiere la literatura de la justicia ambiental y la ecología política, la población tiende a visibilizar la problemática ambiental una vez que ésta se hace evidente en la salud de la población. El sufrimiento ambiental que genera la incertidumbre sobre si estoy o no contaminado, de qué y cómo puedo evitarlo, son parte de las dificultades para desnaturalizar la situación y generar acciones colectivas de rechazo a esta situación (Auyero y Swistun, 2008). En las bahías-puerto analizadas se pudo advertir el daño en el aire y los ecosistemas luego de décadas de exposición; las comunidades empezaron recién a percatarse con los daños y afectaciones a la salud de la población producto de la proliferación de enfermedades y episodios de intoxicaciones producto de la emanación de sustancias contaminantes hacia la población:

“nosotros íbamos a la famosa Playa Papagayo. Era exquisita, había días que se asomaba una espuma y uno como era chico jugaba con la espuma, y resulta que después tú salías llena de pintitas con petróleo. Uno no le daba importancia, era una espuma y como niño uno jugaba, entonces ya de ahí, ahora con los años con todo esto que pasó [conflictividad ambiental en el territorio] hace unos años, uno sabe lo que está pasando, pero no sabe qué hacer porque por ejemplo, sin ir más lejos ahora mis nietas de repente llegaban del colegio con repentino dolor de cabeza, que le duele la guatita...la garganta le molestaba tú te dabas cuenta ese sabor dulzón que se sentía en las mañanas...hay muchas cosas que no se hablan...porque vivido de alguna forma tú te incorporas y para ti pasa a ser algo más...como que de repente te duele muy seguida la cabeza y es un dolor sin explicación, el estómago, las náuseas. Entonces tú sales y aspiras, si te ingresa al cuerpo, se habitúa en uno, yo tengo ahora una nieta que le hicieron un examen y ahora está con problemas, tiene arsénico y mientras los exámenes no sean hechos por [el Ministerio de] Salud no son válidos” (E6, consejero de la sociedad civil, Quintero-Puchuncaví).

Las primeras acciones y advertencias por el daño de la contaminación en la salud de la población serán de mujeres en la década del 90. De la lucha pionera de una profesora en Huasco surgiría la primera norma primaria de calidad del aire en Chile el año 92. En ese mismo período, acciones de denuncia en la Bahía de Quintero exigen la puesta en marcha del primer Plan De Descontaminación en Chile y su posterior declaración como zona saturada el año 93.

En la Bahía de Quintero, aunque ya en la década de los 80 se conoce la contaminación sobre ex-trabajadores mineros que llegaron a construir y trabajar en la fundición y refinería de cobre en la década del 60, sus casos se harían públicos recién a mediados de los años 90, siendo reconocidos por la prensa nacional bajo la denominación de “hombres verdes”. Trabajadores en ese entonces de la Empresa Nacional de pequeña Minería -ENAMI-, comienzan a advertir los efectos de las enfermedades respiratorias en sus compañeros, atribuyéndole como causa de muerte a la contaminación generada por la luego convertida ENAMI en la Corporación Nacional del Cobre -CODELCO-. Estos conformarán la primera organización de ex trabajadores de ENAMI recién el año 2006, una vez que varios de ellos habían fallecido por enfermedades respiratorias y oncológicas (Bolados y Jerez, 2019).

La muerte de varios de ellos generó la aparición de una organización de mujeres conocidas como “las viudas de los hombres verdes”, quienes judicializaron el caso a fin de obtener informes de contaminación de sus ya ex esposos. Solicitaron exhumar a 18 de los fallecidos, cuyos resultados entregados por el Instituto Médico Legal ratificaron la presencia de metales pesados en los cuerpos, principalmente cobre. Sin embargo, los informes fueron enfáticos en señalar que no necesariamente la presencia de estos metales eran el factor de muerte.

Pese a esta realidad, la inflexión en los episodios de protesta contra la contaminación se producirá con los primeros episodios de intoxicaciones en la escuela La Greda el año 2011, que junto a Maitenes representan las

zonas más afectadas de acuerdo a los estudios que comienzan a conocerse en Puchuncaví. Estos hechos fueron de amplia difusión pública y generaron una activación inédita que costó la caída de un proyecto de ampliación de la fundición de CODELCO. Ante las denuncias de apoderados, autoridades y grupos ambientalistas de la zona, la empresa se comprometió a trasladar la escuela a nada más que dos kilómetros de su ubicación actual. Estas intoxicaciones también se conocieron en Coronel donde se inician estudios que fueron igualmente dilatados y deslegitimados, impidiendo avanzar en constatar qué es lo que los contamina, cuestión parecida ocurre con los estudios asociados a los riesgos de muerte en menores de la comuna de Huasco.

En este contexto y bajo la conmoción que significó la afectación de estudiantes y menores de edad, la comunidad comenzó a presionar por más estudios sobre la contaminación. El 2013 se realizó un primer estudio sobre contaminación de aire, suelo y agua, en las cuales colegios y consultorios resultaron con los más altos índices de metales pesados (CEA 2013; CENMA, 2013; PGS, 2015). A partir de estudios toxicológicos, las comunidades advierten que comienza a crecer exponencialmente la demanda de escuelas especiales. En particular, cada vez más diagnósticos de espectro autistas y otras dificultades asociadas al desarrollo y aprendizaje de sus hijos e hijas. Paralelamente, las mujeres de Quintero y Puchuncaví se ponen en contacto con el Dr. Andrei Tchernitchin, médico perteneciente al Colegio Médico y a la Facultad de Medicina de la Universidad de Chile, quien publica trabajos asociados a la relación entre contaminación por arsénico y metales pesados con los problemas reproductivos en mujeres y su potencial heredable (Tchernitchin y Tchernitchin, 1992). Un estudio internacional en Huasco releva los altos índices de mercurio en mujeres en edad reproductiva (IPEN, 2017), y en Coronel evidencia sobre arsénico en menores de escuelas cercanas a las termoelectricas<sup>6</sup>.

Diversos estudios fueron aportando evidencia científica de la contaminación del mar por emisarios (aguas no tratadas) lanzados por la empresa sanitaria en Coronel (CEA, 2016), la pérdida casi total de la biodiversidad marina en el sector de la costa de Huasco por la eliminación de los desechos de la minera de hierro (Viviani et al., 2021), y los permanentes y continuos varamientos de carbón y derrames de hidrocarburos en la Bahía de Quintero por la Empresa Nacional del Petróleo que ocurrieron entre el 2014 y 2016. La concentración de casi 20 empresas tóxicas y peligrosas concentradas en la Bahía de Quintero (compartida por las comunas de Puchuncaví y Quintero), culminará con una intoxicación masiva en agosto del 2018, afectando principalmente a niños y jóvenes de ambas comunas por sustancias aún desconocidas. Las comunidades afectadas iniciaron en este contexto procesos judiciales, tanto en los tribunales nacionales como fue el fallo inédito de la Corte Suprema que reconoció como responsables de la contaminación al Estado y las empresas allí existentes, estableciendo 15 medidas a cumplir por estas entidades, las cuales presentan a la fecha un importante incumplimiento (Timm y Donoso, 2019). Paralelo a este proceso en instancias nacionales, organizaciones como las Mujeres de Zonas de Sacrificio en Resistencia de Puchuncaví y Quintero, judicializa la situación a nivel internacional en las Naciones Unidas en Ginebra en diciembre del 2018 en el marco del Examen Periódico Universal (EPU), y un año después en la reunión de la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH).

La incertidumbre por los riesgos aparece como un tema central en la preocupación de los consejeros de la sociedad civil en los PRAS, incertidumbre que tiende a transformarse en acciones de visibilización y judicialización cuando se tienen estudios. No obstante, estos experimentan permanentes descritos e invalidaciones por el Estado y las empresas, bajo la expresión “ese estudio no sirve”, citando un estudio de la Universidad de Chile (Muñoz et al, 2018) de Paulina Pino (E2, consejero de la sociedad civil, Huasco) o el incumplimiento a medidas dictadas por el máximo Poder Judicial. El estudio de la Universidad Católica reciente que muestra las posibilidades de enfermedades mayores que el promedio nacional generó un impacto que es compartido por el resto de los consejeros que lo nombra (Chile Sustentable, 2019). Así como ven que los estudios tienden a caer en descrédito, estos han ido constituyendo un soporte para demostrar la evidencia

6 <https://resumen.cl/articulos/isp-confirma-14-ninos-7-adultos-escuela-coronel-estan-contaminados-metales-pesados>. Consultado en 30 de julio de 2024.

junto a otras iniciativas levantadas desde la sociedad en conjunto a comunidades científicas comprometidas con el territorio (Madrid et al., 2022, entre otros).

### Dimensiones del análisis. Perpetuando la lógica del sacrificio a través de la política de recuperación ambiental y social (PRAS)

Pese a contar con antecedentes respecto al deterioro en las distintas dimensiones ecológicas, económicas y sociales de las *zonas de sacrificio*, su progresivo agravamiento fue mostrando las negligencias institucionales guiadas a transformar la vida de estas comunidades. En particular, el fracaso del Programa para la Recuperación Ambiental y Social (PRAS) propuesto en el segundo gobierno de Bachelet (2014-2018), cuyo objetivo era revertir la crisis ambiental y reparar los daños en las bahías-puerto de Huasco, Puchuncaví-Quintero y Coronel. En este sentido, junto a la implementación paulatina de este programa se observará el crecimiento de la conflictividad debido al recrudecimiento del desastre generado por nuevos proyectos contaminantes en estos territorios, como lo evidencian los derrames ocurridos en el periodo 2014-2016 y las intoxicaciones de más de 1000 estudiantes de la bahía Quintero a finales de 2018, lo cual no sólo generó un profundo impacto en el territorio, sino que activó un proceso de judicialización que culminó con el fallo de la Corte Suprema el 2019 antes reseñado<sup>7</sup>.

Desde la propia institucionalidad aparecerán las primeras evaluaciones negativas al PRAS, planteando deficiencias estructurales asociadas a no cumplir su objetivo de generar una recuperación ambiental y social de estas comunas. De hecho, se presentarán importantes críticas a la metodología de priorización IGO (Importancia y Gobernabilidad) del PRAS, la cual en testimonio de los consejeros de la sociedad civil resultaría irrelevante al priorizar prácticamente la totalidad de medidas como acciones inmediatas o retos (ver tabla 2):

**Tabla 2:** Priorización medidas PRAS en base a metodología IGO

Categoría IGO	Priorización PRAS Huasco	Priorización PRAS Q-P	Priorización PRAS Coronel
Acciones inmediatas	17 (53%)	114 (77%)	99 (87%)
Retos	10 (31%)	29 (20%)	7 (6%)
Menos urgente	2 (6%)	5 (3%)	6 (5%)
Innecesarias	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Sin priorizar			1 (1%)

Fuente: Elaboración propia a partir de los PRAS de los tres territorios.

El Proceso de Análisis Jerárquico (AHP) realizado junto a consejeros y consejeras del CRAS de Quintero-Puchuncaví y de Coronel el año 2020 nos permitió obtener una nueva priorización de los objetivos y medidas (integradas en los objetivos) que componen actualmente el Programa para la Recuperación Ambiental y Social (PRAS) de estas comunas. En este sentido, pudimos encontrar datos que confirmaban la inconformidad en la priorización expresada por los consejeros del CRAS, ya que en los objetivos en que se observa menor priorización para los consejeros, son los que poseen un mayor cumplimiento, existiendo en contraste un bajo nivel de cumplimiento en los objetivos de mayor prioridad.

Cabe señalar que las distintas medidas y objetivos no se encuentran distribuidos de forma equitativa en los componentes y dimensiones que estructuran el Programa para la Recuperación Ambiental y Social (PRAS). No obstante, sumar la priorización que poseen los objetivos del PRAS, nos permite obtener una referencia de la priorización de cada componente al interior del PRAS. En este sentido, se puede observar que desde el CRAS

<sup>7</sup> Ver fallo y sus medidas en: <https://observatoriopio.cepal.org/es/jurisprudencia/sentencia-la-corte-suprema-chile-rol-num-5888-2019>. Consultado en 30 de julio de 2024.

de Quintero-Puchuncaví existe una mayor priorización a objetivos de la dimensión social con un 52,9% frente al 47,1% que poseen los objetivos de la dimensión ambiental. Por el lado de los componentes del programa, podemos observar que los objetivos del componente “Sociedad” suman la mayor priorización con un 24,6%; le sigue el componente “Aire, ruido y olores” con un 18,7%; el componente “Agua” con un 15,9%; y, el componente “Infraestructura” con un 14,3%, por nombrar los principales

Mientras que en el CRAS de Coronel podemos observar existe una mayor priorización a objetivos de la dimensión social con un 65% frente al 35% que poseen los objetivos de la dimensión ambiental. En su interior, los objetivos del componente “Sociedad” suman la mayor priorización con un 22,5%; le sigue el componente “Infraestructura” con un 19,5%; el componente “Salud” con un 18,8%; el componente “Aire, ruido y olores” con un 16,6%, por nombrar los principales.

En este marco, la evaluación del nivel de cumplimiento a partir de la nueva priorización realizada junto a integrantes del CRAS muestra en Quintero-Puchuncaví un nivel de cumplimiento del 29 % de las medidas y objetivos propuestos en el PRAS, mientras que en Coronel llega al 40% de nivel de cumplimiento. En el caso de Huasco, si bien el proceso fue positivo por los consejeros de la sociedad civil, estos se mostraron permanentemente críticos respecto al espacio del CRAS. Sin embargo, consideraron pertinente tener representantes de las organizaciones ambientales en su interior a fin de ampliar el ámbito de injerencia y conocimiento de los proyectos en el territorio. Destaca en este sentido, que los consejeros de este PRAS promovieron de manera sustancial la norma secundaria de calidad del agua que era de las prioridades más sentidas de esta y las otras comunidades afectadas.

El mismo ejercicio realizado junto a organizaciones comunitarias de Quintero-Puchuncaví, Huasco y Coronel muestra una evaluación más crítica sobre el PRAS con un 12% de cumplimiento en el primer caso, 19,4% en el segundo y un 27,6% en el último caso. (ver tabla 3)

**Tabla 3:** Nivel de cumplimiento PRAS en base a AHP

Objetivo General PRAS	Recuperar ambientalmente el territorio y mejorar la calidad de vida de los habitantes de las comunas		
	Huasco	Quintero-Puchuncaví	Coronel
CRAS	No participaron	39,1%	38,5%
Organización Comunitaria	28%	12%	27,6%

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Por otro lado, la propuesta de ser una instancia de gobernanza ambiental multisectorial, en general no se logra, configurándose en un espacio coordinado y conducido predominantemente por el Ministerio de Medio Ambiente a través de sus Secretarías Regionales Ministeriales (SEREMI). Esto no sólo implica el protagonismo de la agenda de este sector, sino también la ausencia de otros actores claves como son el sector minero, económico y social. La ausencia en los CRAS de ministerios como el Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, Economía o Hacienda dan cuenta de su desconexión (y ausencia de coordinación) respecto a las complejas consecuencias socioambientales que tienen en las bahías la contaminación con indicadores que revelan un crecimiento exponencial de la pobreza por ingreso y multidimensional.

Si bien el PRAS ha trascendido el mandato de presidentes de distinto signo político -la socialista Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018), el derechista Sebastián Piñera (2018-2022), y actualmente el frenteamplista Gabriel Boric (2022-)- su desarrollo no ha estado exento de polémicas con evaluaciones negativas tanto de las comunidades que no ven mayores avances en sus territorios, así como de reparticiones y servicios estatales que han evaluado negativamente el diseño del PRAS. En particular, se han esgrimido diversas críticas en torno al diseño que estructura las etapas

de elaboración, implementación, seguimiento y evaluación de esta política pública, el cual no ha contribuido a la consecución de los complejos y ambiciosos objetivos planteados (Rogers, 2020; Espinoza, 2022).

Al respecto la evaluación realizada por la Dirección de Presupuesto (DIPRES) del Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia para el proceso de formulación presupuestaria del año 2021 objetó técnicamente al PRAS. En dicho informe se señalan importantes deficiencias en términos de atingencia (pertinencia del diseño del programa para resolver el problema o la necesidad, en relación a la población que se ve afectada por dicho problema), consistencia (relación entre el diseño planteado y su posterior ejecución, analizada a partir de la definición de indicadores, del sistema de información y los gastos planificados) y coherencia (relación o vínculo entre sus objetivos, población a atender y su estrategia de intervención) del programa<sup>8</sup>. Para Rogers (2020) la deficiencia más grave se ha encontrado en la Fase V de Implementación y Seguimiento, ya que no está estipulado claramente cómo se llevará a cabo dicha fase. En este sentido, el programa carece de una estrategia claramente definida con acciones y planes específicos; y de un sistema riguroso de indicadores que permita cuantificar los avances e impactos de las soluciones y del programa íntegro.

Estas críticas se han visto igualmente acompañadas por la opinión de diversos consejeros de la sociedad civil en el CRAS, quienes han denunciado las dificultades para garantizar una participación efectiva y vinculante en el desarrollo del PRAS. En este sentido, Espinoza (2022) ha dado cuenta de la existencia de una gobernanza jerárquica y centralizada en el CRAS, donde si bien se valora la incorporación de diversos sectores de la sociedad civil, el Estado y las empresas; la toma de decisiones permanece centralizada en el ejecutivo, derivando en una participación consultiva de las comunidades, las cuales no cuentan con las herramientas necesarias para fiscalizar e incidir en las distintas etapas del proceso de recuperación ambiental y social de sus territorios (Panez et al., 2023).

En Coronel, y, en particular los y las consejeros del PRAS, remiten a un proceso distinto al observado en Quintero-Puchuncaví y Huasco. En cuanto las autoridades encargadas del PRAS supieron canalizar de mejor forma las demandas de los diversos actores y actrices del territorio, lo cual se podría asociar a la baja en la conflictividad y el mejoramiento de los indicadores anteriormente mencionados. En parte, esto puede atribuirse a que la Secretaría Ministerial del Medio Ambiente (SEREMI), a diferencia de sus pares en Huasco y Quintero-Puchuncaví, tenía experiencia en un programa de recuperación inédito en el país como fue el primer Plan de Recuperación Ambiental de Talcahuano (PRAT), el cual se realizó a fines de los 90 en un contexto de reconversión productiva de la población producto del cierre de las carboneras. Esto fue un factor gravitante, así como la participación de un sector importante de las principales empresas involucradas en la comuna.

A su vez, la historia sindical de Coronel cuya presencia de sindicatos de miles de pescadores, algueras y mariscadores generó una dinámica capaz de consensuar las propuestas y los caminos de la recuperación ambiental. No obstante, y en particular desde el municipio que se negó a participar en el proceso, múltiples actores y actrices de las organizaciones socioambientales y ecológicas del territorio son críticas del espacio PRAS. En particular, a la hora de evaluar el daño a la salud que fueron dejando algunos hechos invisibilizados como son los hombres del asbesto que se vieron afectados por la remoción de las cenizas de las termoeléctricas.

## A modo de cierre

Desde la perspectiva de la crítica moderno/colonial que proponemos, el término *zonas de sacrificio* permite entender no sólo el racismo y la injusticia ambiental, sino los mecanismos de negación e invisibilización de la existencia de estas comunidades. Invisibilizados como territorios y delimitados a zonas, donde la contaminación destruyó las economías locales empobreciendo económicamente a los habitantes de estas comunidades. Quienes a su vez ven destruidas sus economías por el daño a sus ecosistemas, son despojados

8 Ver más en: [http://www.dipres.cl/597/articles-212516\\_doc\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.dipres.cl/597/articles-212516_doc_pdf.pdf). Consultado en 30 de julio de 2024.

de sus historias e identidades, siendo negados sus derechos fundamentales como el derecho a vivir en un ambiente libre de contaminación como señala la legislación actual, o el derecho a la salud cuya evidencia muestra la prevalencia de enfermedades, especialmente en grupos como niños, mujeres y adultos mayores. Finalmente, el propio Programa para la Recuperación Ambiental y Social (PRAS) implementado, en tanto un programa marginal e irrelevante en el organigrama de un ministerio (de por sí, uno de los más débiles al interior del gabinete ministerial) que lo subordina en su estructura a un subprograma del área de participación ciudadana, reafirman la idea estatal de que en estas comunas no hay más vida que la que las empresas generan. Las prácticas tanto estatales como empresariales refuerzan la idea de un no lugar para la vida, en la cual solo es posible una vida contaminada y degradada.

Los discursos, prácticas, representaciones y acciones que realizan los actores y actrices que participan del PRAS revelan que si bien esta política pública visibiliza el daño que generan las actividades contaminantes, peligrosas y tóxicas concentradas en ciertas comunidades, también perpetúan lógicas de subalternidad imponiendo un modelo de gestión, participación y gobernanza que niega la agencia de los y las actores locales. De esta manera, tanto actores de la sociedad civil, de las empresas, como del Estado, si bien encuentran en el PRAS una forma de plantear, mostrar, gestionar y denunciar la problemática, éste a su vez inhabilita su agencia, así como estigmatiza al territorio, inhibiendo las posibilidades colectivas de articularse frente a un modelo ambiental que impone un sistema de participación regulado y centralizado.

En este sentido la colonialidad del término radica en que estos complejos no sólo no generan desarrollo económico, sino que profundizan los daños. Las políticas públicas no sólo no recuperan social y ambientalmente estos territorios, más bien profundizan el desempoderamiento social generando condiciones que restringen la organización y activación colectiva. Esto se expresa no sólo en los limitados recursos del Estado para la recuperación social y ambiental de estos territorios degradados por el modelo extractivista, principalmente minero energético en estas comunas, sino también la falta de voluntad para hacer efectivo resoluciones y fallos como han sido los de la Corte Suprema del 2019, así como otros más recientes que ratifican los incumplimientos de empresas estatales y privadas. Estas lógicas de subalternidad se reproducen igualmente en los espacios de participación como los Consejos de Recuperación Ambiental y Social (CRAS) a través de mecanismos de funcionamiento del espacio que impone la agenda del ministerio sin convocar a los actores relevantes para un cambio en la situación de estos territorios. Sin mecanismos de participación vinculante, la participación no sólo no permite avanzar de manera sostenida y estructural que favorezcan una recuperación social y ambiental, sino que legitiman los mecanismos jerárquicos de participación con el objeto de priorizar la agenda gubernamental sin afectar la agenda privada que presiona por nuevos proyectos en los mismos territorios.

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# Movimientos hacia una antropología del gestionar: Introducción al dossier

Movimentos em direção a uma antropologia do “gestionar”:  
Introdução ao dossiê

Movements towards an anthropology of “managing”:  
Introduction to the dossier

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“Leí esta literatura como Darwin dice que leía cuando estaba trabajando en sus teorías sobre el origen de las especies, anotando todo aquello que no lograba comprender”.

Ruth Benedict (2006 [1946])

## I.

Este *dossier* surge de experiencias de pesquisa articuladas por preocupaciones analíticas y ético-metodológicas comunes. Realizamos tentativas sucesivas y traslapadas de conocer y dar a conocer las maneras en las que se van neutralizando nuestras resistencias a través de acciones gubernamentales no tan espectaculares, pretendidamente bien intencionadas, y con frecuencia en nombre de la “protección”. Estas actuaciones constituyen lugares fértiles para entender los modos de dominación administrativos en la contemporaneidad.

Pasamos de una problematización de la “dimensión protectora” de acciones estatales destinadas a determinados segmentos poblacionales (jóvenes, niños/as, adolescentes, mujeres), a la puesta en examen de la fórmula “buenas prácticas” tal como fuera implantada en Córdoba, Argentina, en diversos ámbitos sociales y gubernamentales (Lugones & Tamagnini, 2019). Así, venimos proyectando una antropología del gestionar como espacio de indagación donde se intersectan preocupaciones sobre las pedagogías de gobierno y los ejercicios de poder estatal(izados).

Con la expresión “gestionar” queremos llamar la atención sobre actuaciones estatales/estatalizadas en tanto acciones sobre acciones, y a su cristalización en reglas legales, formatos, formularios o mandatos de gobierno. Insistimos en la importancia de estudiar las gestiones etnográficamente, a través de trabajos de campo focalizados en distintos locus empíricos, aunados por instrumentos analíticos y convicciones políticas compartidas. Tomamos como punto de partida la idea-fuerza del antropólogo brasileño Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima (2002:16) acerca del “gestar” y “gestionar” (*gestar y gerir*) para aprehender matices en ejercicios de poder que “gestan”, por su impronta pedagógica al enseñar a ser y hacer, y “gestionan”, aun cuando las administraciones sean débiles y no por ello menos eficaces en su capacidad de control.

Desarrollamos estas aproximaciones en proyectos de investigación, intervención y extensión universitaria que sostenemos, con reformulaciones, desde hace varios años. El proyecto “Antropología de las Gestiones en la Córdoba Contemporánea” (2018-2023) subrayó la ubicuidad de la categoría “gestión” en tanto fórmula asociada a prácticas gubernamentales, períodos o mandatos de gobierno y prácticas administrativas de diversa índole. A través de observaciones etnográficas estudiamos las (re)producciones simbólicas de agentes y agencias estatales, privilegiando ejercicios de poder vinculados a la gestión cultural.

Acerca de la intervención, participamos en el programa gubernamental ImpaCT.AR, que apunta a resolver problemas sociales, a través de proyectos de investigación, que en nuestro caso están dedicados a estudiar violencias de género y masculinidades, y la promoción de derechos para personas mayores en la provincia de Córdoba (2021-2024).

En materia de extensión, el proyecto “Aportes etnográficos a la consolidación de personerías socio-político-culturales entre colectivos ‘artistas’ locales” (2021-2023) permitió conocer actuaciones administrativas que implican la interacción —más o menos, coordinada— entre activistas y agentes estatales en la construcción de escenas artísticas y demandas políticas (Tamagnini, Lugones & Díaz, 2023).

Todos estos trabajos fueron avalados y financiados por el Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación de la Nación y la Secretaría de Ciencia y Tecnología de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, y desarrollados en el contexto del Área de Ciencias Sociales del Centro de Investigaciones de la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades (UNC).

Mencionar esas apuestas es crucial, ya que fue allí que se forjaron preguntas de investigación y maneras de trabajo de campo: v.g., acompañar etnográficamente la Escuela de Igualdad de la Provincia de Córdoba reforzó las inquietudes sobre la centralidad de lo pedagógico en los actos de gobierno. Crear proyectos de extensión mostró cómo se (re)construye, en la universidad pública, la ficción de compartimentos estancos entre agentes universitarios y los llamados extrauniversitarios; representación tan extendida como la creencia en una supuesta “academia” desconociendo que, en nuestras latitudes, tanto investigadores como administrativos trabajamos como empleados estatales. Al mismo tiempo, tales experiencias suscitaban cuestionamientos ético-políticos acerca de cómo aportar a una crítica, democrática y empíricamente fundada, de planes y programas que parecieran indiscutibles en virtud de sus presuntos caracteres técnicos, y de su remisión al horizonte de derechos humanos. Se trata de formas de gobierno que resultan incuestionables por considerarlas benéficas, respecto de las cuales consideramos preciso escuchar a sus gestores y destinatarios.

La iniciativa de este *dossier* reconoce también como antecedentes las conversaciones que se dieron en dos grupos de trabajo en congresos científicos. En 2020, coordinamos el simposio “Gestiones y prácticas de gobierno en clave antropológica” en el “VI Congreso de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Antropología: Desafíos emergentes: Antropologías desde América Latina y el Caribe”. Allí, convocamos a analizar “gestiones” considerando su función pedagógica ínsita y sus efectos en la generación de subjetividades/sujeciones. En 2021, dimos continuidad a esos diálogos en el “XII Congreso Argentino de Antropología Social”. Esas instancias expandieron discusiones teóricas y ejercicios comparativos entre distintos mundos de referencias: relaciones

entre ONG y agencias estatales, políticas de cuidados destinadas a las infancias, tecnologías de gobierno neoliberales, ejercicios tutelares sobre personas y cosas, y rutinas administrativas en oficinas estatales. Aquellos intercambios se materializaron en algunos de los artículos que componen el presente dossier.

## II.

Entre los puntos de apoyo de esta antropología del gestionar está la impugnación que realiza Foucault (2014 [1976]) al modelo jurídico de análisis del poder, en favor de un entendimiento productivo que se detiene en relaciones atravesadas por técnicas de saber, operaciones de normalización y dispositivos de control, de conductas y prácticas. Nuestras indagaciones recuperan también sus señalamientos relativos a la necesidad analítica de un descentramiento del “Estado” para pensar la gubernamentalidad en un sentido amplio y procesual, en tanto forma de poder orientada a regular los cuerpos y las vidas (Foucault, 2014 [1976]:132). Consideramos los procesos de subjetivación como pliegues de procedimientos de sujeción (Foucault, 2016 [1980]); y retomamos a Butler (2001) para captar las íntimas vinculaciones entre las experiencias de sujeción y cómo se conforman sujetos (de estado, de género, de derecho). Asimismo, recusamos considerar al estado con mayúscula y en singular, a raíz de la crítica al “fetichismo del Estado” que realiza Taussig (1995). Esto permite problematizar al estado como unidad coherente y autoevidente, y observar un conjunto de prácticas cotidianas consolidadas institucionalmente.

También es basal la enseñanza de Geertz en *Negara* (2000 [1980]), cuando llama la atención sobre el ceremonial estatal y sostiene que, lejos de ser un epifenómeno, la pompa es el motor gracias al cual el estado adquiere su fuerza. Es el estado mismo el que se manufactura allí, en esos rituales, en el sentido de esplendor, exhibición, dignidad, presencia, y en tanto gobierno, soberanía, dominio, control. La dimensión performática del estado nación, tal como es postulada por Blázquez (2012), refiere a las tecnologías dramáticas puestas en juego en instancias destacadas y brillantes que materializan lo estatal. Nuestra torsión consiste en explorar rituales minúsculos, quizás más opacos, bajo esta misma premisa de la performatividad de las actuaciones gubernamentales.

En este enfoque, se trata tanto de observar prácticas de gestión para ver cómo acciona “el estado”, como de mostrar que en tales gestiones se estatizan, configurándose, relaciones de interdependencia social, convenciones y estilos de gobierno en proceso sociopolíticos y culturales continuos, inacabados y cotidianos.

Utilizamos el verbo “gestionar” para enfatizar el dinamismo presente en actos como manejar, tramitar o llevar adelante una iniciativa; y, además, para destacar la dimensión de gesta que signa esas prácticas. Esto es, a la diáda de “gestar” y “gerenciar” le añadimos la voz “gesta” —todos términos que comparten origen etimológico— en tanto hazaña que muestra lo que se hace en la (re)presentación. A manera de ilustración, estamos pensando en reuniones que son convertidas en gestión política mediante publicaciones en redes sociales.

Entre nuestras herramientas analíticas, recuperamos las reflexiones de Souza Lima (2022) sobre la formación de cuadros para la administración estatal de los problemas indígenas en Brasil en términos de “tradiciones de conocimiento para la gestión colonial de la desigualdad”. Recreamos un conjunto de preguntas de su autoría (2022:151) en relación a cómo se conforman los funcionarios estatales en tanto *especialistas*, cómo esos saberes posibilitan el ejercicio de sus funciones y cómo se transmiten, en “escuelas” de capacitación y en costumbres administrativas. En tal dirección, construimos una antropología del gestionar que estudia la reproducción de saberes estatalizados; la construcción de políticas gubernamentales en una trama de agentes y agencias en múltiples escalas; y los modos de administración que posibilitan la persistencia de asimetría y la recurrencia de ciertos marcadores sociales de la diferencia.

Privilegiamos las modalidades pedagógicas de gobierno que no remiten a la escuela ni a la educación sistemática con sus estudios especializados. Nombramos como “pedagogías estatalizadas” a la circulación de saberes elaborados en diversos ámbitos (movimientos sociales, activismos, centros académicos) y empleados gubernamentalmente para la formación de administradores (no sólo) estatales. Estos ejercicios de gobierno configuran maneras de regulación de problemas sociales que pretenden subsanar la carencia de infraestructura y recursos, materiales y humanos, con la proliferación de instancias de capacitación. En un plano más extenso e histórico de cuestiones, pensamos estas acciones pedagógicas de gobierno en tanto inhibidoras de imaginaciones políticas distintas a las del instruir, como vía regia para la transformación de comportamientos. Y, en este punto, es relevante considerar una marca moderna específica: la creencia común en la eficacia de la transmisión de saberes como garantía de cambios en las conductas sociales.

Otro movimiento crucial para esta antropología del gestionar radica en la definición de una política de pesquisa atenta a las posiciones encarnadas por investigadoras en sus trabajos de campo. Nuestro empeño es horizontalizar las maneras de construir saberes social y teóricamente significativos (Lugones, 2022). Una investigación horizontal lleva implícita una reflexión ética que se funda en la elaboración recíproca de conocimientos con otros, y reclama la explicitación de las intenciones e intereses de indagación, exigiendo una apertura al diálogo centrada en la escucha (Corona Berkin, 2019:44).

Esta política de pesquisas se inscribe en la línea de *Studying Up* trazada por Nader (1972), cuando insta a jóvenes antropólogos y antropólogas a estudiar hacia arriba, como una vía para no seguir dando a conocer *modus vivendi* de grupos dominados. Aquí radica “la relevancia democrática” de esta perspectiva a la que queremos afiliarnos, ofreciendo investigaciones sobre cómo nos gobiernan. Ni denunciando burocracias ni a demanda institucional, sino en tensa conversación con quienes administran y quienes son administrados, en conversaciones horizontales donde no pretendemos imponer credenciales científicas.

### III.

Este dossier reúne artículos que indagan sentidos sociales y modos cotidianos de gestión en distintos contextos (g)locales y en el marco de gobiernos neoliberales y/o neoconservadores. Los textos abordan gestión(es) como vía de despolitización “técnica”; enfatizan la conjunción de dominación y pedagogía en ejercicios gubernamentales; enfocan la elaboración de conocimientos y la formación de especialistas en diferentes ámbitos institucionales; describen modalidades digitales del gestionar; estudian experiencias y situaciones asociadas a tramitar convenios, solicitar financiamientos, completar formularios y presentar proyectos; consideran la agencia de los documentos y la concomitante constitución de gestores; contemplan las implicancias de las actuaciones de gestión en la coproducción de sujeciones y subjetividades.

Los textos problematizan ejercicios de gestión sobre –y con– mujeres, infancias, expertos, artistas, gestores culturales, migrantes, refugiados e indígenas; políticas estatales a nivel municipal, provincial y nacional, que instrumentalizan tecnologías de gobierno apropiables por administraciones “progresistas” y “reaccionarias”; programas gubernamentales articulados con la cooperación internacional y/o remisibles a convenciones y tratados internacionales de derecho.

Organizamos este conjunto de escritos en tres ejes que denominamos: gestionar poblaciones, gestionar a través de documentos, y gestionar experticias y mediaciones.

En el primero, agrupamos los artículos de Lucas de Magalhães Freire; Marcos Cristiano Zucarelli; Jullyane Carvalho Ribeiro; Angela Facundo y Rita de Cássia Melo Santos. Estos textos acercan distintos casos donde la gestión está cifrada en mediaciones, destratos y esperas de (re)soluciones que suelen no llegar, en medio de crisis variopintas, precarizaciones diversas y dudosas eficiencias de las administraciones.

Zucarelli presenta un caso paradigmático de las violencias extractivas, especialmente, las inherentes al modelo de megaminería, ocurrido en el municipio de Mariana, Minas Gerais, en el considerado hasta ahora mayor desastre provocado por tal modelo de acumulación. El escrito trae instancias de “negociación” y de “mediación” entre comunidades, empresas y operadores del derecho involucrados en esa situación social, conformando “tecnologías sociales de gestión de las crisis”. Lo que percibe el autor es la conversión de responsables y afectados en “partes interesadas”, en procesos donde las pretensas “partes” están en posiciones asimétricas que re-victimizan a las ya desgastadas víctimas.

Freire expone perspectivas y tensiones relativas a la judicialización de la salud en el contexto brasileiro. Apoyado en materiales etnográficos, el autor relativiza la polarización dicotómica en torno de la judicialización, e interroga por quiénes quedan fuera de ese proceso y cuáles son las condiciones que permiten participar en tales instancias. Su argumento afirma que, en tiempos de precariedad aguda y generalizada, es a través de los litigios que se realiza la gestión del derecho efectivo de acceso a la atención de la salud, exponiendo cómo litigios judiciales y mediaciones extrajudiciales fueron incorporados a los itinerarios terapéuticos de aquellos que dependen de la atención sanitaria gratuita.

Ribeiro, basada en el accionar de administraciones paulistas del refugio, explicita las actividades procedimentales de atención y derivación del Comité Nacional para los Refugiados (CONARE). Este aparato estatal, que define las solicitudes de refugio, gestionaba a través de moras, exponiendo un caso más donde la tramitación de los tiempos resulta de capital importancia en diversos modos de despolitización “técnica” del gestionar estatal y sus efectos domesticadores de “producción de arbitrariedad”.

Santos y Facundo describen y discuten las categorizaciones con las que se tramitan las migraciones Warao en dos ciudades del nordeste brasileño. Las autoras advierten que la larga trayectoria de expulsiones de estos indígenas se realiza a través de múltiples violencias, no necesariamente espectaculares, percibiendo en sus acompañamientos enmarcados en actuaciones extensionistas las formas administrativas cotidianas de invisibilizar estas poblaciones negándoles asentamientos y abrigo.

Los artículos de María Celina Chocobare, Lucía Ríos, Santiago Manuel Romero y Melisa Rodríguez Oviedo y Larisa Nadai integran el bloque que titulamos “gestionar a través de documentos”. Mediante el análisis de diferentes referentes empíricos y apelando a variadas experiencias de investigación, estos trabajos enfocan técnicas y prácticas de documentación de burocracias, policías, investigadores y otros agentes estatales. Mientras que algunos se concentran principalmente en las narrativas vehiculizadas a través de los documentos (Ríos y Chocobare), otros llaman la atención sobre formas y formatos, y en los procedimientos implicados en los actos de documentar (Nadai, Romero y Rodríguez).

Un punto que interesa especialmente a esta antropología del gestionar tiene que ver con la *apuesta*, como la califican Romero y Rodríguez, por no distanciar las prácticas de documentación de investigadores universitarios de las de otros administradores estatales cuando, por ejemplo, elaboramos informes, registros, confeccionamos expedientes o presentamos notas para “autorizar” una investigación. En este sentido, el texto de Larissa Nadai muestra con precisión que, analizados en sus contextos de confección, circulación y archivo, los documentos constituyen artefactos etnográficos (Lowenkron & Ferreira, 2014) provechosos para examinar modalidades de gestión que se desenvuelven sin solución de continuidad entre pesquisadores y agentes (no sólo) estatales. Nadai vuelve reflexivamente sobre sus propias técnicas de documentar –o lo que ella denomina *documentar la documentación*– para argumentar sobre la centralidad de los “papeles” en la interacción con instancias estatales. Y reconoce que encarar etnográficamente burocracias implica también mimetizar/replicar sus procedimientos de gestión a través de documentos.



El artículo de Romero y Rodríguez realiza un ejercicio comparativo entre dos instituciones que, si en apariencia tienen poco en común, comparten formas de gestión que los autores caracterizan como ejercicios de poder tutelar. Tanto en el Patronato del Liberado cuanto en la Reserva del Museo de Antropología, *localizar* y *documentar* constituyen actuaciones administrativas cotidianas que involucran la mediación de documentos tales como planillas, registros de asistencia e inventarios. A partir de una aproximación etnográfica a dichos materiales y de entrevistas con las trabajadoras de las instituciones muestran cómo esas actuaciones estaban inscriptas en procesos de producción y reproducción de saberes para el “cuidado” de personas y cosas.

Celina Chocobare trae al centro de la discusión la dimensión simbólica de los documentos estatales a través de un estudio minucioso del Plan Maestro de Las Culturas del Gobierno de San Luis. Este plan no es tratado como un complemento al trabajo de campo, tampoco como fuente para “contextualizar” procesos sociohistóricos particulares. El Plan deviene pieza etnográfica clave para conocer cómo se hace y gestiona un pasado provincial y sus implicancias políticas. Al examinar los usos del pasado materializados en el Plan Maestro, Chocobare advierte cómo el tiempo opera como medida de gestión de las culturas. En su análisis, gestionar sería gestar representaciones de “lo sanluiseño” a través de la manipulación de nociones temporales (pasado/presente/futuro) y gestionarlas, mediante el empleo del lenguaje empresarial de la “planificación estratégica”.

Lucía Ríos presenta los efectos de las prácticas escriturales de la policía durante la década del 70, en los albores de la última dictadura militar en Argentina. En su texto, los *memos policiales* son tomados como piezas documentales que objetivan relaciones sociales específicas y que, por lo tanto, permiten a quien investiga decir algo respecto de quienes los produjeron, cómo, en qué circunstancias y con qué efectos. En particular, se pregunta por los modos de configuración de un sujeto criminal específico –*el enemigo o subversivo*– y por los autores estatales de esos documentos.

Los trabajos de Laura Andrea Ebenau, Florencia Paz Landeira, Pía Leavy, Carolina Ciordia, Roberta Sampaio Guimarães y Paulo Vítor Ferreira da Silva ponen el acento en prácticas de gestión que involucran la constitución de experticias y mediaciones. En sus aproximaciones etnográficas, estos autores siguen atentamente a diversos actores sociales que trazan vínculos entre redes institucionales y configuran posicionamientos diferenciales, a través de la puesta en movimiento de determinados saberes y formas, de presentación y construcción de sí. El énfasis está puesto en las transformaciones que se generan en la vida cotidiana de organizaciones y organismos, y en procesos de especialización que tienen como protagonistas a burocracias, administradores y administrados.

Los artículos de Leavy, Paz Landeira y Ciordia examinan distintas aristas de la administración de las infancias en la Argentina contemporánea. En el primer caso, se comparan las acciones de un programa estatal y de una organización no gubernamental en la provincia de Salta, señalando contrastes y continuidades entre tecnologías de gobierno, recursos materiales y estéticos, y perfiles laborales de quienes trabajan contra la desnutrición infantil. En el segundo caso, se analizan formas particulares de ejercer influencia y ofrecer “evidencia” para las políticas gubernamentales orientadas a la primera infancia, a través de una descripción de las circulaciones de especialistas que mediaban entre organizaciones de la sociedad civil de la ciudad de Buenos Aires e instituciones estatales de distinta escala. El texto de Ciordia investiga los universos del cuidado institucional de niños y adolescentes en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires, explorando cómo los vínculos con pares y adultos en hogares convivenciales hacían que las adolescentes mujeres que circulaban por dichos espacios se constituyeran en sujetos adoptables.

Ebenau, por su parte, analiza la implementación de un modelo gerencial en la legislatura de la provincia argentina de Misiones –aporte que podemos poner en diálogo con lo trabajado por Chocobare–, y las transformaciones que ello acarrió, en cuanto a dinámicas y procesos técnicos en la administración parlamentaria; considerando valores, experiencias y conocimientos de los agentes legislativos, la autora traza tensiones y

también continuidades surgidas del solapamiento entre modelos. Por último, en un registro histórico, el trabajo de Guimarães y Silva rastrea acciones de mediación efectuadas por redes de arquitectos en la administración pública brasileña. Su artículo expone cómo la trama de proyectos y políticas habitacionales contribuyó al desarrollo de técnicas de gestión poblacional y, a la vez, a la consolidación de distintos tipos de experticia y perfiles profesionales.

Los textos que componen este dossier indican posibles senderos para caminar en el futuro. Con el epígrafe que abre esta introducción queremos señalar una orientación fundamental de nuestro trabajo: anotar lo que todavía no podemos entender, e inscribir lo que aún se escabulle a nuestros movimientos analíticos e interpretativos.

Enfocar en gestiones minúsculas y en formas de gestionar no remisibles directamente a tintes políticos partidarios impone insistir en modos de dominación insidiosos, de difícil resistencia, que merecen ser escrupulosamente investigados para ampliar horizontes democráticos de vida.

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# “SUS is for everyone, for everyone who claims it”: managing health litigation in a time of crisis

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## **Abstract**

The judicialization of health is a controversial topic. Some authors see it as the source of a series of problems in health policies that span from the disruption of waiting queues to shortages in drugs purchased by public administrations. For others, the recourse to legal action is a path taken to correct asymmetries in access to public services. Based on ethnographic research conducted between 2016 and 2017 in the Health Claims Resolution Chamber (CRLS), I compare these opposing stances and show how the requests for judicial and/or administrative intervention are to some extent incorporated into the ‘normal flow’ of the Unified Health System (SUS) in the context of a healthcare crisis in Rio de Janeiro. My central argument is that in a period of widespread precarity, the right to health is itself managed through the administration of litigation.

**Keywords:** Judicialization of health, Crisis, Management, Right to health, SUS.

# “O SUS é para todos, para todos que reivindicam”: a gestão dos litígios de saúde em tempos de crise

## Resumo

A judicialização da saúde é questão controversa. Para uns, ela gera uma série de problemas nas políticas de saúde que vão desde a desorganização de filas de atendimento até o desabastecimento de medicamentos adquiridos pelo poder público. Para outros, o apelo ao Judiciário é um caminho para corrigir assimetrias no acesso aos serviços públicos de saúde. Por meio de uma etnografia conduzida entre 2016 e 2017 na Câmara de Resolução de Litígios de Saúde (CRLS), busco relativizar esses posicionamentos dicotômicos e demonstrar como a demanda por intervenção judicial e/ou administrativa é, de certa forma, incorporada ao “fluxo normal” do Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS) em uma conjuntura de crise da saúde no Rio de Janeiro. Meu argumento central é que, em tempos de precariedade generalizada, é através da regulação dos litígios que se opera a gestão do direito à saúde.

**Palavras-chave:** Judicialização da saúde, Crise, Gestão, Direito à saúde, SUS.

# “SUS is for everyone, for everyone who claims it”: managing health litigation in a time of crisis

*Lucas de Magalhaes Freire*

## Introduction

This article is the result of ethnographic research undertaken over thirteen months between 2016 and 2017 at an institution called the Health Claims Resolution Chamber (*Câmara de Resolução de Litígios de Saúde*: hereafter the CRLS or simply the Chamber). Located in a three-storey building in the centre of Rio de Janeiro, the CRLS was created through cooperation agreements between various government bodies at municipal, state, and federal levels, designed to operate through the joint action of the Rio de Janeiro and Federal Public Defender's Offices (DPE-RJ and DPU, respectively), the Rio de Janeiro State and Municipal Attorney General Offices (PGE and PGM, respectively), the Municipal and State Health Secretariats (SMS and SES, respectively), the Department of Hospital Management of the Ministry of Health (DGH/MS), and the Rio de Janeiro State Court of Justice (TJ-RJ).

The people who work in the Chamber are divided among four sectors that correspond to the four phases involved in processing a claim: triage, user service, technical analysis, and analysis return sector. The teams are composed of professional graduates from middle and higher education – doctors, nurses, pharmacists, nutritionists, social workers, and lawyers. In addition, the CRLS's staff also includes interns from Law courses, who work on the customer service counters of the Public Defender's Offices, and outsourced workers who provide cleaning, reception, security, and maintenance services. The Chamber employs no staff of its own: all those working for it are linked to the aforementioned entities making up the institution.

The CRLS was created in 2012 in a setting of an alleged 'excessive growth' in the phenomenon of 'health judicialization.' Broadly speaking, this expression has been used to characterize the activities of members of the justice system in lower and higher court cases who litigate for the provision of a service and/or the availability of a particular asset perceived to be covered by the 'right to health.' These claims are generally addressed to the Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde*: SUS) but claims relating to private health plans also form part of the phenomenon. According to the most recent quantitative survey on the topic, court claims for the right to health grew 130% in lower courts between 2008 and 2017 (Azevedo & Aith, 2019). In the context of an ever larger volume of lawsuits filed in the Courts of Justice and, consequently, an increase in the amount of public funds allocated to comply with court rulings in favour of the claims made by citizens, the Chamber was designed with one main proposal: to settle health rights disputes out of court by offering 'administrative solutions' to the cases.

It is worth emphasizing that the Chamber was created as part of the + *Consenso* program of the Rio de Janeiro PGE (Attorney General Office). This program, in turn, is inserted in a broader context of promoting Extrajudicial Dispute Resolution Methods (*Métodos Extrajudiciais de Solução de Controvérsias*: MESC) and 'good practices' in public management, intended to reflect a "new stance in public advocacy with an emphasis on the administrative resolution of disputes" and "a change in posture of the public administration, no longer

stuck to an outmoded idea that an amicable solution to conflict is impossible.”<sup>1</sup> By encouraging reconciliation, mediation, and arbitration, the program’s objective is to encourage ‘dejudicialization’ and pave the way for other solutions in cases of litigation involving public bodies. Thus the concept of ‘management’ acquires an unavoidable centrality, making specific *management bodies* the main protagonists in the resolution of disputes between citizens and the Brazilian state, while *extrajudicial management practices* are converted into action models for diverse state actors and agencies.<sup>2</sup>

With the inauguration of the CRLS and the adoption of *management* as a paradigm for conflict resolution, the expectation was also for a reduction in the time taken to assess any health claims and for the demands to be answered by the public authorities. In a context marked by the contrast between the ‘vulgate’ (Lugones, 2012) that legal cases take years to reach a verdict because the Judiciary is so slow and the urgency of patients worried about the worsening of their medical condition, time becomes a crucial element in the dispute over the best path to take. In this sense, the speed of administrative responses – compared to the slowness of both the SUS queues and the court rulings – is presented as one of the most important results of the Chamber’s operation in the management of health litigation. In sum, the CRLS’s objective is to propose solutions that dispense with the involvement of members of the judiciary and that are also quick, efficient, and above all cheap. In practice, the institution seeks to manage the progress of health claims, reducing the number effectively brought to trial, lowering the costs of ‘health judicialization’, and speeding up the resolution of outstanding issues. In other words, by formulating administrative mechanisms for resolving claims, the CRLS was converted into an institution responsible, in some ways, for managing the flow of health judicialization.

As I explore later, a series of controversies and consensuses exist among the diverse specialists linked to the issue of health judicialization, including public managers, members of the executive, lawyers, public health experts, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, activists, health professionals, patients and so on. In general, the debate revolves around a central question: should litigation be seen as a ‘problem’ or a ‘solution’? On one side are those who accuse the judiciary of exceeding its powers by directly influencing the distribution of funds allocated to healthcare. On the other side are those who question the effectiveness of public administrators in allocating these funds appropriately, meaning that recourse to the courts is one of the few options available to ensure compliance with the constitutional obligation to guarantee the right to health. In all events, the steady increase in the number of legal cases has been seen as a problematic situation demanding intervention from the managers of public health policies and from the representatives of other bodies with stakes in the issue.

By articulating ethnographic accounts and data from the broader context of public health facilities and services over the second half of the 2010s, I seek to evade the dichotomous positions surrounding health litigation. My central argument is that far from being merely a ‘problem’ or a ‘solution’ – or, as I shall discuss over the course of the text, a ‘para-infrastructure’ (Biehl 2013, 2016) or a mere ‘undesired distortion’ (Ferraz 2009, 2021) – the request for administrative mediation and/or court intervention is routinized and contradictorily absorbed into SUS’s ‘normal flow of care’ in times of crisis. When the shortages and precariousness of the public health system reach alarming levels, the ‘target public’ of the judicialization of health ceases to be only those requesting treatment for rare and/or chronic diseases, as identified in other ethnographies on the topic (Biehl 2013, 2016; Aureliano & Gibbon, 2020; Flores, 2016; Pedrete, 2019). In other words, during widespread shortages, legal claims become an access route that *should* be mobilized by almost everyone dependent on the public health system, whether for the acquisition of basic items like adult diapers and drugs for high blood pressure, or for the realization of exams, consultations and/or other healthcare procedures.

1 Information taken from the pages of the + *Consenso* program and the CRLS on the PGE website: <https://pge.rj.gov.br/mais-consenso> and <https://pge.rj.gov.br/mais-consenso/camara-de-resolucao-de-litigios-de-saude-crls>. Consulted 6 June 2022.

2 One example of this dispersive effect was the creation of the Administrative Chamber for Conflict Resolution (*Câmara Administrativa de Solução de Conflitos*: CASC), another initiative of this same PGR-RJ program. The mission of the CASC is to administer claims in the area of education. Its foundation was described as an effect of the ‘efficiency’ and ‘good results’ of the CRLS.



However much the CRLS is mobilized by a lower-income population and users of SUS’s basic healthcare services, though, a huge gulf still exists between those with the necessary means to seek assistance from the public defender’s offices or the Chamber and those unable even to access public services and who remain excluded from the institutional mechanisms for claiming their rights. Hence the expression uttered by one of my interlocutors and included in the article’s title – “SUS is for everyone, for everyone who claims it” – acquires a somewhat dramatic sense given the enormous contingent of people who require hospital treatment and public healthcare policies, yet are not even computed and are thus unable to be captured in an ethnographic study. Hence, the article examines the histories of those who try to circumvent the precariousness and shortages through litigation and/or the extrajudicial expedients of conflict resolution.

### **Judicialization of health: controversies, consensuses, and transformations amid the crisis**

The judicialization of health represents one aspect of what various scholars of politics and the State have called the “judicialization of politics and social relations” (Vianna et al., 1999). This expression refers to a process involving a transformation in the political role of the judiciary and is linked to discussions of ‘legal activism’ and the ‘politicization of the justice system.’ As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the expression ‘judicialization of health’ is used both descriptively and conceptually/analytically to designate the activities of members of the justice system in lawsuits in the lower and higher courts demanding compliance with legal claims based on the constitutional right to health, whether these pertain to the public healthcare system or to supplementary private health plans.

For part of the literature on the theme, it is through the court rulings made in these cases and through ‘legal activism’ – and ‘activism’ here frequently appears as an accusation – that the judiciary becomes a kind of formulator and executor of public policies in the health sector, exceeding its powers and deciding on matters about which it possesses neither knowledge nor expertise (Silva & Jucatelli, 2017). Other authors argue that there is no necessary connection between legal activism and the judicialization of health since the judiciary does not violate its powers when ruling on these claims. Selayaran, Machado and Morais (2018) contend that to be understood as an expression of legal activism, the judicialization of health would have to be under the control of the judiciary and be an initiative of the magistrates themselves – which is not the case since the judiciary only acts when called upon.

For the many authors, institutions and organizations that debate the diverse topics relating to this issue, the judicialization of health is above all a complex and multifaceted *phenomenon* (Azevedo & Aith, 2019; Oliveira et al., 2015; Ferraz, 2009; Ventura et al., 2010; Ventura, Simas & Bastos, 2022; Messeder, Osorio-de-Castro & Luiza, 2005; among others). I stress the use of the word *phenomenon* – that is, an observable and delimitable event capable both of being explained and of receiving a supposedly scientific/legitimate solution – to characterize and categorize this type of legal procedure since this classification is a fundamental condition and, indeed, represents the first step for the judicialization of health to be subsequently treated as a kind of ‘State problem.’

As Biehl (2013, 2016) discusses, the judicialization of health is situated on the border between medicine and law, exposing issues of interest to Medical Anthropology, the Anthropology of Law and Political Anthropology. In addition to medicine and law, I would also include a third disciplinary field in the discussion of the theme: Public Administration, signifying that this issue can also be discussed from the perspective of the Anthropology of Administration and Governance (Teixeira & Souza Lima, 2010).

The emergence of this phenomenon is comparatively recent in Brazil, related to development of SUS itself and the conception of the democratization of the access to healthcare advocated by members of the Brazilian Sanitary Reform (RSB) movement. At the start of the 1990s, inspired by the right to health guaranteed under the 1988 Federal Constitution, professionals linked to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in

HIV-AIDS advocacy submitted the first lawsuits in Brazilian courts demanding the free supply of antiretroviral drugs from the State. In 1996, Law n. 9313 – which provides for the free distribution of medications for HIV-positive patients – was passed with the aim of reducing the discretionary nature of judicial decisions in such cases and, consequently, the ‘interference’ of the judiciary in the health sector (Oliveira et al., 2015).

The effect of the legislation was, however, precisely the opposite. In the following years, this type of lawsuit spread among movements of relatives and patients suffering from other chronic diseases or those requiring high-cost treatments. In many cases, the legal actions were promoted and financed by pharmaceutical laboratories looking to ensure approval for the commercialization of new drugs in the country (Chieffi & Barata, 2010) and/or manipulate the Brazilian legislation to consolidate a market for their products (Biehl 2013; Biehl & Petryna, 2013).

As well as being perceived as a phenomenon, there are also another two commonalities in how specialists from distinct fields of knowledge conceptualize the judicialization of health. The first is the perception that the increase in the number of legal cases over recent years represents a ‘real administrative and fiscal challenge’ for public healthcare in the country. However, the form taken by this ‘challenge’ is not even a consensus among academics from the same area. The perspectives of the specialists on the theme diverge considerably: on one side, SUS public managers, lawyers and academics in Public Health accuse members of the judiciary of exceeding their powers by directly influencing the distribution of the resources allocated to public healthcare; on the other side, prosecutors, public defenders and other agents question the efficiency of the administrators in optimizing the allocation of public resources and themselves assume the mission of ensuring that the right to health is made effective.

In the legal field, the controversies surrounding the theme concern issues like the separation of powers and the legitimacy of the judiciary’s actions in constraining or forcing the State to implement a given ‘right.’ Authors like Barroso (2009), Ferraz (2009, 2021) and Wang (2015, 2021) highlight a series of problems that may be directly caused by the growing number of healthcare claims. Prominent among these is the idea that judicialization has the potential to further exacerbate inequalities in healthcare provision since less needy people can mobilize the justice system to their own advantage, reducing the resources available for public health initiatives and policies. Meanwhile, authors like Pereira (2015) and Fortes (2021) argue that such criticisms exaggerate the ‘failures’ and negative effects of this mechanism, constituting certain ‘myths’ – a term used here in an explicitly pejorative rather than anthropological sense. According to the authors defending this stance, given the clientelism and patrimonialism that influence the distribution of public resources in Brazil, legal intervention is capable of reducing inequalities by “correcting asymmetries and opening channels blocked by the bureaucratic apparatus” (Pereira, 2015: 2083), promoting access to healthcare for a poorer and more needy section of the population.

The controversies surrounding the judicialization of health also extend to the area of public healthcare and administration. Pepe and other colleagues (2010) argue that three kinds of problems exist in relation to judicialization: ‘management problems,’ linked to economic costs and resource distribution; ‘medical/scientific problems,’ referring to the absence of evidence proving the therapeutic advances offered by medications not yet listed and/or registered; and ‘patient problems,’ which concern their need for treatment. The authors thus discuss how access to medications financed with public money through judicialization can generate imbalances in SUS’s pharmaceutical assistance policies by ‘disrupting’ the budgetary planning with unforeseen expenditures. As well as the problems for the management of pharmaceutical assistance, judicialization is also perceived to have other negative effects, such as worsening inequalities in access to health products and the compromising of the principle of integral care that governs SUS and the National Pharmaceutical Assistance Policy (*Política Nacional de Assistência Farmacêutica: PNAF*), as also discussed by Vieira and Zucchi (2007).

The situation becomes even more complicated when the legal claim refers to a drug not yet registered by the National Health Surveillance Agency (*Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária: ANVISA*). In these cases, along with the question of the reorganization in the distribution of resources, the managers declare concerns with patient safety, since the long-term effects of using a new medication are frequently unknown (Pepe et al., 2010). Furthermore, as shown in Castro’s ethnography (2020), the resistance of the pharmaceutical laboratories to supplying the tested drugs after completion of the clinical trials contributes to increasing the number of cases of judicialization, since often the former participants decide to *entrar na justiça* (‘enter the justice [system]’: take court action) to obtain the medication, even in cases where the drug has yet to be approved for marketing in the country.

Oliveira and colleagues (Oliveira et al., 2015) consider the increase in the judicialization of the health sector to arise primarily from the discrepancy between what is guaranteed under the Constitution and what is actually provided to the population in terms of public health services and products. For the authors, this disparity is an outcome of ‘poor management’ by politicians, consultants and managers, forcing citizens to seek legal action for their right to be respected. Meanwhile Ventura et al. (2010) agree that despite being a legitimate strategy in diverse cases, judicialization by itself is insufficient to concretize a broad and collective right to health. In other words, one of the disruptions caused by healthcare litigation is the divergence between individual and public issues, or between what is seen as a *health demand* – a wish that may be perceived as legitimate or not – and what is considered to be a *health necessity* – something essential to a person’s well-being and/or survival – a distinction of central importance to the professionals working in the area of health planning and administration.

For Guimarães and Palheiro (2015), judicialization also poses other problems. Because products and medications purchased to comply with a court order are acquired in an emergency form, the procedure generates a higher cost for the public coffers: purchases are made on an individual basis on the retail market, significantly increasing the amount paid for particular items. The authors argue, therefore, that the application of large sums to pay for individual treatments causes difficulties for long-term planning, as well as shrinking the funds directed towards collective health policies, since the budget allocated to the sector is not adjusted by the court ruling. The authors also draw a correlation between judicialization and the potential for fraud, given that the need to respond promptly to a court order – especially when failure to comply can result in fines or the arrest of the managers concerned – means that these products are obtained without the usual tender process.

As well as the problem of the individualization of demand in detriment to collective planning, Chieffi and Barata (2010) identified another sensitive issue encompassed by the judicialization of health, namely the potential link between private lawyers and pharmaceutical laboratories. Analysing a set of almost 3,000 legal cases registered at the São Paulo State Court of Justice (TJSP), the authors perceived that more than 70% of lawsuits demanding a particular drug had been filed by the same lawyer. Their conclusion was that this was a strategy adopted by the pharmaceutical companies to introduce their products into the national market. In other words, the laboratories were hiring private lawyers and offering their services to patients with the aim of exploiting ‘loopholes’ in the Brazilian legislation so that their medications would be purchased by the public authorities and eventually added to the formulary of prescription drugs freely available from SUS.

The second understanding shared by the overwhelming majority of these authors concerns the budget available for public health. Most of them do not question – indeed even reinforce – the idea that public funds are limited or scarce, meaning that their proposals almost always set out from the necessity to establish priorities and balance their distribution. In Pereira’s aforementioned article, the author is categorical in arguing that “the challenge resides in defining the limits to the direct application of constitutional commands in the *context of limited material resources*” (2015: 2085, my italics).

The idea of a limitation on resources also appears in the book *Direito, Escassez e Escolha* (Law, Scarcity and Choice) by Gustavo Amaral (2001).<sup>3</sup> In the author’s view, trial court judges, appeal court judges, prosecutors, lawyers and other legal actors must recognize that demands for rights always exceed the capacity of public authorities to meet them: in other words, there are no means to effectively satisfy all proposed rights, not even the most basic. Consequently, it is essential to address the difficult question of promoting a balance between the individual needs of litigious patients and the structuring of public health policies when judging cases, and establishing decision-making criteria on which claims will be met and which will be turned down.

It is clear that the conflicts permeating the judicialization of health convert into a dispute over the distribution of scarce resources, the allocation of which depends on the definition of what is seen as a priority and which public services and policies can be cut, reduced and/or reorganized. A passage from the previously cited national survey coordinated by Azevedo and Aith (2019) provides a good insight into this point:

Considering that the provision of healthcare involves the *distribution of scarce resources* in a complex society with epidemiological patterns that approximate Brazil to developed and underdeveloped countries simultaneously, determining what is a *priority* and who should be the focus of these priorities is a theme that inevitably involves disputes. The so-called ‘judicialization of health,’ therefore, is an expression of this *structural dispute for resources*, but attains even higher levels than what would be expected from its relevance in the world of socioeconomic relations. (Azevedo & Aith 2009: 13, my italics)

It is the disputes surrounding the need to produce a ‘response to the judicialization of health’ that make it a provocative topic, the subject of intense production of data, interpretations, protocols, resolutions, norms and public policies. In the state of Rio de Janeiro, according to data from the National Justice Council (*Conselho Nacional de Justiça*: CNJ), court cases involving health claims leapt from 12,208 lawsuits in 2007 to 29,970 lawsuits in 2014. The combination of apparently scarce resources and a steady increase in the number of cases – and, consequently, in the number of decisions forcing governments to make unplanned disbursements – means that tensions between different public bodies have become ever greater. It is in this scenario of litigations that the alleged ‘excessive’ judicialization of health became seen as a problem requiring immediate intervention for its control. The State’s response to this ‘emergency situation’ was the creation of diverse mechanisms for the quantitative and qualitative regulation of the effectively prosecuted cases. In Rio de Janeiro, the accumulation of experiences of different initiatives for out-of-court resolution of health disputes culminated in the creation of the Health Claims Resolution Chamber (CRLS).

The CRLS began operating in September 2013. Around two months after its inauguration, the institution’s coordination team stated that on average about 60 people per day were attended and that the main demand of users was the supply of pharmaceutical drugs, comprising around 60% of total requests. During the first thirty days of operation, 511 demands were resolved ‘administratively,’ leading to a 37% reduction in the number of new court cases. Working with statistical data, Guimarães and Palheiro (2015) describe how the CRLS responded to about 9,000 users (*assistidos*)<sup>4</sup> in its first year of activity. During this period, around 37% of the claims were resolved out of court. More than half of the total demands (54.33%) referred to drugs of various kinds.

It can be observed that between the start of its activities and mid-2015, the figures publicly presented by the Chamber sought to reflect the success of the initiative in terms of the administrative resolution of potential health litigation. During the period when I was conducting fieldwork, however, I witnessed numerous occasions when the staff expressed perplexity and/or indignation over the constant rise in the number of people waiting

3 Full title in Portuguese: *Direito, escassez e escolha: em busca de critérios jurídicos para lidar com a escassez de recursos e as decisões trágicas*.

4 Although the CRLS is an institution composed of staff coming from distinct government bodies and sectors, the public that seeks out its services are all called *assistidos*, a category designating people who receive assistance from Public Defender’s Offices.

to be attended and also over the types of ‘products’<sup>5</sup> requested by users. It was common to hear remarks about how the consolidation of the idea that the ‘health crisis’ entailed new demands and generated unprecedented situations in the institution’s everyday running. The perception that something had changed – and for the worse – in public health facilities was shared by CRLS staff and users alike.

When the institution first began to operate, the most complex requests were related to pharmaceutical drugs not included on the public formularies, such as the National Formulary of Essential Medications (*Relação Nacional de Medicamentos Essenciais*: RENAME), the Specialized Component of Pharmaceutical Assistance (*Componente Especializado de Assistência Farmacêutica*: CEAF) and the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Formulary of Essential Medications (*Relação Municipal de Medicamentos Essenciais*: REMUME). But from the second half of 2015 and more intensely over the following years, lawsuits for the acquisition of drugs that were in short supply due to budget cuts and/or delays in the transfer of funds became increasingly common. In other words, the crisis occasioned a series of problems in the supply of basic supplies such as adult diapers, sterilized material, gauze, bandages and so on, as well as in the distribution of medications and equipment that form part of consolidated national health policies, including the supply of insulin, syringes, needles and glucometers used in the treatment and monitoring of the health condition of diabetic patients.

By making health services even more precarious, the worsening of the public healthcare crisis in Rio de Janeiro transformed how users resorted to the judiciary to prosecute the State’s failure to comply with their health rights. These alterations occurred in both a *quantitative* dimension – since there was a sharp increase in the number of new legal cases even after the development of mechanisms intended to reduce them – and a *qualitative* dimension – since the profile of the claimants and their claims have undergone significant modifications. In my ethnography, the crisis was vividly present when someone went to the CRLS to demand a medicine out of stock for five months, or complain that they had gone to the Family Clinic and their medication to control blood pressure was unavailable, or when they reported that a relative had been involved in an accident but there were no doctors to provide emergency care at the hospital, or when a patient requested to be transferred to another unit to undergo a surgery because the unit where they were hospitalized lacked the supplies needed to perform the procedure – to cite just a few of the particularly dramatic situations.

Although it is necessary to set out the controversies and consensuses involved in health litigations to contextualize the topic of the article, I emphasize that I have no intention to side with either of the two main positions in relation to the theme – that is, either ‘for’ or ‘against’ the judicialization of health demands. As I stated earlier, the healthcare crisis has inaugurated a new arena in the phenomenon of health judicialization in Rio de Janeiro that cannot be neglected, still less denied, since its effects are felt in devastating form by those who depend on SUS. Going beyond what was perceived as ‘habitual,’ judicialization became mobilized as a response to the impacts of the crisis. In sum, crisis and scarcity figure as inescapable descriptors of the institutional activities of the Chamber in the period when I conducted fieldwork and combine with the problem of ‘excessive judicialization’ with which the CRLS had already found itself dealing. Through the ethnography, therefore, my objective is to discuss what status can be attributed to the administrative resolutions and what role is played by resorting to judicial action in a period of crisis – that is, in a context of acute precarization in public health services.

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<sup>5</sup> In native terms, ‘product’ refers to any kind of demand made by a user, whether pharmaceuticals, supplies, consultations, surgeries, treatments or so on.

## **“SUS is for everyone, for everyone who claims it”: administrative resolutions and state management practices**

According to some of the staff of the CRLS, one of the main criticisms received by the institution from other State agents is that the Chamber allows people to ‘jump the SUS queue,’ creating a kind of ‘parallel queue’ that moves in accordance with ‘court orders and counter-orders.’ For these staff, these people have a mistaken view of the CRLS as an institution that provides ‘fixes’ and ‘workarounds’ to avoid court intervention in a given situation. Ultimately, these actors perceived the work of the Chamber as something that ends up reproducing what the health managers and professionals working in health facilities identify as one of the problems caused by the judicialization of health: the disruption of the flow of healthcare caused by the interference of outside agents and/or institutions who have little idea of how SUS functions ‘in practice.’ For the people who work in the Chamber, this criticism was not always made explicit or directly aimed at the institution. Very often the idea that outside agents saw the CRLS in this way was an interpretation made on the basis of the kind of responses received in their attempts to coordinate actions with other institutions – especially in situations where the conclusion of the Chamber’s analysts suggested the need for a reassessment of the ‘risk classification’ attributed to a particular request for consultation and/or examination registered in the National Regulation System (*Sistema Nacional de Regulação: SISREG*).<sup>6</sup>

On one occasion, this accusation turned into more than a veiled rebuke. In mid-July 2017, while I was accompanying the work of the technical analysis sector, the Chamber coordination team held a meeting with representatives from a local state body. As I had little direct contact with the coordinators, I did not attend the meeting or ask them directly about the reason for its realization, or indeed what it was about. However, talking with other staff, all of them said that the meeting had been tense, its objective having been to present how the Chamber operates to the agents concerned. The information that circulated was that they were members of the Public Prosecutors Office (PPO) – nobody knew for sure whether the State or Federal PPO – who had gone to investigate an anonymous denunciation that the Chamber’s intervention meant that some people ‘jumped the SUS queue.’

These kinds of views and criticisms are understood to result not exclusively from the work of the CRLS, but as a consequence – not necessarily foreseen and/or desired – of judicial or administrative intervention. In the qualitative segment of the national survey on the judicialization of health, the coordinators state that “the requests for hospital treatment granted by the courts may have the effect of ‘jumping the waiting queue’ for beds, which is not only potentially unfair to patients but also disrupts the regulation of hospital treatment in general” (Azevedo & Aith, 2019: 29). According to the authors, many of the interviewees understood judicialization to be a central element in the creation of ‘parallel queues,’ as they explain:

the interviewed managers see judicialization as an ‘unfair epidemic’ that jeopardizes the neediest portion of the population by unbalancing the system. One of the imbalances mentioned are waiting lists for surgeries. In their example, whenever there is a legal ruling to perform a surgery, those who enter through the courts ‘jump the queue,’ taking the place of patients who entered via SUS and have waited their turn normally. (Azevedo & Aith, 2019: 25)

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<sup>6</sup> SISREG is an online platform of the Ministry of Health created to manage flow control and optimize the use of resources in the health sector. All requests for outpatient consultations and exams are ‘regulated’ by their inclusion in this system. The risk classification table adopted by SISREG for outpatient regulation is organized by a colour code as follows:

Red = up to 30 days for attendance;

Yellow = up to 90 days for attendance;

Green = up to 180 days for attendance;

Blue = discretionary attendance / more than 180 days for attendance.

In this section of the article, I explore how the Chamber’s staff respond to this criticism and how they understand the recourse to judicialization as one of the few paths possible for guaranteeing health rights in a scenario of intensification of scarcity in healthcare facilities. In other words, while in ‘normal situations’ judicialization may ‘upset the system,’ when the ‘system is imbalanced,’ administrative or judicial interventions represent attempts to correct this ‘system’ and make it function at least minimally.

### Slots, reservations and checking possibilities: an institutionalization of the ‘workaround’?

*Jaime’s representative procured the CRLS at the start of July to request human immunoglobulin to control the symptoms of chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP), a degenerative disease that causes the progressive loss of reflexes and muscular strength. On this occasion, the patient’s documents were incomplete, meaning that he was asked to return another day with all the documents required for analysis of the case. At the start of August, he returned to the CRLS with the documentation. During the analysis it was observed that the patient was receiving treatment in a federal hospital in the Rio’s South Zone. Consulting the spreadsheet of medications made available by the Specialized Component of Pharmaceutical Assistance (CEAF),<sup>7</sup> the professional from the Chamber noted that the medication is available through SUS but the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) code on the patient’s medical records was not included in the dispensing rules established by the Special Medications State Pharmacy (Riofarmes). According to the staff member, although not included, the indicated medication was prescribed by the contemporary medical literature as the appropriate treatment for the patient’s clinical condition. Given this situation, one of the possible paths would be to forward the case directly to the Public Defender’s Office. However, the analyst first attempted to find an ‘administrative solution’ instead. She contacted the hospital where the user was receiving treatment. During the phone call, she was informed that the unit stocked the medication, but its use is restricted to inpatients. The staff member asked to talk to the head of the pharmacy sector, arguing that were the patient to go to court, the hospital would be included in the lawsuit. During the conversation, the hospital employee said he was unaware of the case. In compiling her report, the analyst solicited a period of 15 days for the situation to be resolved and asked the patient or his representative to visit the hospital’s administration in the morning to explain the situation and try to resolve the issue without the need to take the matter to court.*

*Tales’ father went to the CRLS in August 2017 to request rescheduling of a paediatric consultation for his son at a federal hospital in the city. The request for a consultation had been made in July that year and scheduled for January 2018, which the father responsible for the patient considered too long to wait. Checking the boy’s medical documents, the CRLS analyst could not find any health condition justifying urgent consultation and, therefore, the need for the appointment to be brought forward. Nonetheless, she sent an email to the hospital explaining the situation and asking whether it would be possible to reschedule Tales’ appointment. In her report, the employee wrote: “To those concerned, SISREG does not permit consultations to be brought forward. Email sent to the hospital to verify the possibility of bringing the appointment forward. We advise you to await our contact within 15 working days.” Around a week later, an employee from the CRLS called Tales’ father telling him that a ‘slot’ had been obtained for his son and that his appointment could be made the following day. Next, she sent the report from the Chamber by email and informed him that the said document should be printed and presented at the consultation.*

*Bianca’s husband visited the CRLS for the first time in January 2017 to complain about the delay in scheduling an MRI pelvis scan for his wife, who, according to the medical documents, suffered from constant episodes of acute and debilitating pain. On this first occasion, the CRLS analyst verified that the request had already been registered in SISREG*

<sup>7</sup> The National Pharmaceutical Assistance Policy (Política Nacional de Assistência Farmacêutica: PNAF) is divided into three components: basic, specialized and strategic. The specialized component (CEAF) centres on the dispensation of exceptional drugs for rare diseases or diseases that are prevalent but whose one-off or chronic treatment is considered high cost. The dispensation of medications by the CEAF is linked to the Clinical Protocols and Therapeutic Guidelines (Protocolos Clínicos e Diretrizes Terapêuticas: PCDT) defined by the Ministry of Health (Ministério da Saúde: MS), which establish the pathologies for which specific drugs are recommended and the standard order of therapeutic strategies that should be adopted by the health professionals.

as ‘blue risk’ [least urgent]. Since requests whose deadline has not yet expired are not transferred to the Public Defender’s Office, the CRLS employee reforwarded the user to the Family Clinic concerned and asked the professional health carers there to reassess the patient’s risk category. In April 2017, he returned to the Chamber to inform them that the exam had still not been performed. Consulting SISREG again, the employee responsible for producing the report noted that the request had been altered at the start of February, around a week after the first visit to the CRLS, and that the risk category attributed to the new consultation was ‘red’ [most urgent]. Since the deadline for the performing the exam had expired more than two months previously, the analyst contacted the employee responsible for the regulation – also called “regulator” – who asked the Chamber employee to wait a short while, the exam would be authorized that same day. Around an hour later, the CRLS doctor updated Bianca’s SISREG page and the exam had not only been authorized but also scheduled at a private laboratory that same week. In his report, he advised that the user should arrive at the lab an hour before the scheduled time to have the procedure explained by a health professional and that she could not fail to turn up on the scheduled date, or else risk of request being cancelled and the need to make a new request in SISREG, reinitiating the process.

Based on these ethnographic vignettes, we can note that the procedures adopted by the CRLS resulted in situations like the ‘reservation’ of a medication for a specific person; the possibility of bringing forward a consultation and finding a ‘slot’ for a patient in the schedule of a doctor working at a public hospital; or the alteration of the ‘risk category’ of someone treated at a Family Clinic. In this sense, the *interinstitutional dialogues* – that is, the interaction between CRLS staff and employees from other institutions and public health facilities – undertaken to reach administrative resolutions configure particular *institutional arrangements*. At first glance, these arrangements could be read as a paradox: a kind of officialization or bureaucratization of the Brazilian *jeitinho* or ‘workaround’ as a mode of managing conflicts over health rights. However, as mentioned earlier, my intention is to offer another reading of the situation by demonstrating how judicialization has been incorporated into the ‘normal flow of SUS’ during a period of crisis and widespread shortages in the public health sector.

In Weber’s formulation of the ideal type, the efficiency of bureaucracy resides in principles like rationality, neutrality, impersonality, regularity, technicism, mechanism and transparency (Weber, 1982). In the Weberian view, bureaucracy became indispensable to modern societies and its development was intertwined with the growth of the capitalist market economy, which required a rapid, constant, precise and impersonal administration. In Weber’s conception, bureaucratic government and patrimonialism comprise opposite poles of the state administration, such that the bureaucratic rules emerged as a way to eliminate arbitrary personal authority. The comparison between the Weberian ideal type and the findings of a broad set of ethnographic research on how subjects deal with the law and with bureaucratic apparatuses in their own particular and creative ways in everyday practice has produced contributions to anthropological debates on the State, administration and bureaucracy for decades. Stoler (2004), for example, is one of the authors who discusses how bureaucratic rationality does not represent a separate and sterilized administrative domain, meaning that there is no effective separation between ‘emotion’ and ‘politics.’ According to her, the State’s unity is established through a moral education that produces not only the feeling of belonging to the nation – or a sentimental collectivity – but also sensibilities, aspirations and affective dispositions in the nation’s citizens.

Herzfeld (1993), for his part, concludes that the functioning of the bureaucracy in the nation state is analogous to the ritual system of a religion and is founded on a principle of identity, whether personal, social or national. In this sense, *bureaucratic indifference* is the outcome not of rational practices of an egalitarian and democratic form of management, but of the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ which implies a frontier between those on this side – who are able to manipulate, broaden and interpret the forms of bureaucracy to their own benefit – and those on the other side – who are left only with the indifference of strict and disembodied rules and laws.



In Brazil, *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis* by Roberto DaMatta (1997) was one of the first works to discuss the topic in national anthropology. For the author, the dilemma of Brazilian society rests on the distinction between *individuals* – people governed by formal regulations and by the equal treatment of everyone – and *persons* – people with relations of proximity, kinship and/or intimacy who demand a treatment in accordance with the social position they occupy – in a universe in which the dynamics and practices of social relations bear no relation to the world envisaged in laws. DaMatta (1984) also explores the origins of ‘Brazilianess’ and the characteristics that make Brazil the country it is. Along these lines, he identifies the *jeitinho* (workaround), *malandragem* (street smart) and *você sabe com quem está falando?* (do you know who you’re talking to?) as intrinsic characteristics of the ‘Brazilian mode of social navigation.’ The ‘workaround’ is a form of resolving a dispute between the interests of distinct parties in a harmonious and conciliatory way, while the question ‘do you know who you’re talking to?’ is a more conflictual way of achieving the same result by invoking a hierarchical principle in which the person claiming is perceived to be in a more favourable position.

Although important to discussions of how subjects mobilize positions of authority and deal with bureaucracy in Brazil, the reasoning developed by DaMatta in his differentiation of *individuals* and *persons* produces something of a culturalist interpretation of what he calls *brasilidade* (Brazilianess). Thinking about the activities of the employees and the role of the CRLS among the set of institutions and processes that compose the State along these lines would lead to an understanding of the Chamber as a public space that itself comprises a *jeitinho*, created by the State to cover over its own ‘failures’ and/or ‘absences’ in assisting a portion of the population. In other words, the creation of the CRLS and the establishment of its mode of operation based on ‘good management practices’ would represent a kind of officialization of a strictly ‘informal’ practice of conflict resolution based on specific powers and authorities derived from the posts occupied by particular State agents. This is not the analytic path I intend to follow, as I discuss below.

### A not-so-parallel infrastructure: recourse to the justice system in a time of crisis

Júlio’s daughter visited the CRLS on 19 May 2017 to request the scheduling of an exam for her father, who was extremely weak with a suspected metastatic cancer in different parts of the body. The request had been registered as ‘red risk’ but, according to the “regulatory doctor”, would not be able to be performed within this deadline at any public health facility. Authorization was given, therefore, for the exam to be performed at a private laboratory that had an agreement with the public authorities to cover demands that SUS was unable to accommodate. However, though authorized, the exam had not been specifically ‘regulated,’ that is, actually scheduled. Contacting the clinic’s exam booking centre, the Chamber analyst described the situation and said that the case could already go to court. The conversation was over quickly. Soon after completing the phone call, the employee began to write his report informing that the exam had been scheduled by telephone with an employee from the laboratory and that Júlio should attend the facility to perform the exam the next day, at 9.30 am, taking his documents.

Francisco headed to the CRLS at the beginning of September 2017. Affected by a chronic health condition, he needed continuous medication supplied by Riofarms through the state exceptional medications program; the stock was down to zero and restocking uncertain. Around midday, one of the professionals from the technical analysis sector began to undertake the procedures to decide how to resolve the case. Consulting a table listing the situation of the CEAF medications shared among the Chamber’s employees, the analyst noted that the last time that availability of the medication requested by Francisco had been checked was a little over a week previously. So he called Riofarms and explained the situation. The person on the telephone replied that the medication in question had arrived that morning and that at the end of the day they would check the shipment and begin dispensing the drug the day after. The Chamber employee stated that Francisco had gone to Riofarms

three times already and each time been unable to obtain the medication, which had led him to seek CRLS's help. A short while later he finished the call and said that Francisco's medication would be 'reserved': the user should go first thing the next day to ensure he obtained the drugs. In his report, the employee not only wrote that the medication had recently been restocked but also stressed that it was essential for Francisco to go the next day to withdraw it and, were he unable, for him to return to the CRLS as soon as possible.

Edna was a 42-year-old woman, diagnosed with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE), a chronic inflammatory and autoimmune disease that causes the body's immunological system to attack its own healthy tissue. In August 2017 she turned up at the CRLS to report that she was not receiving Rituximab, one of the drugs included in her treatment regimen. The user received outpatient treatment at a university hospital and obtained the medication at another health facility, which told her that the drug had been out of stock since the start of the year. Edna said that she had been told by the pharmacy's employees that the hospital management had set new criteria for dispensing the drug due to the intermittent supply and the possibility that the stock would run out. Since it is also used to prevent rejection of transplanted organs, the drug had been reserved by the managers for patients in post-operative care. The hospital employees suggested to Edna that she should seek help from the Chamber, since if she had a court order, they would be unable to refuse her the medication. Armed with this information, the user went to the CRLS. In the technical analysis sector, one of the Chamber professionals contacted the hospital pharmacy, which denied what the user had related. The analyst said that the case could go to court and that he was proposing an administrative solution that would result in less work for the hospital, for Edna, for the Chamber, for the Public Defender's Office and for the Court of Justice. After some minutes, the analyst put down the telephone and said that the person on the other end of the line had been unyielding and claimed various times that the drug Rituximab was out-of-stock and the institution's dispensation had been paused. Without any administrative solution possible, the CRLS analyst wrote his report and sent Edna's case to the Federal Public Defender's Office for a lawsuit to be filed.

In his own research, Biehl (2013, 2016) describes judicialization as a kind of para-infrastructure for accessing the right to health. In his words: “the judicialization of health has become a para-infrastructure through which the chronically ill and various public and private actors come into contact, face off, and enact ‘one by one’ rescue missions” (Biehl, 2016: 100). In other words, for the author, the emergence of this ‘para-infrastructure’ relates to the efforts made by diverse subjects to confront a series of obstacles in assuring the right to health, posed by ‘infrastructural problems,’ ‘inadequate public institutions’ and the ‘inefficiency of drug distribution programs.’

The jurist Octavio Ferraz (2021), for his part, develops his analysis of the topic setting out from a central question: does the health right matter? This relates not to the right to health in the abstract but to its legal formulation, meaning that the question concerns whether the legally established right to health is effective or merely a ‘ghost right.’ Taking statistical data as a synonym for ‘empirical evidence,’ the author positively evaluates the constitutionalization of the right to health for reducing the persistent inequality in access to services and technologies and contributing to an overall improvement in the population's health. However, in Ferraz's view, this also generated negative and undesirable effects such as ‘distortions’ to the health budget and policies caused by the judicialization of health. As he writes:

Litigation in the field of health, in contrast, has on balance produced regressive effects, a conclusion I had already reached in my earlier work and have confirmed here based on more extensive empirical evidence. It has by and large diverted an increasingly larger amount of the already severely limited health budget to health treatments of dubious effectiveness and priority (mostly expensive new medicines) to a minority of people who are capable to litigate (Ferraz, 2021: 2-3)

I agree with Biehl and Ferraz that structural problems exist in terms of the adequate and effective formulation and implementation of public health policies in Brazil. However, rather than taking the budget limitation as a given – as Ferraz does in the passage cited above – I believe that we should think of this chronic scarcity as a *mode of government*, a management tool and a form of operation of the State that induces, produces and reproduces social inequality through the creation, reform and/or closure of ‘inadequate public institutions’ and ‘inefficient programs’ at different moments and in distinct political and economic settings in Brazil. In this sense, my aim is not to understand these situations as signs of lacunas in the legislation, or as products of ‘errors’ or ‘defects’ in the design of policies, or as consequences of a supposed ‘absence of the State’ that leaves certain territories and/or populations unassisted.

In a scenario of deepening precarity like that of the health crisis in Rio de Janeiro, *entrar na justiça* (‘entering the justice [system]’: taking legal action) represents neither a parallel infrastructure for accessing health services and technologies (Biehl 2013, 2016) nor an alternative mobilized exceptionally by a group of persons with the capital necessary to litigate (Ferraz, 2021). On the contrary, supported by ethnographic data, I argue that the request for legal aid is perversely incorporated as part of the ‘normal flow of SUS’ in this context. As a consequence, the recourse to the CRLS becomes just one more stage in the therapeutic itinerary (Augé, 1986) of those seeking free healthcare. An inclusion of this kind amounts to a considerable distortion of these itineraries since patients are put in situations where access to health services, technologies, supplies and drugs depends on shuttling public institutions that vary from hospitals to the waiting rooms of public defender’s offices. In other words, people are forced to circulate not only between health facilities but also between bureaucratic and administrative bodies that operate according to logics previously unknown to them – and most of the time not even recognized as legitimate – and that above all appear to make no sense, disorienting those dependent on SUS.

Accounts like those of Francisco and Edna exemplify this point. Their narratives are permeated by episodes in which the managers of public pharmacies and health facilities condition the distribution of a drug on presentation of a court order or legal document – a practice that became increasingly common over the period when I was accompanying the day-to-day workings of the Chamber. As diverse employees of the CRLS remarked, the crisis profoundly exacerbated the chronic issue of *shortages* in public hospitals. This means that ‘everything is judicialized,’ from procedures seen as more complex such as prosthetic implants or neurosurgery, to items taken as basic and trivial, such as adult diapers, baby formulas and drugs for high blood pressure.

The alleged generalization of recourse to the judiciary was made explicit on other occasions during my fieldwork. One day while I was accompanying the work of the technical analysis sector, one of the employees told his team colleagues that the most recent attempts to resolve requests where the main issue was a lack of catheters<sup>8</sup> had proven unsuccessful. According to him, thenceforth the standard procedure for this type of demand should be judicialization rather than any more attempts to resolve the problem administratively. The reason: managers were only purchasing supplies for cases where there was an express court order. Hence it becomes clear that when there is ‘a shortage of everything,’ one of the few paths available to resolve the deficit is to ‘judicialize everything.’ In this kind of context, judicialization is transformed into a routine and becomes part of the flux of SUS, figuring as one more stage – or, to be more precise, one more bottleneck – in people’s access to the right to health. As the employee said on the occasion cited above, “with this present crisis, it seems like SUS is only *operating through judicialization*.”

As I mentioned earlier, according to some of the professionals who work in the Chamber, the doctors from the Family Clinics and the Municipal Health Centres perceive the requests to alter the ‘risk category’ attributed to exams and/or consultations as a form of interference by the CRLS in their professional autonomy.

<sup>8</sup> A catheter is a thin flexible tube used in different diagnostic or therapeutic surgical procedures. They are generally inserted in blood vessels and can be used to drain fluids, inject drugs, insert surgical instruments and so on.

The CRLS staff do not necessarily disagree with this interpretation but understand their actions – and, by extension, judicial or administrative intervention itself – as a sort of ‘necessary evil,’ principally in the context of the crisis and deepening scarcity in public health services.

This idea of the routinization of judicialization in the normal flow of SUS was encapsulated by one of the technical analysis staff – who had also occupied various managerial positions in the Municipal Health Secretariat for over a decade – in one of our conversations. As we discussed the topic, she stressed that the crisis did not affect and was not felt in all parts of the city in the same way, since there was a huge inequality in the distribution of SUS resources between the administrative regions of the municipality, meaning that health facilities located in the South Zone possess better equipment, more health professionals and so on. In her opinion, beyond the question of income, this inequality mainly derives from the level of education and ability of the residents of this wealthier region to pressurize the public authorities and demand that the State meets its obligations. She then drew an analogy between this capacity for mobilization and the guarantee of the right to health at more basic levels. For her, the advent of the crisis meant that access to public health services was becoming ever more difficult and dependent on the work of agents and/or institutions from the justice system. The employee concluded her line of reasoning with a rhetorical question: “and who are the people who matter to the justice system and who are capable of making sufficient noise for them to intervene in the situation?” At the end of our dialogue, she uttered a fairly sarcastic and deeply significant phrase, chosen for the title of this article: “SUS is for everyone, for everyone who claims it.”

### **Final remarks: management of and through health litigation**

Over the course of this article, my aim has been to consider the place occupied by health litigation in a period of acute precarization. I have also sought to show how the consolidation of Extrajudicial Dispute Resolution Methods work to equalize the actions of *managing* and *resolving*, such that management is not just a *function* of the public apparatuses, but also a *method* of conflict resolution between citizens and the State. Initially, therefore, I described the main divergences and convergences on the theme among specialists from areas like Law, Public Health and Public Administration and state agents like health secretariat managers, magistrates, lawyers, public defenders and others. Next, I sought to eschew the dichotomous positions surrounding the judicialization of health and demonstrate how, in the ethnographic universe to which I had access, litigation and extrajudicial mediation were incorporated into the therapeutic itinerary (Augé, 1986) of those who depend on free healthcare. To conclude this text, I wish to underline how the management of litigation is also a form of management *through* litigation.

Observing the way in which ‘macro’ issues of a public health crisis are manifested locally in the everyday life of a significant portion of the population, as well as apprehending the ways in which users and professionals try to circumvent the effects of this precarity, are both tasks for which qualitative research – especially ethnographic – offer important contributions. In this sense, the analyses of health judicialization made solely through a quantitative/statistical approach are problematic for two reasons. Firstly, they transform the question into an urgent problem by highlighting the impacts and supposed distortions caused by litigation. Secondly, this data is incapable of capturing the nuances and concrete conditions that lead people to turn to the judiciary, very often overlooking how this is one of the few means available to guarantee the right to health. As becomes clear from the vignettes presented here, people face exceptionally dramatic situations in contexts involving a severe shortage of medications, supplies and health professionals. However, neither can the questions and inequalities revealed by judicialization be seen as merely the mistakes, failures or neglect of state management where judicial intervention functions as a kind of panacea.

Someone able to pay for a private lawyer can *entrar na justiça* (take legal action) to resolve a health claim whenever they wish. But those dependent on free legal aid from the Public Defender’s Offices have fewer options, given that ever since the CRLS was created and administrative solutions prioritized, public defenders have had less autonomy to prosecute health claims. In the past, someone could head to the nearest DPE-RJ or DPU office and receive help to file a lawsuit. From the moment CRLS began its activities, it was stipulated that public defenders could only file suits after the failure and exhaustion of all possible administrative solutions to the question – a decision that ultimately falls to the Chamber staff themselves.

The management of the flow of the judicialization of health encompasses what I have called the *pace of management* (Freire, 2019), that is, the speed of case processing imposed by the procedures executed by CRLS staff. The imposition of this pace involves a series of determinations and measurements such as the ‘risk’ to which a person is exposed, which establishes how long they can tolerate a given health condition without leading to serious consequences or death. This pace of management regulates the time taken and the promptness with which a user demand can be forwarded to the Public Defender’s Offices if and when it cannot be resolved administratively.

In sum, during the crisis that marked the second half of the 2010s when SUS “was only functioning through judicialization” and where the possibility of taking legal action with the aid of the Public Defender’s Office was conditional on the CRLS’s decisions, control of the progress of administrative and judicial proceedings dictated who had their right to health safeguarded. Considering this scenario, then, I argue that in the ethnographic universe under study, the management of health litigation ultimately entails the administration of access to public health services *through* the regulation of opportunities and of the viability of litigation.

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# Disaster management in mining: an analysis of mediation as a technology of social control

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## **Abstract**

Recent disasters involving mining companies in Brazil have drawn attention not only because of the scale of the social and environmental damage caused, but also due to the management practices implemented by the state. In November 2015 the world's largest iron ore tailings spill occurred when the Samarco dam, located in the municipality of Mariana, Minas Gerais, failed catastrophically. A trail of destruction and death extended downstream for 700km until the mud reached the Atlantic ocean. Accompanying the reconciliation meetings and hearings at the Mariana Justice Forum with local communities, corporations and State officials, I identify some of the traps set by the negotiation space that, rather than offering an ideal condition of autonomy and symmetrical capacity for choice, operates as a mechanism for containing criticism and indirectly manipulating behaviour. Pursuing this line of analysis, the article discusses the political rationality and forms of control contained in extrajudicial conflict resolution strategies.

**Keywords:** Management; Conflict; Mining; Disaster; Mediation.

# A gestão do desastre na mineração: uma análise da mediação como tecnologia de controle social

## Resumo

Desastres recentes envolvendo mineradoras no Brasil chamaram atenção não somente pela dimensão dos danos sociais e ambientais, mas também pelas práticas de gestão experimentadas pelo Estado. Em novembro de 2015 ocorreu o maior derramamento de rejeito de minério de ferro no mundo, a partir do rompimento da barragem da Samarco, localizada no município de Mariana, Minas Gerais. Um rastro de destruição e morte se estendeu por 700km até a lama atingir o oceano Atlântico. Ao acompanhar as reuniões e audiências de conciliação no Fórum de Justiça de Mariana, entre comunidades locais, corporações e funcionários do Estado, aponto para algumas armadilhas do espaço de negociação que, ao invés da condição hagiográfica de autonomia e capacidade simétrica de escolha, opera como mecanismo de contenção de críticas e manipulação indireta de condutas. Neste sentido, o artigo analisa a racionalidade política e as formas de controle contidas nas estratégias extrajudiciais de resolução dos conflitos.

**Palavras-Chave:** Gestão; Conflito; Mineração; Desastre; Mediação.

# Disaster management in mining: an analysis of mediation as a technology of social control

Marcos Cristiano Zucarelli

## Introduction

On 5 November 2015 the Fundão dam – a iron ore tailings containment structure owned by Samarco Mineração S.A. and controlled by a joint venture between Vale S.A. and BHP Billiton Brasil Ltda, the world's two largest mining corporations – failed catastrophically. The collapse of the structure, located in the municipality of Mariana in Minas Gerais state, Brazil, turned into a disaster of kilometric proportions when around 40 million cubic meters of waste spilled into the Doce river basin. Rural villages downstream such as Bento Rodrigues (located on the shores of the Santarém river where the dam was built), Paracatu de Baixo and Gesteira (on the shores of the Gualaxo do Norte river) were completely devastated. Nineteen people were killed in the immediate aftermath:<sup>1</sup> four residents of Bento Rodrigues; an elderly woman visiting family in the subdistrict; a Samarco worker; and 13 workers subcontracted by the mining company. When the mud reached the Doce river, flowing down the Carmo river first, it caused substantial harm to the water quality and compromised the public water supply to dozens of riverside towns all the way to the river's mouth on the Espírito Santo coast. Along the 700 km stretch of watercourses affected by this disaster, the flood also brought the risk of poisoning by exposure to the heavy metals released through the churning of the river channels. As IBAMA's technical report stated:

Even if the studies and reports indicate that the presence of metals is not directly linked to the tailings mud from the Fundão dam, it needs to be considered that the volume of waste released when the dam burst probably churned up and suspended sediment from the bottom of the affected watercourses, which history of use and reports in the literature indicate already contained heavy metals. The churning may have made these substances bioavailable in the water column or in the mud along the route of the flood, leaving the Samarco company responsible for the occurrence and for consequent recuperation of the area. (IBAMA 2015: 31)<sup>2</sup>

The impacts of the Samarco disaster have been manifold. For this article, though, my analysis will be limited exclusively to the measures adopted to remedy the damage caused in the municipality of Mariana.<sup>3</sup> I reflect on the use of social technologies in conflict resolution and their political effects. It is not my intention to explore the merits and the effectiveness of these technologies in other areas of law, such as reconciliation hearings to 'resolve' legal disputes in special courts involving consumer and family rights.<sup>4</sup> My aim is to problematize the use of these technologies for cases relating to human rights violations, especially in the environmental area, including those involving disasters.

<sup>1</sup> According to data published by Cáritas (2022), since the start of the mediation process, more than one hundred people, residents of the affected communities in Mariana, have died without receiving the reparation due to them.

<sup>2</sup> Four years after the dam collapse, studies indicated chemical substances in samples of the water, soil, fish and even cow's milk. These substances included lead, arsenic, nickel, chrome, mercury, magnesium, cadmium, copper and zinc in concentrations far higher than the limits of tolerability set by the Ministry of Health (Ambios, 2019; LEA-Auepas, 2019; Institutos Lactec, 2019, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Eight settlements in the Mariana region were affected by the Samarco tailings flood: Bento Rodrigues, Camargos, Ponte do Gama, Paracatu de Baixo, Paracatu de Cima, Bicas, Pedras and Campinas.

<sup>4</sup> Some studies also point to criticisms of the mediation processes in the special courts, principally due to their emphasis on speed over efficiency (Simião & Oliveira, 2016; Baptista & Amorim, 2014; Oliveira, 2010).

The data presented here forms part of my doctoral thesis, which was based on field research mainly conducted between 2015 and 2017, including my accompanying of diverse reconciliation meetings and hearings at the Mariana Justice Forum (Zucarelli, 2018).<sup>5</sup> As a method, I examined the dynamics of situations of social interaction (Van Velsen, 2010; Mitchell 2008) and their repercussions via two main paths: 1) readings of technical, legal and academic documents produced on the case, and 2) participant observation in the negotiation and mediation meetings between representatives of the local communities, the mining companies (Samarco, Vale and BHP Billiton) and state legal professionals (the Minas Gerais Public Prosecutor's Office and the Mariana District Court).

In situ observation of the negotiations in these mediation and decision-making forums was fundamental to understanding some of the questions that guided my research, such as: Who are the 'relevant' and 'qualified' agents in the 'dialogue'? What happens to the different social subjects when their demands collide with the expectations and the participatory model that these demands presume? How is the so-called 'pedagogy of dialogue' realized, in practice, in the lived experience of these subjects in the meetings and what are their implications? How are these demands treated, managed and possibly transfigured? What are the positionings, discourses, actions and manifestations desirable in this conflict resolution structure?

Attempting to synthesize the responses to these questions, I have organized this article into four parts. The present introduction is followed by a brief contextualization of Alternative Dispute Resolution instruments. Next, I problematize the government technologies mobilized by the state-corporate alliance. I conclude with a critical reflection on the political rationality that steers the disciplined participation of victims in the asymmetric extrajudicial resolution spaces.

## The disaster and Alternative Dispute Resolutions

For the social sciences, disasters are associated with tragic social events occasioned by the combination of a specific social situation and a physical occurrence that unleashes an abrupt disruption to the normality of social life (Valencio 2014; Valencio et al., 2009; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002). However, the institutional initiatives designed to respond to disasters can actually contribute to the perpetuation or worsening of the disruptions experienced by victims. This observation takes concrete form in the case analysed here and will be detailed over the course of the article.

During the analysis of this process, it was possible to observe institutional agents collaborating in the construction of a series of measures capable of managing the damage caused. Twelve days after the dam's collapse, the first systematic process of extrajudicial negotiations was implemented involving the Minas Gerais Public Prosecutor's Office (MPMG), Samarco and the recently formed Commission for People Affected by the Fundão Dam (CABF).<sup>6</sup> Already in the first meetings, representatives of the corporations and the state legal institutions highlighted the need to adopt pre-established models of 'participation,' as shown in the excerpt below, taken from the Minutes of the Meeting of 19 November 2015, two weeks after the dam's collapse:

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<sup>5</sup> My thanks to Gesta/UFMG, especially Raquel Oliveira, for the comments and to Andréa Zhouri for her supervision and unrestricted support towards the development of the research as part of diverse projects funded by CNPq and FAPEMIG. My thesis was also supported by a CAPES doctoral grant. The article was subsequently updated and refined as part of my postdoctoral work, financed by FAPERJ, on the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology of the Museu Nacional/UFRJ.

<sup>6</sup> In Portuguese: *Comissão dos Atingidos pela Barragem de Fundão*. Still in mourning, the *atingidos* had to form representative commissions to join the negotiation process. The CABF underwent three reformulations over the first year of its existence, the members of the first having been appointed by the municipal mayor. At two other moments, elections were held that led to some changes and consolidated the composition of the commission, which includes representatives from all the affected communities in the Mariana municipality with just a few replacements of members over the following years (Zucarelli, 2018).

[The representative of Samarco] said that the representation must be legitimate for the community, that there are many discussions within the group and that the company needs to resolve the emergency issues. He said that the Commission has to reflect internally and reach agreements. He agreed that the meeting had to be larger but there also has to be a limit. “If with 50 people it’s difficult to make progress, imagine with 600 people talking.” (MPMG 2015a: 6)

Expressing the same viewpoint, the sociologist from the MPMG offered to help organize the participation of the newly-formed Commission of People Affected by the Fundão Dam: “the PPO can converse about the models of representation, communication and rights training. The PPO proposes to help the Commission along these lines” (MPMG 2015a: 7).

Nonetheless, the difficulties raised by the company in reaching solutions during the first month of meetings prompted the MPMG’s decision to submit the first Public Civil Lawsuit (*Ação Civil Pública: ACP*) on 10 December 2015.<sup>7</sup> Following the launch of this legal action, the Mariana District Court set up judicial reconciliation hearings between the parties. The aim was to decide on claims that could not otherwise be resolved in the dealings between the agents.

The Mariana District Court’s decision reflects a new tendency in the Brazilian judiciary to encourage mediation as an alternative to conflict resolution, even in the context of a disaster. However, it needs to be asked: from where does this disposition towards reconciliation originate? What are the implications of victims accepting or resisting this model? The aim of this article is not to survey the history of a so-called *harmony ideology* based on reconciliation (Nader, 1996; Viégas, Giffoni & Garzon, 2014). Even so, it is necessary to reflect, albeit only superficially for now, on the set of ideas and instruments mobilized in this arrangement, which can be conceived as a specific technology of governance (Foucault, 2007).

For the anthropologist Laura Nader, who studied the use of *harmony ideology* as a pacification policy, the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) first emerged during the 1960s, in the United States, created in the context of demands for rights by various social movements. Litigants were encouraged to adopt the new modalities of dispute resolution through extrajudicial expedients such as mediation and arbitration. For the author, ADR “was called ‘informal justice,’ a justice that promoted compromise rather than win or lose, that replaced confrontation with harmony and consensus, war with peace, win-win solutions” (Nader, 1996: 3-4).

Long before the construction of this aversion to war, confrontation and litigation, in contrast to the valorisation of pacific, conciliatory and harmonious procedures in so-called modern societies, indigenous peoples were submitted to pacification processes during Brazil’s colonization. The analyses developed by João Pacheco de Oliveira (2016) and Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima (1995) explored the rationality underlying the pacification project, understood as ‘civilizing,’ oriented towards the inclusion of Amerindian peoples in ‘society.’

In the colonial period, ‘pacification’ designated a deep transformation experienced by an indigenous group, in which its pagan, immoral and anarchic components were replaced by a supposedly new and more elevated condition, suitable to participation in the colonizing society. (Oliveira, 2016: 335).

While pacification was conceived as a bellicose activity at the beginning of colonization, it was later transformed “into a pedagogical and protective phase” in which “missionaries would be exclusively responsible for their control, teaching and catechization” (Oliveira, 2016: 346). The path towards pacification would no longer be found in warfare and extermination of the enemy; rather it would lie in behavioural changes and

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<sup>7</sup> The lawsuit was proposed by the MPMG given Samarco’s refusal to sign a Preliminary Commitment Agreement that attempted to safeguard the ‘most basic rights’ of the people affected (MPMG 2015: 17).

forms of surveillance, principally self-control. This would involve a kind of ‘civilizing process,’ as analysed by Norbert Elias (1994), which would become part of the procedures of internal pacification and the formation of the ‘civilized’ States (Souza Lima, 1995).

The change in the forms of rationality and the use of new technologies to shape conduct and exercise power can be analysed via the idea of ‘governmentality,’ as defined by Foucault:

First, by ‘governmentality’ I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. Second, by ‘governmentality’ I understand the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power – sovereignty, discipline, and so on – of the type of power that we can call ‘government’ and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (*appareils*) on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (*savoirs*). Finally, by ‘governmentality’ I think we should understand the process, or rather, the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually ‘governmentalized’ (2007: 303).

Setting out from this notion of governmentality and its apparatuses of power, the article seeks to analyse the political rationality and the forms of control contained in the extrajudicial strategies of conflict resolution promoted by *governance technologies* (Foucault, 2007), such as the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

Formal use of these conflict resolution technologies became more widespread after the Second World War and intensified after the Washington Consensus in 1989. Entities like the United Nations, forged during the pacification of the post-war period and focused on diplomacy and dialogue as a form of avoiding confrontation, started to promote the need for administrative restructuring, the strengthening of legal institutions and the adoption of peaceful confliction resolution practices (ONU, 2016). Along the same lines, nation states, banks and multilateral international agencies, in lieu of the legal procedures that employed competitive and litigious methods, advocated the regulation of disputes through the use of pacific and cordial techniques of dialogue and participation as a way of accepting divergences in the field of conflicts (Bourdieu, 2002).

Although legislation allowing for extrajudicial agreements already existed in Brazil some time earlier,<sup>8</sup> the inclusion of new legal instruments – such as Law 13.140/2015 (which provides for the mediation between individual parties as a means of resolving controversies and allowing the self-mediation of conflicts in the area of public administration) and the new Civil Procedure Code (CPC), which came into force in March 2016 – emphasized the legal obligation to use these devices.

One of the main points addressed by the new CPC is the encouragement for courts and other executive bodies to create judicial centres and/or chambers of mediation and reconciliation, with powers related to the consensual resolution of conflicts, making their application compulsory at the start of all disputes. This centres on the understanding that a decision reached through reconciliation has more chance of resolving the question definitively (Brazil, 2016).

In accordance with their individual specificities, Brazil’s legal institutions have been adjusting to these prescriptions and innovating through constant reorganizations of service provision centres. In developing these new approaches, members of the Public Prosecutor’s Office have access to published negotiation and mediation manuals (CNMP, 2015). Anticipating the incentives contained in the new CPC, the Environmental

8 Reconciliation was instituted in Brazil with the CPC of 1973. Arbitration only appeared in Law 9.307 of 1996. Mediation was established by Resolution n. 125 of the National Council of Justice issued on 29 November 2010, which created the National Judicial Policy for adequate treatment of conflicts of interest within the scope of the Judiciary. All three methods have the objective of reaching a consensual agreement between the parties.

Conflict Negotiation Nucleus (NUCAM),<sup>9</sup> for example, had been created in Minas Gerais in December 2012, following the directive of the Minas Gerais Public Prosecutor's Office (MPMG) to act in the “extrajudicial resolution of conflicts that involve the use of natural resources and to protect the natural, artificial and cultural environment” (Minas Gerais, 2012). NUCAM's primary objective is “to articulate and guide the work of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the mediation and negotiation of complex environmental conflicts” (Minas Gerais 2012: Article 3). Also active in Minas Gerais state is the Social Inclusion and Mobilization Coordination Team (CIMOS),<sup>10</sup> linked to the MPMG, which promotes spaces for dialogue with diverse social actors, seeking “to establish cooperation projects and partnerships that guarantee and expand fundamental rights and make them effective in an approach based on social transformation through empowerment” (Cimos, 2016), as well as avoiding “judicialization and contributing to social pacification” (Cimos, 2014).

### **The perpetuation of the disaster through the use of social technologies of crisis and criticism management**

With an emphasis on preventing disputes and building ‘harmonious’ agreements between litigating parties, the Samarco disaster continues to be administratively transacted through *governance technologies* (Foucault, 2007). I rework Foucault's concept here to contribute to the analysis of the rationality of government and the instruments used to manage the disaster. I thus use the formula *social technologies of crisis and criticism management* to reflect on the technological and institutionalized framework, which combines disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms, created with the sole objective of managing both the *crisis* caused by the dam collapse and the *criticism* of official responses to the disaster.

Before exploring the mechanisms for crisis and criticism management in detail, I highlight the fact that, when referring to *social technology*, some authors take the term ‘social’ to presume the adoption of alternative solutions to the institutionally legitimated practices, arguing that they can be considered “an instrument of social emancipation and not as a means of domination, a form of control or a cause of social exclusion” (Baumgarten, 2008: 106). In the situations examined here, though, I observed the imposition and institutionalization of these technologies despite the opinions and forms of action of the more vulnerable parties in the relationship. Thus, the ‘inclusion’ of the affected people (*atingidos*) in the ‘participatory’ processes is more a tactic of pacification and social conformation than an alternative, dialogic and democratic solution. This is one of the facets of ADR (Nader, 1996) and other *technologies of citizenship* (Hunt, 2015, 2012; Cruikshank, 1993), instruments constitutive of power relations. The idea of ‘empowering’ and transforming lay people into “self-sufficient, active, productive and participatory citizens” (Cruikshank, 1993: 69), capable of choosing the best actions for resolving their own claims, conceals the traps laid by the asymmetric power relationships structuring these processes (Foucault, 2007). Through supposedly democratic means, the inclusion of victims of the disaster on a mediation table with those responsible for the damage and injury caused by the dam collapse gives an impression of autonomy and capacity for choice, when what is actually involved is the administration of criticism (Benson & Kirsch, 2010) and an indirect manipulation of the conduct of the individuals. As Dardot and Laval (2016) emphasize, this ‘freedom of choice’

[...] is identified with the obligation to obey a maximizing conduct within a legal, institutional, regulatory, architectural and relational framework, which must be constructed so that the individual chooses ‘with complete freedom’ what they should perform for their own interest (2016: 216).

<sup>9</sup> In Portuguese, *Núcleo de Negociação de Conflitos Ambientais*.

<sup>10</sup> In Portuguese, *Coordenadoria de Inclusão e Mobilização Sociais*.

Thus the construction of governance is effective to the extent that it succeeds in digesting and (selectively) incorporating criticism, disarming some of the critics, while sterilizing and erasing dissent (Pereira, 2011). Moreover, it links to the process the legitimization needed to respond to criticism and ‘resolve’ the crisis caused by the damage, definitively, at an institutional level.

To construct this asymmetric framework of power, a series of devices are employed, such as making regulations more flexible, restructuring decision-making bodies, proposing democratic consensual spaces, disciplining social participation and defining administrative categories.

To better understand these apparatuses that form part of the *social technologies of crisis and criticism management*, I have organised them along two axes. The first is *structural*, comprising significant changes in bureaucratic composition and management, including the dissolution, re-adaptation and/or creation of agencies and of executive and judicial bodies, as well as the reassignment of officials to new functions. In this axis I include legislative flexibilization, which, under the guise of modernization, has facilitated licensing and eroded socioenvironmental rights achieved by earlier social movements, principally in the 1980s and 1990s. The second axis, which I call *processual*, includes the construction of instruments that contribute to social legibility (Das & Poole, 2008), control and pacification. These include the definition of categories, registration, mediation, reconciliation, arbitration and terms of agreement – in sum, procedures that allow the capture of critique and its channelling into harmonious dialogue with the aim of the management and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Generally, these are methodologies presented to litigants as attractive options, with the justification of avoiding the slow pace of the justice system and the unpredictability of court decisions. Theoretically, it presumes that cooperation will make consensual resolution possible and that both sides of the dispute will stand to gain simultaneously (Fisher & Ury, 1991). It is important to stress that a strong interchange exists between the two axes proposed in this analysis, with mutual influences that work to strengthen and effectuate their scope. Below I explain how these questions unfold in practice.

### *Structural* axis of the social technologies of crisis and criticism management

In the month prior to the collapse of the Samarco dam, in October 2015, the Minas Gerais State Government submitted Law Bill 2.946/2015 to the Minas Gerais Legislative Assembly (ALMG)<sup>11</sup> as a matter of urgency. The bill proposed the restructuring of the State Environment and Water Resources System (SISEMA)<sup>12</sup> to ‘expedite’ environmental licensing. Even after the disaster, the bill soon became Law (n. 21.972) in January 2016. This legislation establishes time limits for the analysis and contestation of state and municipal bodies or entities in the process, after which their acceptance is legally assumed. The law also allows licenses to be issued concomitantly, condensing various essential steps in the analysis of the project’s environmental viability into short periods. Additionally, the law stripped away the functions and powers of the body responsible for environmental licensing, transferring analysis to an ad hoc administrative unit (Zhour, 2015), which selects those development projects to be considered ‘priority,’ whose licensing processes are then fast-tracked.<sup>13</sup>

11 In Portuguese, *Assembleia Legislativa de Minas Gerais*.

12 In Portuguese, *Sistema Estadual de Meio Ambiente e Recursos Hídricos*.

13 Law 21.972/2016 created the Priority Projects Superintendence (SUPPRI), a “complementary structure of SEMAD [State Environment and Sustainable Development Secretariat] [...] responsible for the analysis of priority projects, considered such due to the significance of the activity or construction project for the protection or restoration of the environment or for the social and economic development of the state” Article 5, § 1). The first criterion of ‘significance’ or ‘priority’ concerns the value of the investment, as specified in Deliberation n. 01/2017 of GCPPDES – Sustainable Economic Development Public Policy Coordination Group: “projects with an investment over R\$ 200,000,000 (two hundred million reais) will automatically be considered significant” (Article 2, § 2).



Similar proposals are on the agenda of national public administration, such as Law Bill 2.159/2021, currently under evaluation by the Federal Senate. Mining disasters have wrongly been used by parliamentarians as justification for approving this bill. Rather than adopting more robust measures to prevent similar recurrences, the changes recommend *self-licensing* or simplified licensing for commercial activities with a potential to pollute and degrade, including mining support structures, linear transportation projects, energy supply networks and so on. Obviously, parliamentarians are not unaware of the fact that dam stability reports are produced by companies hired by the mining corporations themselves, a procedure that amounts to self-monitoring. The changes proposed to the framework of environmental deregulation thus reveal different objectives. For the state-corporation alliance, the ‘modernization’ of licensing signifies the guarantee of legal certainty and the opening up to an increased participation of foreign capital.

The Brazilian government’s alignment with the deregulation agenda became evident in the discourses of members of the upper echelon of the executive, as demonstrated in the ministerial meeting of 22 April 2020, when the Environment Minister himself emphasized that distraction of the media’s attention at the moment on the Covid-19 pandemic represented an ‘opportunity’ to implement such reforms:

The **opportunity** we have with the media not... [with the media] giving us a bit of relief on other issues, is to pass the infra-legal reforms allowing deregulation, simplification, all the reforms that the entire world [...] So for this to happen we need to make an effort now **while we are in this tranquil moment in terms of media coverage, because they’re only taking about Covid, and drive through changes to the rules and a simplification of the regulations**. IPHAN [Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage], the Ministry of Agriculture, the Environment Ministry, whatever. Now is the time to combine forces **to relax and simplify** the regulations... it’s the [simplified] regulatory structure we need in every aspect (INC/PF 2020: 19-20; emphasis added).

The ‘deregulation’ and ‘simplification’ sought by the minister involved the time needed to produce an environmental viability assessment for projects, an aspect frequently criticised by investors as excessive, bureaucratic and thus time-consuming and costly.<sup>14</sup> This is the context in which we observe numerous flexibilizations in the environmental legislation aiming to provide greater ‘legal certainty,’ thereby attracting and facilitating capital investments.

Finally, in relation to the *structural axis*, it is important to point out the role performed by the *conditions* and *mitigating measures*, which, despite the socioenvironmental nonviability of many projects, prevent the anticipation of likely damage from turning into a decision to refuse permission. In the case of conditions, a diagnosis of nonviability is replaced by obligations in the present, most of which entail the production of new studies and impact monitoring activities (Carmona & Jaramillo, 2015). However, the audit conducted by the Minas Gerais State Court of Auditors (TCE)<sup>15</sup> found weaknesses in the follow-up and monitoring of the conditions set in the mining licenses. As well as a lack of “preventative follow-up and supervision of compliance with conditions for mitigatory and compensatory measures” (TCE 2017: 54), it also identified the “issuing of licenses without any compliance with conditions” (TCE 2017: 55) and examples where “conditions that should have been set in earlier licenses were postponed to the next phase” (TCE 2017: 54), among other irregularities.

The mitigatory and compensatory measures also work towards the institutional viability of the projects by including ‘future requirements’ that authorize, in principle, the granting of the requested license. In this way, these devices end up functioning as *flexibilization mechanisms*, which postpone actions or effectively block decisions to turn down permission for the projects (Zucarelli, 2006). Samarco’s license was no different.

<sup>14</sup> This criticism does not take into consideration, for example, the extremely poor quality of the environmental impact studies presented by the companies, most of which require complementary information from the licensing environmental bodies. On the political-structural and procedural problems of licensing, see Zhouri, Laschetski & Paiva (2005).

<sup>15</sup> In Portuguese, *Tribunal de Contas do Estado de Minas Gerais*.

The conditions set in the pre-licensing phase remained unmet, even when the operating license was issued, and nor were they implemented in response to the technical reports produced at the request of the Public Prosecutor's Office during the revalidation phase for the operating license (Instituto Prístino, 2013).<sup>16</sup>

### *Processual* axis of the social technologies of crisis and criticism management

In this axis, I specifically examine two mechanisms that produce significant political effects in relation to the management of environmental conflicts, whether through the capture and 'channelling' of criticism and opposition, or through the promotion of 'harmonious' dialogue as a means of preventing litigation and dissolving resistance. Both mechanisms rely on controlling the eligibility of compensation claims and the public expression of conflicts. Under the guise of social pacification, two main strategies are put into operation in order to: 1) discipline participation in spaces of mediation, and 2) define and fragment taxonomies.

#### Disciplining participation in mediation spaces

The spaces planned for the execution of mediation practices constitute an asymmetric field of power where specific symbolic capital is required (Bourdieu, 2002). Those possessing this technical and political capital generally tend to dominate the process of formulating supposedly adequate measures. Participants who lack the required capital need to perform a series of procedures foreign to their immediate universe. In this new form of imperative relationship, marginalized sectors of the field are not permitted to express their own ways of doing, creating and existing without a specific 'translation' (Spivak, 2005) or reconfiguration of their political languages.

Along these lines, an excerpt from the poem written by the teacher Angélica, a woman from Paracatu affected by the dam collapse, "expresses the distress and anguish experienced by social actors who find themselves dealing with a new and strange political and bureaucratic reality" (Zhou et al., 2017: 83).

It's so difficult, this task of mine, our task: to learn how to be an affected person.

What do you mean?

We need to behave like affected people.

Is there a particular way for affected people to behave?

I don't know.

I know that we need to learn how to live together like that.

That makes me think about rights, meetings, assemblies, agreements, foundation, reconstruction, resettlement...

Concepts which make me confused. Confusion which makes it difficult to understand simple words like: ask, require, negotiate, fight, right, wrong.

That's why I cry. I feel affected by not knowing how to be an affected person (A Sirene 2016: 7).

The excerpt shows how participation is based on a set of conditions and normative expectations relating both to the lexicon of the field itself and to ideal behaviours, habitual knowledge and learnt skills that function as prerequisites or dispositions of the body and spirit that enable action and position-taking. When unmet, these requirements and forms of disciplining result precisely in the impossibility of the person being recognized by other actors from the field and in the discrediting or invalidation of the form and content of their actions (Zucarelli, 2021). The effort to translate thus reveals a certain narrowing of political idioms in

<sup>16</sup> These and other examples of failures to comply with the conditions set in environmental licenses can be accessed via the Map published by Minas Gerais Observatory of Environmental Conflicts at <http://conflitosambientaismg.lcc.ufmg.br/observatorio-de-conflitos-ambientais/>.

which the authorized forms fail to apprehend the diversity and complexity of the demands and narratives of suffering (Zhouri et al., 2017; Santos 2007; Das 1995). The wider dimension of the ruptures caused to social life is eclipsed, at the same time as spaces are organized for setting out demands and for their potential apprehension in institutional terms. In this way, the constitution of formal spaces for 'hearing' the other conceals an indisposition towards other forms of knowledge, as Valencio argues (2010: 760):

It is worth stressing that participatory arenas are by themselves no guarantee that their processes will produce a socially better outcome, given that the direction taken by the argumentative and deliberative strategies can be manipulated by groups that neither desire nor expect to lose control over the institutional decisions that, under pressure from society, they adopt. The institution is seen as an instrument of personal power and prestige by the actors in charge. Thus language games are again employed to produce statements that divert the course of public action away from support of the rights of the socially organized and politically represented dispossessed. This is because any new institutional politics constructed through a genuine polyphony could potentially threaten the instituted power relations and discontinue the patrimonialization of public assets that underpins stigmatizing discourses and practices.

In fact, the incorporation of other actors is enabled and accompanied by the mobilization of sophisticated control mechanisms. The victims experience the game of interaction in practice and, at the same time, despite all the difficulties, confront the challenge by incorporating adaptations to the imperatives of official communication in order to produce the discourse of dialogue and, as far as possible, the discourse of resistance too.<sup>17</sup>

However, to insert oneself in this model of social relationship, as well as the obligation to become familiarized with the symbolic capital demanded, it is necessary to exercise self-control, tame behaviour (Foucault, 2003) and maintain the expressive coherence demanded in interactive spaces. During the reconciliation hearings of the Mariana Justice Forum, the legal consultancy hired to 'translate' the losses of the victims,<sup>18</sup> after some disappointment in earlier meetings (Zucarelli, 2018), perceived that using appropriate forms of address and attire had the symbolic effect of enhancing the credibility of their technical and legal arguments (Goffman, 2004). Given the requirement of formality and order in the occupation of these spaces and discussions, those who wished to participate were asked to submit to control and correspond to the expectations of the social situation.

At the hearing held on 5 October 2017, the rite of participation was incorporated by the legal counsel. From this moment, the *atingido* (the person affected by the dam disaster) no longer had to explain their loss to the judge on their own. When invited to speak, a member of *Cáritas*, the consultancy in question, this time wearing an elegant suit and asking for permission from 'his Honour,' looked up the 'technical file' and introduced the 'case,' recounting the 'situation of the *atingido*' with the formality expected in the mediation space. Next, the judge confirmed with the *atingido* the account presented by their counsel, which was then open to contestation by the bench of lawyers representing the companies.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In cyclical movements of strengthening and discouragement, the *atingidos* have responded to the challenges of the struggle for rights through expressive actions of subversion, reorganization and engagement in demanding stances against the inaction of the companies. The blocking of highways, national and international denunciations of human rights violations, rearrangements of organisation and mobilizations, demonstrations and public protests. All these formats are contrary to the logic of 'pacification,' resulting from a politics of resistance to the hegemony of participation, which have emerged from the painful passage of time entailed by endless negotiation meetings. I am unable to explore the topic further in this article, but to visualize the demonstrations and resistance strategies, I suggest consulting my thesis (Zucarelli, 2018) and the newspaper *A Sirene* (all editions, from February 2016 to October 2023, are available on the website <https://jornalasure.com.br/>).

<sup>18</sup> The technical team chosen to assist the Mariana victims was *Cáritas Brasileira Regional Minas Gerais*. For a more detailed analysis of the institutionalization of this and other technical consultancies in the context of dams in Minas Gerais, see Oliveira (2022).

<sup>19</sup> FIELDNOTES. 2017a. *Fieldwork*. Centro, Mariana-MG, 5 October 2017.

Based on these observations, I emphasize that the order mobilized in the interactions contributes to normalization of the field of conflicts and perpetuation of the dominant values. Luc Boltanski (2013), discussing modes of domination, has similarly called attention to a *management policy apparatus* that presents devices capable of containing criticism and maintaining the existing social asymmetries intact. He writes:

In this type of system, the actors, especially the most dominated, are not asked to surrender to an illusion, since they are not asked to adhere to the established order with any enthusiasm. They are asked to be *realistic*. Being realistic means accepting restrictions, especially economic, just as they are, not because they are good or fair 'in themselves,' but because it is impossible for them to be any different (Boltanski, 2013: 450, original emphasis).

This excerpt from Boltanski reminds me of informal conversations I had in the field with representatives of the Public Prosecutor's Office, in which negotiating out-of-court settlements was presented as imperative, the only possible way forward. In this case, the authoritative calculation mobilized by these legal operators is premised on a kind of 'evidence,' namely, that the judiciary would not cede to the claims of the *atingidos* given the economic power of the companies and the illusion of development proportioned by mining in the region.<sup>20</sup>

In this respect, governors and governed, dominant and dominated, confront the same problem. They are all supposed to be servants of reality. They are all asked to be *realistic*. But this equality in theory masks a profound asymmetry. The fetishization of reality conceals what actually constitutes it: namely, the network of rules, laws, formats of proof, norms, modes of calculation and control, which most of the time, but to varying degrees, possess an institutional origin. But one of the main differences between the dominant and the dominated is precisely the asymmetrical position they occupy in relation to institutions and, consequently, in relation to the rules that the institutions set (Boltanski, 2013: 451, original emphasis).

Hence, the *management policy* applied to the administration of conflicts in the environmental field reveals something ever more perverse: the relationship between the creation of a desire for participation and the violence of exclusion (Baviskar, 2003). For Tania Li (1999), these are the effects of a *compromising power*, which, rather than accommodating or resisting, leads to the formation of everyday compromises to achieve a consensual resolution. In this sense, Tania Li (1999: 316) invites us to reflect not only on the institutionalized acts of those who rule but on "how rule is accomplished".

The presence of the Public Prosecutor's Office, historically responsible for defending collective rights and possessing a certain willingness to collaborate in understanding and compensating for damages, provoked this type of feeling and engagement from the *atingidos* during the reconciliation meetings. The accordance of the *atingidos* with the actions adopted by the PPO induced the enchantment needed for their participation and indeed their view of the Mariana prosecutor as a kind of 'guardian angel' (A *Sirene* 2016a: 5). On many occasions, as I noted in my field notebook, *atingidos* declared that they only ever attended meetings when the prosecutor was present. His presence signified a certain empowerment, the capacity to ensure some kind of deliberation, unlike the innocuous meetings with the company alone.

Perhaps this is the main element accounting for the force of these social management technologies. Ultimately, the legitimacy of the so-called democratic and harmonious decision-making spaces can only be assured by the inclusion of diverse representatives in the agreement negotiations. Nonetheless, in enabling this compliance, it is worth emphasizing the importance attributed to discipline when the population becomes the object of management.

The discourse of discipline has nothing in common with that of law, rule, or sovereign will. The disciplines may well be the carriers of a discourse that speaks of a rule, but this is not the juridical rule deriving from sovereignty, but a natural rule, a norm. The code they come to define is not that of law but that of normalisation (Foucault, 1980: 106).

<sup>20</sup> FIELDNOTES. 2016. *Fieldwork in Bento Rodrigues*. Mariana-MG, 10 January 2016.

It is in this sense that the engagement and acceptance of norms regulates the conduct of the actors in the discussion spaces – at least to the extent that these norms are followed. Specific rules are created and passed on via ceremonies, like the official opening, approval of minutes, ordered seating arrangements, stipulation of the time allocated to speaking, denunciations and replies, as well as future courses of action. In this way, disciplining acts to structure a certain hierarchy and regulate attitudes, as observed during fieldwork in the rituals surrounding the reconciliation hearings in the Mariana Forum, participation in which required appropriate posture, dress, use of language and emotional control (Zucarelli, 2021).

During one of the meetings for revision of the registry, an *atingido* from Paracatu broke with the ritual of order, legibility of speech and waiting for the ‘appropriate’ moment to participate in the meeting. The space prepared in advance [the Mariana Conventions Centre] was packed but only a small group of lawyers were talking in low voices at the front of the hall with the prosecutor and another three selected members of the Commission. Shouting slogans, this *atingido* demanded that everyone be allowed to participate because it was a discussion important to the life of all the people present there. In a way, his ‘undisciplined’ behaviour roused the others present who applauded his speech and moved towards the front to hear the company lawyers at close hand. Under pressure and still speaking in low voices, the lawyers felt coerced and threatened to abandon the meeting. Despite having received everyone’s support initially, the *atingido* was then vilified precisely because his actions had failed to coincide with the idea of ‘cordial dialogue’ and the proposals for reconciliation, mediation and acceptance ‘indispensable’ to peaceful resolution of the conflicts. He was described as agitated, ‘hot-headed’ and unbalanced and told that his attitude could jeopardize the compromises reached.<sup>21</sup>

Hence, the ‘selected’ members, trained in the framework of so-called citizen culture, are the actors admitted as ‘organised civil society’ with access to ‘participation’ in the new governance. Captured by this logic, they will be obliged to organize themselves in a civilized form, disciplining themselves not only by complying with the law but also by considering the constructed codes of normalization (Foucault, 2003) of the new *technologies of citizenship* (Hunt, 2015 and 2012; Cruikshank, 1993), oriented towards the construction of agreed solutions via a market contract model. By adopting this conduct, they become ‘empowered participants’ with the symbolic capital needed to act in the field of negotiation (Zhourri, 2015; Carneiro 2003; Bourdieu, 2002).

In effect, all other divergent forms of thought, knowledge, language, posture and behaviour are disqualified, ignored and projected beyond the field of reasonableness or intelligibility, thereby excluded. As witnessed in the field, those who publicly express dissent in relation to these predicates of participation are pejoratively depicted as emotional, problematic and sensitive subjects who do not act rationally – attributes incompatible with the discipline that prevails in the negotiation ritual.

As Weber (2002) has already highlighted, though, when control mechanisms fail to operate effectively, the possibility exists of resorting to violence, which includes the policing and forceful removal of critics from meetings. Despite physical violence being the ‘simplest’ means of exerting power, however, other more efficient forms of perpetuating domination were developed over the final decades of the twentieth century (Weber, 2002). As Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2008) attest, the question is not simply denying belonging or participation, but exercising new forms of regulating resistant populations through special laws. As Nader (1996: 4) denounces:

The elements of control are far more pervasive than the direct extension of state control. An intolerance for conflict seeped into the culture to prevent, not the causes of discord but the expression of it, and by any means to create consensus, homogeneity, agreement.

21 FIELDNOTES. 2017. *Negotiation meeting between those affected, MPMG and Samarco. Convention Center, Mariana-MG.*

Taking a similar approach to Nader (1996), Acselrad and Bezerra (2010) explore the diffusion of ‘environmental conflict resolution’ techniques in Latin America through a survey of the literature. The authors proceed to argue that this model of ‘harmonization’ adopted in negotiated resolution practices displaces the political dimension of the debates taking place in public arenas, “assigning the conflicts a depoliticized ‘treatment’ based on direct agreement – usually through compensations – between the actors directly involved in them” (Acselrad & Bezerra, 2010: 35).

The adoption of resolution technologies based on a ‘coercive harmony’ works to establish a mechanism of cultural control, acting as a policy of social pacification (Nader, 1996; Souza Lima, 1995). In this sense, a kind of training is imposed on victims in order for them to adapt to the demands of the field of negotiations. Following this logic, the ‘training’ involves a tutor who establishes a “pedagogical mediation compensating for their relatively inferior position in the political community, preparing them for the exercise of full citizenship” (Souza Lima, 2012: 784).

Hence, when the Public Prosecutor’s Office joined the case under analysis, we can perceive a certain tutelary orientation with suggestions that individual lawsuits be dropped in favour of collective settlements (the PPO’s area of work) and that commissions and/or organisations should be created to represent the claims in the debate. These actors propose to explain the potential legal or extrajudicial procedures and gradually introduce the culture of ‘citizen participation’ to the *atingidos* (Hunt, 2015, 2012; Cruikshank, 1993).<sup>22</sup>

Problematizing the tutelary mechanism of the legal framework applied to indigenous peoples, Souza Lima argues that tutelage represents “the exercise of state power over spaces (geographic, social, symbolic) through the identification, nomination and delimitation of social sectors taken to lack the full range of capacities necessary for civic life” (2012: 784). In the Mariana case, the Federal Court judge referred to those affected by the Samarco disaster as follows: “an intellectually less-favoured population who must be protected”.<sup>23</sup> In proposing a technical consultant to assist them, the judge explained: “The *atingidos* are complaining about the registration process. They have a very low sociointellectual level and find it difficult to endure the three hours needed for registration”.<sup>24</sup> Rather than questioning registration as an effective and fair instrument for victims to record their losses, therefore, any problems with the process are attributed to the victims themselves, deemed unable to cope with the methodology used. The situation is clearly inverted, ignoring the need to create tools capable of responding to the new reality and the demands of those who suffered the impact of the disaster. Instead, the presumption is that victims must adapt to formal and bureaucratic procedures unfamiliar in their everyday lives. Hence, the negotiation sets in motion a process of domesticating conflict, ensuring the predictability of the victims’ manifestations in the public arena (Oliveira & Zucarelli, 2020; Bronz, 2011).

An example of this situation can be observed in the transcription below, referring to the case of a woman from Bento Rodrigues affected by the disaster, who was asking to stay in the house rented by Samarco, in Mariana, while also receiving a sum equivalent to monthly rent for her uncle. He used to live on his own in Bento, but, after falling sick, had gone to live with his niece who took care of his needs. The company alleged that the high amount paid for renting the house already covered the rights of both households.

**Victim:** It’s the *atingido*’s right to choose where they want to live until they return home... and it’s where I chose. You didn’t say that it has to be a rent of 2000, 3000, 4000. I went there, chose the property and that’s that.

**Representative of Samarco:** But you can see that it’s a long way from the emergency amount that we gave.

**Victim:** No. The emergency was over a year ago. It’s been ten months. The emergency is over.

<sup>22</sup> In the aftermath of the disaster, the Public Prosecutor’s Office created human rights and training courses for Popular Community Defence Prosecutors in Mariana.

<sup>23</sup> FIELDNOTES. 2016a. *Conciliation hearing*. Belo Horizonte-MG: 12<sup>a</sup> Vara da Justiça Federal, 13 September 2016.

<sup>24</sup> FIELDNOTES. 2016a. *Conciliation hearing*. Belo Horizonte-MG: 12<sup>a</sup> Vara da Justiça Federal, 13 September 2016.

**Judge:** You can't wish for everything. The agreement was for you to have the rent and him too. From what I can understand, Samarco isn't refusing to pay your rent. What it's questioning is that you're receiving a house whose monthly rent is double the average that the others are receiving. So I ask you: are you willing to move to a house with a lower rent for your uncle to receive the 1200 [the average amount determined for rent]?

**Victim:** I'd ask you in return: does Samarco have a property I could choose to put my three horses, my fifty chickens, my geese, my dogs, all of them?

**Judge:** The question is that you have to make choices. [...] I think you have to be more flexible.

**Victim:** It's Samarco that has to be more flexible with us.

**Judge:** No. For the purposes of agreement, we have to be more flexible, you understand? Can you follow the reasoning?<sup>25</sup>

In effect, the caveat that 'you can't wish for everything' and the demand for 'more flexible behaviour' fall entirely on the more vulnerable side of the relation. Demands that deviate from the established patterns and the customary practices of the negotiating situation are directed towards the renunciation of claims deemed inappropriate or excessive, as a way of ensuring that the relationship remains domesticated, predictable and in conformity with the filters of legibility that block certain claims for rights.

### Definition and fragmentation of taxonomies

In the context of environmental policies, many classifications are used to organize information on the different environments in which interventions are planned. It is not my intention here to examine the entire range of taxonomies in this field. However, we do need to reflect on various questions in order to grasp the fundamental role of certain categories in delimiting and shaping the *social technologies of crisis and criticism management*.

The first taxonomy I wish to examine is the *atingido*, the 'affected' victim, the construction of which initially referred to the struggle and resistance of social movements to environmental licensing processes for hydroelectric plants in Brazil. Vainer (2008) highlights the implications of its definition:

A contested concept, the notion of *atingido* concerns, in fact, the recognition – read, legitimization – of rights and those possessing them. In other words, establishing that a particular social group, family or individual is, or was, affected by a specific construction project means recognizing the legitimacy – and in some cases the legality – of their right to some kind of compensation or indemnity, recuperation or non-pecuniary reparation (Vainer, 2008: 40, original emphasis).

In fact, the biggest problem in recognizing who is the *atingido* are the legal implications of any such legitimization. This is where we encounter the dispute over reducing costs (for the companies) and guaranteeing rights (for the *atingidos*). Responding to the social struggle for recognition of the damage inflicted on those identified as *atingidos* (affected), the state and companies make use of various devices to delimit the nature of this category. A tangle of other classifications and subcategories are mobilized, therefore, in the attempt to justify the inclusion or exclusion of claimants in the universe covered by any reparation measures. The formulation of the Area Directly Affected (ADA),<sup>26</sup> normally used in the environmental impact studies commissioned by the mining companies, seeks to limit the size of the affected area and population, based on a 'technical' discourse. It is common for the ADA to constitute the exact localization of the project infrastructure – in other words,

<sup>25</sup> AUDIO RECORDING. 2016a. *Conciliation hearing*. Fórum da Comarca de Mariana-MG, 14 set. 2016. Digital recorder, (275 min.). Transcribed by the author.

<sup>26</sup> In Portuguese, Área Diretamente Atingida: ADA.

where the company leaves its physical mark. The objective of the restriction to this area is linked to the project budget since the broader the definition, the larger the expenses will be on compensation for compulsory relocation and mitigation measures.<sup>27</sup>

Also with the aim of limiting the 'social cost' of the projects, use is made of what Vainer (2008: 41) calls a *territorial-patrimonialist* conception, which identifies someone as affected only if they own land in the area concerned. This definition works to exclude other customary forms of possession and use rights in the affected territories, although some advances – albeit in the face of considerable resistance and limitations – have been made in terms of recognizing smallholders, tenant farmers and sharecroppers, for example.

In the mining sector, companies strive to avoid use of the notion of *atingido*. However, this category of struggle, derived from the clashes with the electricity sector, has also been incorporated by victims of mining projects and disasters. In the dispute over the naming of right-holders, mining companies seek to restrict the category, whether by the fragmentation of the requests for licenses or even by the creation of new subcategories. The term most commonly used by the companies and the state to designate those affected in this area is *impactado* (impacted) or *superficiário* (superficiary), which maintain the idea of the spatiality of land ownership (Vainer, 2008).

It is common for the mining company to propose a compensation agreement only to those affected within the *impacted* area, that is, the physical area in which properties overlap with the area utilized or harmed by the project. The category *impact* possesses the spatiality of the mining project as a basic reference and presumes the capacity to objectively assess all the damage in the demarcated region. However, damage extends beyond this physical visibility of the interventions, since the transformations have affected social practices and group territoriality (Teixeira, Zhouri & Motta, 2021).

In the case of the Samarco disaster, the company uses the term *impacted* in order to effectively grade levels of damage and limit any compensatory and remedial measures exclusively to the area and population located within the physical limits reached by the mud – that is, the perimeter defined by the river channels. In this way, the category *impacted* obscures the spatial amplitude of the cultural, social and economic relations and the unfeasibility of recuperating diverse uses previously made of the now transformed territory. Hence, the contrivance of a commensurability between the *impact* and a technical solution, or the *impact* and the amount of compensation required, shifts the political discussion onto the *experts*. The use of a *competent discourse* (Chau, 2003) – that is, the 'technical' definition of *impact* zones – can be seen precisely to provide the symbolic capital needed to legitimize a narrowly managerial and economic vision.

During one of the mediation hearings with the judge from the Mariana District Court, the companies (Samarco, Vale and BHP Billiton) refused to recognize one *atingido* (a victim affected by the disaster) as someone *physically displaced*, and thus eligible to receive rent, because his house had not been destroyed.<sup>28</sup> However, access to his property and its use had been made impossible by the mud, as well as the isolation from nearby neighbours who had been forcibly displaced. In a statement to the judge, a representative of the commission of the *atingidos* explained:

After the dam collapse, he had to abandon his house. The residence still exists but he was unable to access his house. So what happened? During this period he stayed in my home for two months as a favour. His sister has a house there in Pedras. Today then... he spends the weekend with his family in his sister's house... Today he's staying

<sup>27</sup> Environmental Impact Studies commonly specify the amounts due to be spent on the 'socioeconomic environment,' even though this does not present the universe of the affected families.

<sup>28</sup> In the negotiations on the Samarco disaster, lawyers made use of the categories '*physically displaced*' (for those who lost their homes) and '*economically displaced*' (for those who lost their income) based on the recommendations of the International Finance Corporation (IFC, 2012). "This distinction was used as a baseline for scaling 'affectations' in terms of gravity and degree of emergency, ordering the scene of the catastrophe into differentiated situations of intervention and institutional response" (Zhouri et al., 2017: 91).



there for free. Until today he hasn't asked Samarco for anything. He's registered but hasn't sought any help. [...] So today, *doutora*, he can't return to his house because he's sick but he has no neighbours close by [if he needs help]<sup>29 30</sup>.

After an interval of 20 minutes for the lawyers to discuss in private and 'align' their understanding of the situation, they decided that they would reimburse him with the Emergency Financial Aid card,<sup>31</sup> retroactively for the period from 05/11/2015 (the date of the dam burst). However, they did not agree to pay the 20,000 reais established for those who had suffered *physical displacement*.<sup>32</sup> The representatives of the companies insisted that the house was habitable and that he could be considered *economically displaced* only.<sup>33</sup> In the hearing of the following month, the *atingido's* claim for 20,000 reais was once again on the agenda. The lawyers argued that access had been reestablished, the community of Pedras had 29 families and just seven of them were still displaced, hence the 'claimant' would not be isolated. However, the witness explained to the judge that the *atingido* used to have two neighbours living close by on whom he could rely whenever necessary. The house of one of them had been destroyed by the mud and the other had left the community in the aftermath of the disaster. The other families live on the other side of the river, on top of the hill, a lot further away. But the lawyers alleged that the area had not been destroyed, he could reside in his original home and the claim for 20,000 reais for this case would be a distortion of the emergency agreement.

We may have other cases, other cases appear where the house is still intact... localities far from his house, who might also claim 20,000 reais because the precedent is set here, different from what was agreed, 20,000 reais isn't just for the loss of the home. I mean, if I decide I'll no longer live in my house, **for whatever reason**, I'll also want to receive 20,000 reais now.<sup>34</sup>

The biggest concern of the company lawyers was always to avoid giving into decisions that might set precedents. Consequently, they tried to disqualify forced displacement as 'whatever reason,' as though it composed a voluntary choice of the *atingido*. The defence's main argument was designed to limit any compensation to the emergency measures, although a year had passed since the signing of the agreement for the emergency response. In this case, the Mariana judge asked for the amount requested to be paid, as a special case, since although the house had not been lost, the social ties that had previously supported him and made living in the territory possible for the victim had been broken.<sup>35</sup> However, at the request of the company lawyers, the reason for which the judge granted the claim – 'breaking of social ties' – was not included in the Hearing Minutes signed by all the participants on completion of the negotiations (Zucarelli, 2018).

The same logic was used by the companies in relation to rural landowners who had lost their fields, meadows and pastures but not their houses. The company argued that the supply of silage for cattle, for example, would be sufficient for the producer to continue producing and selling milk and cheese and that, therefore, payment of the AFE was unnecessary. The same argument was applied to the manicurists and bricklayers who received

29 In Brazil, *Vossa Excelência* is the form of address formally used for judges, the equivalent of 'Your Honour' in English. However, the term *doutor* (feminine: *doutora*) is also commonly used by working-class people as a form of respect and a marker of authority, recognizing the addressee's superior status in the social hierarchy.

30 AUDIO RECORDING. 2016b. *Conciliation hearing*. Fórum da Comarca de Mariana-MG, 10 out. 2016. Digital recorder, (270 min.). Transcribed by the author.

31 In Portuguese, *Auxílio Financeiro Emergencial* (AFE). Payment of the AFE was a measure negotiated between the Commission of Affected Parties, Samarco and the MPMG and secured by the courts. The aid is equivalent to one minimum wage for each family member who has lost their income, plus 20% per dependent, plus the value of a basket of basic goods.

32 Like the AFE, the payment of 20,000 reais was a right acquired in the first hearing with the judge from the Mariana District Court (23/12/2015), which established the payment to families who had suffered "physical displacement, irrespective of losing income or not" (State Justice 2015: 6). Of this total amount, 10,000 would not be subject to future compensation and the other 10,000 would constitute an advance indemnity.

33 FIELDNOTES. 2016b. *Conciliation hearing*. Fórum da Comarca de Mariana-MG, 14 September 2016.

34 AUDIO RECORDING. 2016a. *Conciliation hearing*. Fórum da Comarca de Mariana-MG, 14 set. 2016. Digital recorder, (275 min.). Transcribed by the author.

35 FIELDNOTES. 2016c. *Conciliation hearing*. Fórum da Comarca de Mariana-MG, 10 October 2016.

so-called ‘work kits.’ Irrespective of the fact that they were now living in other localities, far from their original clientele, the corporate representatives maintained that granting the financial aid would constitute a situation of dependency: “the company wants people to re-establish their way of life”.<sup>36</sup> One *atingido* from Mariana explained the situation when testifying for a woman who had also been affected:

Her husband sells milk at the association, it can be proven that he lost [his production]. He complained to me very recently that the silage supplied by Samarco was too little, his cows lost all their weight. Do you understand? I think he’s re-established himself now, right? But when a cow loses weight, it has to fatten up again to become pregnant and produce milk again.<sup>37</sup>

‘Re-establishing the way of life’ is not as easy, therefore, as the Samarco representative implied during the hearing.<sup>38</sup> A period of assistance is required along with effective actions that allow, minimally, practices and property to be recuperated in a form that enables the *atingidos* to pursue their economic strategies autonomously.

The categories and their fragmentations thus tend to underestimate the scope of the impacts. The examples mentioned show how the affected areas exceeded the physical mark of the mining projects or the mud with regard to the conditions for staying in the area or the viability of land access and use. The impacts include the consequences of becoming isolated from local networks of sociability, abrupt socioenvironmental changes and/or alterations in the cultural and commercial relations that previously existed.

Some taxonomies analysed in the Samarco disaster reveal that they are informed by criteria of eligibility and legitimation for which there is neither clarity nor consensus (Zhou et al., 2017):

There is dissent when, on some topic of the Register, the Renova Foundation/Samarco disagrees with what was indicated by the *atingidos* and presents another proposal. All these divergences, which amount to 2% for the company, are extremely significant and interfere directly in guaranteeing the rights of the victims, which delays the compensation processes.

The company’s choice of the term *impactado*, for example, diminishes the magnitude of the crime, which it calls an ‘event,’ and, as a strategy, eventually wears down the *atingidos* who, after two years, still have to insist on basic issues such as this nomenclature. Hence, defence of the concept of *atingido* reaffirms Samarco’s responsibility for the collapse of the Fundão Dam, identifies the existence of a crime with real victims, and says who should be compensated, contradicting the criterion of mud used by the company (A Sirene, 2017: 25).

While for the mining companies these categories are constructed on the basis of ‘technical’ definitions, limiting them to the juxtaposition of the activity and the conditions for mitigation and/or compensation, for the *atingidos* the categories are constructed through a phenomenological connection between effect, suffering, anger and learning, which exposes the dramatic situation into which they became involuntarily immersed.

The various ways in which the companies and the state avoid being held responsible occur not only through the emphasis on consensus and the rejection of criticism (Benson & Kirsch, 2010), but also through control of the crisis by other means, such as the construction of terminologies that seek to minimize the reparation costs, the huge amount of time taken by the conflict mediation processes (Teixeira & Lima, 2022; Zucarelli, 2021) or the imposition of definitions and their respective solutions. These strategies thus contribute to distancing

36 AUDIO RECORDING. 2016a. *Conciliation hearing*. Fórum da Comarca de Mariana-MG, 14 set. 2016. Digital recorder, (275 min.). Transcribed by the author.

37 AUDIO RECORDING. 2016a. *Conciliation hearing*. Fórum da Comarca de Mariana-MG, 14 set. 2016. Digital recorder, (275 min.). Transcribed by the author.

38 In January 2021, rural producers affected by the disaster, along with the technical advisors, submitted a denunciation to the Public Prosecutor’s Office and launched a social media campaign disseminating videos with reports on the silage supplied by the company, which has been causing the sickness and death of animals from malnutrition (Cáritas, 2021). Even in 2022, the denunciations of irregularity in the supply of animal feed still persist (Cáritas, 2022a).

those responsible from the cases of the ongoing disaster, perpetuating a sense of impunity and the weakness of the public institutions responsible for guaranteeing human rights.

## Conclusion

The initiation of the *atingidos* into the rituals imposed by the social technologies of conflict resolution, such as the mediation meetings (with their set temporalities, discipline and required behaviour), does not allow for any understanding or incorporation of the sensible world of the victims. Paraphrasing Clastres (1979) in his analysis of the initiation rituals and torture of indigenous Guayaki youths in Paraguay, it is left for the victims to carry the *marks on their bodies* and in their territories as a *memory* of this continuous time of disputes.

In this way, these subjects accumulate marks that worsen with the mediation processes, whether in the traumatic effects of the disaster and so many frustrating meetings or in the wounds opened by the toxicity of the mud and the dust of the waste spilled onto the lives of thousands of river dwellers along the Doce river. Various other *marks* can be found in the *atingidos* and in their territories, visible or not, that will leave a record of the *memory* of the violence suffered.

The disaster has continued in the life of these victims for eight years now. Many, even in 2023, have never been 'contemplated' by the emergency measures, given the unilateral corporate decision on the ineligibility of their claims. On 25 October 2019, Samarco received a Corrective Operation License allowing the company to resume its activities in the Mariana region. Meanwhile, the victims still wait for their homes to be built and the restructuring of their ways of life, affected since November 2015 by diverse ruptures.

In this sense, the out-of-court settlements can be seen as ways of guaranteeing some rights, while marginalizing or obliterating other claims, in exchange for the continuation of commercial activities. Hence the 'participation' of subaltern groups and their ability to defend their rights in the face of the governance technologies employed in so-called negotiating spaces is questionable.

The construction of a 'citizen culture,' in this case oriented towards peaceful out-of-court resolution, conceals the power asymmetries and the differences and dissidences at work. Analysis of the case exposes various criticisms concerning the assumptions made by this political rationality. As explored in the article, the requirements for participation involve the control and disciplining of criticism. And as for 'peaceful resolution,' it is worth asking who benefits from the pacific nature of the relationship, since it tends to remove dissenting agendas and languages from the political discussion in favour of a supposed harmonious and consensual negotiation.

What the ethnographic evidence examined here reveals is the long path of suffering, humiliation and exhaustion endured by the Mariana dam disaster victims in their search for recognition. Meanwhile, the corporate agents assume prerogatives and expand their capacity for managing and controlling the construction of the reparation process itself, including dictating rules and defining the obligations that the companies will or will not assume. The outcome is the successful implementation of institutional practices capable of containing 'social risks' and ensuring the infamous 'legal security' of the mining operations.

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# The commonplace period of expulsions: Frameworks for Warao migrations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Natal, RN, and João Pessoa, PB

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## Abstract

In this article we describe and discuss several frameworks through which Warao Indigenous migrations were understood and managed in two cities in the Northeast region of Brazil: Natal (RN) and João Pessoa (PB) during the most restrictive period of the COVID-19 pandemic. We argue that their transits do not begin with the recent ‘Venezuelan crisis’ and do not end with the promised reception in Brazil’s refugee policies, rather they are another stage in a long cycle of expulsions. We also suggest that these expulsions are not the most evident forms of the brutal violence that forcibly disconnects populations from their territories, but rather a banal, daily exercise that slowly, and sustained in time, enables the invisibility of multiple violences that denies these groups a place for themselves in the world. Examining the parallels between the two municipalities, we underline both shared frameworks and practices, and the significant differences in the development of public policies.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Warao, Pandemic COVID-19, Expulsions, Migrants, Refugees.

# O tempo corriqueiro das expulsões: enquadramentos das migrações Warao durante a pandemia da Covid-19 em Natal/RN e João Pessoa/PB

## Resumo

Neste artigo descrevemos e discutimos diversos enquadramentos por meio dos quais foram entendidas e geridas as migrações indígenas Warao em duas cidades da região Nordeste do Brasil: Natal/RN e João Pessoa/PB no período mais restritivo da pandemia de Covid-19. Argumentamos que seus trânsitos não começam com a recente “crise venezuelana” e nem terminam com o acolhimento prometido nas políticas de refúgio no Brasil, mas que eles são mais uma etapa de um longo ciclo de expulsões. Sugerimos também que essas expulsões não são somente aquelas mais evidentes da violência bruta que desliga forçosamente populações dos seus territórios, mas um exercício corriqueiro que, devagar e sustentado no tempo, permite invisibilizar as múltiplas violências que lhes negam a estes grupos um lugar para si no mundo. Com o paralelo entre os dois municípios sublinhamos tanto enquadramentos e práticas compartilhadas, quanto diferenças significativas do desenrolar das políticas públicas.

**Palavras-chave:** Indígenas Warao, Pandemia Covid-19, Expulsões, Migrantes, Refugiados.

# El tiempo ordinario de las expulsiones: Encuadramientos de las migraciones Warao durante la pandemia de Covid-19 en Natal, RN e João Pessoa, PB

## Resumen

En este artículo describimos y discutimos varios marcos a través de los cuales se entendieron y gestionaron las migraciones indígenas warao en dos ciudades de la región Nordeste de Brasil: Natal/RN y João Pessoa/PB en el período más restrictivo de la pandemia de Covid-19. Sostenemos que sus tránsitos no comienzan con la reciente “crisis venezolana” y no terminan con la acogida prometida en las políticas de refugiados de Brasil, sino que son un paso más en un largo ciclo de expulsiones. También sugerimos que estas expulsiones no solo son las más evidentes de la violencia brutal que desconecta por la fuerza a las poblaciones de sus territorios, sino un ejercicio cotidiano y banal que, de manera lenta y sostenida en el tiempo, permite invisibilizar las múltiples violencias que les niegan a estos grupos un lugar para sí en el mundo. Con el paralelismo entre los dos municipios subrayamos tanto marcos y prácticas compartidas, como diferencias significativas en el desarrollo de políticas públicas.

**Palabras clave:** Indígenas Warao, Pandemia Covid-19, Expulsiones, Migrantes, Refugiados.

# The commonplace period of expulsions: Frameworks for Warao migrations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Natal, RN, and João Pessoa, PB

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Rita de Cássia Melo Santos

## Introduction – the long period of expulsions

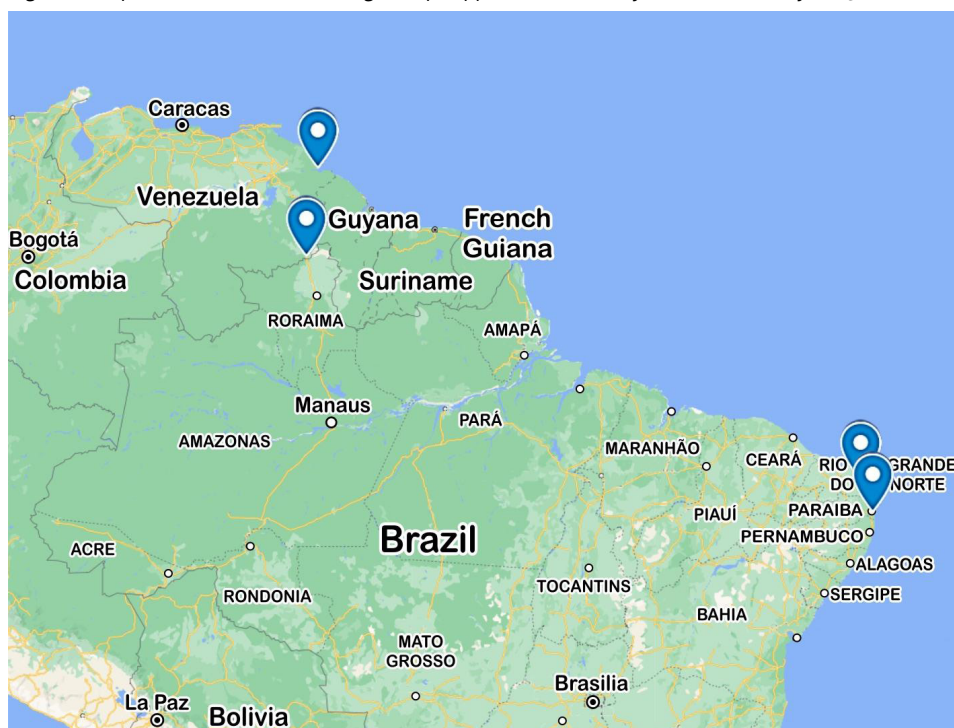
The reflections in this article are the product of several encounters of different orders. The first, when the authors met with some groups of Indigenous people of the Warao ethnic group from Venezuela who, since the end of 2019, began arriving in the cities of João Pessoa, Paraíba (PB), and Natal, Rio Grande do Norte (RN), in the Northeast of Brazil. The second, meetings between these Indigenous people, and Brazilian Indigenous peoples, with different types of governmental and non-governmental agents and agencies, who began to form part in the management of their transit and social assistance services. Finally, the third, within our areas of anthropological work. Until the onset of this process, our work had different emphases, focusing on migration in one case and Indigenous ethnology in the other. From these meetings, it became explicit how common points in the analysis of the management of populations produced otherness and were subordinated in the administrative traditions of Brazil. With no apparent contradiction, at the same time that significant differences in the response to assistance for the Warao Indigenous people in each of the cities became evident, the idea of Brazil as a homogeneous unit and as a receptive, welcoming space was also contravened.

The arrival of several Indigenous groups of the Warao ethnic group in Brazil, together with other groups belonging to the *Pemón*, *Eñepá*, *Kariña* and *Wayúu* ethnic groups, has been documented since 2014 (Rosa, 2021) and research shows agreement of an increase in the number of entries since 2018. During the most restricted period of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the border remained closed, entries were made unofficially, but they did not cease. The Warao stood out among migrant Indigenous groups as numerically more significant and leaving the cities and states bordering Venezuela, undertaking journeys that took them to almost all Brazilian states. The UNHCR estimates that there were approximately 7,000 Indigenous Warao migrants or refugees in Brazil in 2022<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the UNHCR on the agency's Brazilian website. Accessed on: 2 Aug, 2022. <https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2022/04/19/indigenas-venezuelanos-no-brasil-ja-somam-mais-de-7-mil-pessoas-sendo-819-reconhecidas-como-refugiados/#:~:text=A%20maioria%20da%20popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20ind%C3%ADgena,para%20outras%20regi%C3%B5es%20do%20pa%C3%ADs>. The Warao are one of the most numerous Indigenous groups in Venezuela, currently the second most populous Indigenous people in the country, with around 49,000 members (UNHCR 2021, p. 13)

Figure 1. Map recovered from the Google maps app and modified by the authors, May 2023.



The explanation for the departure of these groups from Venezuela is often based on common sense given the intensification of the economic crisis in the country over the last ten years. This is the explanation that we found in some academic activities and that is also mobilised by colleagues and administrators at public events, as well as by many of the Warao Indigenous people we accompany. Whether you need to renew immigration documents or present yourself in the avalanche of live online debates organised during the pandemic concerning your presence in Brazil, ‘the crisis’ appears as a self-explanatory model of a complex reality that has been going on longer than is usually portrayed. This manner of producing an explanatory key for an immediate, superficial understanding of complex processes previously appeared in the dynamics of Haitian and Colombian migration. Due to their graphic force, ‘the earthquake’ and ‘the conflict’, respectively, became the allegory of each of those situations (Facundo, 2021, p. 208). The recurrence and indiscriminate use of these images hide a series of social processes, including that of their own production.

Within the different dimensions of the so-called ‘Venezuelan crisis’, hyperinflation and shortages are in fact very serious problems that directly affect the most precarised populations. Interruption of the sale of state-subsidised food, scarcity of foodstuffs in general, lack of basic hospital and pharmaceutical equipment and items, added to an absence of food sovereignty programmes, are concrete conditions that have led millions of people to leave Venezuela in recent decades, provoking one of the most impactful migratory processes in the region. However, we feel the need to emphasise that these situations do not affect all populations the same way. The extraordinary time of crisis for Indigenous populations, for example, is better thought of as a new moment of intensification in a long, permanent process of expulsions and other daily violence.

As stated, the recent history of the Warao people, anchored in the national pact originating from the Iberian colonisation process, has been marked by a continuum of violence characterised by its power to incapacitate life in its territories. The Orinoco Delta region in the State of Delta Amacuro has suffered the intervention of several projects that directly affected Indigenous populations. García Castro and Heinen (1999) point to the 1960s as the beginning of the expansion of the agricultural frontier for the region. During this period, the construction of

a series of dikes altered the cycles of flood and drought and, therefore, substantially modified the possibilities for subsistence of Indigenous peoples<sup>2</sup>. The construction of the Manamo River dike was followed by a series of events that were reconstructed in a chronology proposed by anthropologist Marlise Rosa (2021), based on these authors. It highlights the cholera epidemic, the administration of which by the Venezuelan national government caused the death and forced displacement of many Warao in the 1990s. A series of violences followed, associated with extractive economies, particularly the oil industry, and the increasingly intense contact of Indigenous peoples with traders, workers, smugglers, churches, missionaries and city inhabitants, which continued to grow with the appearance of more oil and illicit economies.

We understand that the dynamics described are not very different from those that can be reconstructed in the history of Indigenous peoples from other parts of the world. In fact, despite the extraordinary nature of the Venezuelan crisis, we see that in other countries the daily lives of most Indigenous peoples are marked by recurring processes of expulsions and struggles to remain in their territories. In the case of the Warao, Venezuela's most recent crisis corresponds to yet another chapter in the cycle of expulsions and not its origin. Here, we understand expulsion in the sense proposed by Saskia Sassen (2014), that is, not only as the act of brute force that disconnects populations from their territories, but also the systemic process of producing limits that make people and things invisible to the system. In this sense, the Warao were not only expelled from their territories by extractive, agro-industrial and energy projects, but also by the prolonged famine and lack of resources to maintain life as they understood it; that is, through a process of expulsion sustained over time that makes the multiple forms of violence suffered commonplace, to the point that they become invisible (Sassen, 2014). Processes similar to those we see happening in the cities they have inhabited over the last few years.

By emphasising this long-term perspective, we hope to reinforce two premises that are often obfuscated in migration studies. The first is how the entire process of forced mobility is based on the politically provoked impossibility of staying (Facundo, 2019). We are not merely discussing the right of people to migrate and of migrants having rights, but also the struggle for land and the right to remain both in the territories from which they came and the places where they take up residence, according to their interests, desires and possibilities. The second premise is that crossing a national border does not nullify the marks of a person's class, gender, race or ethnicity. Moreover, unfortunately it does not interrupt the cycle of vulnerability and racism to which they are subjected. Although the legal language of the institutional worlds of migration and refuge speaks of receiving countries as those that guarantee a new pact of citizenship and rights for refugees, we know that this is far from corresponding to reality. The Warao left a country with a colonial matrix of social organisation for another that is also organised around a socio-racial hierarchy, and they continue to occupy the lowest ranks in it. From what we have observed following their paths in Brazil, this is not about a resumption of protection, but rather the continuation of the long history of expulsions, though on this occasion, one marked by serious effort from social assistance teams and other agents interested in minimising their suffering and promoting improvement in their living conditions.

The Warao's continued condition of subalternity and exclusion does not directly correspond to a lack of interest on the part of local technical teams in the municipalities in serving these populations. On the contrary, as we examine below, the arrival of the Warao in each city activated a very broad network of people linked to public institutions of different scales (federal, state and municipal), religious entities and organised civil society, as well as actors linked to transnational agencies. We realised that their dual status, as Indigenous people

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<sup>2</sup> According to the authors: 'the Venezuelan government decided to convert the Orinoco Delta into the main food supplier for Venezuelan Guyana (...) To achieve this, a decision to intervene in the Delta was made, building a series of large dams and other works that would prevent the seasonal floods of Orinoco from flooding thousands of square kilometres that was supposedly suitable for agriculture. In 1965, in the first phase of the project, the Manamo pipe was closed; however, the resulting serious negative ecological consequences paralysed the following phases' (García Castro & Heinen, 1999:31).

and refugees, rather than reinforcing a double exclusion, worked in many situations as a fundamental element in the visibility and mobilisation of resources, the proposing of solutions and implementing care processes.

Without diminishing the importance of these efforts, it should be noted that in the majority of the Warao's relationships with different public authorities, old categories historically associated with Brazilian Indigenous populations were mobilised. As previously highlighted in encounters with other refugee groups (Facundo, 2017), in this case, we also perceive a distinction between refugees who cause problems and those who do not. This distinction can be understood in light of the categories analysed by Pacheco de Oliveira (2016) of 'good' and 'bad savages' that, even though they are colonial categories, continue to operate in different types of relationships between state agents and populations produced as peripheral. This is discussed by the author (Idem) in his analysis of the 'pacification' policy in urban communities in the country's large centres.

During the first year of attending to their needs, in both João Pessoa (PB) and Natal (RN), after meetings with tripartite care teams, we recorded in our field notes the words 'problematic', 'a very difficult case', 'greater complexity'. Another coincidence in the records we made in both cities was the constant complaints from the assistance teams concerning what they called grime. Sometimes in reference to living spaces, but sometimes also in reference to the people. This accusation caught our attention because it enables us to notice the greater emphasis given by the teams to the individual responsibility of the persons for their living conditions, to the detriment of a structural vision of the conditions of existence. In Natal, for example, city hall teams insisted on the topic in each meeting with Warao leaders, and they, in turn, insisted on the need to provide rubbish collection containers and periodic delivery of cleaning materials. Skips or rubbish bins were never made available and, according to leaders, the delivery of cleaning products was irregular and insufficient. The concern with the possible harmful effects on health resulting from the lack of cleanliness, which clearly bothered the teams, contrasts with the relative compliance with the fact that the Indigenous people shared a stove for six or more families, only one or two bathrooms for groups of more than one hundred people, with no access to drinking water or a refrigerator to store food. Cleaning as an individual responsibility appeared in the field as a moral accusation that diminishes the collective responsibility in combating poverty and its structural causes and it becomes a criterion for deserving assistance.

Thus, in João Pessoa, as assistance was established, particularly due to the conditions in the context of the pandemic, which we examine below, a certain select group of Indigenous people was produced whose values were close to those shared by the assistance network. Aspects like gratitude, cleanliness, education began to be identified as positive and, in contrast, groups formed by drunk, aggressive, ungrateful, or noisy people, were among aspects classified as undesirable. Given the impossibility of serving everyone, the former began to be prioritised in the implementation of assistance and settlement policies, while the remainder were relegated to the background, as a stimulus to leave. In Natal, in addition to sharing the aforementioned moral categories of interaction, the idea that a smaller number of people would be easier to manage also emerged, such that the fact that there are fewer Indigenous people in the city or in hostels, even though they were the 'problematic' ones, was sometimes interpreted as a positive change that made it easier to assist those who remained. Paradoxically, a small number of people were sometimes activated, by public administrators or members of civil society, as an argument to explain the difficulty in obtaining resources or to question the true need for a differentiated policy for so few people.

In the following sections, we propose a possible anthropological understanding of this ongoing process, simultaneously producing the necessary disenchantment of the state as a univocal entity and of Indigenous people as homogeneous groups (Souza Lima, 2010, Trouillot, 2003, Vianna & Lowenkron, 2017). To achieve this, we describe everyday practices and relationships, woven into contexts imbued with previous experiences in each of the cities. The option, therefore, to contrast the formation process of the Warao assistance network in Natal (RN) and João Pessoa (PB), during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 (which we took part in directly),

responds to the hypothesis that the mobility processes of this group are not an isolated phenomenon of Indigenous people, but are intimately related to the living conditions offered by each of the spaces they arrive at, occasionally renewing the cycle of expulsions. Throughout the text we discuss the assistance teams: professionals and technicians who implement public policies and social programmes, whether they are under contract, outsourced, interns or grant students. We differentiate these teams from administrators, understanding these as the group of people who, while occupying elected or designated public positions, have more decision-making capacity and influence in the understanding and direction of policies. This distinction does not follow an understanding of population management processes as a matter divided between a thinking part and an operating part. On the contrary, we adhere to readings of public administration that understand relationships in commonplace locations of administration as places and interactions that hold the intense power of subjectivation and subjection of the people involved and for guidance in the administrative decisions that constitute state bureaucracy (Lugones, 2012). We make this distinction in the sense of doing justice to the differences in terms of the contact, intensity and daily engagement with the Warao Indigenous people, and regarding the sociological differences between these state agents.

## The frameworks

The process of Warao mobility in Brazil is marked by multiple frameworks, in the sense proposed by Vieira (2019), that guide the understanding of agents and institutions concerning them. Since their arrival in the cities studied, we have identified several categories that seek to classify them, and define the type of assistance they require and those responsible for providing it. *Migrants, refugees, Indigenous people, Venezuelans, vulnerable populations, high complexity populations*, and so on, are some of the categories that operate within these frameworks and which enable such agents and institutions to legitimise or delegitimise access to certain rights at their intersections. These frameworks are fundamental to understanding the cycles of expulsion throughout their circulation and installation in different states in the Northeast region.

The first framework concerning the Warao Indigenous people precedes their arrival in Paraíba and Rio Grande do Norte. It is the result of the presence of non-Indigenous Venezuelan migrant and refugee families in the region, mainly due to the *Operação Acolhida* [lit. Operation Welcome] strategy to relocate migrants, known as *interiorização*<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the states began to receive people of Venezuelan origin in the cities of João Pessoa (PB), Conde (PB) and Caicó (RN)<sup>4</sup>. The choice of municipalities was explained to us by some of the administrators of one of the programmes, due to the presence of units capable of receiving and housing migrants by the civil organisation *Aldeias SOS* [lit. SOS Villages] and the *Serviço Pastoral dos Migrantes* [Pastoral Service for Migrants]. These organisations formed part of the network of receiving institutions in the shelter-to-shelter modality. Upon arriving at the destination cities, non-Indigenous families were directed to a place previously arranged for their reception and a technical team was mobilised for the initial period of assistance.

Once they arrive, the families are accompanied by technical teams for a period of up to 180 days. During this period of assistance, the expectation is that Portuguese classes would be taught, together with professional training, job recommendations and assistance in searching for new places of residence. According to evaluations by these relocated individuals, not all of these aspects were fully and/or adequately carried out and reports of dissatisfaction were frequent. However, minimal assistance and guaranteed transport between regions

3 *Interiorização* is a federal government action, implemented in 2018 as part of the 'border ordering' strategy proposed by the *Operação Acolhida*. It consists of the transfer of refugees and migrants from the northern border of Brazil to other states of the federation.

4 Sites consulted on 31 July, 2022. <https://cmne.eb.mil.br/ultimas-noticias/interiorizacao-da-operacao-acolhida-no-rio-grande-do-norte>; <https://www.clickpb.com.br/paraiba/quinze-familias-venezuelanas-trazidas-pb-nesta-terca-ficaram-nas-aldeias-infantis-sos-245555.html>

reduced the risks of the route, and families' investments along the route. This freed up scarce resources for other purposes: sending remittances to family members, helping with the mobility of relatives, saving for the end of social assistance benefits, preparing for another trip, and so on.

Venezuelan Indigenous populations, however, were not included in the *interiorização* strategy implemented by *Operação Acolhida*, a situation that generated the first framework that we wish to highlight, constructed in relation to the non-Indigenous, *criollo* Venezuelans. The Waraos we met in João Pessoa and Natal expressed (and still express) interest in assistance in travelling from Roraima to join relatives who were already established in other cities or to have relatives from those cities join them. Relocation could have been framed within the family reunification modality that already exists in the *interiorização* strategy or another modality could have been implemented. However, the decision made was that only non-Indigenous people would be included; that is, part of the management of the Warao at the border (Capdeville e Silva, 2021; Vasconcelos, 2021) began with the refusal to accept the distinction requested by the Warao based on their ethnic identity, for example, separate shelters from the *criollos*, while unwanted policies of differentiation were implemented using the distinction between *criollos* and Indigenous people, like the case analysed here, in which the Indigenous people were denied inclusion in the *interiorização* strategy.

It is worth noting that the modality that brought the majority of non-Indigenous Venezuelans to the Northeast region was the shelter-to-shelter modality. Leaving aside the assumption that civil society organisations willing to receive non-Indigenous Venezuelans were not ready to receive Indigenous people, or that they were even consulted regarding this possibility, when the Warao arrived in the Northeast region, the *criollo* groups were already present as an image of what a migrant and/or refugee is. Thus, paradoxically, the distinction created between *criollos* and Indigenous people during the *interiorização*, created a lack of distinction among the administrators of the cities of João Pessoa and Natal in regard to these groups. Initially, the belief was that all Venezuelan refugees or migrants were like those who arrived through *interiorização*, that is, they were non-Indigenous.

The presence of the Warao was often read as the arrival of a few more groups of Venezuelans and was marked by the obliteration of their ethnic status. Their arrival in the cities of the Northeast was characterised by the overvaluation of the category Venezuelan with regard to that of Indigenous, marking the re-encounter of the two groups in the form of a single framework. It worth noting that many of the Warao Indigenous people used Venezuelan national symbols on their clothes, on the posters they created to raise money on the streets, and even in their presentation on signs that registered their Venezuelan nationality as a prominent element. The Venezuelan 'crisis' was also materialised in the streets of these north-eastern cities and allowed potential donors to be questioned with common elements of communication, avoiding complicated explanations concerning the situation of the Warao and their multiple displacements. Hunger on the one hand, and motherhood on the other, functioned as signs of communication for the required comprehension, connection and awareness of passers-by and agents of public power and civil society.



Figure 2. Photo sent via Whatsapp to one of the authors on 10 July, 2020.



Reading the Warao simply as Venezuelans initially enabled the idea that they were people who shared the same educational levels, documentation status and living conditions as the latter group. In contrast, we were faced with a group whose mother tongue was not Spanish, that had very high rates of illiteracy and little or no trajectory in the job market. It is also worth highlighting that between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, the *interiorização* programmes active in the Northeast and the resources and agents mobilised in their execution had already suffered setbacks and in some cities were in a phase of discontinuity (Facundo, 2020; Vasconcelos, 2021), increasing the precarious situation of the first non-Indigenous families that had arrived in the cities.

Given the lack of distinction between Waraos and *criollos* in the initial situation, the process of providing assistance that incorporated the ethnic dimension became even more time consuming, as was required by some leaders in each of the cities and as echoed by some of the people who began to work on their behalf. In addition to us as university professors coordinating extension and research projects, in both cities, this request also had the support of agents from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), who began participating in the *Comitê Estadual Intersectorial de Atenção aos Refugiados, Apátridas e Migrantes do Rio Grande do Norte (CERAM/RN)* [Intersectoral State Committee for Assisting Refugees, Stateless Persons and Migrants of Rio Grande do Norte] created in 2020 and monitoring reception policies in João Pessoa, including offering training courses for technical teams on the specificities of Indigenous migrations. Training initiatives were also undertaken in João Pessoa by the *Secretaria de Estado de Direitos Humanos (SEDH)* [State Secretariat for Human Rights] in partnership with teachers and anthropologists Mércia Batista and José Gabriel Correa, both from the Federal University of Campina Grande, training and developing the state's social assistance network. In Natal there was also a strong presence of one staff member of the formerly named *Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI)*<sup>5</sup> [National Indian Foundation], whose engagement with the Indigenous cause resulted in significant action by this agency in the state of RN between 2020 and 2021 in favour of respect for the group's Indigenous rights. However, this also meant the virtual absence of this agency's participation the moment the staff member asked for leave to attend post-graduate education.

<sup>5</sup> During the period in which the events described took place, the formerly named *Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI)* [National Indian Foundation] was removed from the Ministry of Justice (except for the demarcation of Indigenous territories) and subordinated to the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights during the Bolsonaro government. On 1 January, 2023, President Lula da Silva officially created the *Ministério dos Povos Indígenas* [Ministry of Indigenous Peoples], dedicated exclusively to Indigenous demands, and the newly renamed *Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas (FUNAI)* [National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples], joined other bodies relevant to Indigenous issues within the new ministry.

In addition to the mobilisation of Indigenous people, UN agencies and ourselves as representatives of what those in the field of migration conventionally call 'academia', it is worth highlighting that it was reality itself, the concrete forms of life and interaction that made the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups evident. In concrete terms, the ethnic particularity, which challenged assistance and led to the reinforcement of differences in management from one group to another, can be read through differences in the conception of family, challenges to the parental-proletarian model that guides many integration programmes in the context of migration, in addition to other socio-cultural differences regarding the care of children, the use of language, and the manifestation of moral emotions. These concrete material aspects also appeared very strongly when it came to renewing documents. The electronic, online registration of the *Sistema do Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados (SISCONARE)* [lit. System of the National Refugee Committee] was completely inaccessible to almost all Indigenous people. The vast majority of them not only did not know how to read or write, they also did not have the knowledge and digital tools to fill out forms and request the renewal of documents.

The characteristics of the groups' migration, engendered in the distinction highlighted in the *interiorização* strategies, also played an important role in this transition to their ethnic understanding. Regarding the Warao who arrived in João Pessoa and Natal, their departure from Pacaraima to their destination cities was mostly self-financed by *asking for money* on the streets, according to what they told us<sup>6</sup>. This unstable, precarious source of income often forced them to choose between purchasing food and purchasing transport tickets. Furthermore, due to the costs, Indigenous people moved to the outskirts of large cities, occupying villages and shacks located close to major highways and bus stations. These places became references and circulated as possible locations for other Warao as they began to follow their 'own *interiorização*' or circulating around the cities.

The option of travelling in medium to large groups or having some of their close relatives stay behind at points along the way, with the expectation of regrouping later, vindicated other modes of understanding migratory dynamics and life expectancies. It was increasingly obvious to the administrators and technical teams that these groups did not meet the configuration of nuclear families that commonly structure social assistance mechanisms and programmes, such as registration with CadÚnico<sup>7</sup>, rental assistance, the distribution of food items, and similar forms of assistance.

In João Pessoa, another element that played an important role in terms of frameworks was that of complaints. Some articles were published in local newspapers that provoked a first wave of mobilisation and demands for emergency assistance for Indigenous people. In Natal, complaints in the media and public opinions sent to state and municipal social assistance agencies were intense. The element most emphasised in these articles was the presence of children on the streets, very often accompanied by accusations of child exploitation, as previously discussed with regard to the Warao (Rosa, 2021); however, they also focused on the unhealthy and extremely unsafe situation of housing placement.

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the practice of *asking for money* on the streets, there are disagreements among the Warao Indigenous people concerning whether it is appropriate or inappropriate, including incorporating into the discussion whether or not it is a cultural practice of its own. For some of the Warao people we interacted with in João Pessoa and Natal, 'going to the streets' not only guarantees the necessary income for their own daily expenses and that of relatives who are waiting for remittances, but it is also an autonomous way of circumventing the controls of state policies. Some women in João Pessoa commented on their desire to go, even temporarily, to other cities where their presence is less known and they could obtain larger donations on the streets. This reading by the women strengthens our interpretation that custom, or rather, the commonplace nature of precarity, integrates it into the common landscape and demobilizes indignation and the rush to reverse it. We thus understand that *asking for money* can be understood in multiple ways and when we point out its use for internalisation displacements, we are not ignoring its potential, but rather drawing attention to the fact that displacements to cities does not receive institutional support, not even when it is desired. For a more detailed discussion on the subject, we suggest the work of Marlise Rosa (2021).

<sup>7</sup> CadÚnico is the registry of information on Brazilian families in situations of poverty and extreme poverty, which is then used by federal and state governments and town halls to implement public policies capable of promoting improvements in the lives of these families.

Thus, even before an understanding of the Warao as a differentiated ethnic group was consolidated, a new form of classification was activated to assist them through the high complexity category. This is a category of the *Sistema Único de Assistência Social* (SUAS) [Unified Social Assistance System] which entails the provision of services for complete protection of individuals in vulnerable situations. High complexity entails the provision of 'housing, food, hygiene and protected work for families and individuals who have no references and/or are in a threatening situation, who need to be removed from family and/or community life' (MDSCF, 2009). In each of the municipalities analysed, the departments responsible for social assistance (municipal and state) develop projects and actions for groups that include homeless people, victims of violence, people released from the prison system, people with disabilities, children, adolescents and older adults. In all these subcategories, our attention is drawn to the fact that they are people who have been unhoused temporarily or for longer periods, who have no home, but in the majority of cases, they are people who lack the possibility of living in a domestic group.

With the arrival of the Warao, their demands began to be met through this classification. The framework as a target population for high complexity teams and programmes was also related to the idea that they were a homeless or nomadic population. The precarious conditions of the trip and the fact that they collected food fuelled these views. Moreover, in João Pessoa, the entity responsible for welcoming the Warao was the *Ação Social Arquidiocesana* (ASA) [Archdiocesan Social Action], a social organisation with extensive experience in serving the homeless population and the poor in general. While in Natal, for example, during an action aimed to update the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS) [Unified Healthcare System] to register the group's territorial link to a new local *Unidade Básica de Saúde* (UBS) [Primary Health Centre], the person in charge of carrying out the re-registration did not even ask for a residential address and began registering the entire group as homeless, even though at the time, they had already been housed in an old, deactivated school. These examples are not just circumstantial, but point to the proximity produced between Indigenous people and homeless populations. This approach forms part of the long process of national formation which, in Brazil, was operationalised by state agencies, such as the *Serviço de Proteção aos Índios e Localização de Trabalhadores Nacionais* (SPLINT) [Indian Protection Service and National Worker Location] and the FUNAI, which had strong connections with religious and civil society entities (Pacheco de Oliveira, 2016).

We also consider that ancient representations regarding Indigenous populations in general, not just migrants, played an important role in these interpretations of their presence. When the ethnic status of the Warao finally began to be recognised, the Indigenous presence in the city created a short circuit in the images associated with 'native' peoples as people of the forests or frontiers. News of persecution, deforestation and mining in Indigenous lands is a common theme among administrators in the cities studied and a good number of people who interact with the Warao know that their territories have been the target of different types of invasions. However, this knowledge did not undermine the idea that the city is incompatible with their presence. Their circulation and permanence in the cities and their collective way of life constitutes a certain *discomfort* and, as we show, reinforced the idea of an assumed provisionality, which already accompanies the reading made of migrants in many different national contexts (Sayad, 1991, p. 51). As stated, this misunderstanding does not always occur through public agents at the forefront, some of whom have good academic and political training, but it persists as a basis in the structuring of regulations and administrative instruments.

Perhaps one of the most eloquent examples in this regard is the dispute over vaccination against COVID-19 during the pandemic. When the first vaccines began to be applied, Brazilian Indigenous groups were considered priority groups by determination of the *Ministério de Saúde* [Ministry of Health]. However, in RN, when consulted on the need to allocate doses for urban Indigenous people, the response was that there were no Indigenous people in the municipality of Natal. This affirmation denied the existence of urban and *não aldeado* [lit. non-village] Brazilian Indigenous people, while simultaneously denying the possibility of the inclusion

of foreign Indigenous people in the initial phases of vaccination. It took the intervention of several agents, including the committed FUNAI staff member, to achieve due respect for the right of Indigenous migrants to be vaccinated and for them to be classified as Indigenous. This coincidentally reinforced the urban life of local Indigenous people.

Despite the broad recognition by public agents of the Indigenous condition of the Warao at that time, in João Pessoa, priority vaccination was not granted to them even after the determination of the *Supremo Tribunal Federal* [Federal Supreme Court] that began to orient the vaccination of *não aldeado* Indigenous people, which was replicated at the state level through the work of the *Ministério Público Federal* (MPF) [Federal Public Prosecutor's Office] with the State and Municipal Health Departments<sup>8</sup>. Although they recognised the scarcity of services offered to the Warao Indigenous population, the element of cultural difference was mobilised by employees of the Municipal Health Department as a reason for the non-adherence of Indigenous people to the healthcare services offered, which, for them, constituted 'an evident obstacle to the successful provision of assistance to the Warao'<sup>9</sup>. The group and its cultural differences were considered to be the reasons for obstacles to care and assistance and they were responsible for resolving the impasse by adapting to the formats and culture of the receiving location.

## The paradoxical period of the pandemic

Still within the scope of high complexity, and largely motivated by the pandemic situation resulting from COVID-19, shelter strategies were created for Indigenous people in both cities. This *sui generis* context inaugurated the shelter policy in the first half of 2020; however, each with very distinct characteristics. In Natal, the solution found came as an emergency solution proposed by the CERAM/RN, given the threat of eviction that people were suffering.

The state government had created the CERAM/RN in 2019, and the inauguration ceremony took place on February 18, 2020, shortly before the pandemic and lockdown measures. Soon after, a period of more restrictive circulation was established in the first months of 2020, which imposed a series of limitations on the presence of the Warao on the streets for fear of being infected. Furthermore, there was no circulation of people in either city that would guarantee money when asked in order to pay rent or buy food.

These circumstances, as mentioned, led to the fact that in June 2020 the majority of Indigenous people in the city of Natal agreed to be housed in an old, deactivated school in the Dix-sept-Rosado neighbourhood in the city centre. The shelter solution, in addition to being a demand of the Indigenous people, was decreed in the CERAM/RN document 'Recomendação no. 01/2020 of March 23', an official letter of recommendation advising 'public authorities on measures to prevent and reduce the transmission of the new coronavirus among refugees and migrants in situations of social vulnerability'. Among the measures in this recommendation document was the provision of 'temporary shelter to assist refugees and migrants in situations of social vulnerability'. A large part of the Warao Indigenous people who were in Natal were then sheltered in an old, structureless building, which the state authorities named the *Centro de Acolhida e Referência para Refugiados, Apátridas e Migrantes* [Reception and Reference Centre for Refugees, Stateless Persons and Migrants] (CARE/RN). The Indigenous people and ourselves refer to this place as the 'Abrigo' [Shelter].

<sup>8</sup> The Supreme Court's decision arises from the precautionary measure raised within the scope of the *Arguição por Descumprimento de Preceito Fundamental* (ADPF) [Claim for Noncompliance with Fundamental Precept] no. 709, and, in the case of João Pessoa, PB, it was requested of the State Department of Health through the administrative process initiated by the *Ministério Público Federal* (MPF). See official letter no. 1472/2021/MPF/PRPB/GAB-JGBS, dated 21 April, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> See official letter no. 1472/2021/MPF/PRPB/GAB-JGBS, of 21 April, 2021, on Administrative Procedure no. 1.24.000.000234/2020-11, MPF/Procuradoria da República [Public Prosecutor's Office] - Paraíba, instituted on 10 Feb., 2020.

Despite the deterioration of the place, the Indigenous people who went there were relieved not to have to pay rent or services and quickly began to establish themselves in the neighbourhood and in the building itself. During these months, the clothes hanging on the lines, some wood stoves, as well as two old gas stoves, a soccer field that they created by clearing a space in the courtyard, and the children running and playing in the trees, transformed the abandonment of the place into uproar. They became friends with taxi drivers and church volunteers, arranged small informal jobs with neighbours, distributed space in the corridors, not without fights, and even a small room for the leaders to work together was conditioned by them.

Figure 3. Entrance to the 'Abrigo' (CARE), Natal, RN. Photo: Angela Facundo.



In this temporary, swampy and unhealthy place, which they transformed into their home, one group remained during the most restrictive time of the pandemic. The group of families that did not agree to go to the shelter received the benefit of social rent. The requirement of this other group to stay together made the search for properties difficult, but *Cáritas*<sup>10</sup> managed to rent some adjoining houses in a village in the Nordeste neighbourhood. Shortly afterwards, these people left the city for Ceará, citing a lack of assistance, scarce resources and little or no monitoring of their situation. However, one of them returned a few times to visit and take care of the grave of his wife who had died in the city. In turn, in administration meetings, officials from *Cáritas*, the state and the municipality emphasised the problematic nature of these families, the fact that they made too much noise with parties and loud music, as well as the waste of water and electricity and the 'depredation' of the houses. As the most critical period of the pandemic was becoming a habit, inside the shelter as well, following disagreements caused by disputes over scarce resources for preparing food, the collective use of few bathrooms, the distribution of donations and other social frictions, several families left the place though part of them remained until July 2022. Shortly afterwards, due to a season of heavy rains that flooded the building and put the safety of its residents at risk, another large group also left the shelter and the state.

<sup>10</sup> *Cáritas* International is a coalition of humanitarian organisations run by the Catholic Church, which works mainly with poor and oppressed people.

In June 2022, two more women, a mother and daughter and their children, left and went to live in a room almost as precarious as the state shelter. The room had previously been rented by the first group of Waraos, who arrived in 2019 and who did not remain in the city, and a family who travelled back and forth between Natal and Maceió had also stayed for a few weeks, in April 2021. Likewise, when the Indigenous people who remained sheltered by the state were transferred to a new location without enough space for all the families, and disagreements over the use of the rooms were repeated, one group decided to leave the new building and rent a space on their own. The two small houses that they negotiated for 15 people, now homeless, are exactly the same ones in which we had first met other Warao families, two years earlier, who had recently arrived in the city and who are now in the state of Alagoas.

In João Pessoa, the process of sheltering families followed a different form. With no committee, the assistance network operated through the *Procedimento Administrativo* [Administrative Procedure] instituted by the João Pessoa MPF/*Procuradoria da República* [Public Prosecutor's Office] that activated the different bodies and secretariats<sup>11</sup>. At the end of 2019, the Warao arrived in a residential village located in the Baixo Roger region, known for its high levels of social vulnerability. Initially, the *Secretaria de Estado de Desenvolvimento Humano* [State Secretariat for Human Development], together with the João Pessoa MPF, sheltered the families in a deactivated school in Ernani Sátiro, a neighbourhood located between the main access highways to the municipality and about a 15-minute drive from the city centre.

In February 2020, a few months after the first shelter, the report conducted by the FUNAI to identify the Warao Indigenous people in the same village where the first families arrived showed the existence of around 100 people living in houses rented at their own expense (see footnote 11). The central element mobilised by the administrative procedure concerns their condition of vulnerability, an aspect reinforced in journalistic articles<sup>12</sup> that circulated at the same time the procedure and the FUNAI report were initiated. After the João Pessoa MPF conducted an initial round of consultations with different assistance agencies in the city, the ASA, an organisation with a long history of social assistance serving the homeless population in João Pessoa, was made responsible for shelter. The ASA's actions contributed to guiding assistance for the Warao using the same logic of assistance as groups falling into the high complexity category, to the detriment of their ethnic specificities.

Initially, this second group of Indigenous families went to the *Centro Social* [Social Centre] of the ASA where, in May 2020, they tested positive for COVID-19. Those identified with COVID-19, all of whom had mild symptoms, went to the *Centro de Atividades e Lazer Padre Juarez Benício* (CEJUBE) [Padre Juarez Benício Activity and Leisure Centre], in order to comply with social distancing measures. Those who were not positive received a rented house in the central region of the city, through an agreement established between the ASA and the SEDH, using resources from the *Fundo de Combate à Pobreza* [Fund to Combat Poverty], which financed assistance for the Warao over the next two years.

After the quarantine period, the remaining people occupied two other houses rented through the ASA/ SEDH agreement in the same region, in nearby neighbourhoods. The definition of family group configurations and distribution in each shelter was decided by the Indigenous people themselves. When moving in, each house maintained a private space for each nuclear family (generally a bedroom or living room), while the remaining spaces, such as the kitchen, bathroom and patio, were shared. Cleaning and maintenance of the spaces were carried out by the residents without the presence of a permanent technical team, a characteristic

11 *Procedimento Administrativo* [Administrative Procedure] no. 1.24.000.000234/2020-11, *Procuradoria da República* [Public Prosecutor's Office] - Paraíba, instituted on 10 Feb., 2020.

12 <https://g1.globo.com/pb/paraiba/noticia/2020/02/11/venezuelanos-sao-encontrados-em-estado-de-subnutricao-no-bairro-do-roger-em-joao-pessoa.ghtml>

shared with Natal, where there was also no permanent monitoring or administration of the shelters by third parties. Food was delivered weekly and divided among nuclear families. Disputes surrounding the use of the stove, bathrooms, and demands for more space and food were recurrent. Social workers, psychologists, health agents and other members of the technical teams linked to assistance services carried out occasional visits and, given the pandemic, long periods often passed between one visit and another.

It was in this context that we expanded the scope of action of the extension projects. Not only did we promote the implementation of public policies, we were also responsible for diagnoses, registrations, monitoring and technical visits, together with certain members of the federal, state and municipal teams that had been mobilised. Throughout 2020 and 2021, we actively participated in assistance networks, moving among the assistance, health and education teams<sup>13</sup>. We often participated in medical consultations, wakes, the elaboration of protocols, prior consultations on shelter, events to promote the production of handicrafts, meetings to implement education plans, and meetings convened by Indigenous people to negotiate conflicts, resolve bureaucratic issues, perform translations, hear dreams and suspicions of bewitchment, and many other demands. As our actions unfolded over time, the ethnic condition of these groups became increasingly evident and with it, the need to implement differentiated assistance policies.

This emphasis was equally accentuated by the Indigenous people themselves, who began to use diacritical elements, including headdresses, maracas and the group's distinctive clothing, in public spaces, in addition, of course, to the overt presence of their language. Another important element along these lines was the development of closer ties between the Warao Indigenous people and the Brazilian Indigenous movement, through meetings between different leaders in the two cities and the visit of some Warao representatives to events like the *Acampamento Terra Livre* [lit. Free Land Camp] held in Brasília. These meetings began to take place when confinement and isolation measures were being relaxed, but it is worth noting that in the State of Rio Grande do Norte, during the onset of the epidemic, some Indigenous groups allocated part of their prevention materials (e.g. masks and alcohol gel) to their Warao 'relatives'. A gesture of solidarity and closer ties with the local Indigenous movement that also reinforced the group's ethnic identity. Furthermore, the implementation of ethnically differentiated projects required by the Warao, notably the experience of promoting handicraft production in the two municipalities, generated visibility for their Indigenous condition in spaces beyond the immediate circuit of assistance.

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<sup>13</sup> During the initial context of the families' arrival in the Northeast, universities were activated by public authorities or by Indigenous people. In Natal, this action came from a Warao leader. The actions of Marlise Rosa (LACED, Museu Nacional/UFRJ) and Mércia Batista (UFCG) were fundamental at that time. Together with Mariana Dantas (UFRPE) in Recife, we established a continuous monitoring network throughout 2020 and 2021 that involved four cities: Natal, João Pessoa, Campina Grande and Recife. This network was made official through the construction of projects at the four universities, with strong emphasis on actions linked to the scope of university extension. Over the years of working with the Warao, we have produced several reports, notes, diagnoses, censuses and other instruments. The objective of these documents was to facilitate the implementation of the required public policies, particularly during the pandemic (2020-2021). These instruments are available for consultation. In João Pessoa, they were mostly gathered during the *Procedimento Administrativo* [Administrative Procedure] filed by the *Paraíba Procuradoria da República* [State Public Prosecutor's Office] under no. 1.24.000.000234/2020-11; while in Natal, this was achieved through a joint UFRN/FUNAI report on the situation of the Warao Indigenous people in the city of Natal in 2020 and recommendations for their assistance and guarantee of rights. Available at: [2. RELATÓRIO WARAO NA CIDADE DO NATAL EM 2020.pdf](#).

Figure 4. Workshop to produce handicrafts intended for sale (September, 2021). Photo: Rita de Cássia Melo Santos.



It was also due to the pandemic that there was a significant reduction not only in Warao mobility, but also in ours. During the pandemic period, face-to-face activities, such as conferences, dissertation or thesis defence committees, academic leave, field trips, leaves of absence, among many other frequent trips in our profession, were all suspended. This suspension led to our stay in the municipalities of João Pessoa and Natal for almost the entire period between 2020 and 2021. We began to share an intense daily life; at the same time that we waited for consultations and assistance, we came to know their interpretations, judgments, perceptions about us, of public agents, of the city and bureaucracies. Our knowledge concerning the ‘Warao worlds’ was constructed not from a rigorously planned ethnography, but from a kaleidoscope of situations that were taking shape in different ways in the daily life of our work as mediators between the Indigenous people and the different state agents to ensure their rights within the normative frameworks of the nation-state.

Our action began to take shape as the Warao placed some demands, or as the technicians on the socio-assistance teams, with a very refined knowledge of the SUAS system, proposed solutions and framework possibilities for assisting Indigenous migrants and refugees within existing programmes. But they also unfolded due to the fact that sometimes the answers did not exist and we were activated to help construct them. The way in which our operations were configured also included the widely described discrepancy between the resources and rhythms of social assistance programmes and the urgency and need of the populations for which they are intended, as well as the need for linguistic and cultural mediation, as described above. We were absorbed by feelings of solidarity and a commitment to reversing the insignificance of Indigenous lives. Thus, university extension has become the main front of our action, to the detriment of research work expressed in forms widely recognised and legitimised as ‘truly academic’<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout the two years of the pandemic, our production in relation to the Warao was concentrated on the preparation of reports, opinions, guidelines, and preparation of informative and educational materials, among other elements that favoured the technical teams’ understanding of the Indigenous people and the implementation of differentiated public policies. Throughout this period, we developed two educational booklets, one emphasising education and the other on health-related issues: ‘Caminhos Warao’ [Warao Paths] (available at: <https://bit.ly/3HnHJG2>) and ‘Cartilha de apoio linguístico para interações em saúde’ [Language support booklet for health interactions] (available at: <https://www.acnur.org/portugues/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Cartilha-de-apoio-Linguistico-para-interacoes-em-saude.pdf>). Here, it is worth registering that Spanish is the mother tongue of Angela and the translator of the extension actions in Natal, Luis Meza. In João Pessoa, Spanish was also the predominant language of communication with the Indigenous people, both due to the fluency of Rita Santos and the presence of a bilingual researcher. Over time, Portuguese also began to be frequently spoken by Indigenous people and by those who followed the projects. We reflect on the linguistic dimension of these exchanges in a recently published article (Santos, Facundo Navia & Meza Álvarez, 2022).



This led some people to claim that we were doing humanitarian work rather than anthropological work. At times, this understanding signified an accusatory act, one of censure, especially when expressed by our anthropologist peers. In their reading, our necessary approach through the method of social service, to understand the options for assistance and to try to support the responses, delegitimised the broad knowledge that we were simultaneously acquiring with regard to management practices and Warao migrations. Moreover, we were also aware of the criticism that we were contributing to the capture of Indigenous people by the logic of the nation-state. Well, we were contributing to this, though not without feeling contradictory and in anguish; however, we were also convinced that the refusal of state assistance is a privilege of a few who can enjoy public wealth without having to subject themselves to the moral conditions imposed on the poorest among us. The reflection of this intense period of work then unfolded into an interrogation concerning the role that extension plays in university hierarchies, as well as the academic doxa on legitimate methods for understanding social and cultural issues. Or as some university walls say: Who (and what) is our knowledge for?

As we show, the actions promoted did not ensure the resolution of the 'Warao social problem' (Santos, Menendez & Soares, 2022). What we can affirm is that not doing them would certainly have made the people's conditions worse. We have no interest in reinforcing the idea that the Warao were being saved from death, since we comprehend the political uses of salvationism that requires those who are freed from death to accept any type of life (Facundo, 2017; Vianna, 2002). However, we need to emphasise their intense vulnerability and precarity. The physical debilitation of the groups that arrived was evident, added to the accumulation of consecutive periods or days without eating was the critical condition of previous illnesses associated with poverty. Both cities, but especially Natal, have a very high incidence of ultraviolet rays and the heat at the traffic lights at certain times of the day is intimidating, which makes being on the street even more arduous. In João Pessoa alone, in the first year following the arrival of the Indigenous people (2020), there were seven deaths among the Warao.

What we are interested in reinforcing is that, despite all the difficulties and challenges in providing assistance, the arrival of the Warao, which quickly combined with the pandemic period, was marked by efforts to provide shelter and social assistance. While throughout the country, the entire period of isolation due to the pandemic was described as a threat to the lives of humanity, for the Warao in João Pessoa and Natal, this was the period of greatest deployment of actions to ensure they lived. A moment in which shelter strategies, even though precarious and provisional, slowed down the routine pace of expulsion for a few months.

The deaths we reported were not caused by COVID-19, though deaths due to tuberculosis in people not infected by the coronavirus are common. In fact, it was concern about COVID-19 that led health teams to begin monitoring tuberculosis infections and promoting referrals for treatment. In one of the final stages that we accompanied in João Pessoa, we saw the State Health Department designate a technician who was responsible for monitoring and communicating cases of tuberculosis and other illnesses among the Warao in the states of the Northeast region, including the Warao from RN.

### **Frameworks and cycles of expulsion: by way of final considerations**

In general, assistance to the Warao Indigenous people from the end of 2019 to the beginning of 2022 covered four major frameworks. The first related to the *interiorização* strategy at the border, was the distinction between *criollos* and Indigenous people, excluding the latter from the established process. This was followed by grouping them together under the category of *Venezuelans* and refusing to recognise important distinctions between them in the initial processes of assistance in the cities of João Pessoa and Natal; the production of Indigenous people as a high complexity group as assistance was required and implemented; and, to date, the conjunction of the Indigenous category with that of high complexity.

Based on different forms of classification, each of the frameworks sometimes contributes to the intensification of expulsion and, at other times, reduces the pace of expulsions, enabling longer periods of stay with expectations of durability. In the first framework, by enforcing the distinction between *criollos* and Indigenous people and their exclusion from the *interiorização* process, *Operação Acolhida* deepened the precarity of Indigenous life. The movement of dispersion through the cities of the North to the Northeast, and from there to the rest of the country, traced by the Indigenous people themselves, allowed them to choose where to go and trace their own routes, but it worsened their precarious situation.

The second framework, which coincided with the onset of COVID-19 pandemic isolation measures and which categorised them as Venezuelans, stimulated the first demonstrations of support, such as the delivering food, clothes, money and other items. This was undertaken not only by public authorities, but by a diffuse network of people who responded to the 'Venezuela crisis' as an event that required not only the search for solutions on the part of public authorities, but which provoked a moral appeal on the part of each donor who felt called to act. This framework also meant that Indigenous people were able to activate some public policies, going beyond the level of emergency assistance and activating medium-term social programmes, those more oriented towards permanence. However, these programmes continued to be based on familyist and proletarian models for the integration of foreigners, as discussed by authors who have researched assimilationist dynamics in the context of migration and refuge (Facundo, 2020; Hamid, 2019; Seyferth, 1997, 2000).

We then identified the activation of the high complexity category, which combines emergency assistance programmes with medium-term income generation and/or employment referral programmes and inclusion in *Português como Língua de Acolhimento* (PLAC) [Portuguese as a Host Language] courses. The first were based on food delivery, temporary shelter and some health care. The second aimed to ensure the much-desired autonomy of people and the future exit from shelters, with an eventual perspective of the potential permanence of Indigenous people in the municipalities. Imagining the possibility of permanence was one we did not perceive at the onset of assistance, precisely because it is contrary to the evident provisional nature of the presence of Indigenous people in the cities we studied, and in Brazil as a whole. Furthermore, unlike the 'Venezuelan' framework that was guided by the idea of the nuclear family, the responses provided in the context of high complexity, particularly in relation to the shelter policy and especially during the pandemic, allowed extended families to remain together. This aspect made it possible for Indigenous life to continue in the new spaces they began to occupy. In collective shelters, we saw them develop strategies for maintaining and adapting these spaces to their own ways of eating, the joint care of children, permanent language practice, the creative actualisation of their cosmovision and the re-creation of their bonds of affection and disaffection.

The shelter model constituted a fundamental element in the cycle of expulsion/permanence of families. In addition to the aspect of collectivity, it functioned as a reference point for donations made by individuals, for the development of activities within the assistance network and the university, for establishing ties with neighbours and potential sources of income, and so on. Furthermore, due to its public nature, the shelter modality did not require Indigenous people to pay for rent, water and electricity – which was fundamental to their permanence. Throughout our work with the Warao, we have noticed that the groups that remain outside the shelters or leave them, due to internal disputes and lack of space and resources, are the first to be expelled and begin their journeys again in search of a decent place.

Finally, we affirm that the still developing framework that combines high complexity with the understanding of the group in its Indigenous/ethnic character has been shown to be a more favourable framework for the construction of another way of existing, up to this point, moving beyond the pre-established models of social integration. From this intersection, which took place in both cities, we highlight the possibility of developing projects linked to the strengthening of their ethnic identity, their know-how, their history, in which their knowledge and ways of seeing the world are made possible, together with their desire for a collective life.

This proposal is the opposite of their proletarianisation and incorporation within the national poor, a perspective broadly analysed by ethnic and migration studies (Pacheco de Oliveira, 2016; Seyferth, 1997).

However, it is difficult to know whether this framework for assistance and the more creative development of alternatives can be maintained over time or, at least, long enough to consolidate some of its effects. The paths this framework took from the end of 2021 in both cities were very different. At that time, the majority of Warao Indigenous people had already received one or two doses of the coronavirus vaccine, movement restriction measures had been relaxed and the social charity of the first months of the pandemic, motivated by a strong and sudden feeling of a common humanity, was being abandoned. The crisis was also taking place in Brazil and hunger no longer seemed to be an issue solely for Venezuela and Venezuelans.

Furthermore, the presence of the Warao in the cities of João Pessoa and Natal became widely known by public agents, who were, in a way, normalising their assistance and abandoning the sense of urgency. The technical teams in both cities expressed more frequently that they felt overwhelmed by the constant demands and lack of resources, and by the fact that, at the time, an exclusive and permanent team had not been hired by the city halls, a situation that continues to this day in Natal. From that moment on, the Warao's mobility processes increased and we resumed our own plans involving international travel. In the city of João Pessoa, part of the groups that had moved to the Southeast region of Brazil in the first quarter of 2021 began to return. In turn, a large part of the Indigenous people who were in Natal began to move to the city of João Pessoa, especially after the intense period of rain in February 2022. There was no response from the administrators responsible for the shelter to deal with the flooding and feeling of being at risk, so they left the city. In January 2022, we left the country for academic and professional reasons, which considerably reduced our contact, even virtual contact, with the Indigenous people.

One of the more striking differences between the two locations was that the government of the State of Paraíba, through the SEDH, opted to activate the *Ministério da Cidadania* [Ministry of Citizenship] to welcome and receive the Warao Indigenous people and began negotiations for their inclusion the *interiorização* strategy run by *Operação Acolhida*, in order to promote the reunion of families of Indigenous people whose relatives were in the cities of Pacaraima and Boa Vista (Roraima) and in Manaus (Amazonas). This decision, in addition to possible political motivations, arose from the demand of some Warao Indigenous people living in the state who wanted their relatives to come and be with them. The decision then generated concern on the part of local public officials regarding the 'arrangement of the arrival of the families'. Little by little, the perception consolidated among the assistance teams was that Indigenous people are not a temporary presence and that it would be better to count on resources from the Ministry of Citizenship.

These resources were allocated by the state to transform the '*Projeto de abrigamento dos migrantes indígenas*' [Project to Shelter Indigenous Migrants] into a '*Serviço de acolhimento de migrantes e refugiados indígenas*' [Reception Service for Indigenous Migrants and Refugees]. Requests were sent to the Ministry in December 2021 and in July 2022, multidisciplinary teams were hired that included the participation of psychologists, social workers, social educators, Spanish and Portuguese translators, and Indigenous interpreters. In addition to these staff directly linked to the service, a network of public agents, academics and organised civil society form part of the Indigenous assistance network, strengthening and expanding the services mobilised during the contradictory period of the pandemic. The year 2022 saw the consolidation of policies on educational services (initiated by the *Secretaria Municipal de Educação e Cultura* (SEDEC) [Municipal Department of Education and Culture] in July 2021), healthcare and the regular distribution of fresh food. The arrival of families in João Pessoa, especially in the second half of 2022, was not accompanied to the same extent by the expansion of the shelter policy, which became increasingly restricted and once again began to produce distinctions between those who live in shelters and do not pay rent, water and electricity, and those who live outside them and have to cover these expenses using the social rent benefit, a benefit that does not cover all types of families,

nor all expenses. Indigenous people who are not sheltered constantly register their dissatisfaction with this situation of inequality and often report that they will seek better conditions in other cities.

Despite this internal distinction in the city, due to the set of services offered (education, health, food and a percentage of sheltered families), João Pessoa still shows a more receptive panorama than that in Natal. This is observed by the permanence of families in João Pessoa, while the number of people in Natal decreased at a pace marked by the lack of planned, organised assistance, even though it was never completely absent. In contrast, CERAM/RN has always dedicated at least one agenda item to the subject of the Warao in its monthly meetings (even with no deliberation or linked actions). The few times administrators and political allies went to the shelter, their social networks showed photos and videos of them with the Indigenous people, and they systematically posted solidarity actions in their favour on social media, including vaccination and the delivery of food items and the combat against the coronavirus. Training and capacity building events on migration and refuge and on shelter administration were also promoted for assistance teams, in partnership with the UNHCR and IOM agencies, which were also widely publicised. All of these actions, and others related to non-Indigenous migrants and refugees, earned recognition for the state and the committee, such as the IOM MigraCidades [lit. Migrant-Cities] seal. Recognition was also received by the State of Paraíba, which was added the UNHCR Good Practices seal.

Following this line of a high visibility policy, in August 2022, Natal hosted the first *Fórum Nacional de Conselhos e Comitês estaduais para refugiados e migrantes* [National Forum of State Councils and Committees for refugees and migrants]. In this space, the agenda of assistance for the Warao was positioned as an important axis of action for the local committee and even projects that never got off the ground were presented. However, neither the display of concern, nor the recording of small actions, nor even the enormous skills of some state administrators in policy visibility, led to the materialisation of public policy involving shared responsibility between the state and the municipality that would guarantee the execution of a plan for Indigenous people to remain in the city.

Indeed, in August 2022, the agreement that had been established between the state and the municipality when the Indigenous people went to live in the CARE – the centre for receiving refugees and migrants – appears to have been broken. In 2020, the state became responsible for shelter and the municipality for providing social assistance. As a result of the agonistic political relations between the state and the municipality, from the beginning there was mutual blame for the lack of commitment to providing assistance for Indigenous people, but even so, during the contradictory time of the pandemic, we saw enormous efforts from city hall teams, on the one hand, and some people hired by CERAM/RN as grant students, on the other, in order to achieve the basic guarantee of rights for the Warao who were placed at the CARE. By 2022, however, after increasingly serious episodes of flooding, the departure of several families resulting from conflicts due to living in inadequate conditions, the heavy rains that repeated in July 2022 and the increasingly dangerous situation of the shelter's structure, through the actions of CERAM/RN, the state government decided to move the Indigenous people to the 'Novo CARE' [New CARE]. A building that offered notable improvements in living conditions, but was much smaller than the previous one. This situation quickly led to conflicts between the sheltered families and to the departure of half of the people from the shelter. When asked for a response to shelter for the group that left, the CERAM/RN cited the need to review the 2020 agreement that had been established only for the former CARE, indicating the likelihood of not committing to a shelter policy for people who did not remain in the 'Novo CARE'.

One important development in the days preceding the writing of this article was the reestablishment of the distinction between sheltered and non-sheltered people, which occurred when some of the families in the city decided not to go to the shelter in 2020 and went to live in rented houses with resources coming from social rent, leaving the state shortly after due to lack of service and the possibility of remaining.

Currently, the group of sheltered Indigenous people receive visits from CERAM/RN grant students and people who carry out volunteering activities with them. There is no requirement for Indigenous people to pay rent, water and electricity and some co-ordination in terms of education have already been resolved to ensure children's continued education. Far from ideal, this more inviting situation to remain contrasts with the situation of others. The homeless group is no longer visited by CERAM/RN administrators or grant students, the state insisted that the solution of social rent was borne by the municipality despite the demand from the Indigenous people, and our own, for another building for the collective shelter of the group. For now, with no definitive answer regarding the future of their shelter, families have returned to the streets more frequently, spending more time raising funds under the sun. The abusive rent charged by the owners of the houses they managed to rent is frequently increased, with no legal support for the Indigenous people from public authorities. To date, there is no articulation for their children's education and the threat of eviction and the feeling of being unimportant have once again appeared in the discourses of people in the homeless group. 'We know that we are worthless here', stated one of the leaders during one of our conversations.

According to the arguments of the state administrators, represented by CERAM/RN, the decision not to take on the shelter was to pressure the city hall into assuming responsibility that by law it should. In the day-to-day running of city hall, this has translated into putting pressure on the staff of the *Secretaria de Trabalho e Assistência Social* [Department of Labour and Social Assistance] and not on the mayor, nor his political allies. The team of people who strive to meet the demands for food, shelter, health care, documentation, income creation strategies, and so on, works in precarious conditions and, like us, suffers the frustration of feeling like we are walking in swampy terrain in which it is almost impossible to advance.

On one of those afternoons of anguish and deception, when we realised that it would be almost impossible to find collective shelter for the group that left 'Novo CARE', we asked Melquiades<sup>15</sup> whether he had thought about going to another city in Brazil. Despair activated the common mechanism of expulsion. But he said no, he likes Natal, that it reminds him of his homeland and that he likes the river and the sea. He said he hopes to one day be able to fish in this river and receive his relatives who are in need on the border. He said he will stay, even with the correlation of forces moving more to expelling them or to leave a smaller, easier number of others like him to manage, any other Warao, who, after all, can play the same role in the photograph.

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<sup>15</sup> This interlocutor's name was changed to protect his identity and privacy.

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# Keeping the “public machinery” running: notions of crisis and efficiency in the administration of waiting by the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE)

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## **Abstract**

Based on an investigation of the administration of refugees in the city of São Paulo between 2015 and 2019, this article discusses the administration of time and waiting by the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), the state apparatus responsible for judging refugee requests addressed to the Brazilian government. I analyze different solutions implemented to respond to *crises* and keep the “public machinery” running “efficiently”. I shine a light on administrative activities, and procedures for attending to asylum seekers and granting eligibility with which CONARE carried out its ordinary duties; referred and delegated; provided responses and justifications for delays in each stage of the processes; and resolved *cases*. These resolutions led to decisions but could also mean not deciding, postponing a particular process indefinitely.

**Keywords:** public administration; refugees; crises; efficiency; anthropology of the state.

# Fazendo andar a “máquina pública”: noções de crise e eficiência na gestão das esperas pelo Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados (CONARE)

## Resumo

A partir da investigação das administrações do refúgio na cidade de São Paulo entre os anos de 2015 e 2019, abordo, neste artigo, a gestão dos tempos e das esperas pelo Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados (CONARE), o aparelho estatal responsável por julgar as solicitações de refúgio endereçadas ao governo brasileiro. Analiso as distintas soluções implementadas com o objetivo de lidar com as *crises* e de fazer andar a “máquina pública” de maneira “eficiente”. Lanço luz às atividades administrativas, ao proceder dos atendimentos e aos trabalhos de elegibilidade através dos quais o CONARE cumpria com suas atribuições ordinárias, encaminhava e delegava, fornecia respostas e justificativas para as morosidades de cada uma das etapas dos processos e resolvia *casos*. Resoluções que levavam a decisões, mas que podiam significar também não decidir, postergando um determinado processo indefinidamente.

**Palavras-chave:** gestões públicas; refugiados; crises; eficiência; antropologia do Estado.

# Keeping the “public machinery” running: notions of crisis and efficiency in the administration of waiting by the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE)

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## Introduction

Based on ethnographic research carried out at the office of the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) in the city of São Paulo<sup>1</sup>, this article looks at state administrations that base their actions on notions of *crisis* and *efficiency*. I explore the relationship between administrative entities that are produced as distinct, yet as a coherent unit. The relationship between these entities is based on a distance that is interposed in daily life. In this reflection, I consider the rhythms of administration (Facundo, 2014; Vianna, 2015), as well as the imposition of waiting and urgency on people seeking to regularize their refugee status in the country. Making people wait (Pecheny & Palumbo 2017) to be attended to, to schedule interviews or to sign a document are different ways of playing with time, with the spacing of meetings and decisions in a context of so-called rationing of resources and structural precariousness. I argue that, in CONARE’s activities, it is the incessant manipulation of time and waiting that makes it possible for the “public machinery” to run despite and through *crises*, structural precariousness, a lack of resources and growing demand.

The reflection I present in this article stems from my doctoral thesis (Ribeiro, 2021), in which I investigated ways of administering movements of people who applied for refugee status as an optional method for remaining in the country, mainly between 2015 and 2018. During the research, I identified different strategies of governing, and question how reports of an “unprecedented *crisis*” worked to administered borders and populations. I also analyzed how these management techniques and the subjectivation processes linked to them were permeated by categorizations of gender, race, sexuality and national belonging.

An important aspect of my involvement in the field is that I had the opportunity to volunteer at the CONARE office in São Paulo for a year. In this way, I was also a subject of the state “on the other side of the counter” (Lugones, 2009), facing challenges that have long been explored in research on so-called state institutions. I mention reflections from Castilho, Souza Lima and Teixeira (2014), which, in dialog with Laura Nader’s perspective (1972) and what the author called “studying up”, permeate situations in which the researcher finds herself inserted in power dynamics determined by her professional position or by an involvement in which she takes part in the social processes of the research. At times, it is precisely from professional insertion that the possibilities to conduct ethnographies are derived. These are contexts in which the research was carried out, therefore, not precisely “below”, but “between” and in which the negotiations of access and loyalties are an inseparable part of anthropological practice. But the most important thing about these reflections is what they make possible for analysis, that is, a questioning of the boundaries of state power practices or what is understood by the state.

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<sup>1</sup> CONARE is responsible for processing requests for refugee status addressed to the Brazilian government. The Committee operates within the institutional framework of the Ministry of Justice (MJ) and was created under Brazilian refugee legislation, Law No. 9,474 of July 22, 1997. At a deliberative level, the Committee is composed of government representatives, from numerous ministries and the Federal Police, as well as international agencies and other civil society entities.

It is in this sense that I review CONARE’s practices: in its production of *crises* and *solutions*, in its delimitation of both its competencies and the boundaries of its work. Starting from what is understood as the primary objective of the Committee’s activities: the resolution of asylum *cases*, I reflect on the daily practices that allowed this work to be done. I describe the office visits, the interviews, and the production of confidential reports by state officials - specialists in asylum and refugees. I therefore ask how CONARE produced and resolved cases and crises, specifically addressing the management of the times and rhythms of the processes in each of the moments produced as stages of this work. These processes gave materiality to asylum and refugees, but also to the state itself and its borders.

## The crises

CONARE’s office in São Paulo was located in an old house in the Cambuci neighborhood, in the center of the city, at the offices of the Centro Público de Direitos Humanos e Economia Solidária [Public Center for Human Rights and Solidarity Economy]. The Committee operated in rooms provided by the São Paulo city government and shared its facilities with a project called the Incubadora de Projetos Sociais [Social Projects Incubator], which occupied the structure with numerous activities and employees, exhibitions and workshops for the elderly. From the front gate you could see a somewhat difficult-to-read sign indicating the services operating in the building. The lettering that formed CONARE’s name looked like a kind of sticker pasted on top of the sign, in different colors and typeface, an improvisation that made little effort to perform the “make-believe” of the state (Navaro-Yashin, 2007). The fact is that not only the sign, but the entire building, was somewhat improvised. The building’s configuration was not at all reminiscent of buildings commonly occupied by other offices in the justice system, such as the Public Defender’s Office, for example, where some of CONARE’s activities were carried out before the Cambuci office came into existence. The old house, although large, retained a domestic aura, keeping its original internal structure and wooden flooring, although partition walls were installed in various rooms.

In the entrance hall was the reception desk, behind which an outsourced security guard sat in an office chair. To his left and right were two rows of chairs for people waiting to be attended. To the right of those entering the hall was an old wooden staircase with creaking steps, one of which was slightly broken and sagging. Next to the stairs was a heavy door that was almost always closed. It guarded a large room, divided by sheetrock walls. The room was transformed into four other relatively private rooms where the interviews with asylum seekers took place. These small rooms did not have acoustic insulation, so the sound leaked between them and each interview was heard in the neighboring rooms, and at times more than one interview overlapped on the staff recorders.

The old staircase in the hall led to the second floor where there was a large room with two tables where two city employees, about to retire, were eating their lunches and chatting about the fact that they would be leaving early that day for a doctor’s appointment. They also spoke about their coming retirement, which had been announced for some time but not yet enjoyed because, if they left, there would be no one to take their place. They were concerned because it seemed that no one else seemed to care about maintaining their positions at the Public Center. Between their desks, a bit farther back, a large, noisy printer shared by everyone was hard at work. Facing the desks was another wooden door that was always closed, guarding the room

where CONARE’s so-called “eligibility officers” did their work<sup>2</sup>. Inside, the employees checked the files on the computers, prepared for interviews and produced “technical” opinions, examining demands and talking about the “cases”.

The room had two rows of tables with old computers, one with four and the other with five workstations. To get to the desks, you had to carefully step over broken wooden planks on the floor. Some of the floorboards were held down with adhesive tape that over time had become a wad of tape stuck to the broken boards. It was rare for all the tables to be occupied, not because of a lack of employees, but because of a lack of machines, since every time three were repaired, another three would break, keeping the balance between machines and employees constantly stable. According to the employees, to deal with the lack of computers they worked in previously established shifts. Those who had to do appointments and interviews came to the office, while the others did their work from home.

In the house in Cambuci, applicants could ask questions about their cases, accompany them, and deliver and collect documents. It was also there that the staff carried out their administrative work, preparing for interviews, making copies of applicants’ identification documents, and filing them digitally, producing research and reports, and maintaining the electronic data system for applicants’ and refugees’ cases. However, it was at CONARE’s General Coordination Office in Brasilia that all the logistical work took place and decision-making meetings were held. It was also in Brasilia that the notifications, declarations and terms were drawn up and where all these documents were signed, and their veracity certified.

The Cambuci office was opened in 2015, the year in which a Technical Cooperation agreement was signed between the Ministry of Justice, the body to which CONARE was subordinate, and the Municipal Secretariat for Human Rights and Citizenship (SMDHC). The same type of partnership was established when an office was opened in Porto Alegre, in Southern Brazil, based on an execution agreement with the Instituto Federal, and in Rio de Janeiro, where the structure of the National Archives was used. These “arrangements” - as they were described to me by an official - were the way found to “make offices viable” in other cities, considering CONARE’s “budget limitations” and the lack of “available physical space” from the Ministry of Justice in those locations. At the time of my fieldwork, CONARE had its headquarters in Brasília and offices in São Paulo and Porto Alegre. The Rio de Janeiro office had just closed.

These “arrangements” were made possible by a diagnosis of a *crisis*, that is, a significant and sudden increase in asylum requests, when the structure that had been in place until then proved to be insufficient, making it necessary to open up channels for face-to-face consultations and interviews, with the training of state staff to carry out this work. As far as São Paulo is concerned, in addition to the physical space, the city government provided all the technical equipment needed to run the office: computers, internet, printers, recorders and office supplies. The municipality was responsible for maintenance of this equipment, and had to be notified of any needs. According to the Committee’s staff, the structure was always and continuously “far from ideal”, “limited” or “insufficient” for carrying out day-to-day activities.

The five employees who worked as “eligibility officers” were ceded by the Brazilian Airport Infrastructure Company, Infraero, when some of the country’s airports were concessioned to the private sector. The five “officers” who worked at CONARE included people with degrees in business administration, law, and social work, and people who had worked on a factory floor before moving on to the runway and boarding gates at

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<sup>2</sup> The position of “eligibility officer” never officially existed in the Brazilian civil service, nor was it provided for in national refugee legislation. The absence of the position in the letter of the law, however, did not prevent it from being mentioned in official communications of the Ministry of Justice and reiterated in everyday interactions, becoming a “local” language inspired by transnational frameworks and international refugee law, based on the administrative mechanisms undertaken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). “Local” practices are therefore juxtaposed with normative instruments and modes of management at different scales of government, which must always be considered when referring to the processes attributed to the “state”.

Guarulhos airport. According to these employees, the whole “arrangement” that led to the opening of the office was due to the Ministry of Justice’s budget restrictions and the context of the political and economic crisis that “Brazil” was going through. Considering the calls for a reduction in the “public machinery” and, conversely, the increased demand for CONARE’s services, with the intense rise in the number of people requesting refugee status each year, the relocation of staff from other government structures and the use of the material structure of the city government appeared to be solutions to circumvent the crises and budgetary difficulties.

In addition to the eligibility officers, CONARE had volunteers who helped with the daily activities, in particular the reception, administrative and research work and, occasionally, in translating the interviews. The volunteers were chosen through simplified selection processes, both in Brasilia and São Paulo. The idea was that they would serve at all the hours when the office was open, to assist the staff. At the time I was selected, there were seven volunteers, and the São Paulo office had five permanent staff and five UNHCR consultants, who were dismissed a week after our arrival. As the months went by, however, many of the volunteers stopped showing up, leaving a number of office hours uncovered.

In the Cambuci office, the lack of transparency created by the solid wooden doors between the staff work rooms, and the antechambers that preceded them, as well as the interdiction that prohibited those being assisted from accessing the workrooms, performed modes of fixation. The old house kept those seeking assistance in place, sitting in the reception chairs, while staff and volunteers went up and down the stairs, collecting passports, questions, requests, and complaints. The applicants were kept on the first floor, unaware of what was going on beyond the wooden staircase. All that was known was that “officials” and volunteers would return with a response, which was almost always disappointing and insufficient. The procedures, supported by the physical layout of the old house, were surrounded by an aura of intense mystery, considering that we didn’t know what was being done upstairs. It was therefore often assumed that nothing was being done, based on the feedback: “we still don’t have an answer to your request”, “your file is in Brasilia”, “please make this request online”, “you should go to the PF” [Federal Police], “you should go to Caritas”<sup>3</sup>, “wait at home and we’ll contact you with the day of the interview”.

The pace of the work was dictated by the speed with which the information was checked on the old, slow, and faulty computers. It was determined by the temperamental machinery that crashed and had to be restarted again and again until it was possible to type in each of the 17 numbers printed on the applicant’s refuge protocol, to check the progress of the process. The pace also depended on the data on the documents, which at times didn’t match the data in the system and needed to be corrected by the Federal Police; it depended on files that couldn’t be found or that hadn’t yet been entered into the system because it took a while; on doubts and discussions about specific cases; and on how to get around the slow internet connection or the challenges posed by another process that wasn’t done properly. There was also the time spent going up and down stairs and making copies of documents with a constantly reduced number of staff. The structural precariousness thus performed a job, managing the rhythms and progress of processes. This precarity, as I will argue later, enabled the administration to fulfill its primary objective: the resolution of refugee cases.

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<sup>3</sup> The Caritas Archdiocesan is the Catholic organization that is an official operating partner of the UN High Commission for Refugees in Brazil, which receives funds to assist refugees in the country.

## Waiting

January 2017

The Congolese Jana came to the CONARE office carrying a notification of acceptance<sup>4</sup>. The document stated that she and her son Makori had been recognized as refugees by the Brazilian government<sup>5</sup>. Jana and her son had arrived in São Paulo from Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than two years ago. Makori was not even a year old when he landed at the airport in Guarulhos with his mother<sup>6</sup>.

The notification Jana received said: “The following requests for refuge have been granted”. On the line below it, Jana’s full name and her refugee protocol number were printed. On the other line was Makori’s name, whose protocol number was identical to hers. The child’s name was entered incorrectly. The surname came before the first name on the document. Makori had inherited the name from his grandfather, his father’s father, a former general in the Congolese army who had been assassinated years earlier.

Jana had already visited the Cambuci office many times. To have her refugee status recognized, she expressed her desire to apply for refuge at the Federal Police Superintendence. There, she received an extensive application form in Portuguese. She then returned with the completed form and all the documents needed to open the process. She left the Federal Police building with her asylum protocol. In possession of the document, which temporarily regularized her migratory situation, Jana sent emails and visited CONARE numerous times asking about the next steps in the process. After many visits to the office, she realized that there was no point in asking. She would have to wait for a notification, to be sent by telegram and e-mail, stating the date of the mandatory interview with a representative of the Committee. At first, Jana followed her case anxiously, calling every week and sending messages, and going to the office to demand clarification. After a while she stopped, when she realized that she had no way of knowing whether the interview would take place in a month, a year, or five years.

More than a year after her request, a period in which Jana had to renew her refugee protocol with the Federal Police, she was finally called in for an interview. She answered all the questions she was asked about her life, her family, her professional and political activities, and the persecution and torture she had suffered from the DRC government. After the interview phase, Jana believed that she would soon have a definitive answer, but she had to wait another whole year for her application to be assessed.

Once she had the notification, the next step was to take it to the Federal Police and, with all the necessary documentation, apply for the National Registration of Foreigners (RNE). The misspelling of Makori’s name was a big disappointment. The notification, written and digitally signed by a civil servant whose identity was unknown to Jana, and who was based at CONARE’s headquarters in Brasilia, had to be corrected before she could take it to the PF. I noticed that we were the only ones waiting in the hall. After less than 10 minutes of waiting, a young woman came down the wooden stairs and stopped in front of us. That’s when I realized that we would be served right there. I didn’t know, it was my first visit to the Committee, but Jana had accumulated

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4 I emphasize the importance of considering nationality as a category that is activated contextually by the subjects and is not necessarily identical to their national origin. I therefore understand it as a relational categorization. This is why I present the terms referring to these categorizations in italics throughout the text.

5 Refugee legislation defines that the Brazilian government will recognize as a refugee any person who: I - due to well-founded fears of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinions, is found outside their country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; II - having no nationality and being outside the country where they previously had their habitual residence, is unable or unwilling to return to it, due to the circumstances described in the previous subsection; III - due to a serious and widespread violation of human rights, is forced to leave their country of nationality to seek refuge in another country. (Brasil, 1997).

6 All the names used in the article are fictitious to guarantee the integrity and privacy of the people in refuge, and to keep their cases anonymous.

expertise from years of performing the same ritual. She quickly changed her expression, frowned, and raised her usual tone of voice. She expressed her indignation at having to return to that office because of “such an elementary mistake”. She showed the woman her notification and was asked to wait once again. The employee hurried up the stairs and the wooden steps creaked loudly.

After a short wait, the employee returned with Jana’s documents saying that she was alone in the office at the time, and that there was no one there to sign the notification. This signature had to be requested “in Brasilia”. The employee picked up a clipboard and a form resting on the counter, which read: “Registration update form”. She would have to provide her name, protocol number, country of origin, e-mail address, address and contact telephone number. “That way we can request it in Brasilia and get in touch,” the employee said. “But how long?” asked Jana. “I don’t know, a few more days. You’ll receive the notification in your e-mail. If you don’t receive it in a week, just come back here.”

“Just come back here.” Jana’s tone became even harsher. She said that she had come from far away and expected to leave the office with the document. She had left a child for her neighbor to look after, she was pregnant, unemployed and didn’t have the money or time to visit the office “every week”. With an expression that was a mixture of pity and impotence, the employee repeated that “I can’t do anything, only in Brasilia”. Jana commented out loud, ironically, that if she had known she would have gone straight to Brasilia. After the employee had gone upstairs and the stairs creaked again, Jana folded up the worn papers and returned them to her leather bag because she knew she would have to bring them again next week. As we walked towards the exit door, the security guard tried to console us by saying that “it’s always like that “.

There was no need to make an appointment at the Cambuci office. Applicants were dealt with on a first-come, first-served basis. While on certain days there were more than 50 people, on others there were only 10. People rarely waited more than thirty minutes to be seen, even on the busiest days. Those who had appointments had to wait for the officer assigned to their case. In these cases, the wait could be much longer. The consultations were made right there in the hall, with the plaintiffs standing or sitting on chairs, everyone was attended to in front of everyone else, and there was no privacy. It was pointed out that attending in the hall, in a somewhat temporary and public way, was a circumstance derived from the precariousness of the old house. The “lack of structure” was blamed for this arrangement, since, according to what the staff had been told, it wasn’t possible to install internet points on the first floor. They were thus resigned to having a service structure which, according to one of the officials, “is not the ideal environment for us”.

The time available for each service fluctuated with demand and with the instability of the internet when checking documents, at which point the justification for the delays fell on the “system”. The “system” in question is called SEI, the administrative management software used by the federal government. SEI stored all the documents that materialized a refugee process, both those presented by the applicants and refugees, such as passports and “evidence” that made up their narratives of persecution, as well as the documents produced by the “officials” and the Federal Police. All the ministries and organizations participating in the Committee had access to SEI. The platform had different user profiles, which allowed differentiated access to its information and functions. The signature function, for example, was not available to volunteers or employees of the São Paulo office. Hence it was not possible to promptly provide a statement or rectify a document, leaving everything to be signed by the coordination staff. Whether undertaken by volunteers or “officials”, the service largely consisted of contacts with Brasilia. Without the possibility to present their cases

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7 In addition to representatives from the Ministry of Justice, officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economy, Health, and Education, as well as the Federal Police and two organizations representing civil society, were also part of the Committee in its deliberative sphere. The UNHCR and the Federal Public Defender’s Office also had seats on CONARE, but no voting rights.



to those who “really decide”, applicants and refugees presented them to officials who acted, according to their own perception, as “intermediaries”. The way in which staff and volunteers operated during the visits rarely departed from the response that “nothing can be done now, we just have to wait”. Wait for someone who has the competence to resolve or decide.

This is how distances and waits were juxtaposed in the daily routine, when it wasn't possible to take responsibility for certain tasks or make decisions. These modes of administration determined different temporalities and “waiting times” (Lugones, 2009). The waiting was precisely what led people to seek out the office when they asked about when the interviews would take place or even when they would receive an answer to their various demands. Thus, waiting in the hall was only a small part of the continuum of waits that materialized a process of recognition of refugee status. Waiting was instituted in each of the steps that had to be taken to gain the desired papers.

Pecheny and Palumbo (2017: 20-27) emphasize the importance of considering waiting as an element in power relations that highlight tensions between the subjects' time and institutional time, which operate in the sense of “putting the other in their place”, that is, in the sense of demarcating distinctions and social locations. The authors point out that waiting presupposes a learning of governmentality, in other words, that it is necessary to “learn to wait”. They thus highlight the discrepancy between the experience of urgency of those who wait for a wide variety of services and the valorization of those who make them wait, who are in turn responsible for assigning priorities. Considering this reflection, it is possible to state that waiting consists, contextually, of disciplinary mechanisms, in view of their pedagogical role in the production of docile subjects and bodies (Foucault, 1979).

Maria Gabriela Lugones (2009) also analyzes waiting as a form of the “daily exercise of power”. Lugones speaks of an administration that implied that the administered, “being ‘outside’, separated, in a space of time in subjunctive mode, remained before a range of possibilities”. (Lugones, 2009: 74). Thus, both for those waiting to be attended to in the corridors of the Cordoba Juvenile Court - characters in Lugones' analysis - and for the asylum seekers waiting to be attended to at the reception desk of the Cambuci office, waiting “outside” where the work was being done, in a “situation of uncertainty”, in Lugones' terms, and, I would add, of continuous confusion and tension, “was an operative, active, productive part of the work” (Lugones, 2009: 74).

Considering the productivity of waiting and the “chains of subordination” (Nadai, 2018) that act on the rhythms of service, I observe that what is referred to by employees as improvisation and limitation, far from being obstacles to achieving the administration's objectives, were what enabled the work to be done. I point out that dealing with applicants on the first floor, in so-called “less than ideal” conditions, which were clearly temporary and public, served to keep the interactions brief, while the separation of the reception and administrative rooms gave the officials greater control over waiting times. Thus, the activities carried out by the “officials” of the São Paulo office provided a specific rhythm to the growing demand, which “increased enormously” every year. There was an operative aspect, in this sense, in the temporality of the services, achieved precisely through the precariousness, distances, waiting, and physical separations. These distances were first established in the house in Cambuci, which separated applicants from the space in which their files were checked and “processed”, but distance was also interposed on another scale: in the allocation of “decisions” in Brasilia.

But there is also a productivity aspect to waiting that follows the logic of rationing resources, as Ballesteros et al. (2017) point out. This logic often imposes longer waiting times on patients whose need for attention is classified as less urgent. I understand that in regard to rationing strategies within CONARE (considering here the complaints from “officials” about the inadequacy of the physical structure and everything that would be “not

ideal” for carrying out their activities, such as the low number of staff), this rationing is also fundamentally related to the technical-moral management of waiting. In this way, the lack of staff to carry out service at the counter, interviews and research was consolidated as a permanently provisory state of affairs.

The office staff understood that their responsibility within the CONARE structure was to conduct interviews with asylum seekers and produce “eligibility reports” - the documentary artifacts that supported the decisions about cases. In addition, they all expressed the understanding that attending to applicants was not their job and that the administrative work was being carried out by the “officials” only temporarily, due to the lack of specific staff and the “deficiency” of resources. The justifications for the delays and the somewhat artisanal or insufficient nature of the responses were linked to notions of precariousness and crises: while demand was increasing, given the intensification of movement and the growth in applications for refugee status, resources were dwindling every year.

The employees’ complaints about the deviation of their activities were also related to an hierarchy of functions, in which attending the public was seen as less important to the accomplishment of the work than the production of reports and conducting interviews, which were so-called “technical” activities. The secondary role that employees gave to attending to the applicants who came to the offices indicated forms of administration permeated by “chains of subordination” (Nadai, 2018: 64) which proliferated countless “administrative control checkpoints”. Even though the work was being done, part of it was delegated to volunteers, who had no employment ties, no ongoing training, no payment and no strong possibility of interfering in the resolution of demands. Therefore, these volunteers could not be “held accountable” or responsible for the delays, evasive responses and decisions considered unfair. However, the capacity of the office staff themselves to deal with day-to-day demands was also limited. If the volunteers could not take responsibility, neither could the “officials” - who did the administrative work as best they could, given the “less than ideal” material conditions. It is in this sense that allocating in Brasilia everything from deciding cases to very simple demands such as signing a document was also a way of to resolve, to govern by managing time and waiting, by giving a certain rhythm to each decision, although staff said the placement of all decisions in Brasilia was an obstacle.

With these strategies in mind, I will analyze the temporal administration of procedures, focusing on changes to some of the normative instruments that directed CONARE’s activities. With these norms, although crises were not resolved outright, they were managed continuously and on a daily basis. I discuss some “efficiency” strategies, in other words, the economic and time management of the procedures within CONARE, specifically addressing the manipulation of time and waiting in the day-to-day operations, with the postponement of cases considered “complex” and the acceleration of others considered “simple” in each of their stages. These strategies began to be adopted, especially in 2018 and 2019, with the manifest aim of “relieving CONARE”, “reducing backlog” and “prioritizing true refugee cases”. They were thus presented as ways to speed up the processes of those considered to be “truly refugees”, optimizing resources.

## **The solutions**

April 2018

Chara, an Ethiopian woman who had applied for refugee status more than two years earlier, arrived at the Cambuci office panting and scared. She had run from the subway to CONARE because she lived far away and didn’t want to risk being late. Chara was carrying a notification for her eligibility interview with an official from the Committee. The notification was sent via a messaging app and at first she couldn’t understand any of its content, since the document was in Portuguese and Chara did not yet have a good command of the language.

She spoke a little Arabic and English, as well as Amharic, her mother tongue. After showing the message to her neighbor, Chara realized that she was finally being called for her long-awaited interview at CONARE.

On the day and time stated on the notice, Chara asked for time off work so that she could come to the office. A while later, she told me that she almost lost her job for being absent. Chara lived far from downtown, in a neighborhood on the eastern edge of the city, and it took her almost two hours to get to reach CONARE. She rushed because she said she was very anxious and had spent most of the night awake. Missing an interview for which she had waited so long would be “a terror”.

At CONARE, Chara was seen by the “official” who would be conducting her interview. The woman immediately asked if Chara had brought an interpreter. She replied that she didn’t have anyone who could translate, she was alone, but she could perhaps do the interview in Portuguese or English. The employee denied this possibility, emphasizing that it was extremely important that Chara understood all the questions very well. Asked if it would be possible to return another day with a friend or acquaintance who could act as an interpreter, Chara said no. Her Ethiopian friends did not speak enough Portuguese, English or Arabic to translate. Besides, it would be difficult to ask her friends to leave their jobs in the middle of the week.

The official said goodbye to Chara, saying that she was sorry, but that it wouldn’t be possible to carry out the interview without an interpreter. She also said that, given her “difficult situation”, she would find a translator who spoke Amharic and would get in touch as soon as she could find a volunteer interpreter. More than a year after her visit to CONARE, Chara was still anxiously awaiting contact from the official to reschedule the interview.

The fact that there were no established deadlines for any of the stages of the processes, either in the Refugee Law or in internal regulations, meant that their elasticity, and what was considered to be a reasonable definition period, came to be managed in a somewhat discretionary way, fluctuating according to “demands” or “migratory flows”. If the “flows” increased at a given time, it was understood that it was “normal” for the waiting time to increase as well. It was then determined that the urgency called for emergency actions materialized in “task forces” or in the issuing of regulations to “simplify” procedures (also obeying the political convenience of recognizing or not a particular violation of rights as violence).

Regarding the criteria and prioritization of interviews and other procedural steps, I would like to emphasize that telling those who came to the office that we did not know when the interviews would take place was not a “trick” or a way of misleading those seeking information. The criteria and pace at which each stage of the process was resolved followed a timetable that was not fully known even to the staff. They, like the applicants seeking assistance, had to wait. Marking appointments for interviews was centralized in the General Coordination Office and made by officials who the São Paulo officials referred to as “the scheduling sector”, according to criteria that were not known. While some staff pointed out that what was essential was the order in which the requests were made, or the “chronology”, others admitted that there were factors that influenced the speed or delay of a specific appointment. It was said that people of certain nationalities were called more quickly because they were dealing with “less complex” cases. By this, they meant that the recognition of “severity” or “severe and widespread violation of human rights”, according to the law, as was the case with Syrians, for example, allowed the interviews of these applicants to be shorter, and the opinions to be made more quickly, compared to those that were considered “more complex” cases. As an example of the latter, was regularly mentioned the natives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose interviews, according to the officials, could last up to three hours, while those of Syrians were “cleared in 30 minutes”.

At the time I interviewed the “officials” of the São Paulo office, in mid-2018, something they referred to as a “task force” was being implemented, in which some of these employees selected, interviewed and issued reports exclusively for Syrians, to speed up the resolution of cases that were “truly refugees” and “reducing the backlog”, i.e. the cases pending interviews and reports, considering that every month, with more people

seeking asylum and the limited number of staff, “the backlog only increases”. In addition to the cases of Syrians, however, the officials identified some priorities among people classified as more vulnerable. Elderly people, people with disabilities or people with serious illnesses identified during the visits had their cases expedited. It was unclear, however, whether the cases would actually be included among the priorities, as this was the responsibility of the “scheduling sector” or the General Coordination.

One official said during an interview that “I don’t really know how the scheduling works”, but that “we inform Brasilia what’s going on and then Brasilia does the sorting”. Another official pointed out that he forwards “the oldest cases” to “the guy who does the scheduling”, and that there is also a “triage by language”, but that “the rest I honestly can’t tell you”. In an interview with a coordinator, (s)he said that “as a rule, people join the queue without any discrimination, but if it’s a situation of extreme vulnerability, the case can be expedited”. Another official acknowledged that there are “strategies” with nationalities such as Syrians, where “they’re all granted, so the sooner we can interview them and get them through as quickly as possible, the better”. The same “officer” described a strategy to determine the “number of pending nationalities”, with the aim of “clearing that up right away”. In other words, with the aim of reducing the number of different nationalities of applicants in the official data and “removing from the path” cases where it is assumed that applicants will not show up for interviews. It was also pointed out that the language spoken by the applicants and the possibility of finding an interpreter was another factor influencing the speed of the interviews. At the time, two officers conducted interviews in English and one in Spanish, but none spoke Arabic or French. Thus, the scheduling of interviews depended on the applicant bringing an interpreter, or, if that wasn’t possible, on a volunteer from CONARE or partner organizations doing the translation. As in the case of Chara, interviews could even be postponed indefinitely.

An important strategy for resolving processes was to modify procedures by issuing Normative Resolutions (NRs), which was a form of management that was already ingrained in CONARE’s administrative practices. Normative Resolutions were discussed and approved during monthly or bi-monthly meetings of the Deliberative Committee in Brasilia. The resolutions often proposed by the coordination, in its incessant concern for speeding up processes and “reducing the liability” or the backlog. These actions sought results to be presented publicly in the form of statistics and data about efficiency, which showed that each year, despite the incessant increase in requests, many more cases were resolved than in previous years.

To “reduce backlog”, the regulations prioritized the so-called “accelerated” or “simplified” procedures for processing cases. These procedures made it possible for certain stages, such as interviews, the production of reports by officials and the decisions taken by the collegiate body in Brasilia, to allegedly be carried out more quickly. This series of changes included the aforementioned “task forces”, when some of the “officials” selected and carried out interviews and drafted reports exclusively on people of specific nationalities.

Another way of speeding up processes and guaranteeing efficient action, implemented through changes in the NRs, was the creation of the figure of “manifestly well-founded asylum claim”, in which case “simplified” procedures could be adopted. The rule also created the figure of “manifestly unfounded” applications which could also have each of their stages “accelerated” or “simplified”, which in practice meant that it became possible to reject applications more quickly and without so much rigor in terms of procedures. This series of measures made it possible for Venezuelan nationals to be recognized as refugees by CONARE in collective blocks, without individual interviews in the office or individual assessment of the merits of the cases. This collective recognition, called *prima facie* recognition by refugee “technical” staff, made it possible for CONARE to announce in August 2020 that “Brazil now has more than 46,000 Venezuelans accepted as refugees -

the largest population with this profile in Latin America”<sup>8</sup>. As a result of these measures, while 20,902 applications for refugee status from Venezuelan nationals were granted in 2019, the second most recognized nationality, Syrian, had only 255 applications granted, and the third, Cuban, 35 approvals.

These “simplification” measures, publicized as “cases of success” or “good practices” in news articles and institutional propaganda, such as the one above, made applicants who were waiting for their cases to be processed feel that their applications were being passed over, while people from other countries were granted asylum more quickly. Dolores, a Cuban applicant at the time, an anthropologist and historian, told me that seeing other refugees accepted while her case remained on hold caused her indignation and suffering. Dolores told me about a colleague, a Syrian historian who arrived in São Paulo at the same time as she did. She was resentful because, in less than a year, the Syrian was at University of São Paulo (USP) doing his doctorate, something that Dolores had not yet had the opportunity to do after many years in the city.

Also, in response to the “simplification” measures, a new computer system was implemented, Sisconare, which would allow all stages of the procedures, from the application to access to decisions, to be conducted virtually. With computerization, I began to receive many requests for help from people I followed during my research, who went to the Federal Police every year to update their refugee protocols and were told that they had to register with Sisconare. It wasn’t even explained to them what the platform was for. At the time, the system had not yet been translated into languages other than Portuguese and many applicants did not have a computer or access to the internet, which made the whole procedure very difficult. It was common for people to frequently lose their passwords and have to request new access. Computerization, therefore, once again required applicants to look for intermediaries to receive help - a service that would not be provided by CONARE. The discontinuation of certain activities in the face-to-face mode, moreover, in addition to not making life easier for those who did not have digital access, did not relieve the office either, according to the reports of the “officials”, since applicants continued to come in to ask questions, at which point they would be referred once again to third parties, whether civil society organizations or other government entities.

The measure to computerize all stages of the process was celebrated by the committee’s coordinators, despite complaints from applicants. This was because as a “simplification” strategy, the measure sought “efficiency”, a way to keep the “public machinery” moving, as one CONARE coordinator pointed out in an interview. It was a measure that therefore served the interests of productivity, saving time and resources at a “complex” time when “funds are lacking”, when all that was left, as one “official” pointed out in an interview, was to keep “working with it”. “Working with it” implied continuous provisional measures, in which they had to deal with a demand that exceeded their capacity to attend the applicants, normalizing the waiting and arbitrariness inscribed in the increasingly frequent changes to the rules that guided the procedures. Strategies that determined, through incessant normative measures, which were frequently modified, what was the “correct” or “most efficient” way to make decisions, the appropriate listening format, the narrative mode of the documents produced by the “technical” staff and what had to be discarded a priori as a “manifestly unfounded” case.

Returning to the management of waiting discussed by Ballesteros et al. (2017), I draw attention once again to the relationship between the imposition of waiting and strategies to ration resources. Technologies that defined more or less elastic waiting times for cases determined who should have their suffering shortened and who could wait longer for a definition of their regularization. Solutions that established that, for a given

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<sup>8</sup> From the article “Brasil reconhece mais 7,7 mil venezuelanos como refugiados”, on the portal of the UNHCR, written to congratulate the country for this amount. It is important to emphasize that, until the measures that allowed collective recognition of refugee status, the absolute number of refugees recognized by the Brazilian government since the implementation of the refugee law was not more than ten thousand. Available at: <https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2020/08/28/brasil-reconhece-mais-77-mil-venezuelanos-como-refugiados/>.

applicant, it was reasonable to wait for more than three or four years to have their case considered, while for others this was an excessive amount of time.

In this respect, the pace of the procedures was also influenced on a more day-to-day scale. Even though the officials seemed to see a lesser importance in their duties, interaction with the applicants was essential in the management of times and waits. In determining who was “vulnerable”, what was “urgent” and what was a “priority”, the actions of the office staff were central. One of the elements that defined what was urgent and what could wait was related to what Laura Lowenkron (2015) calls, in dialog with Foucault (1979), “local knowledge”. Local knowledge, from a Foucauldian perspective, is a form of knowledge that is “particular, regional, local, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity” (Foucault, 1979: 170). In the context of her research, Lowenkron (2015: 198) refers to “typical practical police knowledge”, which does not require specific training, but which in no way constitutes “common knowledge”. I point out that it was based on this knowledge that the officials considered, according to their technical-moral perception, what would or would not be an “urgent” situation. It was the “local knowledge” of “officials” and “technical” state employees who identified, according to their own interpretative schemes, certain degrees, and scales of vulnerability, creating what Auyero (2012) identifies as a “politics of waiting”.

Another element of “local knowledge” in the ordinary management of processes involved what was called the specific “way of working” of the coordinator in charge. The understanding of the coordination staff determined numerous procedural criteria, from the interview schedule to the production of the eligibility reports. These criteria fluctuated according to their “work plan” and their understanding of what would be an adequate number of interviews to do or reports to deliver each week. It is important to note that during the year I was a volunteer, four different coordinators passed through CONARE, each with new ideas and visions about productivity, about what should or should not be considered a priority and about the best way to conduct the work to “reduce backlog”. Rhythms and urgencies were therefore established according to somewhat discretionary aspects, establishing different visions of priorities, efficiency and CONARE’s own function.

It would be wrong to say, however, that the coordinating staff was solely responsible for these resolutions, considering that the “tripartite” nature of CONARE’s structure had to accommodate the interests of different actors. This meant that “priorities” were set according to very different visions. As an example, I will look at a provision of “total priority”: cases closely monitored by the Federal Police, specifically compulsory measures. Some officials pointed out the extreme speed required of their work in situations involving people who had been imprisoned in the country -- and who because they wished to remain in Brazil, requested asylum -- considering the limited possibilities for regularization<sup>9</sup>. One official was even recruited to conduct an interview inside a prison in a case involving extradition. At the time, he asked the UNHCR for support in preparing for the interview, considering the unprecedented nature of the situation, which made him feel, in his words, somewhat “insecure”. I cite this case, reported by the staff in an interview, to highlight the perception of extreme urgency that situations involving expulsion and extradition acquired, when the Federal Police had direct influence on prioritizing interviews, opinions and even inclusion on the agenda of the decision-making council. One official described this as a situation of “pressure” for the processes to move at the required speed. The timing of the processes was therefore managed by a group of actors whose decisions required negotiations. In this respect, times were manipulated according to political and institutional interests that were not restricted to the competence of “technicians”.

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<sup>9</sup> Sometimes, applying for refugee status was the only way for non-nationals who had been jailed in the country to stay in Brazil. This is because the legislation provided that, as long as the request was active, awaiting a resolution from the Committee, the applicant could not be deported. Similarly, the guarantee of non-refoulement provided for in the asylum law prevented asylum seekers and refugees from being extradited or returned to their countries of origin.

In an interview, a coordinator confirmed that she had chosen to prioritize appointments based on the “provocation” of the applicants, i.e. their appearance at the office followed by their updating of their contact details, since it was important for them to provide “tools” so that CONARE could “get the process moving”. This was because calling people who might not show up on the day of the interviews was, in their view, putting the “public machinery” to work in an “ineffective” way - which indicates the overriding concern with rationing resources at a time of crisis. The same coordinator pointed out that she considered the positions of employees of migrant aid organizations, considering that these people were in more direct contact with the applicants and were able to identify “more sensitive” situations. Otherwise, “chronological” criteria would be used in cases of priorities provided for by law. Even so, she pointed out, in working with refugees, a “vulnerable population”, “everything was a priority”, and it was necessary to identify the “highest priorities”, considering the existence of a large “backlog” still waiting for interviews. There was also a disciplinary demand that applicants be patient with the lengthy processes, but at the same time to “provoke” CONARE or, in other words, to demonstrate “agency”.

But if the “agency” of the applicants was considered by one coordinator, it might not be by the next, making the criteria somewhat arbitrary and opaque. What was considered a priority or not, therefore, fluctuated according to the vision of the “effectiveness” of “local knowledge”, as well as the “agency” of the applicants. These criteria were not entirely clear to the applicants or even to the office staff who, separated from the “scheduling sector”, did their work in a segmented way, pointing out that they knew little or nothing about the criteria used for calling people for interviews or for including each case on the agenda for the deliberation meeting in Brasilia.

Thus, even though they were told that it wasn’t necessary to go to the office and that the notification would reach the applicants’ addresses, their “agency” could be considered when selecting them for interviews. I will now review some of the complaints from the employees themselves, who said that they were not responsible for attending people who arrived and that this work, especially when a lot of people showed up, got in the way of their production of interviews and reports. I would point out that this “lack of time” was, to a certain extent, an effect of the way the waiting times were managed, considering that it was necessary to go to the office to demonstrate an “agency” and clear up any doubts. Telephone and e-mail were not forms of communication considered effective or reliable by the applicants, who could not simply wait passively for cases to progress. Thus, considering the delays in the processes, which dragged on for years, it was necessary and expected to appear several times and systematically listen to the same justifications until the interview was finally scheduled.

It is remarkable, however, that although the scheduling system was often not fast, there was no consideration of making changes to organize the criteria and increase transparency about them, setting deadlines and scheduling interviews according to a previously established agenda, at the time of the request itself. This is a demand I heard countless times from applicants, who said that worse than waiting, was waiting without a forecast. In addition to the structural problems mentioned, there were other difficulties related to the administration. This was because the lack of deadlines for scheduling interviews and deciding cases generated more work, overloading the service and intensifying a division of tasks or “fragmentation” (Lugones, 2009: 13) which, according to the staff, was the main cause of the slowness in producing reports and conducting interviews. However, it was this very fragmentation and the overload of work - which led to the requirement to go to the office in person - that justified the delays. It is in this sense that distances and waiting times, precariousness and fragmentation were also aspects of management, allowing interviews and reports to be completed in their own time, that is, in the administration’s time.

Considering the “local knowledge” and the ordinary practices of the “officials”, who carried out their daily tasks, in the words of one of the employees, “as best they can”, I point out that both the case resolution strategies and the non-resolution techniques (i.e. postponing a certain decision in order to move the processes along more quickly), were all aimed at the objective of managing crises and “reducing backlog”. They were administrative solutions that operated daily, based on the administration of time and waiting. I am dialoging here with Carolina Moulin (2019: 34), who points out that the “temporality of the crisis” strategically combines the time of urgency, which demands “timely and exceptional” responses, and the time of waiting, which induces uncertainty. Moulin says that the modulations between these two aspects allow for a management of time based on reports on the crises. As far as CONARE was concerned, the signs were that the crises and precariousness that had accompanied the office since its implementation were perpetuated by political and administrative choices that both produced and managed these crises. In this sense, maintaining the office with only five employees meant prolonging the crises, working at the limit of the resources, which appeared more as a way of governing than as an impossible obstacle.

## The decisions

According to the CONARE staff, it was in Brasilia that the refugee processes were “really” deliberated and decided. The São Paulo officials thus reinforced their “technical” position, keeping *decisions* at different levels and the entire political burden of deliberations on the recognition of refugees by the Brazilian government, allegedly, far from their remit. In this way, the Cambuci office staff signaled, for different stages of the process, different ways of not knowing and not deciding. They reiterated that their functions and competencies involved conducting interviews and producing reports, leaving criteria and resolutions up to a General Coordination and CONARE that were distinct from their individual practices. They also justified their non-participation in the Committee’s deliberative plenary sessions. They all pointed out that they had participated in one or another meeting by videoconference, but that this was not common practice. Once the interviews had been carried out and the eligibility reports produced, the next stage of the work became the exclusive responsibility of Brasilia. They knew little about the criteria, timing or even the exact nature of the “higher” instances.

They mentioned reasons of productivity and division of labor for the absence of these employees from the plenary sessions where applications were decided – a decision that, in general, only endorsed the “suggestions” of the eligibility reports. The “officials” themselves felt that they had to give priority to the interviews and reports for which they were responsible, which were piling up while applicants were waiting for a response. There was also the justification of the distance from the center where decisions were made. Regarding these distances, it was reiterated that little or nothing was known about certain procedures, dates and rituals. According to one employee, the “officials” in Brasilia “take part in the meetings, they follow the judgment of the cases”, while those in São Paulo only “forward” the cases. She also pointed out that taking part in the plenary sessions would not be productive for the officers because “it’s the time for us to draft a report, instead of watching something you’re not going to take part in”, and that “it’s still not very clear to me what the plenary session is”, considering that “no one has ever explained it to me and I’ve never tried to find out either”.

These statements once again refer to the analysis of the fragmentation of administrative practices in state entities. Ángela Facundo (2014) and Lucas Freire (2019) discuss the notion of “fragmentation of actions” by Maria Gabriela Lugones (2009). Lugones points out that the work of administrators in the day-to-day operations of the Preventive Juvenile Courts in Córdoba involved managing dramatic situations by “dealing with fragmentations of different orders” (2009: 139), which were seen by the officials as obstacles to carrying out their duties and which Lugones proposes should be understood as “a condition of possibility” for their “exercises of power”. These exercises allowed the administrators to deal with the “exacerbated moralization”



of issues involving victimized and mistreated children. In dialogue with this proposition, Lucas de Magalhães Freire chooses to use the category of “segmentation”, as “a kind of division of labor” in which “each employee/sector performs only part of the service” (Freire, 2019: 310). In his research on the Health Dispute Resolution Chamber (CRLS) in Rio de Janeiro, Freire identifies an “absence of dialog” between the different sectors, so that the segmentations serve as a kind of protection against listening to dramatic stories. Meanwhile, Ângela Facundo’s use of the notion of fragment (2014: 197 - 228), has two main meanings. One regards the portrayal of the stories and lives of subjects who are refugees as “fragments that can be fit into administrative categories”, while the other meaning involves the construction of refugee processes as “an orderly set of stages that will lead to a resolute moment”.

Considering the “step-by-step” nature of the processes described by Facundo, I highlight the important productivity of the fragmentation of CONARE’s work, which was manifested, firstly, in the physical distances that separated the applicants from the room where part of the administrative work was done, and from the entity that “truly decides”, in other words, “Brasilia”. But, in a related sense, the fragmentation I am referring to is related to the view that the processes form an ideal sequence of stages, each to be carried out by a specific entity and by a specific set of officials, separated from each other by distances that are not only physical, but also “labor” related and “informational” (Freire, 2019), and which limit the officials’ actions to specific moments of the work.

It is important to mention that the reports do not bear the individual signatures of the officials. As a result, according to the officials, the report is no longer their own document, but a “CONARE” document, for which officials, coordinators and members of the plenary were responsible. In the end, accountability became somewhat diffuse within the collegiate body, diluted between different actors, organizations, and entities, both “from the state” and “outside the state”. Responsibility for documents and decisions of all kinds was thus diffused. The figure of the “official” was diluted, based on the circulation of reports, in a General Coordination. The coordination, in turn, was diluted, when it came to the decision-making process at CONARE which, as a collegiate entity, shared responsibilities among agents representing the government, civil society, and international agencies.

Refugees and applicants referred to this entity, to those who “decide”, at times as “CONARE”, at times as “the Brazilian government” or simply as “Brazil”, when they said that “Brazil doesn’t help”, “the Brazilian government hasn’t given me an answer” or “the requests don’t progress in Brazil”. This is how, despite the effect of the dilution of responsibilities resulting from the administrative procedures, their results pointed to a “unity”, materialized in the “final decision” of a CONARE or a Brazil that was cohesive in its procedures and criteria. This was an effect of unity or a state-effect (Mitchell, 2006), which is materialized in the stamping of the Committee’s logo on a barely legible and visibly improvised sign on the entrance door of the house in Cambuci. It is reflected in references to a CONARE that made decisions and to a law or regulation that had to be respected, when, upon handing in a notification of rejection, it was said that CONARE, unfortunately, decided this way and the only option was to appeal to another body. This unity and coherence was simultaneously challenged when it was admitted that they did not know anything about the process or other points of the work. It was also challenged when it was said that it wouldn’t be possible to contact Brasilia at that moment because no one was answering the phone, or even to check the process because the “system” was down. The distances established thus contributed to an effect of opacity, considering that it was only possible for the CONARE employees to answer for the part of the work that fell to each person.

## Conclusion: the fragmentations that make the state

Finally, it is important to mention that the opacities do not appear as a deliberate way to camouflage a hidden truth or a supposed cohesion of state practices. What I am saying is that there is no univocal understanding of practices and notions within a solid state. In this understanding, it is first necessary to consider what various studies have been saying for a long time about state practices: that there is no coherent and univocal state “entity”, and that the state is not an objective “thing” to be accessed, discovered, and apprehended in research. It is even more important to understand that:

the production of the belief in the uniqueness, coherence and effectiveness of the public administration’s practices of power is a daily task that imposes itself with enormous force on the actions of the public administration and its extensions, which are in themselves generally dissonant, precarious and contradictory, producing the conditions for their legitimacy and power, weaving with the threads of the administrative fabric what is the product of realms totally alien to it. (Castilho; Souza Lima; Teixeira, 2014: 13).

This is how we negotiate and establish the belief in the borders of the state, conferring to it “the materiality that ideas can have” (Castilho; Souza Lima; Teixeira, 2014: 14). I return here to the reflections of Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004) who point out that, to study the state, it is necessary to move from the most obvious places where its power is exercised to the margins of everyday life, where its practices become observable. What Das (2007) identifies as paradoxical, however, is that the state maintains itself and (re)produces itself in new ways precisely at the locus of excuses and arbitrariness, which indicates the advantage of observing how its authority is incorporated in moments of violence and urgency, when, alluding to the words of CONARE’s coordinator, “everything is a priority”.

In a context of deepening *crises*, the solutions of “prioritizing the priorities” intensified, based on criteria that were not only “technical” but also “compassionate”, as the coordinator of the Committee pointed out. The administration operated based on changing normative devices that were never guaranteed, managing time and waiting in the day-to-day running of the administration. I argue that this production of arbitrariness (Gupta, 2012) can be seen as an effect that permeates what is understood/produced as each of the steps in the administrative processes that I portray in this article. Rather than an aberration or exceptionality, however, the arbitrariness of the criteria is the norm in CONARE’s work, forming part of the very “making of the state” (Souza Lima, 2002) in its daily dimensions and defining how this state presents itself to people.

But limiting oneself to “preparing the report and sending it off”, as one “official” who told me about her duties pointed out, was also a sign of “efficiency”, since there were so many people waiting and “you can’t keep delaying”. Thus, “reducing backlog”, for the officials who met applicants on a daily basis, responding to their demands and conducting interviews, was also, in the words of this official, “making decisions about the person’s life”, it was seeking efficiency so that responses, whether positive or negative, would take a little less time. In this sense, far from being a way of deliberately giving people “the run-around”, as I heard countless times during the fieldwork, the responses to applicants in the different phases of the processes reflected these distances. These fragmentations were central to the work, guaranteeing a protective effect, as Freire (2019) points out, considering that it was not the “official” who was responsible for the decision, but CONARE, Brasilia, the Council or Brazil.

I interrupt the statements of the officials’ here to make room for a statement from a refugee applicant.

And then these people say: ah, it doesn’t depend on us, it depends on Brasilia. I’ve already sent everything to Brasilia, you have to wait. The last time I approached the CONARE representative, he said the same things. Then I asked him: “Why does everyone from CONARE say that they don’t know, that it doesn’t depend on you, that it depends on Brasilia? And when you insist, they give us an e-mail to write to, to send an e-mail to Brasilia (...).

So I told him that this is not normal. Because we don't know anyone in Brasília. We only know you, because you who approach us, you who represent CONARE, you have to answer all the questions we can ask (...). It's not normal, because you're part of the CONARE office [Refugee applicant. July 2016].

The distances between the entities mentioned by the applicant, and the fragmentation of the procedures, mean that these are, in a sense, done “behind closed doors”. This is how the procedures instituted in a “public office” appear - both to those who come to it for information and to instruct their processes, and also, to a certain extent, to those who work there professionally - as “not so public” administrations (Lugones, 2009) when, for example, the access of the employees themselves to parts of the “system”, to the meetings where “decisions are actually made” and to information about the criteria applied at each stage of the processes is restricted. In this sense, fragmentation is yet another way of resolving and running the “public machinery” behind heavy wooden doors, beyond creaking staircases and *in Brasília*. This is how the work is done from and through the opacities and various precariousness of the physical facilities, the distances, the lack of staff and the alleged lack of understanding of the processes on the part of the applicants (when, in fact, who mastered them entirely?).

What makes it acceptable to prioritize “the vulnerable among the vulnerable” in the actions of the staff is that they share the idea that there is a state responsibility to protect these people and that all (the so-called “true refugees”) are entitled to this protection. The other side of this statement, however, is that it implies that, considering the “not so ideal” conditions or the crises, some will have to be prioritized so that this protection can be guaranteed to “those who really need it”. Considering that there are those who “really need it”, however, implies that there are others who do not need it as much, on whom falls not only the entire burden of responsibility for the delays and the continuous and exponential “increase in backlog”, but also the burden of long waits with no end in sight. These are the people destined to live with the uncertainty and precariousness of their condition of permanence in Brazil.

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# Localizar y documentar: Formas de gestión tutelar en dos instituciones estatales de Córdoba, Argentina

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## Resumen

En este trabajo nos interesa comparar las actuaciones de dos instituciones de carácter estatal de la provincia de Córdoba, Argentina, con prácticas que eran entendidas como de *tutela*. Y si bien aparentemente se encontraban en las antípodas, dadas las poblaciones a las que estaban dirigidas, podíamos encontrar puntos de encuentro e interpelación. Prestando atención de no caer en comparaciones anatómicas ni en universales etnográficos nos propusimos, desde una separación analítica, abordar algunas formas de gestión tutelar, tanto en el Patronato del Liberado como en la Reserva Patrimonial del Museo de Antropologías. La distinción entre *tutelar localizando* y *tutelar documentando* nos permitió observar cómo estas actuaciones se inscriben en procesos de producción y reproducción de saberes, construidos en el trabajo cotidiano e íntimo como acciones privilegiadas y legitimadas de cuidado; considerando, también, la polivalencia de estas prácticas similares que, en contextos diferentes y con objetivos diferentes, se torsionan.

**Palabras clave:** tutela; gestión; localizar; documentar; etnografía.

# Localizar e documentar: Formas de gestão tutelar em duas instituições estatais em Córdoba, Argentina

## Resumo

Neste trabalho estamos interessados em comparar as ações de duas instituições estatais na província de Córdoba, Argentina, onde encontramos práticas que foram entendidas como tutela. E embora aparentemente estivessem nos antípodas, dadas as populações para as quais eram dirigidas, pudemos encontrar pontos de encontro e de interpelação. Tomando o cuidado de não cair em comparações anatómicas ou universais etnográficas, partimos de uma separação analítica para abordar algumas formas de gestão tutelar, tanto no Patronato del Liberado como na Reserva Patrimonial do Museu de Antropologia. A distinção entre tutela por localização e tutela por documentação permitiu-nos observar como estas ações se inscrevem nos processos de produção e reprodução do conhecimento construído no trabalho cotidiano e íntimo como ações de cuidado privilegiadas e legitimadas. Considerámos também a polivalência destas práticas semelhantes que, em contextos diferentes e com objetivos diferentes, são distorcidas.

**Palavras-chave:** tutela; gestão; localizar; documentar; etnografia.

# Locate and document: Forms of tutelary management in two state institutions in Córdoba, Argentina

## Abstract

In this paper we are interested in comparing the actions of two state institutions in the province of Córdoba, Argentina, where we found practices that were understood as guardianship. And although they were apparently at the antipodes, given the populations to which they were directed, we could find points of encounter and interpellation. Taking care not to fall into anatomical comparisons or ethnographic universals, we proposed, from an analytical separation, to approach some forms of tutelary management both in the Patronato del Liberado and in the Patrimonial Reserve of the Museum of Anthropology. The distinction between tutelage locating and tutelage documenting allowed us to observe how these actions are inscribed in processes of production and reproduction of knowledge constructed in the daily and intimate work as privileged and legitimized actions of care. Considering also the polyvalence of these similar practices that, in different contexts and with different objectives, are twisted.

**Keywords:** tutelage; management; locate; document; ethnography.

# Localizar y documentar

## Formas de gestión tutelar en dos instituciones estatales de Córdoba, Argentina

Santiago Manuel Romero

Melisa Rodríguez Oviedo

### Introducción

Este trabajo surge del diálogo entre colegas, sobre las formas en que era ejercida la tutela estatal sobre cosas y personas.<sup>1</sup> Durante nuestros trabajos de campo nos encontramos con prácticas que eran entendidas como *tutela*<sup>2</sup> y que, si bien aparentemente se encontraban en las antípodas, dadas las poblaciones a las que estaban dirigidas, podíamos encontrar puntos de encuentro e interpelación. Por ello nos propusimos realizar un texto comparativo con el afán de reflexionar sobre algunas dimensiones de las gestiones estatales (y) tutelares. Siguiendo a Barth (2000), lo que proponemos es intentar evitar las comparaciones “anatómicas”, centradas en la comparación de rasgos discretos, y más bien construir un “campo de variación” de la tutela estatal. Para ello atenderemos especialmente al ejercicio de dos formas de gestión tutelar —*localizar y documentar*— en las instituciones donde desarrollamos nuestras investigaciones doctorales. Se trata del Patronato del Liberado y la Reserva Patrimonial del Museo de Antropología —de ahora en más hablaremos de “Patronato” y “Reserva”— ambas instituciones estatales de diferente grado y ubicadas en la ciudad de Córdoba, Argentina.<sup>3</sup> La fundación de ambas instituciones, con una trayectoria entre 80 y 100 años de antigüedad, es la materialización de un periodo enraizado en la construcción del estado-nación argentino que se encargó de la creación de diferentes organismos, secretarías, instituciones educativas, museos, cárceles, entre otros, orientados a la consolidación del proyecto nacional (Cattaruzza, 2009; Romero, 1994; Ansaldo & Moreno, 1989; Oszlak, 2004, entre otros).

Entendiendo el estado en su multidimensionalidad y polivalencia, en este artículo nos focalizaremos en la tutela como una de las formas específicas en las que se ejerce el poder estatal. Para lo que trabajaremos será fundamental el concepto de poder tutelar, de Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, quien denomina así al “ejercicio de poder de Estado sobre

1 Este diálogo comenzó durante el VI Congreso de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Antropología (ALA), durante noviembre de 2020. En esa oportunidad coincidimos con trabajos por separado en el simposio titulado “Gestiones y prácticas de gobierno en clave antropológica” coordinado por Silvia Aguião, Lucía Tamagnini, María Cecilia Díaz y María Gabriela Lugones. Luego de esta experiencia y los comentarios de las coordinadoras del simposio nos propusimos llevar adelante una presentación en conjunto en el Congreso Argentino de Antropología Social (CAAS), realizado en 2021, en la mesa titulada: “Antropologías de las Gestiones y las prácticas de gobierno” coordinada por Lucía Tamagnini, Laura Navallo, M. Cecilia Díaz y M. Gabriela Lugones. Allí comenzamos a esbozar esta apuesta comparativa sobre las formas de gestión tutelar en el Patronato y en la Reserva, haciendo hincapié en la praxis de la tutela, es decir, en cómo se construye desde las prácticas cotidianas.

2 Quisiéramos dejar explicitado el uso de las comillas, itálicas y negritas en el presente trabajo. Las “comillas dobles” serán utilizadas en aquellos casos que referimos a citas textuales y enfatizar expresiones nativas. Las ‘comillas simples’ por su parte serán empleadas para relativizar conceptos. Las *itálicas* serán empleadas para diferenciar la voz de nuestros interlocutores y documentos. Por su parte, las **negritas** resaltan fragmentos de entrevistas y documentos.

3 Nos encontramos transitando el cuarto año de beca interna doctoral otorgada por el Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET), en el marco del Doctorado en Cs. Antropológicas de la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades de la UNC, Argentina. Santiago Romero centra su trabajo en el Patronato del Liberado de la Ciudad de Córdoba y forma parte del equipo “Antropología de las gestiones en la Córdoba contemporánea” dirigido por las Dras. María Gabriela Lugones y María Lucía Tamagnini (CIFYH-UNC). Esa investigación etnográfica tiene como horizonte interrogar las formas en las que se administran poblaciones en conflicto con la ley por fuera de la prisión y, particularmente, por parte del Patronato cordobés. La atención a la dimensión cotidiana de la gestión estatal forma parte de los intereses de pesquisa del equipo de investigación mencionado.

Melisa Rodríguez Oviedo, en tanto, realiza su trabajo de campo en la Reserva Patrimonial del Museo de Antropologías de Córdoba y forma parte del equipo de investigación “Núcleo de Estudios de Antropología de la vida y la muerte”. Materializaciones, patrimonio e imágenes” (NEAVM), dirigido por la Dra. Ludmila Da Silva Catela, radicado en el Instituto de Antropología de Córdoba. La investigación se centra en el abordaje de cómo es movilizado/disputado *lo patrimonial*, en (y desde) los centros que por excelencia se enfocaron en definirlo, particularmente museos y universidades, teniendo presente las relaciones que se dan entre las profesiones especialistas, las legislaciones (nacionales, provinciales y municipales) y las poblaciones locales en torno a los procesos de patrimonialización. Muchas de las discusiones aquí vertidas son fruto de un trabajo colectivo en el marco de cada uno de los equipos de investigación de los cuales formamos parte.



espaços (geográficos, sociais, simbólicos), que atua através da identificação, nomeação e delimitação de segmentos sociais tomados como destituídos de capacidades plenas necessárias à vida cívica” (Souza Lima, 2012:784). Es constitutiva de su concepto la imbricación entre dimensiones pedagógicas y opresivas, la protección y asujamiento.

En un trabajo que revisa la obra de Souza Lima, el concepto de poder tutelar y sus aportes a la producción de conocimiento, Lugones (2023) plantea que:

En el derrotero de lo que Souza Lima llamó poder tutelar, al partir de una articulación que va de la invasión y conquista de territorios a su gestión y administración en procesos de construcción del Estado-nación, los conocimientos generados permiten aseverar que no son idénticas las formas tutelares de los regímenes colonial o republicano, como tampoco lo son las actuales actuaciones, gestiones, performances y normas de protección integral. Pero sí es preciso aprehender sus recurrencias. Esto puede convertirse en un lugar incómodo para debatir, ya que no se complace con asumir posiciones “principistas” ni asépticas (Lugones, 2023:203).

Por lo tanto, la relevancia significativa de la noción de poder tutelar reside en su flexibilidad, como instrumento conceptual que permite un enfoque directo para el análisis de los procesos continuos de formación del Estado (Elias, 2006 [1972]) en contextos postcoloniales. Al mismo tiempo, ofrece una perspectiva interpelante sobre las políticas gubernamentales y las formas contemporáneas de gobierno, dirigidas a intervenir grupos sociales/bienes culturales, percibidos como necesitados de asistencia para ejercer plenamente su ciudadanía y merecedores de formas especiales de protección.

La propuesta de Souza Lima invita a estudiar ejercicios de tutela desde múltiples abordajes; en nuestras investigaciones, que fundan este trabajo, nos encontramos con casos en los que la tutela estaría instituida jurídicamente. Tal institución era literal en el marco normativo que regula el funcionamiento de la Reserva, mientras que para el caso del Patronato era más bien una noción de uso en el cotidiano de las administradoras estatales. De tal modo, en este trabajo se articula una aproximación a ejercicios de tutela, que se entienden como tales con una conceptualización socioantropológica formulada para pensar, en dichos términos, una diversidad de actuaciones no sólo estatales. También retomamos en nuestra reflexión lo propuesto por Souza Lima (2002), al remarcar el origen etimológico común entre los vocablos *gestar* y *gestionar* (*gestar e gerir*), para analizar las actuaciones estatales observadas en términos de “gestar” como acción pedagógica de “enseñar a ser y a hacer” (Souza Lima, 2002:16), y “gestionar” como administración cotidiana del dominio.

El concepto de tutela nos plantea la pregunta respecto de sus usos en sentido literal o ejemplar, al decir de Todorov (2008), cuyo vasto trabajo sobre los procesos de memoria fue bueno para pensar (salvando las distancias) sobre cuándo y para qué usamos el concepto de tutela, tanto nosotros como las instituciones y personas con las que interactuamos. La cuestión es si en el Patronato y/o en la Reserva se opta por un uso literal del concepto, recuperando todos sus detalles, agotándose en sí mismo, como un evento que no puede ser comparado con otros; o se opta por un uso ejemplar, como un modelo que permite comprender principalmente situaciones nuevas, del presente, sacrificando la singularidad del suceso en sí mismo.

Otro matiz del concepto de poder tutelar radica en la constitución de especialistas en la administración de poblaciones y/o bienes patrimoniales. Para nuestros casos, además de un saber profesional específico, dichas especialistas también tienen ciertas cualidades de género: a lo largo del texto hablaremos en femenino para referirnos a las trabajadoras de ambas instituciones y así llamar la atención sobre lo generificado de sus tareas, ya que la gran mayoría del personal técnico y administrativo del Patronato y Reserva son mujeres cis.<sup>4</sup>

4 Este rasgo invita a preguntarnos sobre cómo la gestión tutelar podría estar cobrando un matiz generificado, incluso más allá del género de las personas que la llevan a cabo, lo que no será abordado en este trabajo. Estas cuestiones han sido analizadas por diversas autoras, como Vianna y Lowenkron (2017), quienes propusieron atender al *duplo fazer* entre género y estado, entendiéndolos no como entidades discretas, sino en un vínculo de coproducción. Por su parte, Lugones (2017) planteó la posibilidad de pensar como gestiones maternas a las accionadas por las administradoras de un Tribunal Preventivo de Menores, atendiendo a que su eficacia podría estar dada no sólo por la autoridad legal sino también por el uso de técnicas de minorización maternas.

Antes de continuar, algunas breves advertencias: la primera refiere a dejar explícito que el ejercicio que nos propusimos para este trabajo tuvo como dinámica la separación analítica entre los actos de localizar y documentar. Sin embargo, somos conscientes de que, en la cotidianidad, estas formas de gestión tutelar no se distinguen tan nítidamente; incluso invitamos a que, en la lectura, se atiendan a las mutuas imbricaciones. En segundo lugar, es preciso tener presente que tanto las trabajadoras del Patronato, como nosotres y nuestras colegas de la Reserva, nos desempeñamos como agentes estatales. Consideramos que todes nosotres, en diversa forma y grado, estaríamos extendiendo la presencia del Estado con nuestras tareas cotidianas y contribuyendo a la continua formación estatal que Elias (2006 [1972]) señaló tan acertadamente.

Además, coincidimos con lo intuido por Lugones (2014), para quien la apropiación en nuestra región de la expresión “academia”, empleada para hablar de nuestras instituciones universitarias y/o de investigación estatales, “contrabandea nociones que responden a realidades de otras latitudes”, señalando asertivamente la distancia abismal entre nuestros institutos universitarios, surgidos de la empresa colonial continuada luego por los Estados nacionales, respecto de la realidad de aquellas prestigiosas universidades del norte global, que son —de hecho— privadas. La autora indica que cada vez que nos nombramos como “de la academia” estamos auto-negando que ejercemos nuestras profesiones como agentes estatales (ya sea como docentes, investigadores, no-docentes, técnicos, etc.) empleados por instituciones estatales.

Nos interesa atender a la advertencia de Lugones (2014) respecto de que, no reconociéndonos como agentes estatales, podríamos estar potenciando el “fetichismo de Estado” propuesto por Michel Taussig (1995), es decir, “esa peculiarmente sagrada y erótica atracción, casi fascinación combinada con disgusto, que el Estado provoca en sus súbditos” (1995:144). Por ello, otra apuesta del ejercicio comparativo aquí propuesto tiene que ver con no distanciar el ejercicio de nuestra profesión –tomando el caso de las trabajadoras de la Reserva– del trabajo de otros administradores estatales –las trabajadoras del Patronato–. Con esto pretendemos evitar pensar las prácticas científicas analizadas como exteriores a los saberes estatales ya que, entendemos, participan de lo que Taussig cifra en el “aura de la E mayúscula”, es decir, la constitución cultural del Estado Moderno y el poder político de esa “ficción” (1995:145-146).<sup>5</sup>

A continuación, presentaremos algunos rasgos de las instituciones pesquisadas y sus prácticas y, más adelante, avanzaremos con las particularidades que observamos en sus formas de *localizar y documentar*.

## **Una breve cartografía de las instituciones. Del Instituto de Arqueología, Lingüística y Folklore al Museo de Antropologías de Córdoba**

El lenguaje ordena la vida cotidiana, y la escritura es un modo de transmisión cultural de la memoria social por excelencia en las sociedades occidentales; a través de la escritura, la historia de la nación se inventa como ficción orientadora (García, 2017). En este sentido, los museos durante el siglo XIX funcionaron como dispositivos que producían subjetividades, con la capacidad de controlar, capturar, orientar, determinar, modelar y asegurar las conductas, las prácticas y los discursos (Agamben, 2011). Estos museos sustentaron sus relatos en los valores historiográficos del paradigma científico dominante; oficiaron como instrumentos para la reproducción del orden social y agentes en la preservación de la desigualdad en el acceso a la cultura.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Siguiendo este señalamiento de Taussig, a lo largo del texto hablaremos de “Estado” cuando hagamos referencia a su constitución simbólica; y de “estado” en el resto de ocasiones.

<sup>6</sup> En Latinoamérica, numerosos museos han surgido en relación a la conformación de los Estados Nacionales, y sus colecciones fueron incorporadas como patrimonio, para educar a los ciudadanos en torno a una identidad nacional homogénea (y hegemónica), unificando territorios y personas dentro de un origen común. Actualmente, estas miradas sitúan a los museos como repositorios de bienes y valores, o como espacios que encapsulan contenidos, que han ido cediendo paso a otras funciones sociales y ampliando la propia noción de Museo y de patrimonio. Un trabajo reciente al respecto es *Políticas patrimoniales y procesos de despojo y violencia en Latinoamérica*, editado por Carina Jofré y Cristóbal Gnecco en 2022. En el caso de Argentina, a través del siglo XIX e inicios del XX, los museos orientaron sus objetivos hacia la recolección y acopio de colecciones (zoológicas, mineralógicas, históricas, paleontológicas, arqueológicas, antropológicas, entre otras) mediante distintos mecanismos (intercambios, expediciones, compras, donaciones). Esto se dio, mayormente, en

La creación de los museos en la Argentina fue relativamente temprana (luego de 1880) y, al compás de la imposición del proyecto político económico de la elite liberal (García, 2017), cumplieron un rol pedagógico en la construcción de un imaginario colectivo sobre la nación bajo el paradigma del progreso cientificista. Los museos ubicados en las grandes ciudades y ligados a las universidades o instituciones, tales como el Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales, el Museo de Ciencias Naturales de la Plata o el Museo Etnográfico de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, fundaron su legitimidad en la recolección, conservación y exhibición pública de piezas, documentos y objetos materiales del pasado que, desde una perspectiva cronológica, pretendían ilustrar un determinado proceso histórico y al mismo tiempo asociarlo a la construcción identitaria que legitimaba cierta versión de la historia nacional: una memoria del pasado historiográficamente elaborada. Funcionales a los estados emergentes, los museos fueron concebidos como “templos” cívicos dedicados a afirmar una idea de Nación y un relato de la historia (García, 2017). Este proceso, sin embargo, no se manifiesta de la misma forma ni al mismo tiempo en las fronteras establecidas para la Nación, debido a la centralización de la ciencia, particularmente en Buenos Aires.

En el caso de la ciudad de Córdoba, el 10 de diciembre de 1941 fue creado el Instituto de Arqueología, Lingüística y Folklore (en adelante, IALF), con Antonio Serrano como su Director. Se fundó como parte de una política de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba de promover institutos de investigación en las ramas de las humanidades y la filosofía entre los años 1930 y 1940 (Bonnin, 2010). Serrano observará las actividades de saqueo y tráfico ilícito en distintas provincias del país, sobre todo cuando realiza las excursiones de estudio. A raíz de esto propone ante los poderes públicos de la Nación la creación del Patronato Nacional de Investigaciones Arqueológicas (Bonnin, 2007), organismo que deberían integrar todos los investigadores responsables del país y que vendría en sustitución de la Comisión de Yacimientos Arqueológicos prevista por la Ley Nacional 9.080, sancionada en 1913. Consideraba que esta ley era anacrónica, defectuosa y que se violaba en todo el país, puesto que nadie la acataba. Serrano se ofrecerá en varias oportunidades para asesorar en estos temas, pero su oferta no tendrá mayor eco en las autoridades ni en el medio académico, posiblemente porque esa no era una preocupación para los arqueólogos que trabajaban en los museos de Buenos Aires y La Plata. Por otro lado, el desarrollo de una arqueología científica en el interior del país, del tipo de la que Serrano estaba llevando a cabo en Córdoba, era muy incipiente –e incluso inexistente– en muchas provincias.

En 1955 se produce la denominada “Revolución Libertadora”,<sup>7</sup> lo que generó la destitución de un gobierno elegido constitucionalmente. Esto implicaría profundos cambios en la práctica arqueológica argentina, que será influenciada por un enfoque desarrollista de ciencia, con la incorporación de fechados radiocarbónicos y análisis fisicoquímicos. El IALF será renombrado como Instituto de Antropología (IA) y se orientará mayormente a los estudios en arqueología, desde la perspectiva científica norteamericana. Se relegarán los trabajos folklóricos y el interés por la colección de materiales culturales contemporáneos, y se incrementarán los trabajos de campo arqueológicos con perspectiva ecológica evolutiva. El IA será, hasta 1966, un centro de desarrollo para la antropología y, en particular, la arqueología con una mirada federal, por fuera de los centros de investigación de Buenos Aires y La Plata. A partir de ese año comenzará a tener altibajos, fundamentalmente debido a las

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museos centrales y de gran envergadura, ligados a las universidades (Lopes, 2010; Castilla, 2010) o instituciones tales como el Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales (Penchaszadeh et al., 2012), el Museo de Ciencias Naturales de la Plata o el Museo Etnográfico de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires (creado en 1904), aunque también dentro de este proceso podemos agregar el Museo de Paraná, en Entre Ríos, fundado en 1884, y el Museo de Corrientes, inaugurado en 1894 (Núñez, 2011). Dichos museos funcionaban insertos en una red institucional a través de la cual se intercambiaban piezas, especímenes, colecciones e informaciones tales como publicaciones o catálogos (Podgorny, 2005; Pegoraro, 2005; Heizer, 2006, entre otros), que sirvieran cada vez más para fines de investigación y pedagógicos. Este proceso llegaría más tarde a otras regiones del país tales como Rosario, en donde el Museo Provincial de Ciencias Naturales Dr. Ángel Gallardo inicia su historia hacia 1948 (Díaz de Ferioli, 2010), y entre sus colecciones posee piezas de San Juan o Catamarca, por ejemplo; o los distintos museos municipales del sudoeste de la provincia de Buenos Aires, creados en la década de 1950, de origen privado en su mayoría, que han sido analizados por Alejandra Pupio (2005), entre otros.

7 La “Revolución Libertadora”, según el nombre con que se autodenominó, fue la dictadura cívico-militar que gobernó la República Argentina tras derrocar al presidente Juan Domingo Perón. El golpe de Estado fue iniciado el día 16 de septiembre de 1955 con la clausura del Congreso Nacional, fueron depuestos los miembros de la Corte Suprema de Justicia y las autoridades provinciales, e intervenidas las universidades nacionales.

interrupciones provocadas por los sucesivos golpes militares (1966-73; 1976-83) que traerán las intervenciones a las universidades y la cesantía de personal universitario.

Como un resultado probable de ese largo proceso de desgaste institucional que fueron los gobiernos dictatoriales, para el año 1988 el Instituto de Antropología fue disuelto e incorporado a la estructura del recién creado Centro de Investigaciones de la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades, situación que continuó hasta el año 2002, en el que se le dio la autonomía a una parte del antiguo instituto: el Museo de Antropología (MdA), como lo encontramos hoy. En lo que respecta a las normativas la Ley 9.080 estuvo vigente desde 1913 aunque sin aplicación. En respuesta a su ineficacia, las provincias produjeron y aplicaron sus propias leyes como modo de proteger sus patrimonios. El Museo de Antropología trabajaría, durante la mayor parte de su historia, dentro de este marco legal difuso, recurriendo como medida administrativa formal a las máximas autoridades universitarias.

A partir de 2003, cuando se sanciona y promulga la Ley Nacional 25.743 de Protección del Patrimonio Arqueológico y Paleontológico, que le da marco regulatorio a las colecciones del museo, sus trabajadoras comenzaron un camino de adecuación a dicha normativa. En este sentido se actualizaron y sistematizaron los inventarios de acuerdo al Registro Nacional de Yacimientos, Colecciones y Objetos Arqueológicos –RENYCOA–, del Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano (INAPL), órgano de contralor designado por la norma. Es oportuno remarcar dos cuestiones. La primera tiene que ver con que el MdA forma parte de los 19 museos universitarios de la UNC; el otro punto es que no cuenta con presupuesto propio. Sin embargo, a lo largo de los últimos 15 años, ha recibido diferentes financiamientos de organismos privados que se dedican a promover el desarrollo de la ciencia y la cultura en Argentina, como la Fundación Antorchas, y Fundación Williams, entre otras. Estos financiamientos se consiguieron a través de la presentación de proyectos a cargo de investigadores del Museo y del Instituto de Antropología de Córdoba; implicaron la compra de equipamiento, formación de personal, becas para trabajadores, compra de insumos para conservación preventiva, etc.

La Reserva del Museo alberga más de 200 mil objetos arqueológicos y etnográficos (Informe de gestión, 2012). Las colecciones que allí se encuentran tienen características particulares, en tanto son producto de variadas formas de adquisición: investigaciones de campo asociadas al área científica del museo, donaciones de otros museos y de personas particulares, canje con otras instituciones, compra de colecciones privadas, depósitos judiciales y transferencias por comodato, entre otras. Durante el trabajo de campo, el Museo contaba con cinco personas en su planta permanente, encargadas de las diferentes aristas que conllevan las tareas de conservación preventiva, documentación y digitalización de los bienes que están *bajo su tutela*.<sup>8</sup> En esta institución se optó por nombrar a cada uno de los depósitos de bienes culturales como reservas, asignándose dos tipos: Patrimoniales y Técnicas. Las Reservas Patrimoniales eran los sectores edilicios que albergaban las diversas colecciones. Cada una de ellas poseía estructuras de almacenamiento diseñadas para preservar las diversas colecciones y sus materiales correspondientes. En cambio, las Reservas Técnicas eran aquellas donde se depositaban las herramientas para trabajo de campo (Informe de gestión, 2004).

Desde 2002, el Museo y la Reserva fueron separados geográficamente; el primero se ubicó en el centro de la ciudad de Córdoba, sobre la avenida Hipólito Yrigoyen, emplazado en una casa de fines del siglo XIX. Allí se encuentran las diferentes salas permanentes y temporarias, recorridas por el público en general, que permiten conocer sobre diferentes tópicos de la antropología (arqueología, antropología social y antropología biológica). La Reserva, en tanto se encuentra ubicada a 15 cuadras del Museo, alejándose del centro de la ciudad, detrás del Pabellón Argentina en la Ciudad Universitaria, donde sólo acceden, por lo general, trabajadoras del Museo. En el ingreso del Museo de Antropología podía leerse, en un cartel sobre la pared, que su misión era “reunir,

8 Las trabajadoras de la Reserva tienen formación en Historia, Antropología, Archivología, Conservación y Fotografía.

conservar, investigar y exhibir la cultura de las sociedades indígenas pasadas y contemporáneas, dentro de un marco científico actualizado y crítico, como una manera de fomentar el respeto hacia otros”.

En nuestras investigaciones, y a lo largo de este trabajo, entendemos que los objetos considerados patrimoniales requieren de un proceso que los nombre, module y taxonomicamente como tales. Para garantizar el reconocimiento público de ese nuevo estatus, se formulan procesos homogeneizantes a nivel nacional. Estos procesos de patrimonialización refieren a la separación o escisión de objetos, lugares y expresiones del flujo de la vida social, para luego tratar de retornarlos a ella, ya codificados, normalizados e interpretados. Los objetos devienen patrimonio y ‘adquieren’ plena existencia y relevancia como tales al ser gestionados, documentados, localizados y representados a partir de un lenguaje distinto.<sup>9</sup> En las próximas secciones nos adentraremos con detalle a cómo se desarrollaba esto en el universo pesquisado.

## El Patronato del Liberado de la provincia de Córdoba

Los patronatos de liberados en Argentina cuentan con una larga trayectoria, habiendo sido creado el primer patronato público en 1906 por Joaquín V. González, entonces Ministro del Interior. Ya entonces estos primeros patronatos surgen como instituciones estatales o fuertemente asociadas a agencias del estado. Milena Luciano (2015) plantea que durante los últimos años del siglo XIX comienza a conformarse en el ámbito local una burocracia especializada en la cuestión penitenciaria. La historiadora relata la creación del primer patronato cordobés en 1909 –creación que venía siendo reclamada por juristas locales desde hacía casi una década– como una institución “mixta” ya que, si bien era ocasionalmente financiada por el estado provincial, la gestión estaba en manos de organizaciones filantrópicas, laicas o religiosas.

Entre los impulsores de su creación circulaba el entendimiento de que, a la salida de la cárcel, las personas liberadas se enfrentaban al odio y condena moral de la sociedad, lo que atentaba contra el proceso correccional y fomentaba la reincidencia en el delito. Los patronatos se encargarían de evitar tal reincidencia y de procurar trabajo para los liberados (Anexo de Justicia, 1907). Entonces, así como sus administradores debían –según el decreto de creación del primer patronato público– *desempeñar su misión como un buen padre de familia* (Anexo de Justicia, 1907) fomentaban también el establecimiento de vínculos con ‘otros’ patrones.

Con la sanción del Código Penal de 1922 se motorizó la creación de patronatos a lo largo del país, fuertemente vinculados a la institución de la libertad condicional, ya que será parte de sus funciones el control de esa modalidad de cumplimiento de penas.<sup>10</sup> Respecto de ello, Caimari (2012) propone que, en ese esfuerzo codificante, se cristalizaron algunos de los intereses y propuestas del positivismo criminológico, entre ellos, la institución de la libertad condicional.

Durante el trabajo de campo, el Patronato cordobés formaba parte del Poder Ejecutivo provincial y realizaba tareas en asociación con los Juzgados de Ejecución Penal (JEP), y otras dependencias del Poder Judicial cordobés. La Ley Nacional de Ejecución de la Pena Privativa de la Libertad –Ley N° 24.660, vigente desde 1996 y modificada en numerosas ocasiones– indica que los patronatos de liberados deben asistir al Poder Judicial en el proceso

9 En este punto queremos agradecer la sugerencia de uno de los revisores, quien nos instó a explicitar aún más lo formulado a partir de sus preguntas: “¿No será que, en la dotación de un lenguaje de la gestión, la documentación, la localización y la representación, el patrimonio material “adquiere” plena existencia y relevancia? ¿No podríamos pensar que en este caso el patrimonio no precede a la gestión, sino que ésta, de algún modo, al nombrarlo, modularlo y taxonomizarlo, lo “instituye nacionalmente”?”.

10 Hagamos un recorrido panorámico por la creación de patronatos en el interior del país, recuperando lo trabajado por González Alvo y García Basalo (2019). En la década de 1930 se fundaron los patronatos de las provincias de Santa Fe, Tucumán y el Patronato de Liberados de la Capital Federal. En Tucumán se crearon dos Patronatos, uno en San Miguel y otro en Concepción, en el año 1936 (2019:69). Durante la misma década, se creó un Patronato de Presos, Liberados y Excarcelados en San Juan, al tiempo que se construyeron talleres en la penitenciaría. En 1938 se fundó un Patronato en la provincia de Mendoza, en un momento de reacondicionamiento de su penitenciaría. A fines de los años 30, se redactó un nuevo reglamento para la cárcel de Santiago del Estero (inaugurada en 1934) que incluyó la creación de un Patronato de Liberados. En Santa Fe, los autores pudieron recuperar una iniciativa de 1940 en la que los liberados sometidos al cuidado del Patronato serían empleados en obras ejecutadas por la provincia. En Corrientes, un Patronato de Liberados fue creado por ley en 1942, y puesto en funcionamiento en 1947, al haberse puesto en libertad a numerosos penados (González Alvo et al., 2019:68). Cerca de esos años, en 1949, se creó un Patronato en Salta.

de ejecución de penas, combinando tareas de contralor con la *asistencia social, moral y material pospenitenciaria*, orientadas a la *reinserción* social y laboral de personas penadas. De esta forma, las personas *bajo la tutela* de la institución se encontraban cumpliendo penas bajo alguna forma de *libertad* o en prisión domiciliaria, y por orden de un juzgado debían *someterse al cuidado* del Patronato.<sup>11</sup>

La institución pesquisada formaba parte de la Secretaría de Organización y Gestión Penitenciaria, del Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos, del Poder Ejecutivo de la Provincia de Córdoba. En una entrevista con una trabajadora social del Patronato, reconstruimos parte de la historia institucional reciente, a partir de su propia trayectoria. A fines de los años 1990, el Patronato había sido una repartición del Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, y luego pasaron por el Ministerio de Seguridad. Allí, el Patronato se acercó en el organigrama institucional al Servicio Penitenciario de Córdoba (SPC) con el cual, finalmente, ambas reparticiones *pasaron* al Ministerio de Justicia en los primeros años del siglo XXI.

Las personas penadas *bajo tutela* del Patronato se encontraban en una diversidad de situaciones, conocidas en la institución como *condiciones jurídicas*. En su mayoría eran personas con penas firmes, es decir, que habían sido juzgadas y sentenciadas por un delito, cuyas penas eran cumplidas bajo la forma de libertad condicional o asistida; penas en ejecución condicional, *probations* o prisiones domiciliarias. El Patronato asistía a los Juzgados de Ejecución Penal (JEP) controlando que los requisitos impuestos para el cumplimiento de las penas en esas modalidades fueran acatados por las personas *bajo su tutela*. Los JEP son quienes se encargaban, justamente, de ejecutar las penas que eran impuestas por las Cámaras del Crimen y tenían también el deber de velar por los derechos de las personas penadas. Parte del trabajo de campo consistió en acompañar etnográficamente estas tareas, que conformaban las actividades del Patronato que podríamos llamar de *contralor*. En la institución se desempeñaban unas 20 licenciadas en Trabajo Social o Psicología, profesiones que se erigieron como las autorizadas para la administración de las poblaciones tuteladas por el Patronato. La gran mayoría de las trabajadoras eran contratadas por el Ministerio de Justicia y sólo algunas pocas pertenecían al Servicio Penitenciario de Córdoba, lo que producía condiciones laborales diferenciales.

El Patronato tenía jurisdicción sobre las personas en cumplimiento de penas en todo el territorio de la provincia, sin importar adónde se cometieron los delitos juzgados; contaba con subsedes –de reciente creación– en las ciudades de Río Cuarto, Villa Carlos Paz y Villa María (tres de las ciudades más importantes de la provincia luego de Córdoba, la capital). Los tutelados que, por lejanía, no asistían a las sedes oficiales del Patronato, se presentaban a los tribunales de San Francisco, Cosquín o Cruz del Eje (ciudades cabecera de departamento, en los que se divide el territorio del Provincia de Córdoba), donde las trabajadoras del Patronato realizaban un promedio de 3 visitas mensuales. En los casos de San Francisco y Cruz del Eje, al desarrollarse las entrevistas en el Palacio Judicial local, las administradoras podían interactuar personalmente con ‘sus’ tutelados y con los funcionarios de los Juzgados de Ejecución Penal que, en general, llevaban esas causas; interacción que en la ciudad de Córdoba era mediada por papeles, llamadas e intermediarias.

## Tutelar localizando

La conceptualización de Souza Lima (1995) de *poder tutelar* incluyó una dimensión territorial, al analizar cómo el proceso de pacificación de grupos indígenas implicaba fijarlos en un territorio. Por su parte, el acto de localizar o ubicar como forma de gestión tutelar fue señalado también por Adriana Vianna (2002) en su investigación sobre procesos de guarda y adopción de niños y niñas en Brasil. La autora indicó que las acciones administrativas analizadas buscaban *reductos de orden* en unidades domésticas, localizando niños en casas y en

<sup>11</sup> Hablaremos de *tutelados* para referir a las personas que asistían al Patronato, ya que así eran nombrados por las administradoras, quienes entendían que estas personas estaban bajo la tutela del Patronato. Esa categoría parece menos confusa que la de *liberados*, que puede remitir a personas que pasaron por prisión, cuando esa era la realidad de sólo una parte de la población administrada.

redes vinculares. En lo que viene nos detendremos en la descripción de las torsiones que el acto de localizar, como parte del ejercicio de la tutela, tomaba en las instituciones analizadas.

En la administración tutelar orientada a personas cumpliendo penas *en libertad*, la práctica localizadora giraba en torno del *fijar domicilio*. Cuando una persona llegaba para una entrevista, las empleadas de mesa de entrada tomaban una copia de la *planilla de presentaciones* o *entrevista de seguimiento* y se la acercaban al escritorio de una licenciada, avisando de la presencia de 'su' tutelado quien, mientras tanto, permanecía esperando en el hall de ingreso del Patronato. La *planilla de presentaciones* constituía un guión –no siempre seguido al pie de la letra– para las entrevistas realizadas por las licenciadas a los tutelados, y era completada en cada una de las visitas. Por su parte, la *planilla de primera entrevista* se producía en la primera visita de los tutelados y allí se inscribían datos que luego no era necesario volver a preguntar en las siguientes visitas (como los motivos de detención, requisitos, trayectoria institucional, conformación familiar, educación, etc.). Lo que sí se preguntaba, y aparecía en todas las planillas, era el domicilio y número telefónico de los tutelados. En las planillas de presentaciones aparecía la pregunta: *Modificó Domicilio: SI - NO*.

El expediente de tutela se iba conformando de estos documentos. Comenzaba con una carátula; luego, el *oficio* venido del Poder Judicial y que instituía la tutela; una copia del Documento Nacional de Identidad (DNI) del tutelado; luego la *planilla de primera entrevista*, seguida de las *planillas de entrevistas de presentaciones*. Entre ellas también se incluían copias de los comprobantes de los distintos requisitos que los jueces imponían a los tutelados. Por ejemplo, si habían pedido que realizara un tratamiento psicológico, debía presentarse un certificado de cada sesión realizada o del alta médica. Del mismo modo, quienes realizaban tareas comunitarias completaban fichas de asistencia, que eran firmadas por referentes de las instituciones donde realizaban dichas tareas. Además de eso, en ocasiones los expedientes incluían tarjetas o folletos de ofertas de servicios prestados por los tutelados, que parecía ser una forma de mostrar o también comprobar que se estaba trabajando, o avanzando en el proyecto laboral.

Durante el trabajo de campo observamos que cuando una persona se presentaba por primera vez al Patronato, lo hacía con un *oficio*, que era confeccionado por un JEP, donde se detallaban los requisitos que debía cumplir para mantener la libertad. Ese documento consignaba, además, la condición jurídica de la persona y su domicilio. Dos fórmulas recurrentes que se empleaban en tales oficios era: *deberá someterse al cuidado de un patronato de liberados* –fórmula que instituía la tutela del Patronato– y *deberá fijar domicilio o residencia*. A partir de una pesquisa documental en el Archivo del Poder Judicial de Córdoba, observamos que los oficios se confeccionaban transcribiendo la parte resolutive de una sentencia, o la resolución interlocutoria para el dictado de una libertad. El siguiente caso es una causa del JEP de 2da nominación de la Ciudad de Córdoba del año 2007, en cuya la parte resolutive podemos leer:

III) Declarar a (nombre de la persona), ya afiliado, autor del delito de encubrimiento agravado, en los términos previstos por los arts. 45, 277 inc.1° apartado “c” en función del inc. 3°, apartado “b” del C.P. ... , imponiéndole para su tratamiento penitenciario la pena de un año y seis meses de prisión en forma de ejecución condicional, con costas, y por el término de dos años las siguientes reglas de conducta, a saber: **1) fijar residencia y someterse al cuidado de un patronato**, 2) abstenerse de usar estupefacientes o abusar de bebidas alcohólicas, 3) completar los estudios obligatorios, 4) realizar prácticas necesarias para su capacitación laboral, 5) adoptar oficio, arte, industria o profesión adecuado a su capacidad, todo bajo apercibimiento de los establecido en el último párrafo del art.27 bis C.P. (arts. 5, 23, 26, 27 bis, 29 inc. 3°, 40 y 41 C.P. y 550/551 C.P.P.) (La negrita nos pertenece).

Con este oficio y el DNI, las empleadas de mesa de entradas iniciaban un expediente, le asignaban una seccional y comenzaba el “tratamiento” del Patronato. Como vimos, el requisito de *fijar residencia o domicilio* era generalmente el primero en ser enunciado en un oficio. Cuando los tutelados tenían una primera entrevista con las administradoras del Patronato, ellas se encargaban de repasar oralmente cada uno de estos requisitos e informar que dicho domicilio no podría ser cambiado sin autorización de los JEP, so pena de ser enviadas a prisión.

Conversando con una administradora sobre posibles motivos de revocamiento de la libertad, una trabajadora del Patronato comentó lo que sigue:

M: No, no, por el tema tratamiento [psicológico] no se les quita la libertad, que no haga tratamiento. Sí por el tema domicilio, el tema domicilio es como el top ten digamos allá, en donde no se pueden mudar sin que le autorice el juzgado, porque hay gente que no puede vivir en determinado lugar, porque la víctima vive a tres cuadras, cuatro cuadras, porque es la zona, porque es donde cometió el delito. La fiscalía de Lucha contra el Narcotráfico, en Cruz del Eje, a varios casos no los dejaron volver a vivir en la casa donde se hizo el allanamiento.

S: *Que eran sus propias casas...*

M: Que eran sus propias casas, tuvieron que buscar otra casa... o sea de locos, porque si ésta es tu casa, ¿a dónde voy a ir a vivir?... bueno... esta chica se fue a vivir con la madre, las nenas van a la escuela, está en prisión domiciliaria, van a la escuela en la otra punta... bueno, toda una desarticulación familiar, pero no les permiten volver adonde se hizo el allanamiento, bue... y sí, entonces el domicilio es como el primero por eso lo ponen ahí adelante como lo principal, después obviamente no pueden cometer nuevos delitos porque *entran* [a prisión] y lo otro bueno, si no vienen acá se los informa, ellos los convocan (entrevista con Mariza, Córdoba, septiembre 2021).

A priori podríamos pensar que este afán por la fijación domiciliaria tendría que ver con la necesidad de que estas personas penadas fueran fácilmente ubicadas por las fuerzas de seguridad y les administradores judiciales, o controladas respecto de la lejanía de las víctimas de sus delitos. Sin embargo, en el fragmento de entrevista presentado vemos que no necesariamente las administradoras del Patronato acordaban con la perspectiva y decisiones de los juzgados.

Habitar implicaba ubicarse en un lugar, reconocerlo y reconocerse en él, en cierto modo implica una co-producción entre espacialidad y subjetividad (Giglia 2012). Considerando que el fin declarado de las gestiones del Patronato tiene que ver con evitar la reincidencia en el delito, y que ello implicaba una transformación subjetiva, podríamos pensar que en las propias actuaciones del Patronato había un interés por fomentar el habitar entre los tutelados: ubicarlos. Respecto de la preocupación por la fijación domiciliaria, es sugerente pensar que estar *localizado* sería la contrapartida de ser *localizable* –*ubicado y ubicable*–, por las fuerzas de seguridad o por las administradoras judiciales. Respecto del cambio de domicilio, conversamos lo siguiente con Mariza:

S: *Y qué otros datos te parecen, así como decís que el delito se trabaja como una alerta, ¿qué otros datos se parecen, que cada tanto son alertas también?*

M: También el domicilio, que la persona cambia de domicilio... **no digo siempre ¿no? digo, sale y vive en una casa, ponen cualquier lugar para vivir.** Me acuerdo cuando yo entré [a trabajar al Patronato], que muchos ponían Sargento Gómez, que es la calle de la ex-cárcel San Martín.<sup>12</sup> Sargento Gómez, ponía el domicilio de la cárcel ¿me entendés? Y le daban la libertad, que era lo peor, o sea, después le daban la libertad... y era la cárcel. **Entonces que cambien de domicilio, implica que están cambiando un proyecto de vida,** por ahí, o porque se han casado o por que los han echado de un lugar o porque han tenido problemas en ese lugar o porque... **también es un dato de la realidad que indica, que indica algo, señala algo, ese es otro dato** (entrevista con Mariza, Córdoba, septiembre 2021. Las negritas nos pertenecen).

<sup>12</sup> Este establecimiento data de inicios del 1900 y fue de las últimas de las antiguas cárceles dentro de la ciudad en dejar de funcionar, cuando se crearon los establecimientos actuales en las afueras. Estaba ubicada en el barrio del mismo nombre, relativamente cerca del centro de la ciudad. Fue declarada patrimonio arquitectónico y existe un proyecto de crear un parque, museo, y algunos desarrollos inmobiliarios. Los proyectos han sido objeto de controversia por parte de la comunidad barrial y académica.



La interpretación de Mariza –de que el cambio recurrente de domicilio implicaba el cambio de *proyecto de vida*– abona la idea de que estas prácticas estatales están (pre)ocupadas en que las personas bajo su tutela logren habitar un lugar. Ya sea luego de la salida de la prisión, que puede ser un momento crítico luego de la experiencia carcelaria; o luego de la condena por un delito que no implicaba necesariamente la prisión, pero que sí podría suponer una transformación de las dinámicas cotidianas. Que los tutelados no logran construir y sostener un *proyecto de vida*, evidenciado por la rotación domiciliaria, implicaba que el *tratamiento* desarrollado por las trabajadoras del Patronato no estaba dando frutos.<sup>13</sup>

Para el caso de la Reserva la minuciosidad en el registro era uno de los estandartes de cuidado porque posibilitaba trazar la *trayectoria de vida* de los objetos que ingresaban y a su vez, conocer su recorrido dentro de la misma institución (tanto espacial como temporal), “los movimientos horizontales, de estante a estante o del estante a la mesa. Las colecciones van y vienen, nunca están quietas, se imbrican unas con otras, cambian sus sentidos. Por lo tanto, la documentación que sumemos no tiene que borrar lo anterior” (entrevista con Eduardo, Córdoba, junio de 2019). Cada uno de estos materiales tenía asignado un sitio específico, cada cambio de locación –tanto interna como cuando son dadas en préstamo a otras instituciones– implicaba un nuevo registro, para evitar la disociación del objeto de su contexto y su posible pérdida. En este sentido, la *ubicación topográfica* de los objetos dentro de la Reserva era primordial. “La Reserva tiende a la entropía”,<sup>14</sup> decía Eduardo. “Las cosas se mueven no sólo físicamente sino categóricamente. Los objetos se transforman, tienen su trayectoria de vida dentro de las instituciones”; es por ello que prácticamente la totalidad de las piezas se hallaban sigladas con un número de inventario que no se repite, y que permite conocer exactamente en qué sección, estantería, plano y lote se encontraban. De este modo se puede identificar cada objeto o lote de objetos en la documentación de primer orden.

Una analogía, mencionada por Eduardo en una de nuestras conversaciones, fue la de asemejar y comparar el número de inventario con el DNI de una persona, que es como el DNI de la pieza,<sup>15</sup> mientras señalaba en la planilla de registro donde se consignan los datos que permitirán rápidamente localizar la pieza dentro de la Reserva y saber de qué región proviene. Es decir, que cada objeto en guarda tiene un número de inventario, una especie de DNI que lo resignifica y convierte en parte de la institución, del patrimonio de la Universidad y, por lo tanto, del Estado. Retomando esta analogía a la luz de Sousa Correa (2019) –que da cuenta en su trabajo del proceso de documentación de las infancias en Brasil, donde plantea cómo la paternidad responsable comienza con el registro– encontramos aquí un punto en común en relación al reconocimiento y el registro por parte del estado como ejercicios de tutela. Otra situación que invita a pensar fue la conversación que mantuvimos con Isabel, una de las trabajadoras de la Reserva (CPA-IDACOR, MdA)<sup>16</sup> sobre las formas de registro actuales y los requerimientos para seguir contando con financiamiento:

Nosotros veníamos trabajando con muchas colecciones, en realidad no trabajamos por colecciones. Veníamos trabajando por áreas de la Reserva (Reserva A, Reserva B, y así...). Ah no... cuando empezó Pali (CPA, CONICET) empezamos a trabajar por colecciones. Bueno, **nosotros tuvimos una evaluación por la fundación Williams**,<sup>17</sup>

13 Una cuestión sobre la que no nos detuvimos, por falta de espacio, tiene que ver con las prisiones domiciliarias, también controladas por las trabajadoras del Patronato. Esta forma de encarcelamiento suma otras complejidades a la fijación domiciliaria y barrial, que de algún modo devienen en cárceles.

14 La entropía es una noción que procede de un vocablo griego que puede traducirse como “vuelta” o “transformación”. Se entiende por entropía también a la **medida del desorden de un sistema**. A pesar de la identificación entre la entropía y el desorden, hay muchas transiciones de fase en la que emerge una fase ordenada y al mismo tiempo, la entropía aumenta.

15 Nota de comunicación pública de la ciencia sobre los trabajos en la reserva patrimonial y archivo del Museo de Antropologías dónde comenta sobre el DNI de las piezas. <https://www.lavoz.com.ar/ciudadanos/los-tesoros-guardados-en-los-sotanos-del-pabellon-argentina/>

16 “Las y los miembros de la Carrera del Personal de Apoyo a la Investigación y Desarrollo (CPA) son personas capacitadas que brindan y realizan asesoramiento técnico a grupos de investigación, y colaboran con la puesta en marcha de los programas de investigación y desarrollo. Trabajan bajo la supervisión de investigadores/as del CONICET.” <https://www.conicet.gov.ar/personal-de-apoyo/>. Fecha de la última consulta 19/09/2023.

17 La **Fundación Williams** es una organización sin fines de lucro creada en 1943 por Thomas J. Williams y Ana King Williams. En sus 80 años de actividad ha realizado innumerables aportes a personas e instituciones, con la finalidad de mejorar el bienestar del país, utilizando como herramientas principales la expansión del conocimiento y el desarrollo de la cultura. Desde el año 2010 se implementó el «Proyecto de apoyo a la informatización de los archivos documentales y colecciones del IDACOR-Museo de Antropología (FFyH, UNC), CONICET». Durante este período se alcanzaron diversos objetivos, entre

creo que en el 2014, fue un año de mundial, no me acuerdo bien. Claro, 2014... en esa evaluación la Fundación Williams le pagó a un arqueólogo notable que nos venga a evaluar. Y la evaluación consistió en que él se sentó en la computadora, agarró todo nuestro inventario y dijo, bueno **quiero esta pieza, señaló una y le dijo a Eduardo, bueno anda y traela. Él dice: bueno tráeme esta caja que dice acá, que está en la estantería tal en la Reserva B en tal lado y Eduardo fue y la trajo y... bueno, resultó.** Nos hizo así un par de evaluaciones y resultaron correctas y después entre las cosas que él vio, que esta persona era Gustavo Politis,<sup>18</sup> nos pidió que le mostráramos la colección de Arroyo Las Mulas con la que Serrano escribió las Líneas fundamentales de la arqueología del litoral (entrevista con Isabel, Córdoba, Agosto 2019. Las itálicas y negritas nos pertenecen).

Como puede leerse en los párrafos anteriores, la evaluación consistió en la compulsión de coincidencia del registro con su ubicación topográfica. Es decir, que la institución pudiera comprobar que los objetos estaban localizados donde indicaba su registro. De esta manera la ubicación topográfica se tornó crucial en el trabajo con materiales arqueológicos y etnográficos, especialmente cuando se trataba de restos óseos humanos.<sup>19</sup> La evaluación resultó exitosa porque lograron saber exactamente dónde estaban las cosas a partir de su ubicación topográfica. Localizar de manera correcta cada una de los objetos –fotos, archivos– implicaba, para la fundación Williams, una ‘buena’ forma de gestión tutelar.

Es sugerente advertir que cada una de las piezas tendría una doble localización en sus metadatos. Por un lado, su localización dentro de la Reserva: su ubicación actual. Sin embargo, también tendría una localización que daba cuenta de su contexto primario, es decir, de qué lugar –ciudad, provincia, etc.–provenía. Ambas localizaciones son necesarias para que el objeto se encontrara contextualizado de manera completa. La primera le otorga su calidad de objeto musealizado y la segunda lo torna patrimonio. En ambos casos, un saber técnico es el que media para otorgar uno y/u otro estatus. La localización en la Reserva presentaba una doble raíz: de dónde provenían y adónde se encontraban. Esta doble localización de los objetos patrimonializados, discutiría lo domiciliario como dato único que calificaba a sujetos sociales en el marco de gestiones estatales, como vimos para el caso del Patronato.

## Tutelar documentando

Partimos de la premisa de que un documento no puede ser considerado sólo como una fuente de la cual extraer datos, sino que, ante todo, debe ser construido también como un campo de indagación. En este sentido, contextualizar un documento supone, en primer lugar, situarlo en el momento de su producción, conservación y clasificación, lo que nos llevó a reflexionar sobre la temporalidad de las instituciones (Muzzopappa & Villalta 2011) sin dejar de tener en cuenta cómo se articulaba esa producción documental con las normativas que podrían alcanzarla. Consideramos, siguiendo a Gupta (2012), que los documentos son acciones estatales en sí mismas que obran sobre los sujetos y fenómenos a los que están referidos.

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los cuales pueden destacarse el fortalecimiento de un área técnica del Museo de Antropología – IDACOR; la formación de recursos humanos en temáticas relacionadas con el manejo y protección de bienes, culturales y científicos (Conservación, digitalización e informatización de objetos y procesos); la conservación de objetos arqueológicos y etnográficos únicos, que revisten de interés científico para la comprensión de las adaptaciones humanas a las distintas condiciones sociales y ambientales, a lo largo del país y en muy diversos contextos temporales. Otros objetivos alcanzados fueron el censo de todos los materiales, obteniendo por primera vez una estimación real de la cantidad de objetos en resguardo por la institución (aproximadamente 199.000); la digitalización, carga en sistemas dedicados y visibilización en repositorios digitales de acceso público de los dos Fondos Documentales más consultados en el Archivo del Museo de Antropología-IDACOR; la creación de bases de datos que contienen metadatos para los 199.000 objetos y que permiten una búsqueda rápida de cualquier ítem en la Reserva; adecuación de los objetos según la composición de sus materiales. Incluye además la creación de una nueva Reserva “E” donde, en un ambiente controlado y siguiendo una disposición ética, se resguardan los restos humanos recuperados en excavaciones realizadas en el pasado y en los rescates arqueológicos actuales.

18 Gustavo Politis es Licenciado en Antropología y Doctor en Ciencias Naturales. Actualmente se desempeña como Investigador principal del CONICET, siendo sus temas de investigación la Arqueología del sudeste de la región pampeana y del Delta Superior del Paraná, Poblamiento de América y Etnoarqueología.

19 El MdA tiene diversos acuerdos y convenios con las comunidades indígenas de la provincia de Córdoba, regulados por la Ley N° 25.517. La Reserva E está destinada exclusivamente a la guarda de restos óseos humanos, y las comunidades ingresan en diferentes momentos del año para la realización de rituales mortuorios y/o en los momentos que lo requieran.

Por su parte, Riles (2006) considera que los documentos y las prácticas de archivo son un emblema de la burocracia moderna y de la forma de producir conocimiento. Estudiar documentos, para esta autora es, por definición, estudiar también cómo los propios antropólogos conocen. Los documentos devienen al mismo tiempo un objeto etnográfico, una categoría analítica, y una orientación metodológica. En este apartado será fundamental atender a ese vínculo entre formas de estatalidad, actos de documentación y conocimiento. Vínculo que refuerza el interés señalado en la introducción respecto de acercar, en la reflexión, la práctica antropológica a otras prácticas estatales de producción de conocimiento.

En lo que respecta a la tarea de contralor de los bienes *bajo tutela* de la Reserva Patrimonial del Mda, como mencionamos anteriormente, era llevada a cabo por el Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano (INAPL), siendo su deber: a) Crear y organizar el Registro Nacional de Yacimientos, Colecciones y Objetos Arqueológicos (RENYCOA)<sup>20</sup>; b) crear un Registro Nacional de Infractores y Reincidentes; c) establecer las correspondientes relaciones de coordinación y colaboración con los organismos competentes en la materia, existentes en las provincias. Desde la vigencia de la Ley Nacional N° 25.743, la forma de registro de los bienes culturales de dependencia nacional fue cambiando, sin embargo, la consignación topográfica era un requisito primordial constante.

Dentro de las secciones de la Reserva se encontraban la de archivo y documentación. Allí era posible encontrar las libretas de campo de diferentes etnólogos y etnógrafos, registros folklóricos visuales y musicales, documentación en relación a cómo y de qué manera fueron adquiridas las diferentes colecciones que integraban el acervo de bienes culturales del museo. También era posible encontrar correspondencia oficial –y personal– de algunos de los directores de la institución en intercambio con otros directores, maestros, colegas y diferentes reparticiones de carácter público y privado; dibujos de planta de las excavaciones, en conjunto con los inventarios de las piezas extraídas y las fichas donde se fueron analizadas; secuencias estratigráficas provisionales planteadas en las libretas de campañas arqueológicas, junto a la lista de compras de insumos y víveres necesarios, etc. Había estampillas, facturas de gastos, y etiquetas que daban cuenta del paso del tiempo y cambios de gestión; resoluciones y pedidos de adscripciones, ayudantes e investigadores para el área científica que conformaba el museo; ejemplares de la Revista que se editaron durante los primeros años del IALF a cargo de Antonio Serrano, entre otros.

Durante las distintas direcciones se realizaron esfuerzos de unificación de las maneras de registro de los diversos objetos (arqueológicos y etnográficos) pero con resultados frustrados, que eran adjudicados a las crisis económicas. A veces, derivaron en que no hubiera alguien específicamente encargado de dicha tarea o incluso que algunas de las formas de registro no fueran óptimas – por haber utilizado códigos de barra que eran leídos con un software pago y del que no pudo sostener la licencia– lo que generó que se perdiera mucha información ya sistematizada. En 2018, la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades contrató a dos personas (egresadas de su Licenciatura de Antropología) para que confeccionaran y aunaran el inventario de los materiales *bajo tutela* del Mda; y realizaran tareas de conservación preventiva sobre los documentos y bienes arqueológicos.

Una instancia de conservación preventiva necesita reflexión para evitar la destrucción o pérdida de cualquier material o documento, se debe diagramar el qué se va a hacer, las técnicas empleadas y llevar un detallado registro. Es importante conocer las partes de los materiales, conocer los objetos para conocer sus puntos débiles y evitar que se rompan cuando se manipulan, conocer con lo que están hechos los materiales. Si no se conserva, literal, nos comen<sup>21</sup> el patrimonio (Conversación con trabajadoras de la Reserva, Córdoba, julio de 2018).

20 <https://inapl.cultura.gob.ar/noticia/nuevas-fichas-unicas-de-registro-fur-de-bienes-arqueologicos/>. Fecha de la última consulta 19/09/2023.

21 Cuando se menciona el temor de que el patrimonio *sea comido*, se refiere literalmente a los agentes de deterioro que consumen las piezas arqueológicas o documentos, a través de diversos microorganismos. Entre los enemigos biológicos están considerados: roedores, murciélagos, aves, insectos, microorganismos (bacterias, levaduras, hongos filamentosos) y a veces plantas inferiores. Estos agentes constituyen, sin lugar a dudas, un serio problema en los museos, archivos y bibliotecas. Se desarrollan en ambiente propicios, especialmente donde existen temperaturas y humedad relativa altas.

En este caso, el nuevo inventario era hecho en papel con lápiz de grafito y luego la información era copiada en una tabla del programa Excel. Desde este enfoque, las acciones de conservación se concentraban en evitar que los agentes de deterioro actuaran de forma nociva sobre los documentos, con el fin de evitar su destrucción y posible pérdida de información valiosa.

Si bien es bastante sistemática la carga de datos, se tiene que prestar mucha atención, porque en un segundo te equivocaste y es volver a cargar de nuevo, o, lo que es peor, generar una disociación (conversación informal con una de las trabajadoras de la Reserva contratada por la FFyH para la elaboración de un inventario actualizado de los bienes de la Reserva).

Para ello se desarrollaban distintas estrategias orientadas a bloquear o minimizar la acción de factores tales como la humedad relativa inadecuada, las oscilaciones marcadas de temperatura, la existencia de fuentes emisoras de pestes, plagas y contaminantes; condiciones edilicias inseguras, vandalismo, catástrofes naturales; manipulaciones inapropiadas de los documentos y sobre todo, evitar la disociación. El fin era minimizar el riesgo de daño y así impedir que se iniciaran –o continuaran, en algunos casos– procesos de descomposición química o física que deformaban el material cultural o que, incluso, pudieran ocasionar su pérdida irreversible.

Las acciones realizadas en el proceso de conservación preventiva permitían observar diferentes situaciones en la trayectoria de vida de los objetos, tanto taxonómicos como culturales (adquisición, traslados, embalajes, reacondicionamientos, intervenciones, reparaciones, entre otros). A su vez, los esfuerzos preventivos no sólo estaban orientados a los objetos, sino también a los documentos y a las instalaciones. En el caso de los documentos, eran colocados en folios individuales libres de acetato, para evitar que fueran manipulados directamente. A los que pertenecían a un corpus específico, se les asignaba un número de inventario y una nomenclatura, para no perder el orden en el que fueron producidos. Se entendía que todas estas tareas técnicas aplicadas sobre las colecciones eran fundamentales para el correcto desempeño de las funciones museológicas y para alcanzar los objetivos institucionales previstos (Informe de gestión 2007).<sup>22</sup>

A los documentos y los objetos a los que estaban relacionados se los consideraba como un todo, ya que se daban contexto mutuamente, se referenciaban y cobraban sentido. Podría decirse que la *disociación* era uno de los mayores problemas en la Reserva: *perder un objeto, perder su contexto, es perder parte del pasado* (conversación con Eduardo, CPA del IDACOR, Mda). El registro, la documentación, era una de las aristas que permitían que las cosas no se perdieran. Según Waller y Cato (2009), la disociación surge de la tendencia natural de los sistemas ordenados a deshacerse a lo largo del tiempo. Este agente de deterioro provoca la pérdida de objetos, de su documentación relacionada o de la capacidad para recuperar, o asociar, objetos y documentos. Para prevenirla, sería necesario modificar los procesos de mantenimiento y otras barreras. Sin embargo, cuando una de las partes *se disocia*, es decir, se pierde su contexto de origen, de dónde proviene y en qué circunstancias fue adquirida, no dejan de formar parte de un contexto más amplio como bien tutelado de la Reserva. Un objeto sin contexto no ‘pierde’ su status patrimonializado, ya que no es concebida la idea de que alguno de estos objetos sea descartado.

El Mda, además de formar parte de un estado que tutela documentando, también se inscribe en las lógicas de una disciplina científica, donde el registrar es central. Retomamos la conceptualización del registro como un hecho social complejo (Guber 2013) por el cual un investigador o equipo de investigadores aspiran a conectar un campo empírico con la academia; pero que también le permite al Mda delinear la filiación institucional y la potestad sobre los bienes bajo su cuidado. Consideramos que el registro documental toma un doble carácter en este caso, donde el registrar como práctica disciplinar y como gestión estatal no se clausuraban, sino que se potenciaban y reforzaban en una misma práctica tutelar. Esta cuestión es crucial para la reflexión sobre la

<sup>22</sup> <https://suquia.ffyh.unc.edu.ar/discover>. Fecha de la última consulta: 11/05/2023.

práctica de nuestra disciplina antropológica y de los registros que producimos. En este sentido, atender a las formas y actos de registros de “otros” agentes estatales sumaría a dicha reflexión.

Por su parte, los *expedientes de tutela* del Patronato no superaban las 15 hojas y entraban en un único folio plástico tamaño A4; estos folios se veían arrugados y opacos, dada su constante manipulación. Eran guardados en carpetas biblioratos y se agrupaban por seccional –divisiones territoriales que coinciden con los circuitos electorales en que se divide la ciudad de Córdoba– y por departamento, en el interior provincial. Las carpetas se ordenaban siguiendo la numeración de cada seccional. De ese modo, si mirábamos esas estanterías podíamos imaginar que se trataba de un micro universo o mapa del territorio jurisdiccional del Patronato. Una cartografía de la ciudad de Córdoba y del interior provincial, trazada desde los biblioratos, dando cuenta en su numeración de una variada topografía.

Durante las semanas de observación en la mesa de entradas del Patronato, aprendimos que las personas penadas que llegaban debían acudir con un documento denominado *Registro de Asistencia*, una hoja de papel A4 donde consignaban sus datos de residencia, el JEP que *llevaba* su causa, y las fechas en las que había mantenido entrevista con alguna licenciada. Esto se consignaba con firmas y sellos, y también se anotaban las citas futuras cuando eran acordadas. En ese documento, los datos se colocaban al inicio; seguía una cuadrícula, donde se anotaban los turnos, y había un espacio destinado a la firma de la trabajadora y el sello de la institución, que se colocaba cada vez que el tutelado se presentaba.

La consulta futura o la preservación de sus actuaciones no aparecía como central en el horizonte de las prácticas documentales del Patronato; aunque sí lo era el mandato de informar a los JEP. Esta no centralidad se evidenciaba en las cualidades del Archivo del Patronato: un pequeño cuarto con pilas de cajas desordenadas. Al respecto de esto, algunas trabajadoras plantearon que la poca sistematicidad en la carga de datos en repositorios digitales, y el desorden del archivo, suponía un problema, ya que deshabilitaba el desarrollo de seguimientos de casos. También imposibilitaba tener una imagen cabal de cuánta *reincidencia había*, ya que cada vez que una persona *entraba* en el Patronato se le iniciaba un nuevo expediente.

Por su parte, en la pesquisa desarrollada en el Archivo del Poder Judicial, pudimos observar que el modo de *informar* a los JEP era más bien sucinto, y privilegiaba la enumeración de las fechas en que los tutelados asistieron, fechas que eran anotadas en las carátulas de los expedientes del Patronato. Estas fechas eran repetidas, incluso manteniendo el formato en que eran anotadas, con lapicera, en las carátulas: *día\_mes\_año*, *día\_mes\_año*, y así sucesivamente.

Las personas llegaban a la mesa de entradas con *el registro de asistencia* en distintas condiciones. Algunos lo traían en un folio de plástico o dentro de alguna carpeta donde también tenían otros papeles. Incluso pudimos ver muchos de estos registros ser extraídos de billeteras donde habían sido guardados luego de realizar varios dobleces. En ocasiones observamos que, a pesar del aura de importancia que parecía montarse sobre ese documento, el registro llegaba con claras señas de manipulación y deterioro. En una entrevista rutinaria, en la que el registro de una persona mostraba fuertes marcas de dobladuras, gastadas al punto de parecer romperse, la trabajadora le dijo a su dueño que *debía cuidar más* de ese papel, ya que era un *documento público*, y que también era la forma de comprobar a la policía que estaba asistiendo al Patronato, como era su obligación, y evitar ser *levantado*.

Esto último refería a la posibilidad de que oficiales de policía chequeasen los antecedentes de una persona y que éstos estuvieran desactualizados respecto de su condición jurídica: que estaba en libertad cumpliendo una pena. El registro de asistencia, en tal caso, implicaba un uso o activación de un documento que podía servir a la persona que lo portaba para probar que se hallaba cumpliendo sus obligaciones, y que se encontraba *bajo tutela* del Patronato, de modo que no hubiera motivo de detención. De esta forma, el estado producía documentos que protegían a los sujetos de sus propias actuaciones, supuestamente producidas por bases de datos desactualizadas. Para ello –paradójicamente, o no– producía un documento sumamente frágil (una

hoja A4 de papel común) cuyo manipuleo constante generaba deterioro. Las cualidades de aquel documento quizás nos hablaban de las cualidades de esa forma de tutela, y del lugar de la (re)producción de fragilidades en la gestión estatal.

## Reflexiones finales

Teniendo cuidado con los universales etnográficos es que nos propusimos, desde una separación analítica, abordar algunas formas de gestión tutelar, tanto en el Patronato del Liberado como en la Reserva Patrimonial del Museo de Antropología. Esta distinción entre el *tutelar localizando* y *tutelar documentando* nos permitió observar cómo estas actuaciones eran inscriptas en procesos de producción y reproducción de saberes, construidos en el trabajo cotidiano e íntimo, como acciones privilegiadas y legitimadas de cuidado. No es posible encontrar protocolos escritos dentro del Patronato ni de la Reserva, pero si se observa cómo las prácticas de lo que sería una buena gestión se conocían, ejecutaban y transmitían. Todo eso a partir de la trayectoria de las personas que se encontraban “haciendo” a la institución, en interacción con los sujetos y/o objetos culturales. *Todo tiene que quedar por escrito, para evitar que se pierda* (entrevista con Camila, Córdoba, diciembre 2019); los documentos eran, en el Patronato y en la Reserva, tecnologías dinámicas que creaban las historias y realidades sociales que aparentemente describían. El ejercicio de documentar y registrar implicaba una forma de gestión tutelar, artesanal y minuciosa, que sujetaba tanto personas como objetos, a través de haceres y saberes-hacer cotidianos.

Por su parte, la localización y la necesidad de fijar un domicilio, es decir, un lugar específico que permitiera conocer el paradero de alguien o de algo, era convertido en un “acto de pacificación” (*sensu* Souza Lima 1995) en medio de la entropía de la burocracia estatal. Documentar y localizar se tornaban acciones, repetidas y sistemáticas: en cada encuentro, trabajadoras y tutelados en el Patronato, o en cada ejercicio de búsqueda de algún objeto en la Reserva, era repetido el ritual de constatar el domicilio –la ubicación topográfica– y se volvía a documentar esa información. Estas dos formas de gestión se retroalimentan, al tiempo que se legitiman y nos permiten pensar en los procesos de estatización de registros, y en cómo –y por quiénes– son activados tales documentos.

Nos propusimos aquí pensar dos instituciones estatales alejándonos de dicotomías analíticas y más cerca de entenderlas como espacios con formas de gestión tutelar polivalentes, es decir, con prácticas similares que, en contextos diferentes y con objetivos diferentes, se torsionan. Una reapropiación de la regla foucaultiana de la “polivalencia táctica de los discursos” (Foucault 2014 [1976]) nos permitió realizar tal ejercicio reflexivo, en el marco del campo de variación (*sensu* Barth 2000) que nos propusimos analizar; invitándonos también a considerar la polivalencia táctica del documentar y localizar como formas de ejercicio de poder tutelar.

Consideramos que los procesos históricos de las burocracias tienen una dimensión personalista y cotidiana, y que en ella se articulan cartografías, que entrelazan pasado y presente, los objetos y las personas, los papeles, los documentos y los registros que hacen al Patronato y a la Reserva. Una forma de materialización concreta de esta polivalencia eran las trayectorias y usos del concepto de “tutela” en ambas instituciones. Mientras que en las leyes que norman la cuestión patrimonial el concepto de tutela es central, lo inverso sucede en las leyes de ejecución penal invocadas permanentemente en las tareas del Patronato. Sin embargo, las trabajadoras del Patronato entendían sus tareas en términos de *tutela*; se referían como *tuteladas* a las personas que entrevistaban; como *informes tutelares* a los que enviaban a los JEP; y como *fin de la tutela* al vencimiento del período de pena que debían acompañar. Entre las trabajadoras de la Reserva, las prácticas se entendían más en términos de *cuidado*, para evitar que *se pierda el patrimonio*, reservando el uso de tutela a instancias específicas de intercambio que implicaban formalidades adecuadas a la normativa.

La relación entre Reserva Patrimonial y Patronato plantea nuevos interrogantes que podrían sumarse a los propuestos por Mario Rufer (2020) acerca de la relación –a la que niega el adjetivo casual– entre el archivo y

la cárcel, cuando reflexiona sobre los casos argentino y mexicano, donde los Archivos Generales de la Nación funcionan en ex-cárceles (Cárcel de Caseros y Penitenciaría de México). A partir de ello, piensa en un “gesto de confinamiento” y se pregunta si el gesto de aquello que aparece aprisionado continúa definiendo la relación con el archivo. En la etapa de revisión de este texto, una parecerista nos recordó la raíz etimológica compartida entre Patronato y Patrimonio –*pater*–, al tiempo que nos propuso la pregunta acerca de qué se pone en juego en la gestión de esas formas de estatalidad con roles disímiles en la producción de nación, identidad, diferencia y gestos de confinamiento.

Para esbozar un avance en esa línea nos parece significativo retomar lo trabajado respecto del “DNI de las piezas” y pensarlo junto a Mariza Peirano en su análisis sobre los vínculos entre documentos, ciudadanía, estado y nación (1986). En el texto citado, la antropóloga hace un temprano análisis sobre formas de documentación y producción de ciudadanías en el marco de procesos de formación de estado en el Brasil. No deja de ser sugerente su entendimiento respecto de la producción de ciudadanos a través de actos documentales, para considerar cómo sería a través de un proceso similar –otorgar un DNI– que volvería patrimonio a aquella ‘cosa’ que fue seleccionada para hablar de la nación. Y doblemente sugerente si consideramos que, como dijimos, algunas de las problemáticas de las personas liberadas de las prisiones tenían que ver con la confección de un –nuevo– DNI. El ‘retorno’ a la vida libre implicaba, también, un acto de documentación de aquellas personas castigadas y des-documentalizadas por el estado.

Las interpelaciones de les pareceristas nos animan a realizar un movimiento mayor respecto del ejercicio que nos propusimos, al tiempo que reconocen la potencia del trabajo realizado. A partir de ello, nos preguntamos: ¿cómo un estado crea instituciones para ‘cuidar’ bienes culturales o personas que han sido juzgadas, condenadas y castigadas? Una respuesta la teníamos en la raíz etimológica señalada entre *patrimonium* y *patronatus*; la primera acepción refiriendo a todo aquello que es heredado del padre, mientras la segunda refiere a aquéllos quienes ejercen la función protectora del *pater*. A partir de la gestión –de nuevo, *gestar* y *gerir*– de patrimonio y de liberados/tutelados que pretendimos describir en este artículo, consideramos que se estaría produciendo cierta forma de estatalidad, la del Estado-pater (Rufer 2012). Entendemos que estos procesos son complejos, performativos y se manifiestan a través de prácticas como las de “conservación”, retomando el caso de la Reserva, y “tratamiento”, para el caso del Patronato. Estos procesos tratan también sobre los discursos en torno a la relación pasado-presente como estado y acerca del interrogante sobre quiénes integran –o pueden integrar– la nación. Avanzar en las especificidades de cada una será objeto de trabajos futuros.

Para finalizar, retomamos la propuesta de Barth (2000) de no abandonar el uso de la comparación en la antropología y repensar sus posibilidades. La pregunta sobre los usos de la tutela y su polivalencia nos resulta interpelante para futuros desarrollos. Del mismo modo, el ejercicio realizado nos ha permitido formular un doble vínculo existente, entre el tutelaje de personas como cosas y el de cosas como personas, como un rasgo posible de análisis en las formas de gestión tutelar. Esperamos que este ensayo de comparación entre actuaciones aparentemente disímiles se ofrezca como una vía óptima e interesante para avanzar en el estudio de prácticas tutelares, en particular, y de formas de gestión (no sólo) estatales, en general.

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## Abreviaturas

- (FFyH) Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades  
(JEP) Juzgados de Ejecución Penal  
(MdA) Museo de Antropologías  
(Reserva) Reserva Patrimonial y Archivo del Museo de Antropología  
(Patronato) Patronato de Liberados  
(UNC) Universidad Nacional de Córdoba  
(SP) Servicio Penitenciario de Córdoba

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# “Una herramienta de inspiración”: el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas de la provincia de San Luis, Argentina, 2013-2023

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## Resumen

A principios del siglo XXI, en la provincia de San Luis, Argentina, las planificaciones estatales en distintos ámbitos de gobierno se expusieron como “Planes Maestros”. “Planificación estratégica”, junto a términos tales como “innovación, participación, democratización, gestión”, entre otros, se tornaron recurrentes. En 2013 se presentó oficialmente el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas 2013-2023. En este artículo se realiza un análisis etnográfico de dicho plan, enfocado en cómo se produce y gestiona el pasado local en las acciones gubernamentales que allí se referencian. Se cuestiona ¿cómo se tensan nociones temporales –pasado, presente, futuro– con la implantación de un lenguaje proveniente de la gestión empresarial? ¿Qué ordenamientos y jerarquías sociales se instauran? También, se indaga sobre el papel que adquieren en la planificación especialistas en aspectos que serían característicos del conjunto de los “puntanos” (gentilicio que designa a las personas de la provincia de San Luis); y cómo dichos aspectos se “documentan”, expresando una representación de lo sanluiseño, al tiempo que se busca legitimarlo.

**Palabras clave:** Plan Maestro de Las Culturas; San Luis; políticas gubernamentales; usos del pasado.

# “A tool of inspiration”: the Master Plan of Cultures of the San Luis, province, Argentina, 2013-2023

## Abstract

At the beginning of the 21st century, in the province of San Luis, Argentina, state plans in different spheres of government were presented as Master Plans. Strategic planning together with terms such as innovation and management, among others, became recurrent. In 2013, the Master Plan for Cultures 2013-2023 was officially presented. This article carries out an ethnographic analysis of the plan, focusing on how the local past is produced and managed in the government actions included therein. It considers how temporal notions - past, present, future - are strained by the implementation of a language from business management. What systems and social hierarchies are established? It also explores the role played by planning specialists in aspects that would be characteristic of the “puntanos” (the inhabitants of San Luis) as a whole; and how these aspects are “documented”, expressing a representation of the “San Luisian”, while at the same time seeking to legitimise it.

**Keywords:** Master Plan of Cultures; San Luis, governmental politics; uses of the past.

# ‘Uma ferramenta de inspiração’: o Plano Diretor de Culturas da província de San Luís, Argentina, 2013-2023

## Resumo

No início do século XXI, na província de San Luís, Argentina, os planejamentos estaduais nas diferentes esferas do governo foram expostos como “Planos Diretores”. Termos como “Planejamento Estratégico” aliado a outros, como inovação e gestão, entre outros, tornaram-se recorrentes. Em 2013, foi apresentado oficialmente o Plano Diretor das Culturas 2013-2023. Neste trabalho é realizada uma análise etnográfica do referido plano, com foco em como o passado local é produzido e gerenciado nas ações governamentais nele contempladas. Pergunta-se: Como noções temporárias — passado, presente, futuro — são tencionadas com a implementação de uma linguagem da gestão empresarial? Quais ordenamentos e hierarquias sociais são estabelecidos? Além disso, indaga-se sobre o papel que os especialistas adquirem no planejamento em aspectos que seriam característicos do grupo de “puntanos” (naturais de San Luís); e como esses aspectos são “documentados”, expressando uma representação do que seja San Luís, ao mesmo tempo em que busca legitimá-lo.

**Palavras-chave:** Plano Diretor de Culturas; San Luís; políticas governamentais; usos do passado.

# “Una herramienta de inspiración”: el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas de la provincia de San Luis, Argentina, 2013-2023

*María Celina Chocobare*

## Usos de un pasado en la “planificación estratégica” de un futuro provincial

En este artículo se exploran usos del pasado involucrados en el “Plan Maestro de Las Culturas 2013-2023” del Gobierno de San Luis, provincia ubicada en el centro-oeste de Argentina. Específicamente, examino cómo se produce y gestiona un pasado provincial en las iniciativas estatales incorporadas en el plan gubernamental.<sup>1</sup> Si bien el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, presentado en 2013, proyecta objetivos y metas a cumplir en los siguientes diez años, la gestión de un pasado provincial cobra centralidad. Recupera acciones desplegadas en el ámbito de cultura desde 1983 y describe la situación particular de San Luis en el espacio nacional, remitiéndose a un pasado originario, anterior a la formación de la nación.

Los usos de un pasado implicados en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas son pensados a partir de la propuesta de Mario Rufer (2010a) sobre la conveniencia de tratarlos como un “campo etnográfico” para indagar los modos en que los mundos del pasado son “producidos, narrados y encastrados” en un presente situado, signado por relaciones de poder y diferencia.<sup>2</sup> Analizarlos de esta manera implicaría considerar las formas en que se evoca el pasado, atendiendo al mismo tiempo las disputas y debates que genera (Rufer 2010a: 77-80). El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas es una vía privilegiada para examinar cómo se produce una narrativa sobre un pasado provincial. Algunas preguntas orientan este artículo: ¿Cómo se tensan nociones temporales –pasado, presente, futuro– con la implantación de un lenguaje proveniente de la gestión empresarial? ¿Qué jerarquías sociales se establecen? ¿Qué ordenamientos temporales subyacen en el plan gubernamental?

El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas fue presentado por el gobierno provincial en 2013 como “el resultado más reciente de una visión estratégica” que caracterizaría el “modelo de gestión” de la provincia desde 1983.<sup>3</sup> En el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas se delinear objetivos y metas que se deberían cumplir en materia cultural entre los años 2013-2023. En un primer momento, examiné las iniciativas estatales allí incluidas reproduciendo la idea de unidad y coherencia. Había sido, de alguna manera, encantada por el modo en que se las presentaba. Me encontré expresando que determinadas acciones estatales se enmarcaban en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, cuando de hecho habían sido desarrolladas previamente a su confección e implementación.

Algunas de las acciones gubernamentales incluidas en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, no se percibieron como parte de una planificación ordenada y despertaron sospechas respecto a su relevancia o a los fondos que se orientaban para las mismas. A modo de ejemplo, la construcción de una réplica del Cabildo de Buenos Aires en la Ciudad de la Punta, en 2010, cuando aún no se ponía en marcha el Plan, fue cuestionada por el gasto

<sup>1</sup> Este trabajo forma parte de una indagación más amplia, cuyo propósito es analizar usos del pasado implicados en políticas gubernamentales, desplegadas en el ámbito de cultura en la provincia de San Luis, entre fines del siglo XX y principios del siglo XXI, desarrollada en el marco de mi plan de tesis doctoral en ciencias antropológicas radicada en la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, dirigida por la Dra. María Gabriela Lugones y co-dirigida por el Dr. Mario Rufer.

<sup>2</sup> Agradezco al referato anónimo esta observación y sus valiosos –y productivos– comentarios.

<sup>3</sup> La provincia de San Luis, desde 1983 hasta 2023, fue gobernada por el mismo grupo político vinculado al Partido Justicialista provincial. La mayor parte del tiempo fueron titulares del Poder Ejecutivo Provincial los hermanos Adolfo y Alberto Rodríguez Saá, con excepción del período 2011-2015, en el que gobernó Claudio Poggi (quien luego se constituyó en oposición de Alberto Rodríguez Saá).

implicado en una obra que no sería prioritaria.<sup>4</sup> Esas desconfianzas se plasmaron en comentarios de lectores, en notas periodísticas online, en publicaciones de periódicos de alcance nacional,<sup>5</sup> en sesiones legislativas y en intercambios que pude oír y compartir en salas de profesores, y en conversaciones con familiares y amigos. No obstante, esas acciones que en su momento de concreción fueron interpretadas como “ocurrencias del gobernador”,<sup>6</sup> se integraron en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas como parte de una planificación estratégica llevada adelante por el gobierno provincial. Entonces, comencé a pensar en el trabajo constante de producción de unidad y coherencia de las políticas estatales y la importancia que tiene este tipo de documentos en la construcción de dicha unidad.

En el marco de los procesos de formación del Estado la producción de documentación escrita es una acción cotidiana (Souza Lima 2002). El trabajo etnográfico con documentos puede servir para visualizar posicionamientos asumidos por quienes los elaboran y la reproducción de jerarquías sociales. No se trata de usar los documentos meramente para componer contextos sino de accionarlos como canal de acceso a la dinámica de los actores en acción (Barroso 2014: 164-165). Los documentos no serían complemento o fuentes secundarias sino parte del trabajo de campo.

Adriana Vianna advierte que tomar los documentos como piezas etnográficas implica considerarlos como constructores de la realidad, tanto por lo que producen en la situación en la que forman parte –esto sería atender a cómo fabrican un “proceso” en el que participan diversos, y desiguales, autores y actores– como por aquello que “conscientemente sedimentan en tanto se presumen de antemano como algo que debe permanecer y durar y que será utilizado y consultado en situaciones específicas” (Vianna 2014: 47). El gobernador Claudio Poggi, en el prólogo del Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, lo presenta como “una herramienta de singular utilidad, que habrá de orientar nuestros pasos y servirnos de inspiración” (Plan Maestro 2013: 7). Advierto en el plan gubernamental un trabajo de delimitación de los referentes que lo guían (la situación histórica de la provincia en el ámbito nacional, las políticas culturales desplegadas desde 1983, el aporte destacado de especialistas y artistas en la producción de “una identidad provincial”) y legitimación de los encargados de conducir la política gubernamental y la narrativa histórica que allí se expone (agentes estatales, expertos, artistas).

Considero, a partir de los argumentos plasmados en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, que los gobernantes provinciales estarían erigiéndose en responsables de “resguardar” un modo de ser sanluiseño. Desde su percepción, la “identidad provincial” se encontraría en “peligro”, por la globalización y por la presencia de pobladores oriundos de otras provincias argentinas. En este sentido, los documentos serían una forma determinada de “imaginar lo real” (Geertz 1994 [1983]). En ellos se plasman visiones de mundo que revelan su capacidad para producir las realidades que enuncian. Restaurar analíticamente la visibilidad de los documentos implicaría tratarlos como “mediadores” (Lowenkron & Ferreira 2014), esto sería entenderlos como cosas que “transforman, traducen, dislocan, distorsionan y modifican el sentido de los elementos que ellos supuestamente acarrear” (Latour 2005 *apud* Lowenkron & Ferreira 2014:82). La configuración en el plan gubernamental en foco de “una identidad provincial” contribuye a crearla constituyendo una visión – entre otras- de la misma (Carrasco & Luxardo 2017).

En suma, procuro indagar en el Plan Maestro de las Culturas, entendiéndolo como una ruta para conocer cómo se produce, y gestiona, un pasado provincial y sus implicancias políticas; prestando atención a lo que se expresa con regularidad para definir lo que sería propiamente sanluiseño, y lo que se omite o se ubica por fuera.

4 A modo de ejemplo, el diputado Fidel R. Haddad manifestaba “Tenemos velódromo, hipódromo, cabildo, pirámide; no tenemos ni educación, ni salud, ni seguridad, ni justicia [...]”. Diario de Sesiones, N° 26. Cámara de Diputados de la Provincia de San Luis. 13 de octubre de 2010.pag. 43.

5 “El otro país de Alberto”, *La voz del Interior*, 27/12/2009. [http://archivo.lavoz.com.ar/nota.asp?nota\\_id=578985](http://archivo.lavoz.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=578985); “La tierra de la Pirámide y el Cabildo” *Página 12*, 23/5/2010 <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-146206-2010-05-23.html>

6 Las comillas se utilizan en este texto para marcar expresiones que no pertenecen a la autora.

Para construir la idea de unidad en la planificación cobra importancia la organización temporal. Norbert Elias señala que “la determinación o sincronización del tiempo se trata de una actividad humana con fines definidos y no sólo de una relación, sino de un poner-en-relación. La cuestión sería: ¿Quién, en este caso, relaciona qué, con qué y con qué fin” (Elias 2010 [1989]: 67). El tiempo tiene una función reguladora e integradora, su gestión es importante para generar el recuerdo de la continuidad y conferirle unidad en función de un marco social de referencia reconocido. En el caso de las acciones estatales incluidas en el Plan, los principales marcos de referencia para constituir una narrativa histórica serían: uno, reciente, que alude a la reapertura democrática en 1983; y otros más lejanos, como un pasado que remite al origen y a la participación de San Luis en la gesta independentista. Esos elementos de un pasado se vinculan con un modo de ser sanluiseño que se extiende sobre el territorio provincial desde tiempos remotos.

El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, aunque proyecta acciones futuras, es una herramienta que permite al gobierno provincial relacionar un conjunto de acciones gubernamentales desplegadas desde 1983. Organiza las acciones estatales en etapas de la política cultural desarrolladas por los gobiernos provinciales. Si bien la planificación delinea políticas a realizar en un periodo de diez años, el pasado cobra un lugar relevante, en tanto las acciones estatales culturales parten de “preservar, custodiar, revalorizar y expandir” bienes que los sanluiseños habrían adquirido colectivamente. A su vez, al establecer continuidad entre las políticas culturales desplegadas por el Estado provincial desde 1983, el presente de la planificación funciona como instrumento para unir un pasado y un futuro vinculado al desarrollo cultural.

Considero que la producción de unidad es ayudada mediante la incorporación de imágenes de las acciones estatales realizadas. Cada meta es acompañada de fotografías de museos construidos recientemente; del Monumento al Pueblo Puntano de la Independencia; de hilados artesanales; de jóvenes bailando folklore; de estructuras arquitectónicas, entre otras. En este planteo, adquiere relevancia la idea de “representación”, en tanto un “volver a presentarse”, evocando determinados elementos de un pasado provincial, una y otra vez, aunque de manera diferente (Navarro 2010: 199). Marc Abélès resalta que “hacer ver” es un aspecto consustancial del orden político, que actúa en la esfera de la representación. Indica que el poder representa en dos sentidos: por un lado, significa que un grupo o individuo se establece como portavoz del conjunto, y por otro, pone en espectáculo el universo del que precede y cuya permanencia asegura (Abélès 1997: 10-11). En el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas se incorporan acciones gubernamentales, efectuadas previamente, en una secuencia ordenada –que se orienta hacia el futuro– donde se resaltan, cada vez, determinados aspectos y formas de hacer de quienes habitaron el territorio provincial desde tiempos remotos. Ello permite sostener la idea de un pasado imaginado común, mientras se erige al Estado provincial en portavoz de los “puntanos”.

Una vez puesto en funcionamiento, el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas constituye un marco que permite encuadrar diversas acciones gubernamentales en los propósitos allí formalizados –incluso aquellas que venían desarrollándose con anterioridad–. A modo de ejemplo, recupero tres acciones gubernamentales. En enero de 2014, el gobierno provincial informaba el inicio de fiestas tradicionales realizadas cada año en diferentes puntos de la provincia:

El Jefe de Subprograma de Eventos Culturales y Fiestas Provinciales, Lucas Nievas, explicó que las fiestas son organizadas en conjunto con cada municipalidad “están enmarcadas en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, lanzado hace unos meses, el cual busca garantizar el desarrollo cultural de todos los habitantes de la provincia”.<sup>7</sup>

Otra iniciativa enmarcada en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas son los Intercolegiales Culturales, realizados en la provincia desde 2014. Este programa depende de la Secretaría de Cultura. En los Intercolegiales Culturales participan, exponiendo producciones artísticas, estudiantes de nivel inicial, primario y secundario de todas las

7 “Comienzan las fiestas de los pueblos”, *Agencia de Noticias San Luis*, 4 de enero de 2014. <https://agenciasanluis.com/notas/2014/01/04/se-viene-la-fiesta-de-los-pueblos/>



instituciones educativas de gestión pública y privada de la provincia. La Ministra de Turismo y las Culturas, Celeste Sosa, en la presentación de esta iniciativa en 2014, expresó que estaba “basada en diferentes ejes temáticos fijados en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas (2013-2023), especialmente en lo que refiere a Identidad y Diversidad”.<sup>8</sup> En la edición 2023, la Secretaria de Cultura, Silvia Rapisarda, manifestó satisfacción “con este espacio que la comunidad va abrazando año a año. Trasladar estos espacios al interior provincial significa trabajar con la identidad de cada localidad, con su patrimonio y con su cultura”.<sup>9</sup>

El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas también ha sido citado para justificar acciones gubernamentales que habían sido cuestionadas por parte de distintos sectores, como la realización del Carnaval de Río [de Janeiro] en San Luis.<sup>10</sup> En agosto de 2014, la Agencia de Noticias San Luis, medio informativo del gobierno provincial, promocionaba que el Carnaval de Río en su quinta edición enmarcaría su temática en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas:

El contenido de los temas elegidos responde a destacar y acrecentar el sentido de pertenencia, la puntanidad, el amor a nuestra provincia, su historia, las hazañas de su pueblo, el crecimiento y desarrollo. Es una oportunidad fantástica para mostrar, no sólo al país sino al mundo, la calidad y calidez de San Luis y su gente, a través de un megaevento de jerarquía internacional, como lo es el Carnaval de Río en San Luis e invitarlos a que nos sigan visitando y conociendo.<sup>11</sup>

El Plan Maestro de las Culturas posibilita aunar acciones gubernamentales y re-definir iniciativas que venían desplegándose en relación con los objetivos estipulados en el plan gubernamental. Encuadradas en este Plan, disímiles iniciativas (festivales, competencias escolares, exposiciones artísticas, entre otras) ponen en circulación temas que son vinculados a una “identidad provincial” y favorecen relaciones entre agentes de distintas áreas de gobierno, artistas, docentes, estudiantes, especialistas y públicos que asisten a las actividades desarrolladas en las localidades provinciales.

## Sobre la planificación estratégica

El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas se sumó a planes elaborados previamente por el gobierno provincial en otros ámbitos como el Plan Maestro de Turismo (2010-2020), el Plan Maestro del Agua (2012-2025), el Plan Maestro de Salud (2014-2025), entre otros.<sup>12</sup> Este tipo de planificación, se inscribe en la llamada planificación estratégica y comenzaría a desarrollarse hacia fines de la década del noventa del siglo XX en América Latina, en el marco de reformas estimuladas por organismos internacionales como el Banco Mundial. Dichas reformas tenían como cometido fortalecer el aparato estatal tras la crisis de las políticas de ajuste y las reformas estructurales implementadas en los años noventa del siglo XX (Pintos et al. 2003; Ramírez Brouchoud 2009). Esta etapa de

8 “Reunión por intercolegiales culturales”, *Agencia de Noticias San Luis*, 26 de mayo de 2014. <https://agenciasanluis.com/notas/2014/05/26/reunion-por-intercolegiales-culturales/>

9 “Presentaron intercolegiales culturales edición 2023”, *Agencia de Noticias San Luis*, 1 de marzo de 2015. <https://agenciasanluis.com/notas/2023/03/01/presentaron-intercolegiales-culturales-edicion-2023/>

9 “Presentaron intercolegiales culturales edición 2023”, *Agencia de Noticias San Luis*, 1 de marzo de 2015. <https://agenciasanluis.com/notas/2023/03/01/presentaron-intercolegiales-culturales-edicion-2023/>

10 El Carnaval de Río [de Janeiro] en San Luis comenzó a realizarse en 2010. En ese año, los docentes provinciales llevaron adelante diferentes medidas para reclamar por su situación salarial. Una de las acciones que realizaron fue un escrache al inicio del Carnaval de Río en San Luis. Seen, Gustavo. “Los docentes de toda la provincia expresaron su rechazo”. *Periodistas en la Red*, 15 de marzo de 2010. <http://www.periodistasenlared.info/marzo10-15/nota2.html>

11 “Temática de las carrozas de La quinta edición”. *Agencia de Noticias San Luis*, martes 18 de agosto de 2014. <https://agenciasanluis.com/notas/2014/03/18/tematica-de-las-carrozas-de-la-quinta-edicion/>

12 Existen diversos planes maestros elaborados en distintas provincias argentinas, por caso, el Plan Maestro de Desarrollo Urbano para Puerto Madero (Buenos Aires); el Plan Maestro Ciudad Río (Chaco); el Plan Maestro de Turismo 2015-2019 (Salta). Existen también en distintos países: el Plan General Estratégico (2012-2015) de España; el Plan Maestro de Antofagasta (Chile), entre otros. Encontré el uso de la herramienta “plan maestro” en el ámbito de la planificación urbana centrada en el gerenciamiento del territorio (González, 2006). En ella se resalta que la idea de gestión cobra mayor relevancia por sobre la de planeamiento (Coraggio 2001). También hallé el uso de este tipo de planificación en el marco de procesos de producción industrial. En este caso, ya no se trata de la gestión de un territorio, sino de poder establecer qué, cómo, cuánto y en qué plazo de tiempo debe desarrollarse determinada producción.

reformas se caracterizó por una preocupación en torno a la eficacia de la intervención del sector público, la eficiencia económica y mejora en la equidad en la provisión de servicios, y la creación de un entorno propicio para el desarrollo del sector privado (Ramírez Brouchoud 2009: 124). En el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, estas preocupaciones se evidencian en el uso de las nociones eficacia, eficiencia, desarrollo, equidad. En sus propósitos, busca favorecer el desarrollo cultural a partir de generar un sector cultural dinámico y proporcionar las condiciones para el despliegue de inversiones del sector privado. Uno de sus objetivos macro expresa:

Promover el desarrollo de las industrias creativas de la provincia a través del fortalecimiento de las industrias estratégicas del libro, el audiovisual, el cine, el turismo cultural y el software y servicios informáticos y mediante el fomento de las iniciativas privadas con y sin fines de lucro en otras áreas de las artes y la economía creativa (Plan Maestro 2013: 27)

Se especifica que el Estado provincial tiene una participación muy importante en el sector a través de la gestión de sus propias industrias. Esto es considerado como “una estrategia de suma importancia para dar un puntapié inicial al sector”. Pero, se plantea como estrategia de largo plazo, “reducir esa participación relativa promoviendo el crecimiento del sector privado” (Plan Maestro 2013: 28). También se señala que ello no debería “confundirse con una estrategia de división de tareas entre el Estado y el mercado” sino que, por el contrario, “el Estado deberá seguir regulando y fomentando el sector” (2013: 28). Por medio de estas delimitaciones, se va constituyendo un lugar específico para el Estado provincial (Mitchell 2015) que favorece la legitimación de sus funciones.

El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas inicia con la presentación de la situación de la política cultural desplegada en la provincia; postula los desafíos a enfrentar y, en función de ello, delinea objetivos macro y metas a cumplir en diez años. Para llevarlos adelante, estipula planes anuales y gestión por objetivos en forma de proyectos. Al observar los distintos apartados, pude advertir que los especialistas tienen reservado un lugar destacado en la elaboración de la planificación y en su ejecución. El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas 2013-2023 fue confeccionado por un equipo técnico encabezado por el gobernador de la provincia, Claudio Poggi y por miembros del Ministerio de Turismo y las Culturas, y un “equipo externo” compuesto por integrantes de la Fundación de Investigación Social Argentino Latinoamericana (FISAL).<sup>13</sup> También, se especifica que la confección del Plan incluyó la elaboración de “entrevistas en profundidad con referentes provinciales de la cultura” (Plan Maestro 2013: 160).<sup>14</sup>

Las palabras estrategia, gestión, resultados, eficacia, eficiencia, son usadas de manera recurrente en el documento ¿será que estas asociaciones contribuyen a obturar resistencias, disensos posibles? Shore (2010) llama la atención acerca de que “las políticas funcionan mejor cuando son percibidas como técnicas racionales y como soluciones “naturales” para los problemas que enfrentamos, es decir, cuando logran desplazar el discurso a un registro que posiciona el debate por fuera de política en una esfera donde el desacuerdo es visto como inapropiado (Shore 2010: 34). A su vez, la presentación de la planificación estratégica como compuesta de conocimientos específicos y precisos favorece que su formulación quede finalmente en manos de expertos.

Lugones y Tamagnini (2019), analizando la implantación de la fórmula “Buenas Prácticas” en la Córdoba contemporánea, advierten que la apoyatura en procedimientos “técnicos” e instrumentos de “gestión” neutrales posibilita que las “Buenas Prácticas” puedan ser (re)presentadas como contrapuestas a la “política” (Lugones & Tamagnini 2019: 276). Tomo este planteo porque considero que el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, presentado como una planificación estratégica orientada a favorecer el desarrollo cultural de la provincia, contribuiría a obturar posiciones y resistencias frente a la planificación. A modo de ejemplo: cuando se trató el proyecto de

<sup>13</sup> Esta fundación fue creada por Adolfo Rodríguez Saá en 1999. En su página web se menciona que tiene como misión “formular ideas, proyectos y acciones que aporten al desarrollo sustentable de la provincia de San Luis y del país, con una perspectiva latinoamericana que tome en cuenta los fenómenos globales”. (<http://fisal.org/vision-y-mision/>). Entre los integrantes del “equipo externo” de elaboración del Plan Maestro de Las Culturas compuesto por integrantes de la Fundación, se nombra a Feliciano Rodríguez Saá, (hija de Adolfo Rodríguez Saá), Cecilia Rojo, responsable de la redacción y Graciela Mazzarino, quien se ha desempeñado como diputada provincial, entre otros

<sup>14</sup> No se explicita, sin embargo, quiénes fueron entrevistados.

ley del Plan Maestro de Las Culturas en la Cámara de Diputados, en la sesión del 13 de noviembre de 2013, dos diputados de la oposición cuestionaron algunos puntos del Plan.<sup>15</sup> No obstante, anticiparon que votarían a favor argumentando, en palabras del Diputado Haddad, “que es bueno que haya un plan maestro para un tema como la cultura”; y que los desacuerdos no son “motivo para que uno niegue la existencia de un Plan Maestro”. Luego de estas expresiones, el proyecto fue aprobado por unanimidad por las y los legisladores provinciales.

La utilización de un plan maestro para gestionar “las culturas” tiene dos aspectos que considero relevantes y sobre los que me detendré. En primer lugar, entiendo que se produce una tensión entre el tiempo, como medida de la gestión, y una organización temporal de larga duración. En segundo lugar, me interesa destacar el papel que se otorga a especialistas encargados de clasificar, conservar y difundir, los “repertorios culturales” que definirían la particularidad “puntana”.

## Volver al pasado para planificar el futuro

Como mencioné anteriormente, un aspecto clave de este tipo de planificación es la dimensión temporal. Percibo en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas una tensión entre el tiempo como medida de la gestión de las culturas asociado con las nociones de eficacia, desarrollo y resultados, y una concepción temporal que subyace en dicha organización que es de larga duración y alcanza a la época colonial.

Antes de explicitar las acciones futuras, en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas se recuperan las acciones estatales realizadas desde 1983. Esto genera que, aunque la planificación y el “desarrollo cultural” se orienten hacia el futuro, el pasado ocupe un lugar importante. A su vez, para definir la particularidad sanluiseña, la descripción se remonta hacia un tiempo lejano, originario, ligado a la geografía provincial y sus primeros pobladores.

En la introducción del plan gubernamental, se expone una breve reseña histórica de la política cultural desarrollada en la provincia. Se expresa que la realidad cultural de San Luis se encuentra marcada por su colaboración en las guerras por la independencia nacional con el aporte de hombres, a pesar de su escasa población, y por las características de la organización económica del país en torno al desarrollo del modelo agroexportador.<sup>16</sup> A raíz de esta situación, el Estado nacional firmó en 1973 el Acta de Reparación Histórica con las Provincias de Catamarca, La Rioja y San Luis. En ella se manifiesta que, en reconocimiento a los aportes realizados por éstas durante las guerras por la independencia y la organización nacional, y en virtud de que posteriormente no fueron favorecidas por el modelo de desarrollo económico preponderante, se arbitrarían medidas para estimular su crecimiento.

La firma del Acta de Reparación Histórica con el gobierno nacional permitió implementar el Régimen de Promoción Industrial durante los años ochenta del siglo XX. El mismo consistía en la exención impositiva para las industrias que se radicaran en San Luis. Esta política contribuyó a su crecimiento económico y demográfico, con el asentamiento de trabajadores de otras provincias argentinas.<sup>17</sup> Reconozco tres aspectos como referentes

<sup>15</sup> La Diputada Ana María Nicoletti (Frente Federal Cívico y Social) y el Diputado Fidel Ricardo Haddad (Alianza Acuerdo Cívico y Social) cuestionaron la representatividad en la definición de la “puntanidad” que tendrían expresiones artísticas como el teatro de revista o la realización del “Carnaval de Río en San Luis”; y la falta de apoyo para el desarrollo del teatro local, y otras expresiones artísticas “netamente” locales. Además mencionaron que era necesario que el gobierno provincial abriera la participación al momento de la confección de las planificaciones y no sólo para su aprobación (Diario de Sesiones, N° 24. Cámara de Diputados de la Provincia de San Luis, 13 de noviembre de 2013, pp. 82-84).

<sup>16</sup> Estas explicaciones se relacionan con la construcción de una historia nacional a principios del siglo XX vinculada al *mito del origen*. Los historiadores provinciales construyeron sus explicaciones revalorizando el aporte de sus provincias a la construcción de la nación. El libro *Escribir la nación en las provincias* (Brezza, Micheletti, & Molina 2013), reúne trabajos que indagan los modos en que distintos historiadores, desde las provincias, narraron el origen y la definición de la nación argentina e intervinieron en la obra dirigida por Ricardo Levene, *Historia de la Nación Argentina desde los orígenes hasta la organización definitiva en 1862*.

<sup>17</sup> De acuerdo a los censos nacionales de población, en el período intercensal 1970-1980, la población de la provincia creció un 10,18% (en número de habitantes, de 183.460 a 214.466). Mientras que en el censo de 1991 se evidencia un crecimiento del 33,6 %, con una población de 286.458 habitantes. Fuente: Ministerio del Interior de Argentina. “Argentina: población total por regiones y provincias. Censos Nacionales de 1914, 1947, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1991 y 2001”. Disponible en: [https://www.mininterior.gov.ar/poblacion/archivos\\_estadisticas/EvolucionPoblacionProvincias1914.pdf](https://www.mininterior.gov.ar/poblacion/archivos_estadisticas/EvolucionPoblacionProvincias1914.pdf)

de la organización temporal que atraviesa la planificación. En primer lugar, la contribución de San Luis en la gesta independentista; por medio de ello, se destacan tanto el aspecto heroico del “pueblo puntano” como el lugar de postergación de la provincia. En segundo lugar, la propia firma del Acta de Reparación Histórica, a fines del siglo XX, mediante la cual se remite a la idea de postergación; y en tercer lugar, dicho reconocimiento tardío habilitaría, en la narrativa oficial, la emergencia de una etapa (re)fundacional para la provincia, que se despliega a partir de la reapertura democrática en 1983.

Las políticas culturales desplegadas por los gobiernos democráticos provinciales desde 1983 se presentan en dos etapas que caracterizarían la política cultural. En 1983 inicia la “etapa constituyente”, orientada a “reconstituir y fortalecer al sector cultural” de la provincia luego de un largo período de gobiernos militares. Durante la “etapa constituyente”, las acciones estatales estuvieron destinadas a “garantizar el derecho a la identidad, a la preservación del patrimonio y a la revalorización histórica”.<sup>18</sup> Para ello, se señala que se “rescataron aspectos y valores salientes de la cultura puntana, particularmente aquellos que le otorgan su impronta particular” (Plan Maestro 2013:18). La segunda etapa lleva el nombre de “industrias creativas” y comienza con la sanción de la Ley de Cine de la Provincia de San Luis en 2002, dirigida al:

(...) desarrollo de las industrias creativas como parte integral del modelo productivo diversificado de la provincia, que sumó a la industrialización la ampliación de la frontera agrícola y el estímulo de las llamadas “industrias sin humos” y el sector servicios (Plan Maestro 2013:19).

De estas dos etapas, en el Plan se identifica como punto más importante de continuidad entre ambas “el fomento de una identidad puntana y la protección y ampliación del patrimonio”. En relación con ello se indica lo siguiente:

Puede afirmarse que la recuperación de la memoria histórica, el folklore puntano y la cultura popular fueron una prioridad desde 1983 y posteriormente se suman tres nuevos ejes de acción en materia de identidad, todos ellos vinculados a nuevos repertorios culturales surgidos de un proceso histórico de redefinición colectiva de la identidad local. Esos ejes son: una política de Culturas Originarias, destinada a valorar y reafirmar la identidad legítima de los Pueblos originarios en la provincia [...]; el fomento de una cultura digital y tecnológica [...]; el fomento de una cultura medioambiental, que tiene su origen en el lugar central que históricamente ocupa la naturaleza en la cultura puntana como fuente de inspiración artística y desarrollo espiritual [...] (Plan Maestro 2013: 20-21).

A partir de lo presentado, observo que la revalorización de un pasado común de los “puntanos” y la construcción de una “identidad provincial” se encuentran en la base de los lineamientos de la política cultural de la provincia. Lo expresado en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas, sobre el desarrollo histórico y las etapas de la política cultural, permite vislumbrar una tensión entre el desarrollo provincial y el nacional, que resultaría exitoso y particular para la provincia de San Luis. Esto estaría dado por el lugar que adquiere la provincia en el ámbito nacional desde las guerras por la independencia y su tardío crecimiento económico, a raíz de ellas y de la organización nacional. Esto se revertiría posteriormente por medio de la promoción industrial y de las iniciativas estatales, de fomento y promoción del sector cultural, con las “industrias creativas”.

Lo anterior se conjuga con la peculiaridad geográfica que le otorgaría al sanluisense un modo de ser particular. En el marco de esas disputas históricas con la nación, que dan cuenta de una formación con espacios jerárquicamente organizados, el espacio provincial “adquiere una identidad específica como lugar” (Gupta & Ferguson 2008: 237). La constitución de ese lugar es importante para sostener vínculos entre quienes

<sup>18</sup> Claudio Lobo (2011) analiza, en discursos del campo político e histórico, la “emergencia/construcción” de tópicos que se activaron para fundar una identidad de lo puntano a principios del siglo XXI. Señala rupturas y continuidades con el proyecto identitario del siglo XX. Se concentra en los desplazamientos discursivos producidos en torno a la categoría de identidad y la centralidad que fue adquiriendo el elemento comunidades/culturas originarias.

se identifican como “puntanos”. Sobre ese espacio se despliegan “repertorios culturales”, a los que se han incorporado en los últimos años “nuevos repertorios” que constituyen la “identidad provincial”.

La reafirmación de los logros conseguidos se relaciona con los desafíos a los que estará expuesta la provincia. Como logros se resalta “la revalorización de nuestros valores, usos y costumbres”. Los desafíos que se mencionan se vinculan con el sostenimiento y profundización de un “sector cultural dinámico” (para lo que se fomenta la actividad artística y se busca estimular el consumo cultural), la llegada de inmigrantes en “grandes niveles” a la provincia y la conexión global, que permite el acceso gratuito a internet (Plan Maestro 2013: 22). De este modo, el desarrollo industrial que posibilitó el crecimiento económico y de la población fue acompañado por la conformación de una sociedad más heterogénea.

Según el Plan, los desafíos mencionados harían “imperioso el diseño de una política de apuntalamiento a una identidad puntana respetuosa de la diversidad cultural” (Plan Maestro 2013: 22). El Estado provincial debería estimular el surgimiento de emprendimientos privados, con y sin fines de lucro, promoviendo la creación y la apreciación cultural, y fomentando “una identidad provincial respetuosa de la diversidad” (2013: 22). A partir de estos argumentos, podemos acceder a las percepciones de los elaboradores del Plan Maestro de Las Culturas sobre la situación de la provincia y cómo entienden su papel vinculado a ello (Girola 2018; Muzzopappa & Villalta 2011: 28). Interpreto que los gobernantes provinciales están construyendo y dirimiendo su legitimidad como los principales responsables para ocuparse de los desafíos identificados.

La tercera etapa abierta por el Plan se denomina “etapa integradora”. La visión que postula es la siguiente: “San Luis se proyecta en el mundo global con identidad propia, inclusiva, diversa, con un mayor nivel de desarrollo cultural y con un sector cultural más dinámico y competitivo” (Plan Maestro 2013: 27). La construcción de esa imagen/visión que se quiere lograr resume cómo están percibiendo los gobernantes provinciales la situación de San Luis y, al mismo tiempo, las acciones para conseguirla.

La promoción de una “identidad puntana”, cobra un lugar relevante en el Plan Maestro. La idea de la “puntanidad” comienza a elaborarse a partir de evocaciones de un pasado imaginado común, que parten de un presente descripto como diverso y competitivo. De allí que las políticas culturales deberían orientarse a favorecer el crecimiento del sector cultural como un espacio que contribuye al desarrollo económico provincial, respetando la diversidad y “fomentando, apuntalando, revalorizando, fortaleciendo y preservando” la singularidad sanluisense.

## Un plan maestro para “las culturas puntanas”

Uno de los propósitos del Plan Maestro de Las Culturas es fortalecer una identidad definida como “puntana”. La denominación “puntano” remite a la etapa colonial; si bien hay distintas explicaciones, se dice que la ciudad de San Luis (capital provincial), era llamada por los conquistadores españoles “San Luis de la Punta de los Venados”, por su ubicación al extremo de las sierras y por la cantidad de venados que había allí.<sup>19</sup> De esta antigua definición, que alude al lugar donde está instalada la ciudad de San Luis, surge el gentilicio de “puntano”, para designar a sus habitantes. Posteriormente, se extendió para nominar a los pobladores de toda la provincia.<sup>20</sup>

19 Según Menéndez (2017), para nombrar esta zona se impuso el accidente geográfico. La punta hace alusión al extremo de una sierra o región. Menéndez indica que “la Punta” hacia fines del siglo XVI aludió, primero, a la zona circundante a la actual ciudad de San Luis, y pasó a nombrar luego un territorio más amplio (Menéndez 2017: 64-67).

20 Esta denominación genera tensiones al interior de la provincia. A modo de ejemplo, en notas periodísticas publicadas en el Diario de San Luis, entre 1983 y 1985, se evidencian desacuerdos respecto al gentilicio de los pobladores provinciales (“Gentilicios: puntanos y sanluisenses”, *El Diario de San Luis*, edición impresa, 3 de abril de 1984, p.7). El debate se produce en torno a si es correcto llamar “puntanos” a los habitantes de cualquier lugar de la provincia, o si debería restringirse a los de la ciudad de San Luis. La circulación del término “puntano-puntanidad”, se acrecentó desde la institucionalización de la “Semana de la Puntanidad y el Sanluisismo” por medio de una ley provincial en 2014. La tensión en torno a la manera de designar a quienes viven en San Luis se materializa en la denominación de la ley, dado que conserva ambas acepciones.

Diferentes escritores y escritoras locales en sus textos se refieren a la “puntanidad”. La definición más convocada en las iniciativas gubernamentales es la elaborada por Jesús Liberato Tobares (1999). Fragmentos de su obra son citados en documentos gubernamentales, tales como el libro del Museo Histórico de San Luis, el proyecto de ley de instauración de la “Semana de la Puntanidad y el Sanluisismo”<sup>21</sup> y en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas. A continuación cito el fragmento que se incorpora en el mismo:

La puntanidad implica conocer y valorar saberes tradicionales como el rastreo (cuyo origen encuentra Sarmiento en la cultura Huarpe), los secretos de la medicina popular, las destrezas manuales con sentido estético [...] conocer y valorar la filosofía ancestral que vive en la copla anónima, la leyenda, la relación, el romance, la tonada; conocer y valorar la fe implícita en la novena, la solidaridad de la minga, la alegría de la serenata. [...] No es ajeno por cierto a estos atributos de la puntanidad, el amor por las cosas y los seres de nuestra tierra. [...] El vínculo de la puntanidad nos une al hombre de Intihuasi que hace 8.000 años luchaba por sobrevivir a la agresión de las fieras, las alimañas y la intemperie. [...] Sentir la puntanidad es valorar ese largo espacio de nuestra historia y prehistoria [...] La puntanidad hermana nuestra sangre con la que entregaron nuestros comprovincianos en San Lorenzo y Chacabuco, Cancha Rayada y Maipú [...] (J. Tobares/Plan Maestro 2013: 39).

La definición de Tobares permite situar la “puntanidad” como vínculo que se expresa, persiste y extiende en objetos, sentires, saberes y pensamientos que se propagarían entre los sanluisenses desde un pasado remoto hasta nuestros días, proyectándose hacia el futuro. Esta definición de la “puntanidad” se relaciona con las etapas y los referentes socio-temporales que se postulan (pasado indígena, gesta independentista, saberes populares) y se vincula con la acción de preservación, custodia y fomento del patrimonio cultural y natural de los sanluisenses porque no basta solo con conocerla, también implica “valorarla” y “amarla”.

El objetivo de “apuntalar la puntanidad” se expone junto al reconocimiento de diversidad tanto al interior como al exterior de la sociedad sanluisense. Como objetivo macro se plantea:

Contribuir al fortalecimiento de una identidad puntana inclusiva y diversa, reconociendo, preservando y promoviendo repertorios culturales que la hacen única, mediante una política patrimonial específica, el respeto a la diversidad cultural y la promoción del diálogo intercultural (Plan Maestro 2013: 32).

Para cumplir este objetivo el Estado provincial debería “diseñar e implementar una política de custodia, preservación y expansión de su patrimonio cultural y natural, material e inmaterial” (Plan Maestro 2013: 35). La identidad se construiría a partir de la apropiación de la sociedad de determinados “repertorios culturales”. Éstos funcionarían como “diferenciadores (hacia afuera) y definidores de la propia unidad y especificidad (hacia adentro)” (2013: 33). Por ello, el énfasis se coloca en preservar los rasgos culturales que caracterizan a los “puntanos”:

Mientras que las fronteras de nuestra identidad puntana están marcadas por la decisión de elegir a la provincia de San Luis como nuestro destino [...], los repertorios culturales que la distinguen y la hacen única en la actualidad son los siguientes: nuestra cultura tradicional, folklórica y popular, la cultura de nuestros pueblos originarios, la cultura medioambiental, la cultura digital y tecnológica, la cultura joven (Plan Maestro 2013: 34).

Percibo en la presentación de los repertorios culturales que conformarían la particularidad sanluisense un orden de mayor a menor antigüedad (la cultura tradicional, folklórica y popular, la cultura de los pueblos originarios, la cultura ambiental, la cultura digital, la tecnológica, la cultura joven). La frontera espacial posibilita situarlos y establecer una relación directa entre cultura e “identidad puntana”. Estos atributos

21 La ley N° II-0887-2014 dispone que durante la Semana de la Puntanidad y el Sanluisismo (entre el 17 y 25 de agosto) los establecimientos educativos realicen actividades áulicas e institucionales relacionadas con la geografía, la historia, expresiones artísticas, entre otras, de la provincia. También estipula la realización de un acto central, por región educativa, que involucre a toda la comunidad.

aparecerían como herencia que se obtiene por nacer o elegir vivir en la provincia. La permanencia no se apoyaría en los rasgos culturales, que pueden modificarse, sino en el territorio. Esto permite arrojar a la “puntanidad” por fuera del tiempo; la misma funcionaría como marco que engloba a los cambios culturales que atraviesan los “puntanos”. Para que tenga un carácter “inclusivo y diverso” se expresa lo siguiente:

También es preciso respetar y promover todos los repertorios culturales que coexisten en nuestro territorio. Este convencimiento llevó a la provincia de San Luis a reconocer y proteger la identidad de sus pueblos originarios, y es la manera más apropiada y saludable de hacer frente a los desafíos planteados por nuestra historia reciente como provincia receptora de inmigración y por los fenómenos mundiales de la globalidad y la interconectividad. Nuestra intención es delimitar una identidad puntana inclusiva y diversa, que abrace a las culturas ancestrales, la creciente diversidad cultural de la provincia y las nuevas culturas emergentes (Plan Maestro 2013: 35).

Si bien en este trecho se propugnan el respeto y la promoción de todos los repertorios culturales que coexistan en el territorio de la provincia, advierto un especial interés en fijar límites. Su sostenimiento no puede mantenerse con una delimitación territorial, sino que ellos necesitan ser expresados y ratificados de forma continua (Barth 1976: 7); de ahí la importancia de fomentar acciones que permitan construir continuamente la “puntanidad”.

El fragmento citado señala que la protección y la preservación de la identidad de los “pueblos originarios” es una “manera apropiada y saludable” de hacer frente a los desafíos impuestos por la recepción de inmigración y la globalización. Los pueblos indígenas aportarían, a partir de su “cultura particular”, un rasgo peculiar a la “identidad puntana”. Una de las metas enunciadas en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas estipula: “fortalecer la identidad de nuestros pueblos originarios preservando y recuperando su cultura ancestral, coadyuvando a su desarrollo socioeconómico y cultural y difundiendo sus logros y realidades en la Argentina y en el mundo” (Plan Maestro 2023: 43). En esta meta, se proponen tres acciones que el Estado provincial debería desarrollar frente a los “pueblos originarios” de la provincia: preservar, ayudar y difundir.

El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas incorpora una breve reseña histórica de los “pueblos originarios” huarpe y ranquel, se hace alusión a las tierras que ocupaban en “tiempos inmemoriales o ancestrales” y a cómo eran sus viviendas. En el caso de los ranqueles, se los describe como “aguerridos guerreros y con una organización social sencilla”. En cuanto a los huarpes se destaca que “trabajaban la cestería y la alfarería, que aún siguen practicando junto al tejido. La autoridad es el cacique de cada comunidad”. Luego, se introduce un salto temporal, en el que se contraponen un pasado lejano con un presente de reconocimiento: “hoy en día (...) la comunidad huarpe” y la “comunidad ranquel”, “habitan en las tierras restituidas” por el Gobierno de San Luis (Plan Maestro 2013: 43-46). En esta construcción se omite cómo se produjo la pérdida de unas condiciones que el gobierno propone preservar y recuperar (territorio, cultura, desarrollo económico).

Las acciones destinadas a los pueblos indígenas se elaboran omitiendo las condiciones socio-históricas (Crespo & Rodríguez 2013: 183) mediante las cuales los pueblos indígenas se constituyeron en pueblos subalternizados. A partir de “ese salto al presente”, de “ese agujero histórico” (Rodríguez de Anca 2013: 29), se habilita una narrativa que opera en función de “nuestro pasado”, “nuestra historia”, “nuestra identidad”. El modo en que se los describe contribuye a legitimar qué espacios y posiciones pueden ocupar determinados agentes sociales, y cómo deberían contribuir al fortalecimiento de la “identidad puntana”.

En el Plan gubernamental se promueve el “rescate, la preservación y valorización” de “su cultura, su lengua, costumbres ancestrales y patrimonio tangible e intangible” (Plan Maestro 2013: 48). Mientras se insiste en el reconocimiento de la diferencia cultural apelando a su particularidad, se integra a los “pueblos originarios de la provincia” de manera subordinada al “nosotros puntano”. Los pueblos indígenas aportarían, con sus producciones artísticas, saberes, lenguaje y prácticas, a la configuración del patrimonio provincial. Convertidos en “bienes” materiales e inmateriales, pueden ser apropiados como símbolos de la “puntanidad”: de esa manera

su cultura se tornaría “nuestra” y, como tal, objeto de preservación, rescate, protección y difusión (Rodríguez 2013: 75). Este énfasis en la ampliación de la noción de patrimonio como provincial, sumado a la borrada histórica (Rodríguez de Anca 2013: 29), permite subsumir a los pueblos indígenas en una narrativa que busca producir una única identidad, definida como “puntana”.

En el Plan se destaca que la “visibilidad que este hecho histórico logró darle a nuestras raíces ancestrales es probablemente el hito más importante de nuestra historia cultural reciente”. Ello porque “ha revitalizado nuestra realidad cultural” y además habría “modificado la percepción que todos los sanluiseños teníamos de nuestra identidad, ayudándonos a redefinirla en función de sus orígenes” (Plan Maestro 2013: 48). En esa delimitación y abrazo en la que se funden las “culturas ancestrales, la diversidad cultural y las nuevas culturas emergentes”, se hace alusión a una continuidad entre pasado, presente y futuro. Establecer cuáles son los repertorios culturales de la provincia se tornaría crucial para cimentar “una identidad provincial” determinando cuáles son los rasgos que permanecerán y permitirán definir a quienes viven en San Luis como “puntanos” y, al mismo tiempo, mantener/construir las fronteras de la “puntanidad”.

Observo en la construcción de la “puntanidad” un ordenamiento socio-histórico de cuño colonial. Mario Rufer (2010b) señala que percibir una continuidad histórica con la conquista no significa pensar en términos de persistencias inmutables, sino como

Continuidades miméticas silenciadas, parodiadas bajo el aparente quiasma del “sujeto nacional”, amparadas por las disciplinas que a su sombra se construyeron, asumidas como “nuevos órdenes políticos”, metamorfoseadas en la singularidad histórica del ser nacional. Continuidades escudadas en las sinécdoques productivas que supieron sustituir [...] casta por mestizajes, racionalizaciones por inequidades, diferenciación por reconocimientos (Rufer 2010b: 19-20).

Se trataría de reconocer marcas coloniales en nuestros ordenamientos históricos nacionales. Las mismas perduran en procesos de diferenciación e inciden en las posiciones económicas y sociales de determinados segmentos de población que fueron subalternizados durante la etapa colonial (especialmente, pueblos indígenas).

En la búsqueda de definir la particularidad sanluiseña, en relación y tensión con la historia nacional, se articula una narrativa histórica provincial que plasma sus orígenes en la colonia y que traza un devenir particular para la provincia en el escenario nacional. Al remontarse al período pre-colonial y colonial, la historia de la provincia se construye como preexistente a la nación. Eso le permite cuestionar la centralidad de Buenos Aires en la construcción nacional, puesto que San Luis se inscribe en esa narración como provincia fundadora de la nación. Para destacar la preexistencia, se recurre al medio natural y a un pasado originario que remite a los primeros pobladores de la provincia. A partir de ello, se establece un ordenamiento socio-temporal que ubica a los pueblos indígenas como punto de origen y a los jóvenes, y niños (“puntanos” en formación), como herederos legítimos de la “puntanidad”, para quienes se propone elaborar acciones específicas para contenerlos. (Plan Maestro 2013: 63).

Respecto a los jóvenes, el plan gubernamental manifiesta que son cruciales para el desarrollo cultural; se dice que “son el futuro” y, por ello, se busca diseñar políticas “específicamente orientadas” hacia el sector (Plan Maestro 2013: 63). Los jóvenes serían colocados por la “sociedad adulta” en un lugar ambiguo entre ‘receptores de políticas’ y ‘protagonistas del cambio’. En esa construcción, ya no serían los propios jóvenes quienes proyectan su identidad y sus anhelos al resto de la sociedad (Plan Maestro 2013: 63). La ‘cultura joven’ se incorpora en el Plan a la lista de repertorios culturales que hacen única a “la identidad puntana”, reconociendo que los “jóvenes puntanos” poseen sus propios sistemas identitarios y manifestaciones artísticas. Estos serían “una parte esencial en el proceso constante de redefinición de nuestra identidad cultural y nuestra principal fuente de innovación en materia de cultura y creatividad” (Plan Maestro 2013:34). Por ello, el Plan Maestro postula no “tratar a los jóvenes como receptores de políticas sino facilitar los medios para que los jóvenes de la provincia sean protagonistas de su propia realidad cultural.” Para tal fin, promueve una política “que tiene por objetivo



hacer emerger nuevas realidades culturales de la provincia, muchas de las cuales ya existen pero todavía son poco visibles” (2013: 64). A partir del tratamiento que se propone, se reafirma un ordenamiento que ubica a los pueblos indígenas en un pasado originario y a los jóvenes en un futuro, como los encargados de desplegar un desarrollo cultural genuino.

## Gestionar las culturas

Otro de los puntos que subrayo en el Plan Maestro de las Culturas es el énfasis puesto en la protección y producción de patrimonio para “fortalecer” la “identidad puntana.” La constitución del patrimonio cultural tiene una especial relevancia en la construcción de identidades y alteridades (Crespo 2013: 9). Su conformación se desarrolla en un presente atravesado por relaciones de poder, a partir del cual “se reconstruye, se selecciona e interpreta el pasado” (Rosas Mantecón 1998: 5). El pasado se moviliza con la intención de construir continuidad social. Rosas Mantecón señala que la idea de “construcción del patrimonio cobra sentido cuando se considera que el Estado precede a la nación” (1998: 5). Dado que fue desde los círculos dominantes que se propusieron, y se continúan proponiendo, a la comunidad nacional en formación, identidades y memorias que procuran cohesionarla. Para “hacer real esa comunidad”, el patrimonio, junto a la escuela, los medios de comunicación, entre otros, se tornan herramientas cruciales (Rosas Mantecón 1998: 5). En esta línea de interpretación, el factor determinante del patrimonio sería “su capacidad para representar simbólicamente una identidad” (Prats 1997: 22). Esto es lo que permitiría explicar el “cómo y el porqué se movilizan recursos para conservarlo y exponerlo” (Prats 1997: 22).

El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas establece una relación directa entre repertorios culturales, identidad y patrimonio: “cada uno de los repertorios culturales que conforman nuestra identidad provincial están vinculados al patrimonio” (Plan Maestro 2013: 71). Se los detalla en la planificación del siguiente modo:

- El patrimonio material e inmaterial de nuestras culturas originarias, que comprenden el arte rupestre y vestigios arqueológicos como las grutas de Inti Huasi, así como también sus lenguas ancestrales, tradiciones, costumbres, etc.
- El patrimonio material e inmaterial, que es la herencia de nuestra cultura tradicional y folklórica y que incluye bienes culturales como algunos de nuestros museos, la red de casas históricas, el Monumento al Pueblo Puntano de la Independencia y también nuestros mitos, leyendas y cancionero puntano, etc.
- Los testimonios presentes: el patrimonio que aún se está construyendo a partir de nuevas expresiones de nuestra cultura digital y tecnológica, de nuestra cultura joven y otras culturas contemporáneas emergentes (Plan Maestro 2013: 71).

Los “repertorios culturales” enumerados en la planificación se patrimonializan, se constituyen en herencia, en elementos que configurarían a los “puntanos”. Se otorga a estos bienes la capacidad de trascender fracturas sociales (García Canclini 1999: 17) en tanto la sociedad sanluisense se imagina homogénea, sin conflictos y sin accesos desiguales a dichos bienes. Cruces (1998) señala que la idea de patrimonio remite a un doble proceso que, en un primer momento, separa objetos, lugares y expresiones del flujo de la vida social ordinaria para luego, por medio de un trabajo de mediación, tratar de regresarlos a ella, pero “ya codificados, normalizados e interpretados por un trabajo de mediación”. De acuerdo a ello, por ejemplo, las reservas ecológicas se vuelven naturaleza mediada, al igual que las colecciones de los museos son artefactos mediados (Cruces 1998: 76). Esta mirada permite vislumbrar el trabajo de identificación, clasificación y definición de un conjunto de prácticas, costumbres, sitios, paisajes, etc., que se constituyen en “patrimonio material e inmaterial” del

conjunto de la sociedad sanluiseña. Posibilita también visualizar qué se escinde de la configuración nacional como propiamente sanluiseño, al mismo tiempo que contribuye a ubicar como sus portadores a “los puntanos”.

Por medio de esta “intervención mediadora”, el gobierno provincial instituye el patrimonio como herencia, en la misma medida en que busca construir una “autoimagen” de los sanluiseños. Según Cruces, resulta paradójico el hecho de que se asigne a un conjunto de especialistas, legisladores y técnicos “la función de construir y mantener un depósito de conocimientos, documentos, objetos y expresiones que ha de representar la cultura viva del conjunto de la sociedad” (1998: 79). Esta “división” entre quienes administran/investigan y las sociedades en su conjunto como destinatarias a quienes, por definición, pertenece el patrimonio, puede reconocerse en el Plan Maestro de las Culturas. Allí se expresa que el patrimonio cultural y natural de la provincia, en todas sus formas, es “nuestra herencia cultural” y, por tanto, “tenemos el derecho de heredarlo de nuestros antepasados y es por eso que el Estado tiene la responsabilidad de custodiarlo, preservarlo y expandirlo” (Plan Maestro 2013: 69).

En el Plan Maestro se indica que la estrategia a largo plazo de una política patrimonial debe ser “instalar la valoración social del patrimonio cultural, a través de campañas de educación y difusión pública orientadas a transmitir la idea de patrimonio como herencia cultural con función social” (Plan Maestro 2013: 73). A partir de estos fragmentos, advierto una contradicción: los “bienes culturales y naturales” de los sanluiseños se juzgan por su valor intrínseco pero, al mismo tiempo se postula la necesidad de “instalar su valoración social” por medio de acciones pedagógicas. Cabe preguntarse entonces quiénes participan efectivamente en la definición de lo que se considera patrimonio y/o patrimonializable.

Como mencioné anteriormente, en diferentes partes de la planificación se explicita que fue elaborada con asesoramiento de “expertos en política cultural, política pública y planeamiento estratégico” y de “referentes provinciales de la cultura” (Plan Maestro 2023: 160). Además se expone que se realizaron “talleres de planeamiento estratégicos con agentes estatales (2013: 26). Los expertos encargados de formular, ejecutar el plan y brindar conocimientos acerca de la cultura sanluiseña tienen reservado un lugar destacado. Advierto en la planificación una dimensión pedagógica orientada a fortalecer la “identidad puntana”. El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas señala la necesidad de formar “gestores culturales”, “creadores de cultura” y “audiencias”, para generar un “sector cultural dinámico”. Souza Lima (2002) ilumina la unidad etimológica entre “gestar” y “gerir”. *Gestar* remite a una función constitutiva y pedagógica de enseñar a “ser”; y “gerir” alude al control cotidiano en términos administrativos (Souza Lima 2002: 16). Las acciones estatales incluidas en la planificación estarían, de acuerdo a su dimensión pedagógica, “gestando” pasados e identidades, al mismo tiempo que se las gestiona, a partir de la implementación de acciones, proyectos, talleres, etc. estipulados en el plan gubernamental.

Otra dimensión que destaco en la planificación es el vínculo que deberían conservar quienes se encuentran implicados especialmente en la construcción de la “puntanidad” con un pasado local. Según el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas,

la clave para que nuestra identidad puntana continúe produciendo manifestaciones artísticas auténticas a lo largo del tiempo es, sin lugar a dudas, que permanezca fiel a su pasado y que jamás pierda de vista sus raíces ni la fuerza espiritual de sus ancestros (Plan Maestro 2013: 38).

Si bien “todos y cada uno de los habitantes de la provincia formamos parte del proceso de construcción de nuestra identidad, muchos han colaborado de manera especial al definirla o describirla, a través de su accionar en el campo de la ciencia o de las artes” (2013: 38). En estos enunciados visualizo distinciones en torno a quiénes serían los principales encargados de sostener la “identidad puntana”. Recurriendo a las palabras del poeta sanluiseño Antonio Esteban Agüero, se indica que “es precisamente la función de nuestros poetas y cantores custodiar y enaltecer” cada uno de los elementos de “la naturaleza y cultura puntana” y “jamás traicionarlos” (Plan Maestro 2013: 40). Se menciona que si el deber de poetas y cantores sería no traicionar

estas tradiciones “es función del Estado provincial custodiarlos y preservarlos” (2013: 42). Luego se delinear acciones destinadas a promover investigaciones multidisciplinares que “abarquen desde diferentes ángulos el patrimonio, la historia de nuestras fiestas populares o nuestra herencia cultural y los medios de transmisión de la misma” (2013: 42). Se busca “generar ámbitos donde se fomente el pensamiento y la reflexión en torno a nuestras tradiciones, folklore, historias, costumbres populares” tales como: exhibiciones, talleres, charlas, conferencias con artistas e investigadores (2013: 42). También se prevé la creación de

contenidos y programas específicos desde las diferentes áreas de gestión que permitan recuperar, proteger y promover nuestras tradiciones, folklore, historia y costumbres populares, por ejemplo: corredores turísticos, premios, concursos, eventos artísticos, formar profesionales en artes y artesanías folclóricas, danza, músicos, realización de fiestas y festividades locales (Plan Maestro 2013: 42).

En los fragmentos citados resalto cuatro aspectos: en primer lugar, que un pasado provincial adquiere una función de “garante” en la continuidad del nosotros “puntano”, en tanto la fidelidad a ese pasado y la “fuerza espiritual de los ancestros” permitiría seguir produciendo “expresiones artísticas auténticas”. Ese “nosotros” se construye a lo largo de toda la planificación por medio del uso de “nuestras”, “nuestros” para aludir a los elementos que conformarían el patrimonio cultural de los sanluiseños. Otro elemento es la delimitación de la función del Estado –mediante el uso de palabras como recuperar, preservar, proteger, custodiar– y de los principales “creadores de cultura” (poetas, cantores, etc.) a quienes se responsabiliza moralmente en tanto no deberían traicionar los elementos que caracterizarían a la “naturaleza y cultura puntanas”. Junto a la ponderación de recursos técnicos para fortalecer la “identidad puntana”, se predica la “fidelidad al pasado”, el “no traicionarlo”. Se añade una carga moral que convive con nociones vinculadas a la planificación estratégica (eficacia, eficiencia, resultados, etc.).

## **A modo de cierre**

Realizar una lectura del Plan Maestro de Las Culturas que se interesa por los usos de un pasado provincial allí implicados ilumina la importancia que adquiere la dimensión temporal en el diseño de una planificación que se presenta como estratégica. Aunque el plan gubernamental se orienta a delinear metas y objetivos a cumplir, la evocación de un pasado imaginado común ocupa un lugar privilegiado. El Plan Maestro de Las Culturas reúne un conjunto de iniciativas realizadas por los gobiernos provinciales en el área de cultura desde 1983 enfatizando la búsqueda de afianzar la “identidad puntana”. A partir de ello se produce una idea de unidad y coherencia de las acciones estatales.

Considero que examinar usos de un pasado en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas posibilita visualizar la circulación de determinados aspectos que re-producen, en distintos soportes, lo que sería específicamente “puntano” (en expresiones de agentes estatales, normativas, planes de gobierno, obras arquitectónicas y monumentos construidos por el gobierno provincial, además de danzas, estampillas escolares, concursos, celebraciones conmemorativas). Estas reiteraciones contribuyen a instaurar sentidos sobre un pasado provincial. La dispersión de obras, eventos y celebraciones en diversos ámbitos de la geografía provincial ayuda a construir asociaciones entre objetos, paisajes, costumbres, con un modo de ser “puntano”, al designarlos como tales.

Estas acciones gubernamentales favorecen la imaginación de un pasado compartido y contribuyen a formar la idea de que “todo”, en el ámbito provincial, se torna “puntano”. El espacio geográfico (los ríos, las sierras, los poblados, etc.) y las acciones (hablar, vestirse, rezar, etc.) se “puntanizan”. Es decir: cuando en el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas se retoman determinadas acciones gubernamentales del pasado para proyectar acciones futuras, se llevaría adelante un proceso en que aspectos de la vida social se documentan y se tornan “puntanos”. Al mismo tiempo, dichos aspectos, clasificados y ordenados –como patrimonio material e inmaterial, repertorios

culturales, en torno de los cuales se enumeran acciones realizadas y a realizar– sirven para evocar un significado más amplio, un modo de ser “puntano”.

En el plan gubernamental se manifiestan dos formas de operar con el tiempo. Una, vinculada a la lógica de los planes maestros, se relaciona con el cumplimiento de metas y objetivos y con las nociones de eficacia, eficiencia, resultados, desarrollo, proyectos, monitoreo, entre otros. Esta medida del tiempo ayuda a delimitar la acción estatal, la del sector empresarial y la del conjunto social. Y favorece que la planificación y gestión quede en manos de especialistas, quienes serían los encargados de implementarla.

La otra manera de organizar el tiempo alude al lugar relevante que adquiere un pasado en la planificación. Uno de los cometidos principales que persigue el Plan Maestro de Las Culturas es “apuntalar” la “identidad puntana”, para lo cual apela a un tiempo extenso que se remonta al origen, a la etapa fundacional, previa a la organización nacional. En esa narración se produce un ordenamiento socio-temporal, que ubica a los pueblos indígenas en un pasado originario y a los jóvenes, y niños (“puntanos” en formación), en “un futuro”, en el otro extremo del *continuum*.

Para finalizar, el modo en que la planificación se elabora, por un lado, enfatizando la construcción de un “nosotros”; y por otro, expresando a las iniciativas gubernamentales en términos de eficacia y eficiencia, y como resultado del asesoramiento de expertos, produce una invisibilización de lo político, que contribuye a obturar desacuerdos. Cabe preguntarse, al cabo de este recorrido: Si la “puntanidad” existe desde un pasado remoto, ¿a qué tanto trabajo para construirla y conservarla?

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*‘We have arrested one of the fundamental pieces of subversion in the country’:*

The construction of the figure of the *enemy* in police memos of 1975 following the arrest of Marcos Osatinsky

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**Abstract**

In the following article, I investigate the modes of construction of a specific subjectivity in the 1970s in Argentina: the figure of the *enemy* at the onset of the last civic-military dictatorship in the country. To achieve this, I focus on the arrest of Marcos Osatinsky, head of the *Montoneros* organisation, in Córdoba in August 1975. I analyse the how his arrest was handled by the security forces, based on police memoranda that refer to this event, available for consultation in the *Archivo Provincial de la Memoria* [Provincial Memory Archive]. I inquire how the Córdoba police functioned in the 1970s, and how what happened to Osatinsky was reflected in the writing practices of the police through police memos, in order to understand how the figure of the *subversive* was constructed in this handling of the facts.

**Keywords:** Subjectivity, Subversive, Dictatorship, Police.

# *‘Hemos detenido a una de las piezas fundamentales de la subversión en el país’:* La construcción de la figura del “enemigo” en los memos policiales de 1975 tras la detención de Marcos Osatinsky

## Resumen

En el presente artículo indagamos en los modos de construcción de un sujeto específico en la década del 70 en Argentina: la figura del *enemigo* en los albores de la última dictadura cívico militar en el país. Para ello nos centramos en la detención de Marcos Osatinsky, jefe de la organización Montoneros, en agosto de 1975 en Córdoba. Analizamos el tratamiento realizado en torno a su detención por las fuerzas de seguridad a partir de los memos policiales elaborados que refieren a dicho acontecimiento disponibles para su consulta en el Archivo Provincial de la Memoria. Describimos el funcionamiento de la policía de Córdoba en los 70, el modo en que se plasmó lo ocurrido con Osatinsky en las prácticas de escritura de la policía mediante los memos policiales, para comprender así cómo se construía en ese modo de tratamiento de los hechos la figura del *subversivo*.

**Palabras claves:** Sujeto, Subversivo, Dictadura, Policía.

# *‘Prendemos uma das peças fundamentais da subversão do país’:* A construção da figura do *inimigo* nos memorandos policiais de 1975 após a prisão de Marcos Osatinsky

## Resumo

No presente artigo investigamos os modos de construção de uma subjetividade específica na década de 70 na Argentina: a figura do inimigo no alvorecer da última ditadura cívico-militar no país. Para isso, nos concentramos na prisão de Marcos Osatinsky, chefe da organização *Montoneros*, em agosto de 1975 em Córdoba. Analisamos o tratamento dado à sua prisão pelas forças de segurança com base nos memorandos policiais elaborados que se referem ao referido evento disponíveis para consulta no Arquivo Provincial da Memória. Perguntamos sobre o funcionamento da polícia de Córdoba nos anos 70, a maneira como o que aconteceu com Osatinsky se refletiu nas práticas de redação da polícia por meio de memorandos policiais, a fim de entender como essa forma de tratar os fatos a figura do subversivo.

**Palavras-chave:** Subjetividade, Subversiva, Ditadura, Polícia.

# ‘We have arrested one of the fundamental pieces of subversion in the country’:

## The construction of the figure of the enemy in police memos of 1975 following the arrest of Marcos Osatinsky

Lucía Ríos

### **The guerrilla leader: An introduction and a brief profile of Marcos Osatinsky**

The profile of Marcos Osatinsky, as it appears in the *Memorial Virtual Presentes* [Presentes Virtual Memorial] of the *Archivo Provincial de la Memoria* (APM) [Provincial Memory Archive]<sup>1</sup> marks his date of birth on 6 October, 1933, in San Miguel de Tucumán. Married to Sara Solarz, he was a public accountant and had two sons: José and Mario. He joined the Communist Party of Tucumán and then joined the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* [Revolutionary Armed Forces] and the *Montoneros*<sup>2</sup>, the latter was the last organisation of which he was a member. The profile narrates Osatinsky’s first arrest on 29 December, 1970, when he was detained after attempting a *golpe comando* [commando attack]<sup>3</sup>, at the branch of the Bank of Córdoba located on Avenida Fuerza Aérea in the city of Córdoba.

In 1972, Osatinsky participated in the so-called *Fuga de Trelew* [Trelew Escape]<sup>4</sup> and went into exile in Chile and then in Cuba. Upon returning to Argentina, he actively participated in the *lucha revolucionaria* [revolutionary struggle]. Osatinsky was kidnapped on 9 August, 1975, in the Alberdi neighbourhood of the city of Córdoba. He was held captive in the *Centro Clandestino de Detención, Tortura y Exterminio* (CCDTyE) [Clandestine Centre for Detention, Torture and Extermination], *Departamento 2 de Informaciones de la Policía de Córdoba* (D2) [Information Department 2 of the Córdoba Police]. Finally, he was killed on 21 August during a transfer to prison. Subsequently, his corpse was stolen and appeared dynamited, in mid-September 1975.

In the following article, I investigate the modes of construction of a specific subject in the 1970s in Argentina: the *enemigo* [enemy] at the onset of the last civic-military dictatorship in the country. To achieve this, I focus on the arrest of Marcos Osatinsky, head of *Montoneros*, in Córdoba in 1975. I analyse how his detention by the security forces was handled based on public memoranda that refer to this fact, available at the APM. The article focuses on how the Córdoba police functioned in the 1970s and the way in which what happened to Osatinsky was reflected in police writing practices through memoranda, in order to understand how the figure of the *enemigo* was constructed in this handling of the facts. To address these issues, I argue that

1 The *Virtual Memorial Presente* is available on the official website of the *Archivo Provincial de la Memoria* (AMP): <https://apm.gov.ar/apm/portada> Accessed on: 24 Feb. 2022.

2 The *Montoneros* was one of the most important armed organisations in Argentina with regard to the flow of people it mobilised: ‘the organisation of the Peronist left *Montoneros*, whose philosophy was based on a fusion (...) of urban guerrilla tactics with popular struggles of the Peronist Movement’ (Gillespie 2011: 74) Audio-visual record available on Canal Encuentro: <http://encuentro.gob.ar/programas/serie/8071/1050?temporada=1>

3 Besides the use of italics for the proper names of relevant institutions, italics also indicates expressions, phrases, fragments or native terms collected in the field, either from interviewees or the documents analysed.

4 In the early morning of 22 August, 1972, 16 political prisoners detained at the Almirante Zar Naval Air Base, in the city of Trelew, were murdered by members of the Argentine Navy. All were militants of political-militant organisations who had managed to escape from the Rawson prison unit and, when realising it was impossible to escape the country, had surrendered to the armed forces. It is worth mentioning that Mariano Pujadas was also present at this event and was murdered in the *massacre*.

archives, collections and traditions are not given, neutral or static entities, but rather, even in cases of the representation of great power (such as, for example, the national archives in France, or the *Archivo de Indias* [Archive of the Indies] in Spain), they compose sets of specific social relations. (Da Silva Catela 2002: 197)

Thus, unravelling the specific social relations materialised in the documents allows us to investigate not only the state agency at the time of their constitution, but also the agency that these documents possess, from which it is not only possible to reconstruct the modes of signification of subjections and subjects – in this case of a specific criminal subject, the *enemigo* or *subversivo* [subversive] –, but also provide an account of the constitution of the state agents who composed them, entangled in the specific relationships and coordinates of the time.

As documents of the state, and considering that a state exists in part because of what it generates through the very act of writing (Muzzoppappa & Villalta 2011) working on the documentation produced by administrative bureaucracies (in this case, police bureaucracy) transforms it into an ethnographic tool that enables access to one of the ways in which state power is exercised 'in its capacity to transform and generate' (2011: 18). Correspondingly, analysis of this documentation enables us to perceive one of the forms of the state's sovereign exercise through one of its means of the execution of power, generating certain types of subjects that respond to specific socio-political contexts.

Similarly, it is worth noting that this documentation has actuated in the present as *evidence* – including probative evidence in instances of crimes against humanity carried out in Argentina – even when different intrigues of state operations in the 1970s were known, highlighting the relevance of studies on the state in the prolegomena of the dictatorship in intimate relationship with its bureaucracies and administrations (Sarrabayrouse Oliveira 2011; Mora 2008; Villalta 2010).

## The Córdoba Police in 1975 and how the Information Department functioned

This article investigates the documentation produced by the police surrounding the arrest of Osatinsky, considering the agency of the documents and their effects on the construction of a specific subject, the *enemigo* or *subversivo*, and on the constitution of state agents producing such documentation, in a given social and political era.

Therefore, it is important to begin with a definition of a state that facilitates support for these inquiries. The state is understood as

A heterogeneous set of institutions, both ancient and recent, managed and inhabited by agents moulded in strongly corporate and hierarchical modes and habits of work and belonging. They are institutions registered in the long-term, regarding their structures, the constitution and arrangement of the members, and the rules and regulations that organise them. (Tiscornia *et al.* 2014: 49)

Likewise, it is understood that in Latin America and particularly in Argentina, even in periods of dictatorship, the state was constantly linked to forms of the exercise of power where the institutions of repression and control (which form part of the state itself) were concerned with moulding and shaping subjects and domesticating bodies, among other issues. These management and production procedures for restrictions were also encouraged in the preparation and circulation of specific documents, produced to be read within the institution (memos or police memoranda) or to be made known publicly (decrees and regulations).

This is a summons to return to the events that occurred in Córdoba in the late 1960s and early 1970s to account for how the police had a nodal presence in the construction of a particular type of subject, the *enemigo*, as I intend to show in the Osatinsky case.

If there is something that has historically characterised Córdoba in the national imaginary, it is its pre-eminence in the political and social map of Argentina, particularly in the 1960s and 70s. The emergence of the people of Córdoba in the public space, a territory of demonstration, confrontation and conflict resolution (Castells 1986; Žizek 1994; Lynch 1981; Cohen 2002), meant that since the 1960s – particularly after the Cordobazo<sup>5</sup> at the end of the 1960s and the Viborazo<sup>6</sup> in the early 1970s –, repressive forces began to maintain an ever-greater presence in the province.

With an epochal climate marked by riots and confrontations over the exercise of power – and violence – between the different militant organisations and state organs, on 27 February, 1974, the provincial police revolted. Both police and armed civilians took control of the city and began persecuting political and union leaders.

In this context, the then Chief of Police of the Province of Córdoba Navarro<sup>7</sup> arrested Governor Obregón Cano<sup>8</sup> and Vice Governor Atilio López<sup>9</sup> using the argument of 'controlling the forces enrolled in the far left who were going to cause a complete torrent' (Servetto 1999: 107). The condemnation of political disorder fell on the provincial authorities from the national government, who had tolerated the presence of disturbing *elementos* [elements] and had fomented conflict situations (Servetto 1999), causing Córdoba to be viewed as a *foco infeccioso* [infectious focus], a node of the social upheavals of the period (Servetto 2004: 146).

In an interview with a local channel in 1974, Colonel Navarro stated that

I think it was the only thing that could be done at the time. You should know in your capacity as a journalist, that here in Córdoba a plan had been launched to turn Argentina into a socialist homeland, and Córdoba into the capital of the socialist homeland, through the articulations expressed by one of the main organisers of the project, union leader Agustín Tosco<sup>10</sup>.

According to data provided by the APM in the *Registro de Extremistas* [Registry of Extremists]<sup>11</sup>, I found that 1,139 arrests were recorded from 3 February, 1974, to 30 December, 1974. This implies a notable increase in relation to 1973, in which 530 arrests were registered from 1 January, 1973, to 3 February, 1974<sup>12</sup>.

In view of this increase in arrests carried out by the Córdoba Police in 1974, I assume that they established themselves as key actors in the functions of the control and detention of militants, generating in turn management practices over their bodies – through legal and clandestine detentions, interrogations followed by torture (or vice versa) – that signified warning and disciplinary modes for those associated with actions considered *subversive*.

5 The plan initially imposed in 1967 by the Minister of Economy of the Onganía dictatorship, Adalbert Krieger Vasena, had frozen wages and suspended collective bargaining, promising to restore these by the end of 1968. At that time, the promise was not fulfilled. Within a complex socio-economic framework, a general strike was launched for 24 hours in the province, on 30 May, 1969. The police violence that prevented the march of the masses, under the order not to let the protesters reach the centre, generated the first confrontations, the rupture of the initial organisation and the support of numerous social sectors that joined spontaneously, transforming the worker-student protest into a 'popular rebellion' (Gordillo 2019: 20).

6 The Viborazo was configured as a social explosion that occurred in Córdoba in March 1971. A massive protest against Uriburu's appointment as governor led to an urban insurrection. Pontoriero (2019) considers that in the Viborazo – organised by the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* [Revolutionary Workers Party], which becomes one of the targets in the Lacabanne intervention, from September 1974 to September 1975 – a central change was attempted in the repressive methodology, as it had been developed since the mid-1960s, incorporating the use of the armed forces.

7 Lt. Colonel Antonio Navarro led an uprising against the government authorities of the province, Governor Ricardo Obregón Cano and Vice Governor Atilio López, who established the governmental policies of the *Frente Justicialista de Liberación* (FREJULI) [Judicialist Liberation Front].

8 Obregón Cano became governor of Córdoba Province following the elections of March 1973. Constitutionally elected, it was the FREJULI policies that had received the support of the most radicalised sectors of Peronism, the unions and the most combative union leaders.

9 Atilio Lopez became vice-governor of Córdoba Province following the elections of March 1973. He was kidnapped on 16 September, 1974, in the nation's capital, and his body was found riddled with bullets in Capilla del Señor, a city located in the northeast of Buenos Aires Province, together with that of Córdoba's former Undersecretary of the Economy, accountant Juan José Varas.

10 Audio-visual record available on Canal Encuentro, <http://encuentro.gob.ar/programas/serie/8071/1050?temporada=1>

11 Part of the *Fondo de la Policía* [Police Archival Collection] of Córdoba Province, which is currently in the *Archivo Provincial de la Memoria*, is composed of photographic negatives taken between 1964-1992. They portray people detained for political reasons whose names were recorded in a distinct list under the title *Registro de Extremistas*.

12 Data provided by the Área de Investigación [Research Area] of the *Archivo Provincial de la Memoria*.

These processes of population management through control and punishment had their correlates in decrees and regulations. Thus, in September 1974, following the federal intervention of the province and the appointment of Lacabanne<sup>13</sup>, a project was launched that began acquiring characteristics of a systematic plan. In this context, *Decreto Secreto* [Secret Decree] no. 261<sup>14</sup> was signed, which authorised the army to neutralise and annihilate *elementos subversivos* [subversive elements] in the province of Tucumán and which was extended to Córdoba. A few months later, and seeing that the problem of *subversion* was becoming more generalised, another decree by the *Poder Ejecutivo Nacional* [Executive Branch], no. 2770/1975 of 6 October, 1975, constituted the *Consejo de Seguridad Interior y el Consejo de Defensa* [Internal Security Council and the Defence Council] (Ortiz 2019)<sup>15</sup>.

## The panorama changes, repressive practices harden: The arrival of Telleldin at the D2

Since mid-1975, kidnappings, detentions and torture began to multiply. Mentions of acts of violence became recurrent in the newspapers of Córdoba, with headlines such as: 'Serious acts of terrorist violence became clear in Córdoba'<sup>16</sup>, 'Two dead in confrontation in Chacras de la Merced'<sup>17</sup>, 'Panic in the city. Two policemen killed in extremist attack'<sup>18</sup>, 'In dramatic shootout three guerrillas died, two policemen wounded'<sup>19</sup>, 'Deep grief at funeral of 5 policemen killed by extremists'<sup>20</sup>, 'New shootings in the city: One policeman & one extremist killed'<sup>21</sup>, 'Body found with bomb and bullet mutilations identified'<sup>22</sup>, 'Body of man who was kidnapped identified'<sup>23</sup>.

In the brief articles referred to, no details were spared when recounting how the bodies were found and several of them contained images of the faces of the murdered or their names and ages. As October 1975 approached, images of faces that referred to people's identities (Le Breton 2008) began to disappear. Deaths were counted, but not explained. The press considered them understandable and justified. It was unnecessary to identify the culprits since those killed were responsible for their own deaths and deserved to die for the good of society (Gamarnik 2017: 25-26).<sup>24</sup>

The mention of police, *guerrilleros* [guerrillas] and *extremistas* [extremists] as the protagonists of acts of violence enabled an account of the diversity of actors who made use of violence at the local level in 1975, while disputing the legitimacy of its exercise by both sides, in a rupture of civilisational contracts (Elías 2000) The presence of armed organisations, para-statal and para-police commandos and the different modes of violence by the state, helped devise this rationalisation. What was now in dispute was who exercised violence and its meanings. But what about the state police forces?

According to the data provided by the APM in the *Registro de Extremistas*, the arrests administratively referenced in the D2 began to increase in 1975 in relation to 1974, and even in relation to 1976. The data indicate

13 Raúl Oscar Lacabanne was an Argentine military officer of the Air Force, appointed Federal Controller of Córdoba from 7 September, 1974, to 19 September, 1975.

14 *Decreto Secreto* 261/1975 of the *Poder Ejecutivo Nacional* [Executive Branch]. Available at: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/decreto-261-1975-210287#:~:text=Resumen%3A,EN%20LA%20PROVINCIA%20DE%20TUCUMAN>. Accessed on: 25 May, 2023.

15 Decree reproduced in Portugheis (2012). Available at: [https://es.wikisource.org/wiki/Decreto\\_2770/75\\_\(Argentina\)](https://es.wikisource.org/wiki/Decreto_2770/75_(Argentina)). Accessed on: 15 October, 2023.

16 *Diario Córdoba*, edition 8 August, 1975. CISPREN newspaper library consulted on 5 July, 2022.

17 *Diario Córdoba*, edition 9 August, 1975. CISPREN newspaper library consulted on 5 July, 2022.

18 *Diario Córdoba*, edition 20 August, 1975. CISPREN newspaper library consulted on 5 July, 2022.

19 *Diario Córdoba*, edition 22 August, 1975. CISPREN newspaper library consulted on 5 July, 2022.

20 *Diario Córdoba*, edition 22 August, 1975. CISPREN newspaper library consulted on 5 July, 2022.

21 *Diario Córdoba*, edition 23 August, 1975. CISPREN newspaper library consulted on 5 July, 2022.

22 *Diario Córdoba*, edition 6 October, 1975. CISPREN newspaper library consulted on 5 July, 2022.

23 *Diario Córdoba*, edition 20 October, 1975. CISPREN newspaper library consulted on 5 July, 2022.

24 Gamarnik states that 'quantitatively, one of the most used strategies to refer to "subversion" was the use of headlines with the absence of images. Newspapers and magazines were filled daily with headlines announcing "elements killed", "extremists dead", "corpses found", "subversive criminals", with no photographs showing who, were dehumanisation strategies par excellence adopted by the mass press' (Gamarnik, 2017: 25-26).

that for the year 1975, 1254 arrests were recorded from 1 January 1975 to 29 December 1975, exceeding the figures for 1974, while from 1 January 1976 to 29 December 1976, 747 arrests were recorded<sup>25</sup>.

In August 1975, Commissioner Telleldin took charge of D2. Telleldin was charged with incorporating both police personnel and civilians belonging to the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* (AAA)<sup>26</sup> into the repressive structure that was being set up. From that point on, the police brigades operated in coordination with operational groups of Detachment 141, under the command of Héctor Pedro Vergez. The members of both agencies gave rise to the *Comando Libertadores de América* [Liberators of America Command], which acquired a notorious presence given an exponential growth in murders and the number of victims, highlighting the treachery of the acts carried out, as well as the exhibition and the signature (Segato 2013) regarding the events that gained notoriety in the public space.

The Córdoba Province Department of Information D2 – historically linked to political persecution in the 1950s and 60s, and more systematically from 1972 onwards – was located on Pasaje Santa Catalina in the city of Córdoba, where the APM and the *Comisión Provincial de la Memoria* [Provincial Commission of Memory] are currently located.

Córdoba Province *Decreto del Poder Ejecutivo* [Executive Branch Decree] no. 1047/72, issued by Rear Admiral Guozden, sought to regulate the *organisation and functioning of the Police Information Department*. The purpose of D2 was to *collect, process and disseminate all activity that enables them to understand the real situation of criminal organisations operating in the province*.<sup>27</sup> This decree organised the police personnel of D2 into divisions and sections whose purpose was to obtain and manage information in different areas.

The paradox of this space is that it was established in 1975 as a CCDTyE, while retaining its character as a state dependency and, in some manner, public; a place where citizens sought protection, shelter, characteristics that the police conventionally present (Sirimarco 2017; Tiscornia 1999). This mention not only accounts for the dual nature of the space, but also of those who composed it. The dual nature, legal and clandestine, of state agents who fulfilled functions related to control, as its armed wing, while exercising repressive illegal practices as members of the brigades commanded by Vergez.

Regarding the functioning of D2 during those years, one of the voices that allows us to understand it is that offered by Charlie Moore in an interview conducted by Miguel Robles, published in the book *La Búsqueda* [lit. The Search] (2010). A former member of the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* [People's Revolutionary Army], who spent 6 years sequestered by D2 – from 1974 to 1980 – Moore knew how it worked in detail<sup>28</sup>.

Moore reported that during his work at D2 there were different categories of political prisoners. At the time of admission, if a person was subjected to a summary, they automatically became a *detenido* [detainee]. Although being a *detainee* did not guarantee survival, it meant a halo of hope since the summary implied a search, a bureaucratic trail that could imply entry into the legal system, then they remained available to the justice system. If the person was not prosecuted and therefore there was no record of their detention, then they were a *prisionero* [prisoner]. As the dictatorship loomed, irregularities within the institution deepened, such

25 Data provided by the research area of the *Archivo Provincial de la Memoria*.

26 *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* [Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance], created by José Ignacio López Rega while at the *Ministerio de Bienestar Social* [Ministry for Social Welfare].

27 Information obtained from the *Archivo de Documentos Emilia Villares de D'Ambra* [Document Archive] available at: <https://apm.gov.ar/archivosdelarepresion/organizacion-y-funcionamiento-del-departamento-de-informaciones-policiales/> Accessed on 18 July, 2022. Also available at the *Reglamento Organico del Dpto. Informaciones Policiales* (R.O.D.I.P. - R.R.O.P.5) [Organic Regulation of the Police Information Department]: <http://www.saij.gov.ar/553-local-chaco-reglamento-organico-dpto-informaciones-policiales-rodip-rrop-5-h19710000553-1971-12-22/123456789-oabc-355-0000-1791hvorpced?&o=1&f=Total%7CFecha/1971%5B20%2C1%5D%7CEstado%20de%20Vigencia/Derogada%7CTema/Defensa%20y%20seguridad%7COrganismo%7CAutor%5B25%2C1%5D%7CJurisdicci%F3n/Local%7CTribunal%5B5%2C1%5D%7CPublicaci%F3n%5B5%2C1%5D%7CColecci%F3n%20tema%Etica%5B5%2C1%5D%7CTipo%20de%20Documento/Legislaci%F3n&t=10> Accessed on 18 July, 2022.

28 In this regard, Da Silva Catela (2014) states that 'Charlie Moore is an "uncomfortable" presence in the memory of police repression in Córdoba. Militant of the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP), his person detonates simplistic analyses concerning the recent past (...) the history of the Córdoba Police Information Department – D2 from 1974 to 1978 – would be difficult to tell if the controversial and ambiguous "character" called Charlie Moore were not included' (p. 38).

that ever-greater number of *prisioneros* were *detained* and the number registered in state documents decreased. At this point it is relevant to consider that

bureaucratic practices and tasks reflect the capacity of the organisation of groups and sectors, and are the form of expression and communication of politics, the materialisation of legal norms and the embodiment of the structures of limitation of absolute power, of an authority capable of knowing and resolving everything. (Di Liscia & Soprano 2017: 9)

In this sense, bureaucracies organise the administrative practices, groups, sectors and, with them, specific ways of being in the world where each subject structured in a certain way corresponds to a specific place and, sometimes, a previously determined destiny.

It is understood that these modes of management and generation of subjects were characterised by a process where the passage from *detenido* to *prisionero* meant a transition from 'visibilisation' to 'invisibilisation' (Foucault 1971) between 1975 and 1976, implying its correlate in the documentation produced in the system that certain subjects had or did not have. In 1975, procedures still existed that enabled what happened to certain people to be made visible: they were arrested – which established a way of *blanqueo*<sup>29</sup> [lit. laundering] where someone who had passed through a clandestine space was moved to a place where there was a record of detention (Montero 2019) – and then released or killed in an *intento de fuga* [escape attempt] or in a planned *enfrentamiento* [confrontation]. This process continued to give way to the 'invisibilisation' of these people through the figure of the disappeared (Gatti 2011; Da Silva Catela 2001; Calveiro 2004).

Thus, I argue that the bureaucratic practices analysed contributed not only to the processes of the state's management of people's lives through specific forms of control, but also enabled a 'visibility' that corresponds to what is sayable – in this case materialised in the writing, in the registry of detained persons – and that is determined in the narrative possibilities of that which is observed. Indeed, it constructs that which is observed in the way it is named: they were detained for being *subversive*.

### ***The arrest of one of the fundamental pieces of subversion in the country: Osatinsky's arrest in August 1975***

Ortiz (2019) performed an exhaustive analysis of the *Memorándums y Radiogramas de la Policía Federal Argentina* [Memoranda and Radiograms of the Argentine Federal Police] based in Córdoba that are digitised in the APM. This documentary corpus was produced between 1974 and 1982. Included among these documents is information that circulated internally regarding army and police procedures on everything considered to be *subversion*: from the background records of political detainees to the activities of parties, student organisations and unions (Ortiz 2019).

Ortiz argues that certain practices in documentary production have been maintained since the 1950s. For example, the structure of the memoranda of the documentary collection analysed, in its *monthly panorama* organised by *factors* (political, union, economic, etc.) repeated this systematic practice in the bureaucratic generation of intelligence (Ortiz 2019: 145). On the one hand, this bureaucratic action speaks to us concerning the interests of state agents, that is, knowing in detail certain *factors* in order to have a complete picture of where and how to act. On the other hand, the narrative modes present in the memoranda enable an account of the way in which these bureaucratic practices acquired their own agency when defining and shaping certain subjects and practices of subjection in Córdoba in the 1970s, as becomes evident in the Osatinsky case.

<sup>29</sup> The practice by which someone who is illegally detained goes through some form of administrative processing in order to make the entire process appear legal. A close equivalent in English is probably the documentation process involved in laundering money from illicit sources.



Regarding the structure of the memoranda, the header has a stamp that says *RESERVADO* [EYES ONLY] and below this the title of the document reads: *MEMORANDO del jefe de la delegación Córdoba al jefe de la Dirección General del Interior* [MEMORANDUM from the head of the Córdoba delegation to the head of the General Directorate of the Interior], that is, who sends it to whom – it could also be a Deputy Commissioner or someone else, and their personal names are almost never indicated. The data of the place, the date and document number follow. Immediately below is a brief reference concerning what it is about, and then the body of the text with the shared information.

The documentation worked is available in the research area of the APM<sup>30</sup>, according to the route that a series of documents must take when entering the institution. In regard to this, María, the APM director, in an interview conducted on 15 December, 2021, that took place in her office, stated that when the staff found the documentary material, in some cases it required someone from the judiciary to accompany them in the search and withdrawal of the documentation, while in others, this dynamic was not necessary. The former occurred numerous times when touring police stations in Córdoba, where police personnel were reluctant to deliver the requested documentation. ‘Institutions are people too’, María stated. Thus, more than to the letter of the law, the modes of access to documents and permits were also subject to the names and surnames of the actors in charge of these spaces, considering that the network of personal relationships certainly becomes a structural factor of what may or may not be possible in certain places (Sarrabayrouse Oliveira 1999).

It is also important to emphasise that these documents are constituted as sources of power, not only due to their agency in the formation of types of subjects, but also because they configure a space in the dispute of meanings, acquiring relevance as evidentiary documentation (Da Silva Catela 2007; Muzzopappa & Villalta 2011). The documents then enter into a double juxtaposed configuration, in which they are constructed through power relations, while also being a constitutive vector of those same relations. It is based on this that, in part, it becomes possible to think about the powers of transformation and agency that these documents possess (Muzzopappa & Villalta 2011).

On one occasion when I arrived at the research area to consult with Ana, one of the staff, concerning the Osatinsky documents, she replied, ‘Ah, you mean the *victim’s folder*<sup>31</sup>, which was striking to me since I had never heard of these folders. When I asked María about it, in her interview, she told me:

The *victims’ folders*.... uh... For example, we gave a person his photo and his [extremist] registry book (...) and then for whatever reason that person needed the documentation again and all the work had to be done over, so we began to put together what are now these *victim folders* and that’s when the criteria began to shift. I’m going to tell you things that are obvious, but that, in the dark, were not so obvious. Disappeared, one thing. Murdered, something else. Former political prisoner, something else again. Survivor of a clandestine concentration centre, another. Politically persecuted, yet another. That’s how the *victims’ folders* were pieced together. (Interview recorded 15 December 2021. APM)

In Osatinsky’s case, the documents that compose his *victim folder*, named ‘Osatinsky Schlosberg Marcos’ are digitised in their entirety. Inside this folder, I found the following subfolders:

30 The research area is a large office located on the second floor of the APM, where there are three offices, a bathroom, and an archive in which APM documentation that has not yet been digitized is located, in better conservation conditions. Among other things, this is the area that provides information to both researchers and relatives of disappeared people or former political prisoners, by filling out a form that is delivered by APM workers, and which involves searching for information on them or others in the contexts of illegal detention and disappearance, as well as generating documentation that enables you to request that the state execute the reparatory laws sanctioned in the first instance during the government of President Carlos Menem (1989-2000).

31 According to Sarti (2011), the modern figure of the victim constitutes a framework for the interpretation and intelligibility of suffering, a powerful element in identity-based social movements as they generate identification in those who perceive this suffering through the story. In this regard, the reading provided by Tello (2012) is interesting in reference to the fact that the idea of victim has been configured since resuming the idea of innocence.

Folder docket 03967

- Contains 41 scanned images

Folder docket R576 by Emilio Casas

- Contains 3 images

Journal folder

- Contains 3 newspaper clippings

Photo folder

- Contains 2 photos

Folder with infantry archives

- Contains 2 files

Folder with Osatinsky's identity docket 1021

- Contains 10 files

Memo folder

- Contains 21 images

Memos folder – Osatinsky

- *Juventud Universitaria Peronista* [Peronist University Youth] actions subfolder
- Fall subfolder
- Panorama August 1975 subfolder (contains 21 files)
- Corpse theft subfolder
- Requested murder subfolder (contains 5 files)

Morgue folder

- Morgue subfolder 15 Oct 1975
- Morgue subfolder Osatinsky Marcos

Osatinsky folder - Jewish community book

- Contains 1 image

Police Record folder

- Contains 4 images

Internet pages folder

- Human rights: Osatinsky's remains identified
- Revolutionary Armed Forces
- Index 2006 Aug 22
- Osatinsky - Cepeda
- Interview with Santucho
- Tribune newspaper

#### Extremist Registry folder

- Subfolder 26055
- Subfolder 50893 - Marcos Osatinsky

For this article I concentrated particularly on the police memos folder<sup>32</sup>.

The memos folder consists of 21 scanned images that show general procedures – I would say, daily procedures – in the actions of the D2 police<sup>33</sup>. It is interesting to reflect that accessing today documents that provide an account of the state bureaucracies of the 1970s becomes a gateway to become acquainted with specific modes of government management in a context of pre-dictatorship, based on the trails constituted by these writings. Modes that might otherwise be impossible for us to understand. At this point, it seems less important to consider that the act of administrative management itself generates the trail that enables an accounting of that act, objectively situating this procedure in the same configuration and existence of the document.

The memo prepared by Deputy Commissioner Oscar Horacio Gómez consists of eight pages, which is extremely atypical for the time, given that the memos did not usually exceed one side of a page. It is dated 11 August, 1975. In it Osatinsky is mentioned as *una de las piezas fundamentales de la subversión en el país* [one of the fundamental pieces of subversion in the country] and it narrates his arrest in the first week of August 1975.

The page on which the event is described bears a blue seal in the centre of the top of the sheet on which it reads *estrictamente confidencial y secreto* [strictly confidential and secret]. A line below reads: *subversive daily panorama at the local level, place: Córdoba, origin: own media*. The event is narrated as follows:

As stated in the previous report, personnel of Police Information Dept. II of Córdoba Province, recently dismantled an important *célula extremista* [extremist cell] that operated in the capital city, following successful procedures that were fulfilled in the last days of the first week of August and that culminated in the discovery of a *people's jail* and the arrest of one of the fundamental *piezas de la subversión* in the country, within the *Montoneros* organisation. This is Marcos Osatinsky (...) he is arrested by a police commission that had prepared a '*ratonera*' [lit. rat trap] waiting for the suspected *extremistas*.

As Ortiz (2019) states, these types of records based on the figure of their *medios propios* [own media] are evidence of the infiltration that the intelligence services had in these areas, mentioning that the data were obtained from *informantes* [informants] who carried out *auscultaciones* [eavesdropping]. There is also information collected from *journalistic* and *police media*, which in many cases were combined with the previous medias.

In the same mode, I dwell on the 'discursive formula' (Foucault 1971; Tiscornia & Sarabayrouse Oliveira 2004) *estrictamente confidencial y secreto* that repeats throughout the memos analysed. This narrative structure marks the boundary between those who can access information and those who cannot; it is especially used to avoid interference from other state bureaucracies (Muzzopappa 2018). Thus, this management of information, the power to of knowing it, can also be thought of as a framework in the disputes between various administrative and political actors concerning the production, use and access of information. Not all state agents would have access to the same information, nor would they be able to access it to the same extent, thus demarcating internal divisions and hierarchies in the same bureaucratic frameworks.

32 One of the issues that should be considered in the profuse production of provisions and rules of police procedure involves heeding that: 'if anything distinguishes the writings that the police produce on an institutional basis, it is the type of knowledge that is displayed in them. There is a constant tension between the possibility of setting rules in writing and the impossibility of putting them into practice. [...] Police knowledge transits a liminal space, a territory of negotiation between the codified and the discretionary, a being between the rigidity of the written norm and the urgencies of practice. And that between should not be understood as a passage, but as an ontological condition of the police' (Galeano 2009: 50-51).

33 These documents would undoubtedly be extremely powerful for analysing the daily life of the Córdoba police's *Comando Radioeléctrico* – a police unit that had mobile radio communication. However, nothing specific appears there in relation to the *arrest* of Marcos Osatinsky. Despite this, they enable reflections on the general writing methods of the Command at that time.

The body of the memo mentions *waiting for suspected extremists*, where the *extremistas* were *suspected* and the waiting was due to the suspicion that a certain event occurred there, referring to the modes of preventive action typical of intelligence actions. The description of the space is also noteworthy: *on a street in a peripheral city neighbourhood, with no street lighting and in precarious conditions that could well have been identified as a hide-out*. There are constant references in the memos of *dark places, dirty alleys, prisons and hide-outs, filthy spaces*, in direct association with the territories where people defined as *subversivos* were found, together with elements that were linked to them: *red flags, communist books, lanterns and sleeping bags, ropes*. This descriptive mode in the story presumably constructed a specific territory that the subjects considered *subversivos* inhabited, while the modes of relationship established between these places, these people and the normative frameworks that made them differentiated subjects, were linked to exercises of violence (Segato 2013; Colombo 2017; Meloni Gonzalez 2019), in which these places ended up being the scene of an arrest, a *confrontation*, or a murder. Thus, it is possible to conjecture that the relative agency of the documentation referred both to the construction of subjects and to specific territories that acted as a whole when defining, nominating and cataloguing types of subjects – a type of criminal subject, the *enemigo* or *subversivo* –, in order to then proceed on the basis of how they were constructed, made visible, narrated.

The notion of territory can also be contemplated by considering the presence of the *Comando Radioeléctrico* (CRE) in 1975. In this regard, Paiaro (2016) mentions that the CRE was formed under direct dependence of the Police Headquarters to carry out surveillance in the city and its surroundings, with the novelty that radio (medium and long range) was incorporated into the car in order to turn the CRE into an agile patrol service in the urban space that was in continuous communication (p. 50).

The memo contained *an addition to the previous report with details and number of weapons seized* on August 10, 1975, in which the origin of the information was: *own media and local police* and it is signed by Deputy Commissioner Oscar Horacio Gómez. It reads,

This body advances the procedures carried out by the staff of the Dept. Police Information of the Córdoba Police, which culminated in the arrest of one of the top *extremista* leaders, Marcos Osatinsky, and the discovery of a 'people's jail'.

While in the memo of August 11, 1975, located in the *Fall* subfolder, I found the following reference:

This is how the arrest of one of the *piezas fundamentales de la subversión* in the country occurred, within the *Montoneros* organisation. To wit, Marcos Osatinsky, Argentine, son of Jacobo and Sara Schlesberg, born on 15 October, 1933, married.

In this writing, the mention of the names of Osatinsky's parents is striking. This point is not minor considering that the anti-Semitic practices that led to the shaping of specific criminal actions in Nazism in Europe, provided ideological elements, meanings and practices, including anti-Semitism, in the execution of the last Argentine civil-military dictatorship (Rafecas 2021). An anti-Semitism that was becoming evident in the years prior to the dictatorship, according to the testimonies of the victims provided in the Megacausa La Perla<sup>34</sup>, and that was not alien to the consideration of the Jewish origins of Osatinsky and his wife Sara Solarz (Canosa & Kahan 2021)<sup>35</sup>.

34 Known as *La Megacausa La Perla* [lit. The La Perla Mega-cause], it began in November 2012 in the city of Córdoba. The name reflects the magnitude of the trial, in which the sentencing was read on 25 August, 2016, and which included a large number of names of victims, witnesses and plaintiffs. This case brought together the cases of 416 victims among the murdered, disappeared and survivors. The majority passed through La Perla, one of the largest clandestine detention centres in the country, although there were also cases of captivity in the Campo de la Ribera Clandestine Centres, the Police Information Department D2 (in its successive headquarters), and the *Casa de Hidráulica* and *Puesto Caminero*, in the town of Pilar. The majority of the 45 accused repressors were Army members, including officers, non-commissioned officers and civil intelligence personnel, as well as provincial police officers. Members of the *gendarmérie* and the Air Force were also charged.

35 The work by Canosa and Kahan (2021) reports that Osatinsky and Solarz met when they were young at a local Jewish social club, linked to the non-Zionist left. Sara was two years younger than him and her family was of Polish origin, with a leftist tradition and had been decimated during the First World War. Her maternal grandfather had been a rabbi, while her parents were decidedly atheists and communist sympathizers; in fact, they collaborated with the local party headquarters. Besides the religious issue, Sara remembers that during her childhood, practices typical of Jewish culture were preserved in her home, such as the celebration of certain festivals, food or language (p.154).

In the memo of 12 August, 1975, which references a *daily subversive panorama at the local level*, it states that:

Marcos Osatinsky, with the same affiliation data, was arrested by Córdoba police officers. The deceased, together with other members of the ERP [People's Revolutionary Army], assaulted the branch of the Bank of Córdoba on Av. Fuerza Aérea Argentina, 1200. In August 1972, he escaped from Rawson prison, fled to the Republic of Chile and from there to Cuba. He was granted amnesty on 25 May, 1973, by the former government of Dr. Cámpora. It should be noted that *elementos* like Mario Roberto Santucho and other *extremistas*, considered *piezas fundamentales* within the guerrilla actions in the Argentine territory, participated in his escape from prison.

The reference to people as *piezas* or *elementos* is reminiscent of the proposal made by Calveiro (2004) that the operation of semantic and syntactic replacement to avoid using certain words by resorting to others, 'to a certain extent reconciles a dehumanisation of the victims and with a reassuring objective that endows the actions carried out by the repressive forces with innocence' (p. 24-25)<sup>36</sup>. This raises the questions: does the agency of documentation only produce effects of subjection/subjectivation? Or can it also do the opposite, de-subjectify, objectify?

Together with the argument made by Calveiro that these terms were intended to dehumanise, I also find it relevant to highlight that these forms of naming, which on first reading seem to be of a quasi-ontological order – the subject that happens to be constituted as an object –, refer rather to the operation that enables the justification of the atrocities committed, and that makes the construction of a 'framework' possible (Butler 2009) in which things and people that are contemplated by the norm are demarcated, as well as those who are not. As *piezas* of the *guerrillero* network, they become the object of persecution, in the practices of police documentation they are determined as *enemigos a aniquilar* [enemies to annihilate].

The way in which the figure of the *enemigo*, the *subversivo*, the *extremista* was constructed, named and circulated in the terms set forth above, constituted both part of the process of repression and the political framework before and during the last civic-military dictatorship, and its condition of possibility, proposing the existence of a particular other, an *enemigo* to be *eliminated*, because this other is *subversivo*, *extremista*, *terrorista*, *guerrillero*, or because this other is a *pieza* and/or an *elemento* in all of the above. This infers that, in specific contexts, the exercise of state power intimately linked to its management and government capacity, was based on bureaucratic and administrative practices that participated in the configuration of the conditions of possibility of that which could be said, named, seen and executed during that period.

The police memo of 21 August, 1975, reports that as a result of *the attack on the police station on Wednesday, 20 August, tranquillity returns to the city because the Security Forces, for this reason, adopted strict measures to prevent incidents in order to maintain public order*. Here, the demarcation of *we/others* not only implies a relationship of interdependence in a militarised territory, in which an antagonistic process of forces prevails through violence, but also in that this interrelation certain moral territories are constructed where places like *police stations* should be protected, because they are inhabited by those in charge of caring for the moral order of the public space from the attacks by *extremistas*. The call for *public order* contained in the memo again enables us to infer that there is a construction of moral hierarchies where the other takes on a specific meaning, either as an ally – the *city* as a reference to civil society – or as the *enemigo* – those who cause the *attack*.

The characteristics articulated in the memos to define subjects like Osatinsky, implied a type of relationship with different moral forms, which enabled or denied the use of force (Garriga Zucal 2010: 76). The actions of

<sup>36</sup> In this regard, Calveiro (2004) highlights that 'the use of language is significant, avoiding certain words by replacing them with others: in the camps there is no torture, there is "interrogation", therefore the torturers are simply "interrogators". There is no killing, there is "*manda para arriba*" [sending up] or "*se hace la boleta*" [the ticket is made]. There is no kidnapping, there is "*chupa*" [sucked]. There are no cattle prods, there are "*máquinas*" [machines]; there is no suffocation, there are "*submarinos*" [submarines]. There are no collective massacres, there are "*traslados*" [transfers], "*cochecitos*" [prams], "*ventiladores*" [fans]' (p. 24).

the *guerrilleros* and *terroristas* justified the use of violence. As Police Chief Navarro said, 'I think it was the only thing that could be done at that time...'<sup>37</sup>.

In the memo of August 13, 1975, whose reference states: *subversive daily panorama at the local level*, we find the following story:

All those named were taken to Information Department II to investigate *subversive activities*, where they are currently housed, stating that in said procedure, no *elementos* that violate urgent legal norms were seized.

The D2 was not only the place of Marcos Osatinsky's arrest, but also constituted a nodal space in the repressive scheme of Córdoba Province.

### The last resting place. Osatinsky's passage through D2

In Robles' interview with Moore, he asked him about Osatinsky's arrest, given that by then he was in D2:

I don't remember how it happened, but they did raid a home and grabbed the full address. But here it's not about Osatinsky, Mendizábal, or the other five they had in the other piece. The most complicated thing for *Montoneros* was the amount of documentation they seized. It was a lot and extremely valuable. (Robles 2010: 120)<sup>38</sup>

It is interesting to note that the objectives of the repressive forces, who at this point are recognised as state agents producing documentation, were both the people and the documentation, that is, the search for information, since that would enable them to understand the *enemigo* in order to *annihilate them*, consistent with intelligence practices that were operating at the time (Ortiz 2019; Ranalletti 2007).

Moore continues his account of the arrest and the days Osatinsky spent in D2:

Finally, as I told you, Mendizábal was able to get out. And Osatinsky was transferred to prison, but his days were numbered. Everyone in D2 knew what his fate was going to be. At that point, the idea of preparing a summary was already half outdated, because they went out to kill everyone. But they made a summary and placed him at the disposition of the justice system, of Federal Court no. 1 because Zamboni Ledesma was there. And with Zamboni Ledesma, they knew they were going to get the *transfer* order. And in the process, the feigned escape and murder of Osatinsky, as eventually occurred. (Robles 2010: 121)

It is interesting to see how, in the Osatinsky case, the bureaucratic record is present in the generation of a summary, but the result is the same: to forge a procedure to assassinate him within the framework of an alleged *confrontation*. In fact, in the aforementioned *Registro de Extremistas*, I found two images of Osatinsky, front and profile, with the entry log into D2. Likewise, Osatinsky has a police file which provides an account of the robbery at the branch of the Bank of Córdoba, as well as specifying his transfer to Rawson prison dated 8 September, 1971.

Thus, it could be argued that certain people who held particular political views of relevance, like Marcos Osatinsky, deserved treatment that *blanqueó* [lit. laundered] their condition, despite an inevitable fate. In this sense, it is interesting to see how the same tools that could be used within legal frameworks – the arrest of someone who might present a record which leads to an arrest – were also available for illegal procedures by repressive forces, thus generating a sample of the sovereign power of the state (Foucault 2003, 2008; Mbembe 2019).

37 Audio-visual record available on Canal Encuentro. <http://encuentro.gob.ar/programas/serie/8071/1050?temporada=1>.

38 Horacio Mendizábal was one of the *Montoneros* commanders and, according to Moore, someone of higher rank in the organisation than Marcos Osatinsky. During torture carried out by 'Captain Vargas', the pseudonym of Héctor Pedro Vergez, Osatinsky managed to convince him that he was the head of the regional organisation. Mendizábal was transferred to Buenos Aires, where some time later he managed to escape from his captors. It is interesting to note that in the *a posteriori* accounts concerning this event – testimonies, left-wing newspapers – the event is narrated as *before being murdered, he saved the lives of Mendizábal and other comrades, he decided to give his life to save a comrade*, reinforcing an image of Osatinsky as a hero.

## Conclusions

For the execution of the so-called 'ideological cleansing' (Servetto 2004) in the country, and particularly in Córdoba, it was essential to provide the Provincial Police with a series of powers that became necessary for this armed wing of the state to be established as the *de facto* executing arm, appointing Héctor García Rey<sup>39</sup>, who was a member of the Federal Police and who by then had already been linked – as a member – to the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*<sup>40</sup>.

This fact becomes relevant when considering the way in which people belonging to the legal frameworks of the state, such as the police force, also acquired a double identity. Thus, they were part of a para-police and para-statal organisation also composed of members of the security forces at that time, under the direction of López Rega<sup>41</sup> of the *Ministerio de Bienestar Social* [Ministry for Social Welfare]. As I have mentioned, this shows the dual nature, legal and clandestine, both of the state and of the administrators who formed part of it.

In the article, I discussed specific questions concerning the Córdoba Police during the period studied, concentrating on the elaboration of police memos, thus providing some insight into the treatment of Osatinsky's arrest based on police narratives present in the memos available in his *victim folder*. In this analysis, I was able to address certain questions regarding how they were configured based on the documentation produced by police bureaucracy, documentation understood as a locus of meanings that materialised relationships, meanings and specific practices, the territories and subjects determined to be *subversivo and extremista*, together with the interwoven constructed moralities – instructive and disciplinary – that the police force carried out in their mode of recounting the facts surrounding Osatinsky's arrest.

As a corollary, it is worth pointing out that, based on this work on the police memos, it can be assumed that the management of the exercises of control, torture and repression before the last civic-military dictatorship in Argentina, more specifically in Córdoba and in 1975, generated particular modes of relationships between the subjects and territories. The official communiqués and dispositions generated norms and practices of subjection in which everything that threatened the system deserved to remain in a space constructed as *marginal* and the people who inhabited it became a differential category – their bodies and lives despised – at the mercy of the exercise of violence arranged against these populations. These events necessarily implied the formation of a police version that had the desired 'effects of truth' (Foucault 1971), through which the action and its possible consequences was justified.

These subjects who were established in relation to certain territories considered marginal, due to both their spatial, material and geographical descriptions, and because they were presented as 'outside' the normative and moral frameworks constructed during the decade – *people's prison, dark, alleys, poor sectors*. Thus, in the years prior to the last civic-military dictatorship, a process was configured using the same administrative and bureaucratic practices of the state seen in the elaboration of police memos, a process to establish a *social order* in parallel to a mode of constructing, defining and transiting through the urban space – the patrols of the *Comando Radioeléctrico* – consistent with the descriptions of these *enemigos*.

During 1975, the process of criminalisation also involved the production of documents by repressive forces of the state and was exercised on those subjects constructed as such within the same management and

39 Rey was appointed in 1974, as soon as the Lacabanne intervention takes place. Rey came from directing the Tucumán Police, where he had already been denounced for torture.

40 Here, I recommend the work of María Eugenia Marengo entitled '*Lo aparente como real: Un análisis del sujeto "comunista" en la creación y consolidación del servicio de inteligencia de la policía de la Provincia de Buenos Aires (1930-1962)*' [The apparent as real: An analysis of the 'communist' subject in the creation and consolidation of the police intelligence service of Buenos Aires Province (1930-1962)] (2015) in order to understand the manner in which the figure of the communist subject was constituted in the country.

41 José López Rega was private secretary of Juan Domingo Perón and María Estela Martínez de Perón. He was *Ministro de Bienestar Social* during the governments of Héctor J. Cámpora, Raúl Alberto Lastiri and Perón himself and organised the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*. Forced to resign from his position in 1975, he fled to Europe with an official position granted by the Executive Branch and was a fugitive from justice for 10 years. He was arrested in the United States and transferred to Argentina, where he died in 1989 while being prosecuted on charges of multiple homicides, illicit association and kidnappings.

administration process, who were defined by the categories of *extremistas* or *subversivos*, which sometimes involved any dissidence that opposed the established order, as was the case of sexual dissidents, gypsy groups, prostitutes, and others.

The configuration of classifications surrounding arrests in 1975, like the differences between *detenidos* and *prisioneros*, is consistent with regarding the classification activity as part of both the basis of police work, and considering how they are configured by the same state administrators responsible for the preparation of the documentation analysed. Where certain ideas of order are present, normativities are conceived (the legal, judicial and constitutional framework), specific modes of subjection, and required norms of action (so-called procedures) and classification systems necessarily arise (Duraó et al. 2005: 8).

Based on the work, I assume that, prior to the last civic-military dictatorship, the configuration of a certain type of criminal subject – *subversivo and/or extremista* – through state agents producing documentation, generated a particular morality linked to a certain public order that sought to sustain the establishment of the exercise of power of a *de facto* government.

Here, it is relevant to begin to ponder certain political uses of the living considering that they were the carriers of everything that had to be *eliminated*, since it was required – much like their constructions of the *enemigo* – for the configuration of a certain 'framework' that would enable the actions committed.

Here, it is relevant to begin thinking about certain political uses of the living considering that they were carriers of everything that had to be *eliminated*, that they were necessary – and their constructions as the *enemigo* – for the configuration of a certain 'framework' that would permit the actions committed.

In the same way, it is interesting to observe that the classificatory categories have, on the one hand, a level of specificity that enables them to refer to people, objects and situations, and simultaneously, they show such laxity that they enable meaning to be attributed to a large spectrum of actions, people and elements (Franco 2012; Gamarnik 2017).

The detention of Osatinsky *blanqueada* [lit. laundered] in the D2 records, while exposing the illegal practices that accompanied his entire stay in that space, implies considering that when the state establishes itself as a monopoly holder of legitimate violence, it does not annul such violence, rather it appropriates it for the purposes of preserving the status quo (Weber 1958; 1968). As Elias (2000) discusses, the civilising process implies understating that within modern states the legitimate exercise of violence is restricted to specialised agents, who are also state administrators, who require a high technification and intellectualisation in their formation, in which we could situate not only the security forces, but also the intelligence practices exercised by actors also linked to these forces that promote the violence generated and managed within the sphere of the state.

Having worked on documentation produced by different administrative bureaucracies – while also noticing the absences in the very same documentation production –, an analytical instrument to understand the modes of managing subjects and subjections based on the capacity for agency of the documents and their organisers not only became necessary, but it also turned into a powerful ethnographic tool that allowed me to access one of the ways in which state power is exercised, both in its capacity to transform and generate (Muzzopappa & Villalta 2011) situations, territories, moralities, forms of action, and subjection and subjects, particularly a type of criminal subject classified as the *enemigo* or the *subversivo*, managing the conditions of living and dying through the treatment and administration of the population (Mbembe 2011)

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# Concerning the artifices practiced in *documenting the documentation:* on writing, testifying and learning to file

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## Abstract

This article aims to shed light on the formal and official paths through which researchers seek to obtain authorisation to conduct our research, particularly in state offices. Thus, I begin from the conviction that letters, certificates, academic transcripts, and research projects, together with their subsequent circulation within various sectors at the *Instituto Médico Legal* [Medical Examiner's Office], São Paulo, Brazil, are excellent sites of analysis precisely because they reveal the different management and government strategies put into operation both by researchers and by those who, as designated authorities, form the employees of these bodies. Artifices made of paper that, on the one hand, forge and convey an idea and an image that is projected and recurrently reaffirmed of what the state is. While on the other, they enable us to provide ethnographic nuances to the 'common condition of state subjects' in which all of us are immersed, by force or desire.

**Key words:** documents, state bodies, authorization, ethnography

# Das artimanhas pelas quais se *documenta a documentação:* sobre escrever, dar fé e aprender a protocolar

## Resumo

Este artigo pretende lançar luz aos caminhos formais e oficiais pelos quais nós, pesquisadores, procuramos conseguir autorização para a realização de nossas pesquisas, sobretudo, em repartições estatais. Assim, parto da convicção de que cartas, certificados, históricos escolares e projetos de pesquisa, bem como sua subsequente circulação junto a diversos setores no Instituto Médico Legal (IML), São Paulo, Brasil, são excelentes lócus de análise exatamente por revelarem as diferentes estratégias de gestão e governo colocadas em operação tanto por nós pesquisadores quanto por aqueles que, como autoridades designadas, ocupam os quadros destas instâncias. Artimanhas feitas papel que, de um lado, veiculam e forjam uma ideia e uma imagem a ser projetada e recorrentemente reafirmada do que é o Estado. E, de outro lado, nos permitem dar nuances etnográficas à “condição comum de sujeitos de Estado” a que todos nós, por força ou desejo, estamos imersos.

**Palavras-chave:** documentos, instâncias estatais, autorização, etnografia

# Concerning the artifices practiced in *documenting the documentation*: on writing, testifying and learning to file<sup>1</sup>

Larissa Nadai

## Introduction

And anyway, the secret is not as important as the paths that led me to it. Each person has to walk those paths himself. (Borges 1999: 334-335)<sup>2</sup>

This article aims to reflect on the formal and official strategies through which I sought to obtain authorisation to conduct my doctoral research at the *Instituto Médico Legal* (IML) [Medical Examiner's Office] in Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil<sup>3</sup>. Less than an article on research methodology or focused on the misfortunes to which researchers are subject during their research on social sciences and anthropology, this reflection is oriented towards my own *documentation* techniques, highlighting the effect of certain choices in the process of doing significant paperwork. This paperwork is organised into two stacks of papers, including copies of my enrolment certificate, my academic record, a presentation of my research and a formal request for access to the files and work routine of the Campinas IML<sup>4</sup>. The IML is an autonomous branch of the São Paulo police, called the *Polícia Científica* [lit. Scientific Police], which, together with the *Instituto de Criminalística* [Forensic Institute], responds to its own Superintendency, directly subordinate to the *Secretaria de Segurança Pública* [Department of Public Safety] of the State of São Paulo<sup>5</sup>.

When paying attention to what I call *documenting the documentation*, I follow not only terms and symbols, but also techniques incorporated in this process and through which, using different means, researchers believe they know in advance how to request access, from whom, and through which narrative formulas this must be achieved. Moreover, how this should be done when the research assumes so-called state bodies, organs or agencies, such as the IML, as the object of reflection. A type of knowledge concerning how to request

1 Funding from the São Paulo State Research Foundation (FAPESP), research grants no. 2018/26728-4 and 2013/22349-5.

2 In the original, the poem reads: 'El secreto, por lo demás, no vale lo que valen los caminos que me condujeron a él. Esos caminos hay que andarlos'. This heading evokes the presentation of Maria Gabriela Lugones in the *Seminário Etnografando Elites, Redes e Dispositivos de Poder: experiências de pesquisa, reflexões metodológicas e questões ético-políticas* [Seminar on Ethnographing Elites, Networks and Devices of Power: research experiences, methodological reflections and ethical-political issues], held in November 2012, in Rio de Janeiro. Her voice narrating the text by Jorge Luis Borges remains very much alive and echoes in my thoughts, see Lugones (2014).

3 It is important to clarify that, in early 2014, when the research on my doctorate began, it was not mandatory that the same document be endorsed by any ethics commission, nor that my project was forwarded to the *Plataforma Brasil*. I understand that these requirements, mandatory for the current scenario, are complex and, even provide new contours to discussion that I seek to achieve in this article. This is because researchers are currently advised (or instructed) to go through ethics committees at their respective universities. Some are prohibited from providing details concerning their research before a document signed by an authority regularises their work proposal. Others, in turn, are prevented from defending their theses and dissertations publicly or from publishing their scientific discoveries, in the event that they do not have a document that legally supports research conducted in state, private and/or public institutions. For more on this theme see: Fleischer & Schuch (2010); Sarti & Duarte (2013); and Santos & Jeolás (2015).

4 The first of these documentary compendiums was delivered to the care of the director of the city's Medical Examiner's Office. These documents travelled through various sectors within the IML administration until they reached the *Comissão Científica* [Scientific Commission]. The second of them, I filed directly with the Scientific Commission based in the city of São Paulo. These different forwarding routes are analysed throughout the article.

5 Based on scientific-technical prerogatives, the IML's function is to perform a variety of examinations for expert purposes: examinations of living people, corpses, bones, and numerous laboratory analyses. These so-called scientific and technical analyses are essential to obtain conclusive material evidence in the most diverse cases, including rapes, homicides, suicides, accidents, and so on. In the same technical-scientific theme, the Forensic Institute is responsible for producing criminal evidence; however, this evidence is collected while investigating the crime scene and objects collected for this purpose, such as clothing, personal belongings, sheets, projectiles, weapons, and so on. These two pieces of forensic evidence are called technical-scientific evidence for criminal purposes.

access that is embodied both through our daily practices as citizens and our perceptions as researchers of investigations conducted in and about state bodies<sup>6</sup>. Namely, the inescapable intuition that – faced with a corporation previously delimited by means of an address, a building and its staff, with hierarchies and precise work rules – the research will be fated in advance to reiterate the official contours that produce institutions as institutions and the ‘counter’ as a simultaneous point of access and retention (Lugones 2012).

In order to recompose the threads that interlace actions, beliefs and machinations, in addition to this introduction, this article is divided into two sections and a conclusion that should be read as inseparable and articulated parts. A dialogue with the epigraph by Jorge Luís Borges (1999) is inevitable. As the poet suggests, it is a matter of recomposing ‘the paths taken’ in order to unravel the effects (projected and recurrently reaffirmed) that *documenting the documentation* and recording it correctly have among those who *request access*, as was my case, together with those who, like the IML, can *grant* or *deny access* to their routine work<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, in the first section, I seek to show the ways in which *documenting the documentation* is carried out and how this act of recording sustains, conveys, propagates and/or extends the ‘presence of the state in our societies’ (Lugones 2014). To this end, I use the expression *documentation* as a means of denoting a set of techniques through which a varied number of documents can be managed and organised (Buckland 1997). Related to this idea, I also think of documents and the act of *documenting the documentation* as a type of physical evidence, the background of which alludes to characteristics of bureaucracy in the modern state described by Max Weber (1946). I also expound an unusual similarity between the ways in which we communicate with state bodies in order to research them and the procedures performed by these same ‘bureaus’<sup>8</sup> in their daily activities. It all begins and ends with merely, and above all, paper (Ferreira 2013).

In the second section, in possession of the *documentation* that you learn to *document*, I recompose my zeal and care in forwarding these papers to the correct places, in order to guarantee (at least in belief) their adequate circulation and, naturally, their *approval*. Here, I try to bring together different management and governing strategies put into operation by state departments: techniques of assisting and waiting, of doing without doing or of doing for some and not for others. Paper artifices that, concomitantly, ‘harass, torment, or facilitate the life of the individual in modern society’ (Peirano 2002).

Finally, I return to these practices of *documenting the documentation*, with the aim of refuting certain anthropological imaginations that relegate the practices of *requesting access* as a prelude to research, which indeed seem important and will only be carried out *a posteriori*. I argue that more than anecdotal elements or mere methodological debates, *documenting the documentation* and *forwarding it* correctly are crucial elements for those who are concerned with the ethnography of governance technologies (Foucault 2009) and gestation and management practices undertaken by state bodies (Souza Lima 2002).

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6 As citizens, we share the belief that documents are central to both facilitating and formalising relationships; however, as researchers and participants in networks of researchers whose studies are conducted in different state bodies, we are informed beforehand of the impediments and requests for access that we will be involved in.

7 For reasons of choice, I will not pay much attention to the dimension of the implicit secret, also present in the short story by Jorge Luís Borges (1999) that I used as an epigraph. I understand the idea of ‘the world of official secrets’ (Abrams 2006: 114) not as something that is hidden, but rather as techniques that encourage us to see certain information, terms, relationships and functions of the institution. Thus, I understand that the strategies and impediments to access to rooms, files and staff dictate the terms of knowledge through which the mechanics of power proliferate and illuminate the many ‘checkpoints’ (Jeganathan 2004) imposed on the victims, the accused, researchers and citizens. For a more detailed analysis, see Nadai (2018).

8 I follow the formulation provided by Weber (1946) for the term ‘bureau’. The author affirms that an office constitutes the reunion of a ‘body of officials actively engaged in a ‘public’ office, along with respective apparatus of material implements and the files’ (Weber 1946: 197).



## Words, insignias and acts of faith or how you *document the documentation*?

(...)

Carlos, há uma máquina  
Que nunca escreve cartas;  
Há uma garrafa de tinta  
Que nunca bebeu álcool.

E os arquivos, Carlos,  
As caixas de papéis:  
Túmulos para todos  
Os tamanhos de meu corpo  
(...)  
(Melo Neto 1996: 60)<sup>9</sup>

The heading is repeated numerous times. Under the decal of the Campinas State University (UNICAMP) insignia, the titles ‘UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DE CAMPINAS / INSTITUTO DE FILOSOFIA E CIENCIAS HUMANAS / PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM CIENCIAS SOCIAIS’ [Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences (IFCH) / Post-graduate Programme in Social Sciences] reinforce the links between these bodies and the papers I produced and accumulated over a few weeks. Through the repeated suitability attested by the personal and institutional documents gathered in my blue folder, I begin to weave myself a *documentation* procedure. To this end, a pile of paper was written and intentionally ordered by me: first, a cover letter, followed by a request for access to the institutional files of the IML and other annexes proving my academic performance. Among these, my enrolment certificate and my academic transcript, both provided by the *Diretoria Acadêmica* [Academic Board]<sup>10</sup>.

Forms of documenting that, through the act of writing, distinguished not only my research interests and my academic curriculum, but sources of research funding – National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) – and the name and surname of my supervisor – Dr. [Supervisor Name]. The successful and appropriate completion of another piece of research conducted by me on the archives and the daily work of the Campinas *Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher* (DDM) [Women’s Police Station] – a police body, much like the IML – completed the institutional and academic guarantees gathered by me. In a cover letter, under the words ‘the research aims to continue the studies initiated in my Master’s research’, I introduced the interests and objectives of my doctoral project to the authority of the IML. In my terms, the research is interested in understanding ‘from an anthropological perspective [...] how material evidence is produced in cases of rape at the *Núcleo Técnico de Perícias Médico Legal* [Centre for Legal Medical Expertise], at the Campinas Medical Examiner’s Office – SP’ (Research presentation letter, March 2014).

Similar to processes conducted by academic selection boards and research funding agencies, the research project is assessed and qualified in this institution – the IML. Only this time with the aim of granting or denying a request:

permission to conduct research among expert reports, especially forensic reports involving cases of rape and sexual assault, between the years 2003 and 2006. We also request authorisation to observe the daily work

<sup>9</sup> The following is a free translation of part of the poem ‘*Difícil ser Funcionário*’ [Difficult to be an Employee] by Melo Neto (1996): Carlos, there is a machine / That never writes letters; / There is a bottle of ink / That has never drunk alcohol. / And the files, Carlos, / The boxes of papers: / Tombs for all / The sizes of my body.

<sup>10</sup> As I indicate in the Introduction, in addition to the documents presented above, a second pile of papers was created during the months in which I sought to begin my doctoral research. These papers include certificates of confidentiality regarding the data collected and declarations that the IML would be expressly cited in publications, oral presentations, posters, and so on.

of the Campinas Medical Examiner's Office, following the work of experts and medical examiners in cases involving crimes of rape and the rape of vulnerable persons.<sup>11</sup> (Research request letter, April 2014)

In these interactions plotted using letterheads with the UNICAMP insignia, references to the CNPq and the FAPESP, and the identification documents of students and supervisors, I also used the code of ethics defined by the *Associação Brasileira de Antropologia* (ABA) [Brazilian Anthropology Association]<sup>12</sup>. The following citation was included:

[I] certify that I will protect the privacy of all professionals participating in the research, as well as records that identify confidential documents and procedures of the institution. (Research request letter, April 2014)

Thus, the detailed *documentation*, written presupposing the ethical expedients that had to be fulfilled, was more than certificates and requests for access; it was also a reflection of something indelible and quite subtle: my own research trajectory with the Campinas DDM and the obstacles I encountered in completing the fieldwork conducted at this institution. At the time I had introduced myself to this police force with a simple letter of introduction, signed by my supervisor and myself. The document contained a generic description of the research that I wanted to conduct within the police force, located in the central region of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil. With no bureaucratic obstacles, the chief officer authorised the research. Sometime later, other forms of restrictions began to permeate my coexistence at the DDM. These situations would culminate in difficult emotional negotiations in the final months of the research: clarifications concerning the research conducted, what documents were seen and analysed, how observation was conducted, and what the purpose of the interviews conducted with the staff was, sometimes without the presence of a recorder (Nadai 2012).

Since authorisations were granted prior to interactions with the staff, these lacked documents that attested to and served as material and official evidence for the agreements, and the terms associated with them. Thus, instead of formal agreements, which had circulated through all the higher levels of the police force of the State of São Paulo and at least supported the intended research, I found myself entangled with other demands that coexistence with the DDM gave way to. Specifically, the desire for 'loyalty' demanded by the chief officer of that particular police station in response to my request to attend the office of one of the clerks on the days in which she held interviews with victims and perpetrators involved in cases of rape and sexual assault. The demand made of me, in the main corridor of the DDM and which resonated throughout every room in the building, represented one of the most embarrassing moments of my research at that time. According to her advice, I could participate as long as I was 'loyal' to the trust she placed in me and my work. Her informal authorisation, which had been granted in words only during the first few months of my Master's research, enabled me to be at the police station every week. However, it did not precisely express the parameters of my stay. Given this, at least in my *a posteriori* imaginings, research at the DDM lacked clearly established specifications that could be reported because they were attested, registered and signed by both parties<sup>13</sup>.

Faced with this experience, a diffuse idea of 'loyalty' began to serve me as a kind of point of reference, and, above all, as a logical response to the need to put everything on paper that I imagined to be important both for approval and for conducting the research, which I would later carry out inside the IML. Evoking the poet João Cabral de Melo Neto (1996) in the epigraph that opens this section, the 'paper boxes' preserved in the 'archives' were 'tombs'. They should only be 'opened' if moral/ethical conduct is taken into consideration.

11 In the Brazilian Penal Code, the rape of vulnerable persons includes the rape of minors, persons with illnesses, physical and mental disabilities, and/or those under the influence of drugs or alcohol who are unable to consent consciously and assertively.

12 Even though the research was academically linked to the *Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Sociais* [Post-graduate Programme in Social Sciences], in the field of gender studies, its ethnographic and anthropological references were always highlighted, even in my doctoral selection. This explains my choice to cite the code of ethics defined by the Brazilian Anthropology Association created during the 1986-1988 administration and later changed during the 2011-2012 administration.

13 For a more accurate analysis of the place occupied by the term loyalty in the context of the work of police corporations, see Renoldi, 2011. For an analysis of the meanings that *loyalty* came to assume in my research with the Women's Police Station, see Nadai (2012); (2018).

Without doubt, I should demonstrate ‘loyalty’ (and demanded as much of myself) before even participating in the daily work of these professionals, now based not in the police force itself, but in another of its branches: the *Polícia Técnica-Científica* [Forensic Investigators] of São Paulo, Brazil.

Thus, under the label of ethics, I imagined that access to the institution, its work routine, its staff and the documentation stored in its archives, was entangled in state bureaucratic meshes and expedients in which *documentation* procedures are of great importance and centrality. Based on my experience in the DDM, these are the ‘cultural standards’ and ‘intimacy’ that need to be protected to replicate the terms of the ABA code of ethics.

Therefore, based on the formulations of Max Weber (1946), as a particular type of ‘bureau’, I believed that the Campinas IML also placed great value on the documents and work performed by its staff. In this sense, in the act of *documenting the documentation*, I tried to replicate the care put into the work procedures undertaken in these police and bureaucratic bodies, which I assumed I understood. Inspired by the ‘principle of documentation’ (Weber 1978) and my two years of research at a police station, I presumed that I sought to handle official papers when requesting access to the documents produced at the Campinas IML. This means that, in addition to their varied contents – rapes, victims and their personal identifications –, I would also end up accessing the fixed, stable rules of administrative norms and principles that govern the performance of the role of expert/medical examiner.

I presumed that these staff members registered the techniques and official activities (Weber 1946) that they carried out as professionals at the Centre for Legal Medical Expertise of the Department of Public Safety of the State of São Paulo, on sheets of paper. To this end, instigated by the methodological reflections undertaken by Vianna (2014), and much like she did, I anticipated in my *documentation* that which I imagined would be necessary to research and take notes in these state bodies. In Vianna’s research, the real names of those involved in custody proceedings conducted in court, and studied by her, needed to be protected through a formal obligation<sup>14</sup>. However, while doing so, in addition to the names of the parties involved, Vianna (2014) chose to suppress the procedural numbers contained in these court documents, since ‘everyone’s bureaucratic identities were right there, in some numerical sequences’ (Vianna 2014: 49-50). It was a kind of siren song, in which, as Vianna (2014) highlights, we find ourselves placed in the same ‘theatricalised dimension’ that shapes legal processes as a whole and characterises what we believe to be ‘the legitimately administrative dimension’ of the *Justiça Infância e da Juventude* [Child and Youth Justice Service] or, in my case, the police and the IML.

Hence, my care in explaining in these papers that *requested access*, a kind of belief and understanding incorporated into what was at stake in these documents and expert procedures, which I was interested in observing/researching. Namely, the [not at all] public (and deeply encrypted) forms of managing material evidence with a view to determining criminal authorship [and, I would add, materiality] (Lowenkron 2015; Lugones 2012).

Guided by what Laura Nader (1972) called ‘studying up’, directed at state strata and institutions that guide, manage, organise and impact the daily life of any common citizen, I conjectured, in the presentation documents and requests forwarded to the IML, that my bond of trust should protect numbers, protocols, techniques and investigation procedures performed by the medical examiners assigned to the Campinas IML. I believed that by committing to protect the ‘legitimately administrative dimension’ of the IML, I consequently took responsibility for hiding the name, address, date of birth or any type of information that could become public or that could reveal the ‘identities’ of the ‘victims’ who were or would be registered there. In other words, inspired by reflections on the *Registro Geral de Identidade* (RG) [Brazilian ID] formulated by Mariza Peirano (2006), I assumed that I knew and understood the character of identification contained in forensic reports. This

<sup>14</sup> For Vianna (2014), access to custody processes was only released following the researcher’s agreement to omit the real names of those involved in such disputes. The determination required by the *Justiça da Infância e da Juventude* [Child and Youth Justice Service] itself, however, made no requests regarding numbers, dates, signatures and other documents that constitute these papers as administrative assets (Vianna 2014). It is important to emphasise that, aside from prosecuting crimes by underage offenders, the Child and Youth Justice Service also has sole jurisdiction over judgments that concern the individual, diffuse or collective rights and interests of children and adolescents.

is because, as Peirano (2006: 36) states, a document ‘groups together a range of information, legally defined by a certain state body’, therefore, the immediate object of my research request, the reports, also contained important identification information given that they indexed name, surname, affiliation, age, ID, place of birth and address on the same physical platform. Indexing performed through a succinct paragraph that opens the forensic report and provides the personal ‘qualifications’ of the victim in the first few lines (Nadai 2022).

Furthermore, as Luís Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (2004) argues, through these bureaucratic *documentation* procedures, I sought to equate and impede two instances of anthropological work that are almost always unpredictable, which were already among the documentary records of the research request to be filed with the IML. On the one hand, a clear, conclusive definition of the research object and, on the other, absolute control over the questions and interests that would eventually be developed in a book and/or published thesis, following the interaction between researcher and the subjects of the research.

As ‘state subjects’, in the words of Maria Gabriela Lugones (2014), I indirectly reified and endorsed the restriction techniques, without major dilemmas, whose interest is to produce these corporations as inaccessible, unknown, or of restricted access, as highlighted by Nader (1972). According to Lugones (2014), and evoking Judith Butler (1997), in the very act of researching in state bodies, we must account for the omnipresent effect – constant, timeless, everywhere and simultaneous – of ‘state interpellation’ that not only ‘acts on us’, but rather without which we would not exist, both in documentary terms and beyond them.

Mixing belief and the ‘learning we acquire in our own flesh’ (Lugones 2014: 81), I tried to obtain a signature, an insignia and, consequently, a name with *authority* to *authorise* my research. Thus, *documenting the documentation* materialises a generous dose of ‘shared credulities’ around that which we imagine to be the expedients of certain state bodies, bureaucratic authority, and the ‘ingrained belief in their legitimacy – whether feigned or the result of necessity’ (Lugones 2014: 74).

Like Lugones (2014), I began my research at the Campinas IML sceptical that I could conduct it while only obtaining oral agreements, which are easily invalidated by transfers and removals. Much like the research conducted by Natália Padovani (2018), this type of scepticism is based on the procedures of state public safety bodies, particularly police forces and prisons. They are institutions that gestate and manage people, in the words of Souza Lima (2002), through determinations that are produced precisely in flows and in which roles occupy a central place. Therefore, believing in the legitimacy of ‘bureaucratic authorities’ and the need to reiterate them, I sent in my ‘academic credentials’. My documents and the techniques painstakingly incorporated into how to *document the documentation*, as argued by Mariza Peirano (2011: 63), sought to demonstrate how the fundamental character of documents, ‘issued by legally authorised bodies, serve as modern amulets that open doors and, in their absence, close them’. As the author suggests, when someone demands ‘your ID, please’, among all the papers forwarded – the university documents – it is ‘the authority of the issuing agency that matters, and not the individual who is identified’ (Peirano 2011: 51): UNICAMP, always in bold letters.

After an effortless entry into Campinas DDM, in mid-2009, and a hellish end of research, which juxtaposed the creation of unprecedented paperwork concerning the research and its consequences, requests for ‘loyalty’ and an unparalleled difficulty in equating what is ‘said there’ and what is ‘written here’, in the words of Marques and Villela (2005), I was supposedly ahead of myself. By *documenting the documentation*, with all the transparency (and ingenuity) possible and necessary, I sought to circumvent or at least dispense exclusively with the personal relationships that give flesh to the institution, and that could later leave me at the mercy of the most diverse legal and emotional problems. By *documenting* techniques, I was convinced of and conceded existence to the disembodied (and non-existent) dimension of state bodies (Abrams 2006; Mitchell 2006).

## On ‘counters’, transits and stamps: where does the *documentation* go?

[I]n order for you to gain access [to these reports], *you expressly* need to ask for authorisation from the Director of the IML, who will ask the Superintendent, the Superintendent will ask the Secretary for Public Safety, the Secretary for Public Safety will ask... *all this will take about three years*. (Interview conducted in January 2015; emphasis in original)

Months after presenting a compendium of 11 sheets, duly signed and stamped, to the Campinas IML for the attention of ‘Mr. Director [Name]’, and filing 23 signed sheets directly in São Paulo, I received a single document via email and later through the hands of Milton, the medical examiner at the Campinas IML and the main interlocutor of my research. ‘Official Letter no. 017/2014’, signed and dated April 22, 2014, on a single sheet of bond paper, bearing the coat of arms of the State of São Paulo and its institutional affiliation: ‘Department for Public Safety/ Superintendency of the Scientific-Technical Police/ Medical Examiner’s Office/ Official letter: Scientific Commission – IML no. 017/2014’.

The field ‘Interested party’ read ‘Name – Supervisor – Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences’. Regarding the ‘Subject’, the ‘Official letter’ reiterated the research request addressed to the commission: ‘Requests assessment of the research project by doctoral student Name – Entitled ‘Among investigation documents: research on the production of material evidence in cases of rape’. In response to ‘Dear Dr. Name’, the document clarified that, in possession of the aforementioned project ‘for analysis’:

Since it is the responsibility of the Medical Examiner’s Office to protect the identities of the victims attended, the Scientific Commission did not approve the research project forwarded.

Sincerely,

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Dr. [Name]

Member of the Scientific Commission of the IML/SP.

When I read ‘the Scientific Commission *did not approve* the research project forwarded’ in the letter sent via email by Isabel, the autopsy assistant, with whom I made my first contacts at the Superintendency in São Paulo, I was surprised. Research in state bodies can be made difficult, limited, but never so summarily and succinctly *denied*.

I remembered the secretary who received me at the Campinas IML, when I made my first visit to the institution, a building located at the back of the 1<sup>st</sup> Police District of Campinas and whose aged facade was the unattractive business card of the Superintendency of the Scientific-Technical Police. The railings around the building mark specific entrances and organise the path for inattentive pedestrians: on the left, the Medical Examiner’s Office; on the right, the Forensic Institute; in the middle, the sign for the Centre for Legal Medical Expertise unites both the scientific and technical obligations indicated therein.

Somewhat without references and in possession of a blue folder full of letterheads, I was looking for information on how I should proceed to schedule a meeting with the current director of the Campinas IML. The staff member not only discouraged me from making such an appointment, but she persuaded me not to wait for one and not to bother returning at another time. As she helpfully warned me, I would not be able to obtain anything through him in terms of authorisation for the research. After all, any research conducted at the IML needed to be approved by the IML Scientific Commission, based in the state capital, the city of São

Paulo. However, she very kindly accepted the papers I carried in tow. She stamped 'Received Today' on the left margin of the cover letter and wrote in pen 'forward to CP-IML for consultation'. Below, she stamped 'Campinas \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_' and filled in the date the documents were delivered: '7 April, 2014'. Finally, she stamped the words 'Dr. [Name] Director of the Campinas NP-IML'. Later, out of my sight, the letterhead was signed in pen by 'Mr. Director', to whom I sent the documents I brought with me and an infinity of stamps whose materiality emphasised the journey these papers took through numerous sectors of the IML in Campinas and São Paulo.

However, noticing my discouragement with this 'bureaucracy', she was willing to help me. After informing me that many studies were being denied, she gave me the phone number of a staff member working in the city of São Paulo. This supposedly opened up a faster way to get around what Peirano (2002) calls 'this horrible time of papers'. Thus, in possession of this supposed information, I smiled immediately and left there very excited with the paper that contained a phone number written in pencil with the name of the staff member in São Paulo.

From that moment on, contrary to my fixation on documents and formal access paths, I myself began to forge the personal relationships that move *documentation* forward and, without doubt, form part of the ways in which we learn to document it. As the work of Kregg Hetherington (2011: 149) demonstrates, 'far from being impersonal, bureaucracy worked as an economy of favors' that always and inevitably involves 'moving paper'.

After calls and emails exchanged with Isabel, the autopsy assistant whose phone number I obtained in Campinas, on 16 April, 2014, I headed to São Paulo capital with an even larger quantity of letter-headed papers. During the exchange of information, Isabel patiently explained to me that the *documentation* I had already gathered and left in the care of the director of Campinas IML was incomplete. With the aim of providing guidance on the production of new paperwork, in an email, she numbered all the papers that should compose the dossier now destined for the IML Scientific Commission.

- 1) A letter of introduction from the university about the student, stating enrolment and the course; 2) a request from the university to the Scientific Commission asking them to assess the project. This can be submitted by the supervisor; 3) The research project, following the standards proposed by the Scientific Commission, namely: Introduction; Objective; Methodology and Bibliography; 4) If applicable, attach approval from the Research Ethics Committee; 5) Inform whether there is any financial incentive to conduct the project (FAPESP, CNPq, etc.); 6) Inform whether the person responsible for the project is an integral part of the staff of the Medical Examiner's Office; 7) Declare confidentiality regarding all information collected and/or accessed, subject to legal sanctions and, finally; 8) A declaration of commitment by the researcher(s) to include the name of the Medical Examiner's Office in future publications, oral presentation, posters and any other dissemination, scientific or non-scientific, arising from the project. (IML Scientific Commission, São Paulo Scientific Police)

In possession of the extensive list of statements that had to be produced, item 3 caught my attention. I should submit a research project, formally edited according to the assessment standards designated by the commission. Following the instructions provided by the IML regarding the necessary parts that should be included in the research project, I presented a brief essay concerning the interests, objectives and methodologies of my research to the Scientific Commission. In order to avoid the rejection of my request, I also chose to submit a more objective version of my project, trying to refrain from theorising or previous analyses based on reflections that I had already developed during my Master's degree<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, I chose to follow the technical terms which IML reports and routines are based on, such as the idea of material evidence.

Furthermore, if people are compelled to carry, in the words of Peirano (2002: 34), 'legal papers that harass, torment, or [regarding our research] facilitate the life of the individual (...)', it is because this is an unavoidable

15 During my Master's degree, I developed the idea of *pieces of flesh*. A formulation that sought to emphasise both the effects of fragmentation present in the medical examiner's reports referring to rape cases and the different processes of carnality (Foucault 2003; Gregori 2016) linked to them. For an analysis of the idea of bodies seen *in pieces* and through *pieces of flesh*, see Nadai (2022); (2018); (2012); Nadai & Veiga (2019); and Nadai & Veiga (2020).

procedure in the multiple relationships established with state bodies. However, the mere certificate provided by numbers – RG [Brazilian ID], CPF [taxpayer ID], *Registro Acadêmica* [Faculty Registry] and so on – is insufficient as identification. Indeed, through countless examples, they attest to the referential and iconic effects of papers. Therefore, if the ‘state does not control this social force’, as argued by Peirano (2006: 38), research like that conducted by Navaro-Yashin (2007) on the effects of fictionality transmitted by documents and their local transactions in the Republic of Cyprus, they also remind us that any and all documentation produced always carries with it a generous dose of ‘make believe’. This, in turn, dismantles the idea of bodies as a domain of rationality, impersonality and bureaucratic oppression, as argued by Roberto da Matta (2018).

This also explains why projects are nothing more than ‘letters of intent’ and anonymous and abstract sequence numbers that need to be associated with clothing, body aesthetics and very specific prestige contacts that circumscribe research and researchers, as suggested by Leirner (1997) in his research on the Brazilian army. The way I produced myself as someone who was ‘all right’, in Foote-Whyte’s words (1993 [1943]: 300), required much more of me than the mere ability to know how to *document the documentation*, it also required the astuteness of mapping where, to whom I should deliver it correctly, and how to behave correctly when sending it directly to police and medical authorities, with respect to the IML. Thus, if for Leirner (1997), a jacket, a tie, a clean beard, a haircut and the prestigious indications of his supervisor complemented the letter of intent, with the stamp of the University of São Paulo, similar tactics intertwined my wanderings through the IML and the Superintendency. Formal attire, no cleavage or transparent apparel, together with transcripts and enrolment certificates, composed one of the possible images of credibility that I sought to certify as a researcher. Finally, my supervisor’s surname was the finishing touch to these claims.

It was through the intertwining of these multiple points that embodied the *documentation* that I arrived at the cold, imposing building located on Rua Moncorvo Filho, in Butantã, São Paulo, adjacent to the *Academia de Polícia de São Paulo* [São Paulo Police Academy] and close to the University of São Paulo. The building that housed the Superintendency of the Scientific-Technical Police contrasted with the small entrance of the Campinas IML, even though it was also divided, only this time into floors that were each a world in themselves. One floor for the Medical Examiner’s Office, another for the Forensic Institute and, finally, one for the organs responsible for managing the Superintendency itself. The large entrance had an information desk and a panel detailing each floor and sector. To the left, there were two doors with metal detectors and an independent entrance next to the revolving doors, with an armed guard. This restricted access door only permitted access for staff and the people authorised by the woman responsible for providing information, strategically located behind the ‘counter’. The ‘clientele’ were directed to attendance at a second window, to the right of the independent entrance. In a similar manner to a notary’s office, right in front of this ‘counter’ were some chairs that were occupied by people carrying documents or retrieving some type of official paper.

After asking for information at the entrance ‘counter’ (Lugones 2012), I headed towards the glass door with an independent entrance, where the uniformed guard was positioned, carrying a firearm. Once on the floor designated for the sectors of the Medical Examiner’s Office, I was surprised by the clear, aseptic environment. Nothing was similar to the police institutions I had already visited. The floor, the minimal decoration in the corridors and the lighting provided by cold white bulbs seemed to have transported me to a hospital or a laboratory. This sensation was replicated by the metal plaques that indicated what was behind each door and restricted access rooms that composed the long, wide, silent, meticulously clean corridor: genetic laboratories, chemical analysis laboratories, anatomopathological laboratories, and so on. In addition to naming the type of procedure performed in each of the rooms, the metal plaques also designated the names of the staff members allocated to the workspace. It was through these procedures that I not only recognised the room I was looking for, but also identified the name of the staff member with whom I had spoken on the phone. After not being

attended at the Scientific Commission office, I went to the Human Resources office, where I was finally informed that Isabel was not available and would only return the following day.

Noting my disappointment, the human resources staff member offered to accept the papers that I needed to file. However, there was one condition: that I inform Isabel over the phone regarding the delivery of this *documentation*. As had occurred in Campinas, the staff member in São Paulo also counted all the documents I gave her, with her fingertips. This time, however, she photocopied the statement signed by the secretary of the post-graduate programme that appeared on the first page of the pile of paper. Then she stamped the copy, and the original with the following words 'DTD-IML / APR.16.2014'. Finally, in pen, she wrote in cursive '[Name] received this and + 23 pages' and handed me the copy.

In possession of the receipt provided by the human resources employee, I returned to Campinas. It was now a matter of 'waiting'. A kind of waiting characteristic of and quite common when engaging in relationships with state bodies. It is not enough to 'sit' and abide the imminent waiting on the coming and going of papers to be completed satisfactorily. If, as Vianna and Farias (2011: 88) emphasise, 'registering a document' means delivering it personally to the correct institution, then making sure that it reaches its destination and only then, finally archiving it as proof of the procedures performed with the signature of the official responsible for receiving it, all these precautions may not be sufficient.

In the authors' research, the 'war' waged by the mothers from Rio de Janeiro against the state, which 'is sitting there', while the murder of their children continues without justice, involves filling the transit of papers with the insistence of an 'institutional pilgrimage'. Although life remains frozen since the brutal death of a loved one – son, nephew, brother, husband –, even documents filed with care do not 'move forward on their own'. The time of 'waiting for justice' is filled with the 'struggle' (parades, marches, going to trials of similar cases, etc.), with trips to the judiciary, making contact with prosecutors, new examinations of the victim's body (often already buried), going to the execution sites of said relative, and so on (Vianna & Farias 2011).

Without doubt, the contexts of access to research and the 'fight for justice' cannot be compared here. For political reasons, they are incommensurable. However, the procedures and ways of relating to state bodies – the police, the judiciary, and every state department imaginable – can be replicated. Using similar mechanisms with regard to requesting access to conduct research, in addition to *documenting the documentation*, in the words of Lugones (2014), it is important to 'keep things moving' through other means. Waiting for the transit of documents is, concomitantly, an incessant coming and going. This time based on personal relationships, as I had intuitively begun to do.

Thus, even before the formal response to my research, through the aforementioned 'Official Letter no. 017/2014', I had already contacted a professor at the UNICAMP *Faculdade de Ciências Médicas* [School of Medical Sciences], who was also a medical examiner at Campinas IML. Even though *documenting the documentation* seemed central to me, it was my university connections that gave me confidence that the 'waiting' period imposed on these bureaucratic procedures was avoidable. Furthermore, the moral assurance of a staff member, together with that of the director of the institution, and then from the director to the commission, could impart a personal dimension to the coldness of the insignia contained in the paper 'amulets' (Peirano 2011).

However, the wait for the assessment of the *documentation* forwarded to the commission was insignificant. In less than a month, my request was answered. The commission, however, was not addressing me, but rather my supervisor. They denied me *access* to the IML archives and facilities, despite having confirmed in a 'declaration' that I agreed and would not fail to comply with the 'confidentiality protocols regarding all information collected and/or which I accessed during research conducted at the Medical Examiner's Office, subject to legal sanctions'.

The email I received from Isabel was just one of the denials included in the documentation. In mid-July 2014, I met with Milton, one of the key interlocutors of my research at Campinas IML, and received a pile of



papers from him: the same papers that I filed in the care of ‘Mr. Dr. [Name], director of the Campinas IML’, in March 2014. The director of the institution, in possession of my *documentation*, had also sent these papers for consideration by the same IML Scientific Commission. As I have described so far, my desire to reduce the waiting time by directly filing a new pile of paper with the Scientific Commission did not prevent the paperwork I had left in Campinas from continuing to follow its institutional path. It took two months for these first papers to reach São Paulo and return from the capital to the interior.

Through a wide variety of ‘Dispatches’, the *documentation* received new signatures and numerous stamps. However, rejection was reiterated again. If in ‘Official letter no. 017/2014’ sent to me by Isabel, the ‘project of doctoral candidate Name’ was under ‘analysis’ and the response was addressed to ‘Dear Dr. Name Supervisor’, here, in the dispatches made in response to the same (and other) *documentation*, it appeared that ‘the request from the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences at UNICAMP had already been assessed and not approved by the Scientific Commission in Order no. 017/2014’.

My request had been transmuted into a request made by the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences (IFCH) to the IML. Addressed to my supervisor, to the IFCH, to UNICAMP, the repeated rejection definitely hinted at very important layers of *authority*. Supervisor covers the doctoral student’s research that, in turn, refers to the supervisor’s teaching role at the IFCH, which is ultimately subordinated to the insignia of UNICAMP as an academic institution. As I sought to argue in other reflections (Nadai 2018), the rejection of the student’s research has ‘elective affinities’ (Weber 1930) with refusing the university – UNICAMP –, the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences and, in regard to an area of knowledge, the human sciences in general. By opting for the concept developed by Max Weber (1930), I seek to refute a case-by-case analysis between research and the university or between research and the human sciences. The research was not denied because it was from UNICAMP or because it was focused on the area of human sciences, even though these affiliations share an important convergence and attraction<sup>16</sup>.

Furthermore, the request for access made using the technique of *documenting the documentation* is now entangled with rejection precisely because it explains and reveals the ‘chain of acts, authority and authorisations’ (Ferreira 2013: 41) imposed on my research when inserted into the gears of management of the IML and the Department for Public Safety. As the epigraph suggests, becoming governor of the State of São Paulo would be an almost unavoidable fact, even if it takes a considerable amount of time and is unfeasible for a doctoral research.

Seen from this angle, the formal request I sent to the director of the IML and later directly to the Scientific Commission was correct, even if apparently ineffective. The stamps made on each section through which my papers passed within the administrative bodies of the IML reinforced these multiple mandatory ‘checkpoints’ (Jeganathan 2004). At the base is the director of Campinas IML, whose authority is directed towards the city’s employees and the work performed there. Above him is the Superintendent of the Scientific-Technical Police who, strictly speaking, is responsible for jointly managing the IML and the Forensic Institute. Above him is the Secretary for Public Security, responsible for the numerous security institutions in the state – police, prisons and *Centro de Atendimento Socioeducativo ao Adolescente* [Socio-Educational Support Centre for Adolescents] foundations –, who is chosen by the state governor. And, finally, elected by popular vote as the citizen’s ‘representative’, is the governor. These were the very addresses that I needed to do an ethnography of, as Hetherington (2011) astutely describes. Thus, my papers were documents that, when considered, revealed more than techniques for withholding information or setbacks in access that reveal malicious or improper conducts established by these police forces. *Documenting the documentation* was also a decisive part of the research requested and eventually executed.

<sup>16</sup> Such correlations of convergence and attraction guided the writing of my thesis and are summarised in the polemic, controversial figure of Badan Palhares (Nadai 2018). For an analysis of the many meanings that Weber assigns to the term ‘elective affinity’, see Löwy (2004).

## **On documenting, registering and *moving to the other side of the counter*: some finishing touches and many loose ends**

I began the first section of this article with lines from a poem by João Cabral de Melo Neto. As an epigraph to the section, his verses addressed to Carlos Drummond de Andrade talk about the difficult task of ‘being an employee’. In his words, the files seem like tombs made to the exact dimensions for all sizes of the poet’s body. Boxes that store papers printed by machines that do not write letters. The latter, imagined by the poet as the domain of the personal, of feelings, everything that seems so distant from the bureaucracy forged by the civil servant. Bureaucracy that mortifies him and buries every part of his body. In another context, Navaro-Yashin (2007) narrates the case of Fuat, a Turkish-Cypriot, and his feeling of fear/panic upon receiving a letter in the mail addressed to him by a British administrative body. In possession of the letter, still unopened, Fuat goes to a community centre that has Turkish translators so they can explain the contents printed on the paper to him. As the anthropologist highlights, by keeping his correspondence transacted with the British state filed in a safe in this community centre, Fuat somehow seeks to appease the ghostly effect of these documents on his life as an immigrant living in England. Thus, the file seems to be a flat, grey box that, due to the appearance of rationality and contention it engenders, contrasts with the ‘explosive affects’ experienced by Fuat when coming into contact with the letters sent to him by the British government. Whether in João Cabral de Melo Neto’s poem or in Navaro-Yashin’s (2007) ethnography, documents appear as objects that carry multiple affects and meanings. Without doubt, *documenting the documentation*, forwarding it to the correct places and then receiving it with a decision, whether positive or negative, raises the most diverse anxieties and uncertainties.

The impression of confusion, uncertainty and anguish that so many papers convey is not, therefore, an undue or unreflective effect of the argumentation that I have sought to produce throughout this article. I intentionally tried to awaken such sensations in the reader through the systematic enumeration of the sayings and imaginations imposed on the papers I forged. *Documenting the documentation* begins as an intuitive procedure that, only over time, becomes a practice carried out using formally stipulated guidelines and, precisely for this reason, profoundly legitimised. If, as João Cabral de Melo Neto suggests, it is ‘difficult to be an employee’, the differences between bureaucrats and us social scientists end up blurred and fairly well correlated due to the specious, pedagogical procedures of *documenting the documentation* (Riles 2006; Hull 2012; Ferreira 2014).

By bringing these figures together, on the one hand, I seek to highlight the centrality that documents acquire for both researchers and bureaucrats. Reports, letters, declarations, notices, forms, accountability are neglected records precisely due to the triviality and ordinariness they assume in the lives of researchers and their interlocutors – state agents, business elites, bureaucrats, and so on (Riles 2006; Hull 2012). On the other, inspired by the reflection of Ferreira (2014), I seek to underline how documents remain separate from the ‘self-representation’ of anthropology. In her words, ‘in the imaginary picture composed of the solitary ethnographer, the native village and the distant tropical beach, there is no space for formal authorisations to be signed and stamped by police chiefs (...)’ (Ferreira 2014: 142). Furthermore, the analytical implications of such similarities crystallise two important images through which, as Navaro-Yashin (2007) suggests, *documentation* can be considered. On the one hand, all papers are fictions, that is, they carry, perpetuate and support elements of fabrication both for those involved in their making and those who use them. On the other, documents support feelings and affects managed by the people who produce and transact them. As Navaro-Yashin (2007: 84) suggests, they carry ‘the image of proof, stability and durability’, but they also retain in their depths all the ‘Kafkaesque’ aspects of their creation: the anxieties, the absurdities and other explosive phantasmagorias (mistakes, shady and obscure intentions, dangerous political connections, and so on)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> For other analyses on the intrinsic relationship between the rational and magical aspects propagated by state bodies and their inscription on paper, see Das (2004); Taussig (1997); Drybread (2022).

Seen through these itineraries, *documenting the documentation* has important effects. First, this procedure highlights the ways in which we communicate with state bodies. Official papers are preestablished forms of interaction, the formats, materialities and textual formulas of which must be mastered and replicated by any citizen who intends to establish a dialogue with state sectors and/or bodies<sup>18</sup>. Seen from this angle, the act of forging documents was a mandatory and required artifice for this investigation. As Anelise Riles (2006: 2) suggests, documents are important because they are ‘paradigmatic artifacts for modern knowledge practices’. They function as a kind of ‘epistemological model’ and a ‘paradigm of interpretation’ that prevails in different fields of knowledge – from the human sciences to state bureaucracies (Riles 2006: 6). Producing, transporting, handling and filing them is directly related to the experience of those who would have been my research interlocutors.

A second effect of the term *documenting the documentation* aims to highlight, ethnographically, the intentional mechanism of replicating the very work schedules undertaken by these police departments in this paperwork. Producing papers, registering them at the indicated ‘counters’ and filing them are management techniques routinely articulated in state sectors, agencies or bodies. If declarations, official letters, memoranda and requests are administrative models and solutions, *documenting the documentation* simultaneously mimics these precepts and their real and imagined purposes.

Moreover, such procedures, when taken as reflected movements worthy of analysis, enable us to dismantle reifications that I myself had replicated when choosing a formal, official path to enter the field: the certainty that the papers would grant more impersonal access and, therefore, separated from the personalities and verbal acts that always *help move bureaucracy forward*. As Ferreira (2009: 23) suggests, based on Weberian premises, even if ‘impersonality’ permeates the forms of administration practiced by state bodies, it cannot ‘be derived that bureaucratic procedures are purely formal and devoid of personality’. However, even when classified as personal, these same interactions and disputes between staff members, actions of ‘public faith’, files, techniques and authorisations, do not become or conform to ‘less bureaucratic’ administrative apparatus and procedures (Ferreira 2009: 24).

There is even a third effect that I sought to present throughout this article, which requires other developments. Inspired by the reflections undertaken by Lugones (2014: 81), that have been previously discussed, this effect speaks directly with what the author calls the ‘common condition of state subjects’. Whether this is because, as researchers or university teachers, we depend on and respond to state institutions – FAPESP, CNPq and UNICAMP – or because by *documenting the documentation* in the manner we imagine to be the most correct and efficient way of doing so, we propagate and/or extend the ‘presence of the state in our societies’ (Lugones 2014: 79). The belief that written documents are the exclusive means of opening the closed doors of the IML is supported by the ‘conscious habit or calculation (emotive and not always rational)’ that such authorities exist, are legitimate and can impersonally and definitively authorise these access flows (Idem).

When I began my *documentation processes*, I did not know the paths my papers would follow; however, I did believe they would be forwarded. As I sought to reconstruct in this article, I took a rather simplistic route through figurations, an address, a building, a name. Similar to the routes outlined in my master’s research, I imagined arriving at the building, obtaining more precise information about how I should conduct my request and, finally, having a meeting with the director of the IML. However, I never met with the director of the Campinas IML. The staff member who helped me, the director’s secretary, was my only face-to-face contact with the institution. Her indications would lead me to learn about the existence of a Scientific Commission

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18 As Guterres (2016) argues in her research on the formation of vulnerable territories in the port area of Rio de Janeiro, a distinct and politically incomparable context, the ‘storing of documents’ enacts this very desire for permanence, in a world in which the rumour and terror of being about to get removed from your home is routinely and intentionally handled by these state bodies.

specifically created to assess research projects of a 'scientific' and not an 'ethical' nature<sup>19</sup>. Similar to the procedures imposed on countless research studies in state bodies, I was only seeking to 'formally request authorisation to conduct the research' (Ferreira 2015: 37). Authorisation was the ultimate goal, that is, I saw this bureaucratic process as necessary to conduct the research, but not as a **notable** part of my research. I needed to go through it and only then would I be authorised to work within the IML, which was the actual locus of my research.

The director and then the Commission were, thus, the '*pasillos*' [hallways] and '*barandillas*' [rails] of my doctoral project. As Lugones (2012) suggests in relation to the conduct undertaken by the Juvenile Courts in Córdoba, waiting is an imposed and necessary process for any of the 'administrated' who seek assistance in the court's '*pasillos*'. In this type of corridor, people physically wait, almost always standing due to the small number of seats, and without immediate access to drinking fountains or bathrooms. Between the corridor and the court room, the '*barandillas*' limit access. This type of mobile 'counter', particularly common in courts and public offices, fulfils a dual function. First, they provide access to the judges' offices. Secondly, they restrict access and serve as a 'counter', whose function is to provide information and simultaneously reaffirm to those administered: '*que me esperem*' [let them wait for me] (Lugones 2012: 82).

During this process, in the search to obtain *authorisation*, I was obliged to identify myself. I was a 'doctoral student' in possession of and intending to conduct 'research' whose entry into the IML would only be permitted following an assessment. Therefore, the commission was a particular type of 'checkpoint'. As Jeganathan (2004) argues, the function of 'checkpoints' is to impede vehicle and pedestrian traffic<sup>20</sup>. This type of mandatory stop requires those who are in flow to answer questions posed by those who control borders and territories. According to the author, such questions revolve around issues of identity and are all sustained by the possession of valid, legible papers.

Although the distances between checkpoints are evident in zones of armed conflict, like in Sri Lanka, and the function of a Scientific Commission, I suggest that the similarities between these techniques of curbing and enabling passage are quite revealing. Both draw power from their controlling nature and, through their identification techniques, trigger correlations of differential forces between those who have the *authority to authorise* and those who are *authorised* to access the other side of the 'counter' (Lugones 2012). Therefore, the intent behind the papers that sought to *document the documentation* was to enter the organised and (not at all) dusty IML archive. Between peeks and readings, I would overcome the 'primordial lack of fetishised ethnography in the face-to-face meeting, of hours shared in the same space and time between researchers and those studied' (Vianna 2014: 46). Much like in the methodological manifestos of Abrams (2006) and Mitchell (2006), through an ethnography *in loco* and limited to idealised, reinforced institutional boundaries, I would be able to highlight the dissensions, 'illegalisms' and disputes that traverse and flesh out the IML's daily routine and working hours. This image, a mixture of 'projection' and 'mystification' and when agreed upon in our research, ends up reinforcing institutions – here, the IML – as beings that hover over all of us (Abrams 2006, Mitchell 2006).

As a final consideration, it is worth adding that by choosing not base this article on the forwarding of papers solely from a methodological perspective, I refuted certain imaginations that the intended practice of *requesting access* is separate from the research we aim to conduct. Indeed, I made an effort to carefully examine the techniques through which institutional functions and positions are publicised and agreements and access to agencies, bodies or institutions are plotted and remade on a daily basis. *Granting authorisation*, much like

19 At first, and even after going through it, I did not know which IML staff members were also members of the Commission, nor did I know what their obligations were or what the motivations were for its creation. The only information I had was that this Commission held meetings every second Tuesday of each month.

20 According to the author, checkpoints concomitantly function as physical devices that organise the flow of people and objects and as potential fixation points (targets) that anticipate latent violence. Checkpoints map targets and bomb attacks, while simultaneously determining and mapping such territories as subject to this violence due to the act of verification undertaken there.

producing bureaucratic documents that *request authorisation*, are nodal points for the research that later we will be authorised to conduct or through which spaces we will be permitted to circulate. By allowing myself to be enchanted by bibliographies and analyses that demystify the state as an abstraction, I myself was confronted with the state, that which does not exist as an entity, but, as Foucault (2009) argues, when its borders are drawn, too often produces ‘deadly’ effects. **You cannot enter, you cannot research, you cannot see, you cannot find ‘all the names’<sup>21</sup>** (Saramago 2003), because **you are not vested** with the keys that give you access to the other side of the ‘counter’ and allow certain research to finally be conducted in so-called state bodies.

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<sup>21</sup> Here, I allude to the novel by Saramago (2003), in which Mr. José, an exemplary and efficient employee of the *Conservatória Geral do Registro Civil* [General Civil Registry Office], sneaks into the austere registry office at night, with the intention of completing, with a simple date of birth, his unusual, well-organised, personal collection of newspaper and magazine clippings of famous people: bishops, artists, sportsmen, politicians, criminals, etc., archived by him. For other connections between Saramago’s novel and my doctoral research, see Nadai (2018).

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# La gestión legislativa estratégica de la Cámara de Representantes de Misiones, Argentina: entre dos modelos y múltiples tensiones

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## Resumen

A partir de la implementación de lo que en términos contextuales ha sido referido como *gestión legislativa estratégica*, la Legislatura misionera ha sido la primera en Argentina en obtener la certificación ISO de calidad institucional. Mediante un estudio etnográfico en el campo parlamentario centrado en los procesos sociales y simbólicos que permitieron configurar una nueva institucionalidad, en este artículo se argumenta que la implementación de un ‘modelo gerencial’ no ha logrado desplazar ciertas prácticas asociadas al ‘modelo burocrático tradicional’, que se supone preexistente y en vías de superación por el primero. Antes bien, la *gestión legislativa estratégica* combina aspectos de ambos modelos. Si el primero aparece desplegado como una política institucional que conlleva la ejecución de normativas, lineamientos y procedimientos específicos; el segundo, aparece encarnado en los hábitos y disposiciones de los agentes, suscitando así no pocas tensiones y evaluaciones morales.

**Palabras claves:** gestión legislativa; campo parlamentario; Provincia de Misiones; etnografía.

# The *strategic legislative management* of the missionary parliament (Arg.): between two models and multiple tensions

## Abstract

From the implementation of what in contextual terms has been referred to as *strategic legislative management*, the Missionary Legislature has been the first in Argentina to obtain the ISO certification of institutional quality. In this article, through an ethnographic study in the parliamentary field focused on the social and symbolic processes that allowed the configuration of a new institutionality, I will argue that the implementation of a 'managerial model' has not succeeded in displacing certain practices associated with the 'traditional bureaucratic model', which is supposed to be pre-existing and in the process of being overcome by the former. Rather, *strategic legislative management* combines aspects of both models. If the first appears deployed as an institutional policy that involves the execution of regulations, guidelines and specific procedures; the second appears embodied in the habitus and dispositions of the agents, thus raising not a few tensions and moral evaluations.

**Keywords:** Legislative Management; Parliamentary Field; Province of Misiones; Ethnography.

## A *gestão legislativa estratégica* da Câmara dos Deputados de Misiones, Argentina: entre dois modelos e várias tensões

## Resumo

A partir da implementação do que em termos contextuais tem sido denominado como *gestão legislativa estratégica*, a Legislatura de Misiones foi a primeira na Argentina a obter a certificação ISO de qualidade institucional. Neste artigo, por meio de um estudo etnográfico no campo parlamentar focado nos processos sociais e simbólicos que permitiram a configuração de uma nova institucionalidade, argumentarei que a implementação de um 'modelo gerencial' não conseguiu deslocar certas práticas associadas ao 'modelo burocrático tradicional', que se supõe ser pré-existente e em vias de ser superado pelo primeiro. Em vez disso, a *gestão legislativa estratégica* combina aspectos dos dois modelos. Se o primeiro aparece implantado como uma política institucional que envolve a execução de regulamentos, diretrizes e procedimentos específicos; o segundo aparece encarnado no habitus e nas disposições dos agentes, suscitando assim muitas tensões e avaliações morais.

**Palavras-chave:** Gestão Legislativa; Campo Parlamentar; Província de Misiones; Etnografia.

# La gestión legislativa estratégica de la Cámara de Representantes de Misiones, Argentina: entre dos modelos y múltiples tensiones

Laura Andrea Ebenau

## El campo parlamentario como campo etnográfico

Mediante la realización de un exhaustivo estudio etnográfico en la Cámara de Representantes de la provincia de Misiones (Argentina) –cuyo desarrollo y resultados han sido sistematizados en la tesis para finalizar mi formación doctoral<sup>1</sup>–, abordé un conjunto de procesos que confluyeron en la construcción social de la llamada *gestión legislativa estratégica*.<sup>2</sup> En una primera instancia de las indagaciones, el análisis se centró en los cambios producidos a nivel de las prácticas de gerenciamiento, implementados a los fines de la obtención de la certificación de calidad institucional, otorgada por el Instituto Argentino de Normalización y Certificación (IRAM). De este modo, en mi condición de agente legislativa y de etnógrafa, pude observar que el proceso reformador (iniciado en 2008) durante el transcurso de una década produjo una nueva institucionalidad –una nueva dinámica de funcionamiento– para el Poder Legislativo; pero, más que esto, favoreció asimismo la producción de otros estándares morales, que modificaron la percepción social de los misioneros respecto del parlamento provincial.<sup>3</sup>

A fin de presentar algunos argumentos que remiten a los procesos de producción de “*sentidos sociales y modalidades cotidianas de gestión en distintos contextos (g)locales*” –siendo éste uno de los ejes de la convocatoria al presente dossier temático–, recupero aquí la descripción y análisis de escenas etnográficas, y relatos de un conjunto de agentes más directamente implicados/as en la producción de la institucionalidad parlamentaria, y quienes acreditan, en relación a los/as legisladores/as (que tienen un mandato a término), vínculos más estables y duraderos con la institución. Abordo particularmente las tensiones generadas por la adopción de nuevas prácticas de gerenciamiento, y los procesos de significación a ellas asociadas. A propósito de éstos, advertí que, entre el conjunto de narrativas, algunas evocaban críticamente la convencional idea de burocracia a la luz de la distinción de dos sistemas en tensión: la *gestión burocrática tradicional* y la *gestión legislativa estratégica*. Como intentaré demostrar, en el contexto etnográfico tal distinción operaba fijando disímiles representaciones sociales (y evaluaciones morales) respecto de la vieja y la nueva institucionalidad; no obstante, atendiendo a la dinámica del funcionamiento cotidiano del campo parlamentario, ambas modalidades de gestión subsisten y se articulan en un movimiento de complementariedad, más que de sustitución.

Quisiera señalar que tratar a la institución legislativa –y a cualquier otra institución estatal– como un “campo” (siguiendo a Bourdieu 1990, 2005), indefectiblemente implica poder describir las diversas posiciones ocupadas y

1 Con algunas revisiones, recupero aquí el análisis desarrollado en los capítulos 3 y 4 de la tesis doctoral (Ebenau 2020) presentada en el marco del Programa de Postgrado en Antropología Social de la UNaM. Mi condición de agente legislativa requirió un permanente ejercicio de reflexividad, que fue recuperado en la introducción de la tesis.

2 A lo largo del texto todas las categorías “nativas” serán destacadas en itálicas.

3 Si en la perspectiva de las autoridades parlamentarias la reforma institucional propició la *jerarquización* del Parlamento, una aproximación en clave etnográfica permitió elucidar de qué manera este poder del estado se posicionó como un ‘centro ejemplar’ (definido en los términos de Geertz 1994), esto es, como centro ordenador que condensa concepciones, valores, una forma de ejercer el poder; y respecto del cual se desarrollan los acontecimientos institucionales y simbólicos de mayor relevancia para la vida política en el contexto provincial. Este desplazamiento del locus del ejercicio de la conducción política (desde el Ejecutivo al Legislativo), es interpretado como uno de los aspectos centrales del proceso de construcción de hegemonía que, de manera ininterrumpida en el transcurso de dos décadas, lleva adelante el partido Frente Renovador de la Concordia Social (en adelante, FR).

las trayectorias desarrolladas por los/as agentes, en relación a los “habitus”, en tanto disposiciones adquiridas o esquemas de percepción y acción. En tal sentido, una aproximación etnográfica al Poder Legislativo me permitió concebirlos como una categoría de actores especializados, portadores de creencias y valores específicos.

Por otra parte, una comprensión de la esfera estatal como un campo de poder (cf. Elias 1996 [1969]:162), implica considerar que, a lo largo de su desarrollo, la reconfiguración de las interdependencias y las relaciones sociales que la caracterizan resultaron en equilibrios de fuerzas inestables (antagonismos y negociaciones) que, en su devenir, han ido modificando la institucionalidad del campo. Siguiendo este presupuesto, antes que reflexionar sobre “la institución” legislativa definida como “un agrupamiento social legitimado” (Douglas 2007 [1986]:56), he optado por poner el foco en la institucionalidad para referirme a las dinámicas de funcionamiento, los procesos vinculados a la práctica administrativa y legislativa, y el conjunto de categorías que componen las representaciones socialmente compartidas sobre el parlamento en Misiones.

A quienes nos convocan estas problemáticas sabemos que, sobre la burocracia, el estado y sus instituciones existe una copiosa literatura producida en diferentes tradiciones disciplinares de las ciencias sociales. Ante la imposibilidad de presentar una revisión bibliográfica exhaustiva, destaco apenas que, desde la sociología, Weber (1977 [1922]; 1985 [1905]) enfatizó el carácter “racional” de la lógica burocrática, cuya expansión descontrolada prefiguraría al estado moderno como una “jaula de hierro”; visión luego discutida por Bourdieu (2005) –entre otros autores–, quien propuso analizarla en relación al desarrollo de un poder estatal que, constituyendo al estado como un cuerpo “ficticio”, establece las condiciones para pensarlo desde sus propias categorías. Próximos a esta perspectiva, quienes rechazan las interpretaciones reduccionistas y sustantivas del estado postulan que, a los fines analíticos, es necesario interrogarse sobre las operaciones que subyacen y producen una representación naturalizada, reificada, de un fenómeno que debe ser concebido como una “abstracción” o un “constructo ideológico”.

De este grupo de autores, recupero aquí la propuesta de Abrams (2015 [1977]), quien entiende al estado como un proceso que plasma, al mismo tiempo, un *sistema-estado* (una trama palpable de estructura práctica e institucional) y una *idea-estado* (proyectada y variadamente sostenida por diferentes sociedades). Según este autor, para desmontar la idea reificada del estado –una abstracción ideológica que lo prefigura como una cosa, un objeto real concreto–, el análisis debe considerar tanto el sistema-estado –esto es, el conjunto de instituciones de control político ejecutivo y de seguridad, la administración, los funcionarios (sus prácticas y agencias)–, para dar cuenta del funcionamiento del poder político institucionalizado, como las formas específicas en que, para legitimarlo, se produce socialmente una particular idea-estado. O, lo que es más interesante desde una perspectiva etnográfica, ideas contrastantes que pueden coexistir en un mismo contexto societal (véase, especialmente, Balbi 2010).

Siguiendo estas formulaciones, en mi investigación partí del supuesto de que la *gestión legislativa estratégica* expresa una idea, una categoría “nativa” (Ebenau 2020). Dicha idea se encuadra bajo los principios de un modelo gerencial y fue instrumentada gradualmente por funcionarios con cargos jerárquicos que, ejerciendo funciones de dirección, propiciaron la implementación de nuevos procedimientos, criterios técnicos y un conjunto de valores, evocados en términos de eficacia/eficiencia, servicios de calidad, estandarización de procesos, profesionalización y accesibilidad, por mencionar sólo algunos.

Sin caer en una comparación directa y mecánica –porque, además, sería impropio–, consideré algunas orientaciones analíticas desarrolladas en la introducción al clásico trabajo de Edmund Leach (1996 [1964]), sobre los sistemas políticos de Alta Birmania. Recordemos que, según este autor, los modos ideales de vida elaborados por los kachin representaban sistemas en equilibrio, pero para explicar la variabilidad de su estructura social, “en situaciones prácticas” se debía atender a la manera en que se articulaban contradictoriamente dos tipos polares (*chan* y *gumlao*), resultando en ocasiones un sistema político alterno (*gumsa*) como una especie de compromiso entre estos (Leach 1996 [1964]: 72)<sup>4</sup>. Inspirándome en sus argumentos, especialmente en la

4 Considerando el parecer de uno de los árbitros anónimos y para reducir la posibilidad de equívocos, señalo que no se trata de una comparación por analogía porque no estoy comparando referentes empíricos equivalentes. En el caso de Leach, la variabilidad estructural es observada a nivel de los sistemas

distinción de los/as propios agentes legislativos/as, fue posible abstraer en el campo etnográfico dos sistemas de gestión en tensión, pero que en la práctica coexisten y, más aún, se fusionan según sus elecciones pragmáticas y evaluaciones morales. Para ello, en lo que sigue describiré el modo en que la nueva gestión se fue “gestando”<sup>5</sup> y desarrollando en la práctica, al tiempo que producía su propia base de legitimidad.<sup>6</sup>

## La Nueva Gestión Pública (NGP) como paradigma de la modernización institucional

En paralelo al declive del llamado estado de bienestar en Latinoamérica, los organismos internacionales de crédito requirieron de los gobiernos nacionales el desenvolvimiento de procesos de reforma del estado o de la administración pública, regidos por un nuevo paradigma, denominado como la Nueva Gestión Pública (NGP) o *New Public Management* (NPM). Encontrándose muy en auge una visión adversa de la burocracia y, vinculada a ella, la firme convicción que juzgaba a la corrupción y al clientelismo como problemas endémicos de las administraciones estatales, la necesidad de ‘sanear’ al estado a los fines de tornarlo eficaz, eficiente y transparente, justificaba una urgente reestructuración del sistema institucional y una reingeniería técnica y administrativa. La Nueva Gestión Pública se postuló entonces como el único esquema capaz de reorientar las pautas de funcionamiento, roles y objetivos de la administración estatal. Acorde a esta tendencia los lineamientos trazados exacerbaron un conjunto de distinciones dicotómicas, que oponían a administradores/gestores y funcionarios/políticos; tecnocracia y burocracia; procesos técnicos y decisiones políticas; entre otras. De este modo, como lo analiza López (2005), “Términos tales como ‘gestión por resultados’, ‘mejora continua de la calidad’, ‘satisfacción al cliente’ o ‘gerencia de contratos’ adquirieron predominio en los nuevos programas de ‘modernización’ del Estado” (2005: 72).

Por su parte, entre algunos analistas de la NGP se ha instalado un amplio consenso en explicar aquellas transformaciones en términos de la transferencia y preeminencia de la lógica privada sobre el sector público, mediante la aplicación de las tecnologías de gestión empresarial caracterizadas por una supuesta neutralidad política. No obstante, si bien así fueron (re)presentadas, en la práctica se dio una combinación variable entre los principios del *management* y los valores de la administración pública tradicional. De modo tal que, pese al optimismo y expectativas de los “expertos”, la lógica gerencial se encontraba con no pocas limitaciones para sustituir aquellas formas convencionales de gestión y que tuvieron un desarrollo específico en el ámbito de la organización estatal. Antes bien,

...el resultado, a más de dos décadas de experimentos reformistas, es la caótica convivencia de una incipiente burocracia de carrera, superpuesta con segmentos clientelares tradicionales y estamentos tecnoburocráticos que pretenden asumir un ‘liderazgo de tipo gerencial’, situación que reproduce en el aparato estatal la arraigada lógica de los ‘compartimentos estancos’ (López 2005:86).

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políticos; mientras que, en el caso aquí estudiado, no se observa tal variabilidad ni alternancia de la estructura institucional. Simplemente, procuro describir los sistemas de gestión que son distinguidos en la perspectiva de los actores y también en la mía como investigadora sólo a los fines analíticos, ya que en la práctica la vida institucional transcurre mediante procesos sociales que los articulan dialécticamente.

5 El antropólogo Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, distingue las nociones de “gestar” y “gerir” (gestionar) para pensar cómo se produce y ejerce el “poder tutelar” en relación con la política indigenista desarrollada en Brasil. Si bien ambas categorías se originan en una única etimología latina, refieren a “...dos dimensiones que se desacoplan de la misma operación para permitimos recortar y describir matices en los ejercicios de poder. “Gestar” nos apunta hacia la función constitutiva y pedagógica, de “cuidados maternos”, del enseñar a “ser” (...), una dimensión de instauración”; mientras que “gestionar” “...nos señala al control cotidiano de una administración que, débil, impregnada por intereses personales y de redes clientelares cuales fueran (...) aun así representa este “tutor” de colectivos, controlador de espacios, mantenedor de las desiguales en sus nichos” (Souza Lima 2002: 16. La traducción me pertenece). Con relación a los estudios sobre prácticas de gerenciamiento, considero útil dicha distinción analítica porque permite examinar, en el mismo plano, la dimensión pedagógica y la del control administrativo como condiciones para la formulación y desarrollo de tales prácticas, cualquiera sea el contexto de su producción.

6 Una versión preliminar de este artículo fue presentada como ponencia en el 12° Congreso Argentino de Antropología Social (La Plata, 8/9/21). Agradezco las observaciones de quienes evaluaron la versión original del artículo, contribuyendo así a la revisión de algunos argumentos. Agradezco también la colaboración brindada por mis colegas, Dra. Mariana Lorenzetti y Guido Diblasí (investigadora y técnico principal del IESyH, CONICET/UNaM), en la preparación de este artículo.

Los supuestos doctrinarios, ideológicos e instrumentales de este esquema conforman lo que en este trabajo referiré como la “perspectiva del modelo”, que ha configurado tanto los discursos de las autoridades legislativas, como los instrumentos mandatorios, publicaciones institucionales (y también académicas) de quienes fueron, o se desempeñan actualmente como, agentes legislativos (cf. Britto 2015; Razongles Carreras 2016; Saucedo 2019). En ella, prevalece un “enfoque institucional normativo” que reproduce acríticamente los principios, orientaciones y directrices de la NGP. Tomando distancia de este punto de vista, el “enfoque etnográfico” desarrollado durante mis indagaciones me llevó a atender las relaciones, experiencias y prácticas cotidianas de los/as agentes, para problematizar aspectos de la producción situada de significados y clasificaciones que le son propias.

Basándome en los materiales de campo, se fueron tornando inteligibles las tensiones y los “discursos ocultos” (en el sentido analizado por Scott 2000) que, de manera sutil, cuestionaban aquellas narrativas, criterios eficientistas o las formas de implementación de un paquete de acciones. Pero, como se desprende del análisis, más allá de algunas quejas o dificultades en la adecuación de las rutinas de trabajo, cada agente desde su posición participaba activamente –y participa aún hoy– en la construcción de una nueva institucionalidad legislativa y de los postulados morales que la orientan. Las tensiones y los cuestionamientos son aspectos constitutivos de este complejo proceso y ponen de relevancia que el “modelo gerencial” en la práctica no ha logrado desplazar ciertas rutinas y modos de hacer pautados por una “gestión tradicional” que, desde la perspectiva del modelo, se presupone caduca y, por tal, en vías de superación. En cambio, en su realización concreta y cotidiana, la *gestión legislativa estratégica* combina aspectos de ambos sistemas. Si el primero aparece desplegado “desde arriba” en un conjunto de normativas de calidad y disposiciones operativas que deben ser ejecutadas, el segundo –podría afirmarse– se halla encarnado en *habitus* y disposiciones determinadas por el sentido práctico de los/as agentes que, al reproducirse, serían más difíciles de reencauzar.

## El proceso de certificación

El desarrollo de la *gestión legislativa estratégica* fue anterior a los inicios del proceso de certificación de la calidad institucional. A través del Instituto Argentino de Normalización y Certificación (IRAM), la Cámara de Representantes de Misiones (primer Legislatura Provincial en el país en contar con esta garantía de estandarización) adquirió las sucesivas certificaciones que acreditan que los procesos desarrollados se ajustan a los criterios establecidos por las normas ISO,<sup>7</sup> referidas específicamente a los Sistemas de Gestión de Calidad.<sup>8</sup>

En concordancia con estos lineamientos, el enfoque basado en procesos, el enfoque al cliente-ciudadano como unidad de referencia del servicio público, la mejora y evaluación continua, la profesionalización de los funcionarios, la planificación de los resultados, entre otros, son algunos de los principios y directrices del modelo. Si el régimen discursivo de la NGP establece el marco ideológico, los sistemas de certificación internacionales prescriben los procedimientos, etapas y condiciones técnicas que se deben cumplir para llevar aquel modelo a la práctica. De esta convergencia o asociación estratégica se produce, en términos generales, una noción normativa de ‘calidad institucional’.

<sup>7</sup> Tales normas fueron instituidas por una Organización Internacional de Normalización (la *International Organization for Standardization*), conformada como federación mundial de organismos nacionales de normalización. De acuerdo a estas normas ISO, los procesos técnicos de certificación y los estándares de calidad pueden ser aplicados tanto a empresas, organizaciones comerciales como a instituciones públicas; principalmente, a partir de que en el contexto Latinoamericano cobró nuevo impulso el movimiento regional en torno a la Nueva Gestión Pública. Se suma a ello la propuesta de trazar a nivel de los estados nacionales nuevos objetivos, como los contenidos en la “Carta Iberoamericana de Calidad en la Gestión Pública”, elaborada por la IX Conferencia Iberoamericana de Ministros de Administración Pública y Reforma del Estado (en 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Según declaraciones del entonces Secretario Parlamentario a cargo del Área Administrativa, la primera certificación obtenida por la Cámara en 2013 fue conforme al cumplimiento de lo especificado por la norma ISO 9001:2008. Seguidamente, en 2016, se logró una nueva certificación (respecto de la cual no encontré mayores referencias); y posteriormente, en 2018, la Cámara fue certificada por el cumplimiento de los requisitos establecidos en la norma ISO 9001:2015, que alcanza específicamente a los procesos de sanción y consolidación de las normas legislativas (Cf. Nota de prensa disponible en el sitio institucional de la HCR, “*Legislatura: Capacitan para mejorar la calidad de gestión de acuerdo con la norma ISO 9001:2015*” Accedido el 05/02/2020 de: [http://www.diputadosmisiones.gob.ar/web\\_camara/home.php?pagina=contenidos&id=5955&categoria=1&secretaria=5&nropagina=110#menu](http://www.diputadosmisiones.gob.ar/web_camara/home.php?pagina=contenidos&id=5955&categoria=1&secretaria=5&nropagina=110#menu))

Abocarse al proceso de certificación, entonces, significó para las autoridades legislativas la tarea de concebir y desarrollar una *política de calidad* (actualizada y aprobada por Resolución C.R./R. 24-2018/19), una serie de objetivos programáticos y un *sistema de gestión de calidad* (SGC). El desarrollo de este último logró su versión más acabada por la vía de la innovación tecnológica y la adopción de las Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones (TIC) como instrumentos de gestión aplicable tanto a los procesos administrativos, como a los propiamente legislativos. Los cambios así implementados debieron ser estandarizados y formalizados por escrito en una serie de documentos mandatorios y manuales de procedimiento. Para efectivizar los procedimientos se conformó ‘el equipo de calidad’, integrado por cuatro responsables y subresponsables (uno por cada secretaría parlamentaria)<sup>9</sup> con diversas funciones que abarcaban desde: la elaboración y actualización de los procedimientos, la coordinación del cumplimiento de sus objetivos y de los programas anuales de auditoría y formación, y el control del cumplimiento de las acciones correctivas (cf. Razongles Carreras 2016).

Para dar cuenta de estas acciones, es necesario explicitar muy brevemente algunas cuestiones metodológicas. Debo señalar que como agente y etnógrafa no me fue posible registrar todas y cada una de las etapas y acciones que se fueron desarrollando. No obstante, la diversa información recabada en campo fue complementada con las descripciones elaboradas en las investigaciones (de grado y postgrado, respectivamente) de Saucedo (2019) y Razongles Carreras (2016). Por otra parte, como mi interés se centraba en recuperar la perspectiva de los/as agentes para inscribir las distintas evaluaciones morales que emergieron en las interacciones concretas, seleccioné algunas situaciones en las que yo misma me vi involucrada en mi rol de asesora parlamentaria.<sup>10</sup>

A los fines expositivos, recupero la distinción nativa entre área legislativa y área administrativa, como sectores vertebradores de la organización funcional del campo parlamentario (véase nota al pie 9). Si bien esta diferenciación se funda en atribuciones específicas, el área legislativa, por su competencia en la producción normativa, suele ser percibida como un ámbito “más político”; mientras que a la administrativa se le atribuye un carácter “más burocrático”. Desde la perspectiva de algunos actores con larga trayectoria en el ámbito de las comisiones parlamentarias, los cambios de procedimiento y su estandarización supusieron dar preeminencia a lo técnico por sobre lo político, instalándose de este modo una tendencia a la centralización. Para dar cuenta de esta tensión y cómo ha sido problematizada por parte de mis interlocutores/as, me detendré en describir las especificidades que definen el trabajo en ambas áreas.

## **Los procedimientos de gestión legislativa para el área administrativa**

Cambió mucho con la parte de informatización, la firma digital... o sea, nuestro mecanismo [de gestión parlamentaria] (...) Ahora uno ve que hay cierto formato, ciertas reglas, y todos tuvieron, tuvimos que hacer el curso e ir capacitándonos día a día (...) creo que habla de una profesionalización del Poder Legislativo en todos los aspectos. Creo que hay un cambio, una mejora (Entrevista a la Pro-Secretaria Legislativa, febrero de 2020).

9 La organización burocrática del Poder Legislativo se estructura en torno a dos áreas funcionales: la ‘Secretaría Legislativa a cargo del Área Parlamentaria’ y la ‘Secretaría Legislativa a cargo del Área Administrativa’, con sus correspondientes Pro-Secretarías. De la primera dependen los bloques partidarios y todas las reparticiones, vinculadas a la producción y gestión de expedientes legislativos, y al desarrollo de las tramitaciones concernientes a la *práctica legislativa*. Por su parte, la segunda agrupa a las reparticiones que contribuyen al funcionamiento cotidiano de la institución, en relación con la ejecución presupuestaria y la administración de los recursos humanos, edilicios, patrimoniales y otras tramitaciones internas al Poder Legislativo. En 2007, con la asunción a la presidencia del Poder Legislativo del diputado Carlos Rovira (máximo líder y *conductor* político del partido de gobierno, cf. Ebenau & Abdulhadi 2022), fueron creadas dos áreas con rango de Secretarías Legislativas que venían a completar la armazón burocrática. Ellas son: el Centro del Conocimiento Parlamentario, creado por Ley IV-Nº 37 (Antes, Ley 4424) y el Digesto Jurídico que, instituido a través de la Ley Nº 4465, inició sus actividades a principios de 2009. A pesar de estas innovaciones, persiste una distinción bipartita –como principio de estructuración– que se halla inscrita en los modos de percepción de los agentes.

10 Con una trayectoria de 19 años de servicio, también tuve que *aggiornarme* a los cambios que implicaron nuevos aprendizajes respecto a los procedimientos incorporados. Mientras avanzaba en mis indagaciones para concluir la tesis doctoral, estuve afectada al bloque parlamentario de un partido opositor, circunstancia que me permitió posicionarme en un buen lugar de observación para poder construir el necesario distanciamiento con mi objeto de estudio.



El proceso de informatización tuvo inicio en 2008, con la implementación del *Sistema de Información Parlamentaria* (SIP) como herramienta para la digitalización del trámite de expedientes legislativos. Asimismo, se adoptó la firma digital y la modalidad del voto electrónico, para lo cual los/as legisladores/as debieron familiarizarse primeramente con el uso de tablets, hasta que en 2018 se dispuso el uso de notebooks. Paralelamente, se fue testeando la implementación de una *Intranet Legislativa*, desde la cual varios de los procesos comenzaron a realizarse en la plataforma digital. En ella también se alojan los documentos mandatorios y los registros que se fueron elaborando para satisfacer cada uno de los requisitos establecidos en la norma ISO.

Imagen 1. Sección de inicio de la Intranet Legislativa



Entre los documentos mandatorios de mayor generalidad se cuentan el Manual de Calidad (del cual se han editado ya diez versiones). En el mismo, se define al Procedimiento de Gestión Legislativa (PGL) como un “documento que detalla la secuencia, tareas, responsabilidades, controles y registros del SGC de la Cámara” (HCR 2019: 5); distinguiéndose entre “procedimientos comunes” a todas las Secretarías, y otros “procedimientos operativos” que prescriben las actividades y procesos específicos, de cada área y división particular.

Atendiendo a lo descripto, se advierte que en el universo legislativo el personal tiene un conocimiento parcial de los procesos específicos de cada área (legislativa o administrativa). Dadas su estabilidad en el cargo y su continuidad en el área o departamento particular, con el tiempo, dicho personal va desarrollando un estilo de trabajo y ciertas competencias, un “saber hacer” pautado por reglas procedimentales, que son específicas a la función que cumple.<sup>11</sup> Como no todos/as tienen la exigencia de instruirse en todas y cada una de las nuevas pautas, el/a agente va paulatinamente conociendo, y asimilando, los cambios institucionales a partir de: a) las disposiciones y comunicaciones internas; b) la participación en capacitaciones; y c) las interacciones cotidianas con otros agentes. Para aproximarnos a las múltiples situaciones que permiten describir algunas tensiones, en lo que sigue presentaré

<sup>11</sup> El *plantel de personal* (diferenciado en *planta temporaria* –personal contratado, con y sin relación de dependencia– y *permanente*) cuenta con un Estatuto del Empleado Legislativo y se dispone en un orden jerárquico preestablecido según una clasificación formal de rangos y categorías funcionales. Sin embargo, se ha observado que los/as agentes participan de otros espacios de sociabilidad, donde se tejen las distintas redes de filiación, que influyen en la conformación de agrupamientos y formas de identificación paralelas y alternas a la organización formal. De este modo, el trabajo de militancia en períodos electorales, la participación regular en agrupaciones partidarias y en redes de filiación, política y parentales, fueron identificadas como los principales medios de reclutamiento y continuidad en la burocracia parlamentaria; esta sumatoria de relaciones constituye lo que Borges (2009:199) denominó como *politización del Estado*. En la práctica, los nombramientos a nuevos cargos por parte de la Presidencia contravienen abiertamente el propio Reglamento de la Cámara (RC, Art. 34º, inc. 12), que establece el mecanismo de “concurso de selección”. Interesa señalar que la reforma institucional no ha producido cambios significativos respecto a esta dinámica.

escenas etnográficas a través de las cuales se pueden reconstruir las interacciones específicas y los esfuerzos que “seguir una regla” puede suponer para quien no está compenetrado con/en la nueva dinámica institucional.

Particularmente, describiré a continuación algunos de los procesos alcanzados por el Sistema de Gestión de Calidad (SGC) correspondientes al área administrativa. A través del estudio de Saucedo (2019), se reconstruye cómo afectó el proceso de digitalización al área específica de la Dirección General de Recursos Humanos (en adelante, RRHH).<sup>12</sup> El autor argumenta que la eficiencia administrativa alcanzada con la innovación tecnológica constituyó un proceso superador de la llamada “*gestión tradicional*” que, característica de una “*burocracia estancada*”, se llevaba a cabo mediante el uso de planillas y el empleo de la escritura como principal tarea para la producción de, por ejemplo, los legajos del personal. En contraste con esta modalidad de trabajo, la incorporación de herramientas informáticas posibilitó por sí misma una mayor productividad de tareas, economía de tiempo y mejora en la capacidad de respuesta.

Para el grupo de agentes afectados a la Dirección, el proceso de digitalización se inició a comienzos de 2014. Concluido el sondeo prospectivo y la convocatoria general, agentes del Área de Capacitación de Recursos Humanos, dependientes de la Secretaría del Centro del Conocimiento Parlamentario, dictaron cursos a lo largo de dos semanas consecutivas. Los ingenieros en sistemas de información y tecnologías, y los técnicos en programación, instruyeron al equipo de RRHH en las nuevas funciones y tareas.

Con el desarrollo de los programas específicos y el entrenamiento de los/as agentes la nueva gestión en RRHH pasó a realizarse mediante la confección de un Legajo digital; se incorporó la Póliza digital; también, para las licencias anuales ordinarias (LAO), se generó una “Ficha LAO digital”; y toda notificación registrada por mesa de entradas y salidas se canalizó por el Sistema de Gestión Trámite Administrativo. Tal sistema no es exclusivo del área de RRHH, ya que concentra la gestión de la “mesa de entradas y salidas” y todas las comunicaciones internas al Poder Legislativo:

...Con la gestión del trámite administrativo, se comienza a registrar sistematizadamente los pases de notas, instrumentos legales y cualquier otro hecho concerniente de información y comunicación entre esta dirección de RRHH y otras áreas; eliminando los interminables cuadernos de registros (Saucedo 2019:46).

Si bien el sistema registra e identifica cada nota con un número específico para su posterior seguimiento, esto no supuso la eliminación definitiva de la notificación impresa. De hecho, para presentar cualquier solicitud dirigida al secretario administrativo se adiciona, a la nota impresa, un *registro de pase*. Para ilustrar esto, quisiera comentar que una mañana, al recibir una notificación del área de RRHH tuve que firmar, además del registro de pases, el acuse de recibo en otra planilla, que me fue entregada por uno de los auxiliares del área. Me llamó la atención este detallado control y expresé que, a mi parecer, suponía un mayor gasto de recursos. A lo que mi interlocutor respondió: “¡Mucha tecnología y más problemas, nomás!”, refiriéndose a que las tareas de registro de las notificaciones de oficio, antes que ser simplificadas por la base de datos, se tornaron más engorrosas. Desde luego, no se podría tomar esta declaración como una impugnación absoluta a todo el sistema de gestión, pero pone en evidencia que ciertas rutinas asociadas a la “burocracia tradicional” perviven pese a la extendida digitalización.

Desde un enfoque institucional normativo, el estudio aquí referido concluye presentando algunas reflexiones acerca de la nueva institucionalidad legislativa, que es tomada como modelo por parte de otros órganos de gobierno:

Luego de los períodos y con los indicadores de gestión que fueron claros ejemplos que no sólo expusieron, un antes y después de la dirección, del paso de una burocracia estancada, ralentizada, de la ineficiencia en la gestión de tareas llevadas a cabo de manera tradicional (...), y así evidenciando la burocracia informatizada y finalmente

<sup>12</sup> En el organigrama general de la Cámara, la Dirección General de RRHH está subordinada a la Secretaría Parlamentaria a cargo del Área Administrativa. Dependen de ella la Dirección de Personal y tres Subdirecciones: la Subdirección de Liquidaciones, la de Estadísticas y Legajos, y la de Servicios Médicos; cada una de ellas alberga un Departamento específico: Departamento de Novedades de Sueldos, de Verificación y Actualización de Legajos, y de Reconocimientos Médicos, respectivamente.

desembarcando en la reorganización e interoperabilidad del área, no podemos dejar de expresar que son datos relevantes más que positivos en la modernización y aceleración de funciones (Saucedo 2019: 62-63).

Una vez más, se aprecia el contraste trazado entre la nueva gestión y las anteriores; y de qué manera el modelo gerencial es concebido como una experiencia de vanguardia en la modernización de las instituciones públicas.

### **Acerca de la atención de las demandas como un *servicio legislativo***

Entre los servicios legislativos que la Cámara ofrece se cuentan aquellos vinculados con la actividad parlamentaria y que son especificados como “compromisos” en la Resolución C.R./R. 24-2018/19, concerniente a la política de calidad. Pero, dado que los/as legisladores/as combinan en su trabajo político (el cual excede a la actividad proselitista y partidaria, según Gaztañaga 2010) la actividad legislativa con el trabajo de gestión social,<sup>13</sup> diariamente reciben en sus despachos demandas de distinta índole. El área de “Atención al Ciudadano” –dependiente de la Secretaría del Centro del Conocimiento Parlamentario– se presenta como la primera instancia de contacto con la institución y, a través de ella, con los/as funcionarios/as y legisladores/as. Tiene a su cargo las tareas de recepción y registración de las personas visitantes, así como brindar orientación ante consultas diversas.

Para analizar de qué manera pueden ser formuladas estas demandas sociales –que nos permita compararlas con las prácticas analizadas por Pantaleón (2005) en el Ministerio de Desarrollo Social en la provincia de Salta (Argentina), y Bezerra (1999), en el ámbito del Congreso Nacional de Brasil– me detendré en la descripción de un par de escenas que posibilitan relativizar la representación difundida en torno a una *Cámara de puertas abiertas*. En tal sentido, observo que, en la práctica, el acceso a la atención de los/as legisladores/as, antes que ser facilitado, se tornó más restringido. De este modo, en la tensión existente entre dos valores (eficiencia y apertura institucional), el procedimiento establecido para la atención al ciudadano determinó una circulación condicionada de las personas.

Cabe señalar que, con la inauguración del nuevo edificio anexo, en 2011,<sup>14</sup> se hizo cada vez más frecuente la colocación de vallas de contención, ampliándose también la afectación del personal de seguridad, ante la emergencia de diversas movilizaciones sectoriales y sociales que pretendían canalizar sus demandas a través de la Legislatura. Sin ser ésta una práctica exclusiva de la institución parlamentaria (ni en Misiones, ni en el país), destaco que a partir de entonces se tornó recurrente. De este modo, los portavoces de los colectivos movilizadores eran los únicos autorizados para presentar sus peticiones y, previo registro en el área de Atención al Ciudadano, podían acceder a una audiencia con autoridades legislativas o diputados/as interesados/as en dialogar con los manifestantes.

Cuando algunas de estas demandas fueron canalizadas como proyectos legislativos, siendo las comisiones parlamentarias las instancias de debate y tratamiento de los expedientes generados por cada legislador/a, a las reuniones ordinarias o extraordinarias pudieron asistir representantes sindicales, sectoriales y de otras organizaciones de la sociedad civil, e incluso participar como oradores, si así lo disponía la presidencia de la comisión. Pero, para esto último debía mediar una invitación formal.

No obstante, en alguna ocasión fue posible omitir el trámite de autorización. Con la presunción de que “las reuniones son públicas” –porque así me había aseverado un secretario de comisión– en una oportunidad (a comienzos de julio de 2012) asistí como oyente a una reunión de comisión, junto a dos docentes investigadores, interesados en registrar las intervenciones de otros académicos locales en torno al proceso de consagración de la

<sup>13</sup> Para una discusión más exhaustiva de la noción de “trabajo de gestión social”, consúltese la tesis de grado de Hartwig (2022).

<sup>14</sup> El primer edificio de la Cámara de Representantes fue inaugurado en 1944 con motivo de la realización de la Primera Fiesta Nacional de la Yerba Mate, pero recién en 1955 fue destinado a sede del Poder Legislativo Provincial. Si bien a lo largo de los años la construcción ha sufrido numerosas modificaciones internas, en el transcurso de 2012 y 2013 el Palacio Legislativo –renombrado como “edificio histórico”–, fue íntegramente remodelado. A esta edificación histórica la complementa una segunda estructura, el *nuevo edificio anexo*. En 2011 se concluyen las obras, reimpulsadas en 2010, en vista de la necesidad de ampliación y el establecimiento de condiciones adecuadas que favorezcan una “positiva funcionalidad”.

figura del prócer provincial. Como agente legislativa, facilité el acceso de mis profesores a este espacio (en el cual también participan asesores, secretarios y trabajadores de prensa), omitiendo la gestión de una autorización expresa (el procedimiento de registro) por parte del secretario y/o presidente de comisión. Simplemente, nos ubicamos en la sala de reuniones como espectadores y observamos. Otros/as agentes, que me conocían, nos miraron con cierta extrañeza; pero nadie nos interpeló por nuestra presencia, quizá porque les resultaba evidente que yo acompañaba a esas personas ajenas al Poder.

Años más tarde, un viernes del mes de agosto de 2019, recibí –como era frecuente– una llamada de parte del área de Atención al Ciudadano para informarme que un señor se encontraba interesado en hablar con algún legislador. La derivación a nuestra oficina, según lo explicó la agente, se fundaba en que “era alguien del interior, de la zona del diputado”. No era la primera vez que escuchaba este argumento, que solía enunciarse aun cuando la persona no había solicitado expresamente hablar con funcionario, o a sabiendas de la recepcionista de que éste último se encontraba ausente. Con el tiempo pude advertir que, de cierta forma, la agente ‘perfilaba’ a las personas: por lo general, se trataba de *personas del interior*, algunos de ellos vestidos con ropas que presuntamente daban cuenta de su pertenencia al ámbito agrario; percepción que era reforzada por un particular acento idiomático o forma de presentación de sí (Goffman 2001).

En aquella ocasión recibí a un joven de no más de 30 años, que expuso su situación de extrema necesidad por la que se veía obligado a procurar alguna “ayuda económica”. Habiendo enfermado su hijo pequeño, se encontraba junto a la madre del niño en el hospital pediátrico y estaban pasando necesidades, porque el joven trabajaba como jornalero en la cosecha de yerba mate y no contaba con un empleo permanente. Además de darle una mínima colaboración de mi parte, traté de indicar las reparticiones públicas a las que podría dirigirse. Pero, además, me tomé el atrevimiento de sugerirle que fuera a ver a determinado legislador oficialista, quien antes de asumir su diputación se había desempeñado como Ministro de Salud. Mi intervención en tal sentido se basaba en el presupuesto de que, al tratarse de un profesional de la salud, el diputado o su equipo podrían ser los más indicados para orientar y facilitar las ayudas que el joven estaba requiriendo.

Transcurrida aproximadamente una hora, recibí la llamada de la recepcionista, quien me preguntó si yo le había “mandado” al joven al despacho del diputado en cuestión. Me llamó la atención el tono de reclamo, a lo que reaccioné explicándole que atendí su consulta, le recomendé que hablara con otros diputados del bloque para el que trabajo; pero que cuando las personas se retiraban de mi oficina, no podía hacerles un seguimiento o controlar hacia dónde se dirigían. Dicho esto, agregué enfáticamente que “nosotros siempre atendemos a las personas que requieren alguna asistencia”, por más que no hayan solicitado previamente audiencia con el diputado, aun cuando éste se encuentra ausente, y cuando son derivados a criterio de la misma guardia o del área de Atención al Ciudadano. La recepcionista me respondió algo así como que es impropio recomendar que las personas se dirijan a otros despachos, que primero deben informar al área de recepción, “porque el personal de esta área es quien previamente debe consultar a las oficinas si pueden o no atender las demandas”.

Le pregunté, seguidamente, si había recibido una queja. Me contestó afirmativamente, y que además, por tal situación “ellos podrían recibir un llamado de atención por parte del jefe”. Respondí, en consecuencia, que me parecía en realidad impropio la actitud del/a agente que presentó la queja, teniendo en cuenta que la Cámara es un ámbito público y que sería bueno que los demás secretarios/as también tuviesen la misma predisposición de atender a las personas. Cerramos la conversación, acordando que a futuro yo no derivaría a nadie a otras oficinas, y le expresé a mi interlocutora que entendía su posición, en tanto está obligada a seguir ciertos “procedimientos”, pautados por las nuevas disposiciones, pero que no podría estar de acuerdo con algunos planteos de aquellos/as secretarios/as que, indudablemente, guardan alguna animadversión cuando se trata de atender solicitudes de personas de escasos recursos. Luego del tenso intercambio, nos despedimos cordialmente.

La situación en cierto modo confirmaba lo que yo venía percibiendo: que la nueva gestión a través del “registro de visitas” fue adoptando ciertos mecanismos que restringían el acceso, ya limitado, de personas

ajenas a las oficinas legislativas. Pienso que la incomodidad de la recepcionista al momento de recibir la queja se fundaba en el temor de que tal reclamo pudiera constituirse formalmente en un “reporte”, y que fuera formalizado en el “registro de hallazgos” del que el sistema dispone.

### **El trámite parlamentario y el trabajo en comisión**

Desplazando el análisis al área parlamentaria, en esta sección me centraré en las prácticas implicadas en el denominado *trabajo en comisión*. Esta categoría delimita un espacio privilegiado para el estudio y tratamiento de los proyectos legislativos que, una vez dictaminados, serán tratados y/o sancionados en las sesiones ordinarias. Para ello, los/as legisladores/as deliberan en las comisiones permanentes o especiales, cuyas funciones y competencias son establecidas en el Reglamento de la Cámara.<sup>15</sup> En las comisiones una serie de interacciones son producidas en el decurso de lo que se denomina el *trámite parlamentario*; en función de los cambios adoptados, intenté dilucidar de qué manera las innovaciones afectaron paulatinamente algunas de las rutinas de trabajo en estas instancias.

Es importante señalar que, antes de la adopción del *Sistema de Información Parlamentario* (SIP) como herramienta para la digitalización del trámite ordinario de expedientes, el procedimiento se iniciaba con la presentación del proyecto impreso (original, más 7 copias) por Mesa de Entrada Legislativa donde, luego de ser foliado y sellado, era registrado asignándosele un número de expediente de acuerdo con un criterio de numeración correlativa. Luego, el conjunto de proyectos ingresados pasaba a integrar el Boletín de Asuntos Entrados (BAE), el cual era puesto a consideración del pleno durante el desarrollo de cada sesión ordinaria, donde tomaban *estado parlamentario* y se remitían a la comisión de destino correspondiente. Luego de que el proyecto fuera estudiado y debatido por los/as legisladores/as, el dictamen acordado pasaba a integrar el Orden del Día (OD), en relación al cual se elaboraba el Plan de Labor (PL) que sería considerado para su votación en la sesión ordinaria.

Cada secretario/a o asesor/a acompañaba a su legislador/a con la llamada *carpeta de sesión*. Esta estaba compuesta por el BAE (un listado detallado y ordenado de todas las comunicaciones oficiales y los expedientes ingresados semanalmente, al que se le adicionaba las respectivas copias de los proyectos); la segunda sección correspondía al OD (reunía las copias de todos los dictámenes); y la última sección contenía el PL (esto es, el listado de dictámenes que, tras un acuerdo previo entre los bloques parlamentarios, pasarían a ser debatidos en la sesión ordinaria para su sanción). La carpeta constituía, así, el dispositivo por excelencia que, por un lado, condensaba en su producción un conjunto de prácticas documentales, procesos y relaciones previas inherentes a la *práctica parlamentaria*; y, por otro, era el instrumento que habilitaba la instancia del debate y el ejercicio de la representación en el ámbito de la asamblea legislativa. En otras palabras, sin este dispositivo, la Cámara no podría sesionar.

Desde la perspectiva de las autoridades, el SIP permitió la optimización de las tareas; permitió a los legisladores tener un repositorio digital de información para la elaboración de nuevos proyectos; habilitó la generación en forma automática de los documentos necesarios para la sesión (BAE, PL); y permitió iniciar un proceso de “despapelización” a partir de la disposición en línea de toda la información generada en la Intranet Parlamentaria. Una vez que el SIP se encontraba ya en pleno funcionamiento, en 2018, la Cámara fue certificada por el cumplimiento de los requisitos establecidos en la norma ISO 9001:2015 (que alcanza, especialmente, a los procesos de sanción de leyes y otros instrumentos legislativos). Ciertamente, si con la digitalización de algunos procesos se logró reducir la reproducción de expedientes en formato impreso, esto no implicó su supresión definitiva, ya que para que el trámite tenga validez el archivo digital debe reproducirse en el formato impreso; éste, una vez suscrito por los/as legisladores/as, es presentado por duplicado en la mesa de entrada para su registro.

<sup>15</sup> Los/as agentes que intervienen de manera directa son: el equipo de la comisión (integrado por un/a secretario/a y un grupo de auxiliares, cuyo número es variable para las distintas comisiones), el equipo de asesoría jurídica (profesionales, en su mayoría vinculados al ámbito del derecho), a los que se suman otros agentes que conforman el equipo técnico especializado en el uso de las TIC (para asistencia de los diputados o el equipo de la comisión); todos ellos, supervisados por un equipo de dirección (subdirección, direcciones, prosecretaría y secretaría parlamentaria).

Si bien el *trabajo en comisión* es la instancia donde los/as legisladores/as participan del proceso decisorio, en la confección de los expedientes intervienen un conjunto de agentes que conforman el “equipo de la comisión” y el “equipo de asesores”. Ambos ofrecen el apoyo y el saber experto concerniente a lo prescripto por la *técnica legislativa*. En el contexto estudiado, ésta es conceptualizada como el conjunto de pautas y reglas específicas que deben reunir los actos emanados del Poder Legislativo, tales como: vigencia, aplicabilidad, eficacia y conveniencia. Estos aspectos se deben tener en cuenta en cada etapa del proceso de producción normativa, y por ello el Manual de Técnica Legislativa (MTL) establece que:

La vigencia requiere el acatamiento de determinadas reglas en las etapas de preparación y emisión de la voluntad legislativa; la aplicabilidad exige tener presente normas referidas a la publicación y difusión de los actos y tanto la eficacia como la conveniencia, exigen el cumplimiento de preceptos referidos principalmente al contenido y forma del proyecto (MTL 2002:5).

De acuerdo con el Manual de Calidad adoptado (HCR 2019), los procesos normatizados desarrollados por la Secretaría Legislativa a cargo del Área Parlamentaria alcanzan las actividades de distintas Direcciones Generales. En cada una de estas áreas, la profesionalización de los agentes se presentó como condición y resultado para ponderar el éxito del nuevo modelo institucional. Pero, en el terreno de las comisiones, la convivencia entre agentes idóneos “con trayectoria” y algunos asesores jurídicos iba a ser problematizada, teniendo en cuenta las descripciones y reflexiones de Roque y Omar, dos agentes (que al momento de entrevistarlos se desempeñaban como auxiliar de comisión y secretario, respectivamente) cuyas trayectorias promediaban los 30 años de servicios.

Queda claro, entonces, que la producción del expediente exige la consecución de un conjunto de acciones. Es un proceso activo mediante el cual se reúnen los antecedentes o “elementos de prueba” –para emplear una expresión tan extendida en la jerga judicial– que, sometidos a análisis por parte de asesores (jurídicos y técnicos) y el cuerpo de legisladores/as, conducen a la toma de una decisión política plasmada en el dictamen resultante. En función de esta racionalidad, los/as secretarios/as de comisión entienden que deben ejercer un riguroso control en cada una de las instancias por las que transita el expediente, al tiempo que lo producen.

De este modo, las comisiones están facultadas para requerir a los organismos con competencia todos los informes o datos que se consideren necesarios; además, pueden cursar invitaciones a funcionarios de los demás poderes del estado o a representantes de la sociedad civil para que participen en las reuniones extraordinarias. La búsqueda más o menos exhaustiva por parte del equipo de comisión de los antecedentes jurídicos, técnicos y de opiniones expertas se debe, principalmente, a que los/as agentes entienden que no pueden pasar por alto los “principios de técnica legislativa”. Tales principios prescriben la eliminación, o al menos la reducción, de indeterminaciones y ambigüedades.

Aun cuando el relevamiento y producción de los antecedentes se considera una instancia fundamental, todavía no es una acción suficiente para poder dictaminar el proyecto. El análisis jurídico sería la segunda instancia vital del trabajo en comisión, que requiere la actuación simultánea o complementaria del equipo de asesores jurídicos. Pero, como me relataron varios interlocutores, la relación entre ambos equipos puede tensionarse por diferencias de criterio. Las discrepancias fueron, al parecer, bastante comunes entre los años 2010 y 2012, momento en que se estaban consolidando los procedimientos y se sucedían las periódicas capacitaciones y auditorías en el área parlamentaria. Como resultado de este proceso, desde la perspectiva de mis interlocutores/as, los asesores con credenciales profesionales fueron revalorizados como cuerpos técnicos en detrimento de los equipos de comisión. De suerte que, con la nueva gestión, los asesores pudieron adquirir un estatus preeminente, aunque formalmente compartan con los primeros la misma categoría en el cargo de subdirectores. En las esferas jerárquicas había entonces algo más que una disputa por la imposición de criterios: se trataba también de una forma de afirmar la posición y el estatus.

Si bien este mismo punto de vista podía ser compartido por los/as secretarios/as de trayectoria entrevistados, su permanencia y vasta experiencia los llevaba a reflexionar sobre otra cuestión sustantiva del quehacer parlamentario y que estaría siendo reconfigurada conforme se consolidaba la nueva gestión. Nos referiremos a continuación a los sentidos de la *práctica legislativa*.

### **La producción normativa entre la *técnica* y la *política***

Según la experiencia de los agentes entrevistados (aquí referidos con los pseudónimos de Roque y Omar), además del manejo procedimental, el/a secretario/a o auxiliar a lo largo de su trayectoria va incorporando otros saberes y capitales que lo habilitan a revisar y discutir algunos criterios políticos plasmados en los proyectos y en las exposiciones de los/as diputados/as. En tal proceso, donde es permanente la tensión y adecuación de criterios de forma (la correcta aplicación de la técnica) a los posicionamientos políticos, los actores tienen por regla –a decir de uno de mis interlocutores– el deber de *preservar el espíritu de la ley*.

Como se describió en las secciones anteriores, pese al avance de la informatización, hay ciertas rutinas que se mantienen. Roque, y otros/as secretarios/as con quienes conversé, valoran positivamente estas innovaciones y entienden que el cumplimiento estricto de las tareas está orientado por un fuerte sentido de la responsabilidad, en tanto valor que determina el buen desempeño del agente, así como el buen funcionamiento de la comisión.

En estas trayectorias se tensionan las viejas y las nuevas prácticas, pero ha sido significativa para Omar la percepción de que los nuevos criterios eficientistas han ocasionado una suerte de desplazamiento de los/as secretarios/as a un espacio marginal, cuya pericia e idoneidad los posicionaba como actores claves, pese a no contar muchos de ellos/as con credenciales académicas como un recurso de legitimación. Desde este punto de vista se soslayaba una crítica al lugar privilegiado que la gestión actual otorga a los/as asesores/as y directores/as, y que restringe la participación y competencias de quienes conforman los equipos de las comisiones. En tal sentido, Omar interpreta las transformaciones institucionales en términos de una sobrevaloración del saber técnico que, al ser tomado como principio de autoridad, restó valor y supeditó al necesario trabajo de análisis político.

...porque es lo que yo te comentaba el otro día: si vos te estandarizás tanto, te automatizás y terminás embruteciéndote en vez de tratar de razonar y pensar (...) Pero si de pronto vos ya no tenés más participación, entonces decís ¿para qué analizo, analizo para mí nada más?

(...) hay otra cosa que... so pretexto de técnica legislativa a veces se sustituye la voluntad del legislador y el que termina legislando es el asesor o alguna otra persona que le agrega cosas que no tiene [el proyecto]... y se transforma toda la idea del legislador en otra cosa, que no refleja la intencionalidad original que lo impulsó (Omar, secretario de comisión, entrevistado el 03-11-11).

Este posicionamiento contrasta con el de Roque quien, si bien adhiere al principio de que en el proceso de análisis debe primar la voluntad política del legislador, al mismo tiempo justifica como aceptable y hasta necesaria la expansión de un movimiento hacia la centralización:

Sí, se da un proceso de centralización que permite una mayor organización... al ser un poder político las decisiones deben ir acompañadas con la lógica que es esa decisión política y esa centralización que permite una mayor organización en lo político. Como te dije anteriormente, yo fui partícipe de otras formas de hacer políticas y realmente había indecisiones y desorganización abismales, porque justamente no se aplicaba lo que se aplica hoy: esa política organizativa. ...todo lo que sea centralización, todo lo que sea organización, todo lo que sea intelectualismo, todo lo que sea aprendizaje, todo lo que sea informatización, esta presidencia puso al alcance del empleado (Roque, ayudante de comisión, entrevistado el 11-06-12).

En suma, lo que aquí se ha referido como la “centralización” de los procesos expresa una tendencia establecida gradualmente por la estandarización de los procedimientos, y que afecta a la práctica parlamentaria en dos sentidos: por un lado, las definiciones políticas concernientes a la sanción de leyes quedan supeditadas a la aprobación de la autoridad parlamentaria, más que a la construcción de un consenso amplio entre las distintas fuerzas políticas con representación parlamentaria; y, vinculado a esta cuestión, el tratamiento de los proyectos quedaría circunscripto a la esfera de la técnica.

Asimismo, desde el 2014 se instaló una modalidad de trabajo por la cual los presidentes de los bloques parlamentarios recibían semanalmente las versiones preliminares de los dictámenes (documentos en los que se podían identificar los cambios sugeridos por parte de los/as diputados/as de la comisión y asesores). Si el/a legislador/a daba su conformidad, *bajaba* la versión final a la comisión para ser aprobado; pero mientras no se tenga la aprobación del Presidente de la Cámara, un proyecto puede mantenerse años en estudio y aun contando con el dictamen favorable, no será sancionado hasta tanto no se acuerde su incorporación al Plan de Labor de la sesión. En este esquema general, hasta qué punto *el espíritu de la ley* puede ser preservado depende sólo de la posición y el capital político, el involucramiento, el seguimiento atento y la capacidad de negociación que despliegue el/a autor/a de la iniciativa.

Como se señaló, entre sus alcances la técnica legislativa prescribe criterios o “aspectos externos” del proceso parlamentario, concernientes a las reglas referidas al formato y publicación de los actos legislativos; y asimismo a los aspectos “internos” referidos al contenido de los expedientes parlamentarios. No obstante esta distinción formal, normativa, los interlocutores establecen otra distinción según las etapas del proceso legislativo: su “parte política” y su “parte administrativa” según Roque; o su “trámite burocrático”, en términos de Omar. La primera, referida al proceso de análisis, discusión, negociaciones y construcción de consensos; y la segunda, al curso burocrático que debe seguir la iniciativa.

Con algunos matices, esta forma de clasificación sugiere que el proceso legislativo no constituye un tipo de curso de acción progresivo y lineal, sino una serie de etapas interconexas, de mediaciones técnicas y políticas en las diferentes instancias de tratamiento (comisiones, coordinación jurídica, subdirección y dirección de comisiones, secretaría legislativa a cargo del área parlamentaria y asamblea legislativa), y de producción de formas de clasificación, sentidos y una racionalidad que permanentemente es actualizada en el quehacer cotidiano de los actores y que, por ello mismo, puede ser cuestionada, modificada o transformada. Lo que intenté hacer inteligible hasta aquí es la forma particular en que algunos de los actores implicados en estos procesos identifican, experimentan y evalúan su propia práctica en función de los nuevos lineamientos de la gestión.

## Notas conclusivas

A partir de la descripción desarrollada hasta aquí, y atendiendo a la perspectiva de las autoridades parlamentarias, la noción de *gestión legislativa estratégica* refiere a una modalidad de gestión institucional que se presupone vanguardista, eficiente y moderna, con relación a un modelo o sistema de gestión “tradicional” que, por su obsolescencia, estaba condenado a perecer. Desde la perspectiva del modelo gerencial, el mismo fue presentado y legitimado como el punto de fuga para superar al llamado modelo tradicional burocrático.

Como se ha descrito en los apartados precedentes, los *Procedimientos de Gestión Legislativa Operativos* establecen que cada interacción y cada decisión de los/as agentes responsables de tareas específicas, sea registrada y formalizada hasta la instancia de control, para luego producir los informes generales que permiten la evaluación periódica y anual de la gestión. Este dato no puede soslayarse: nos sugiere que la nueva gestión o el gerenciamiento en la práctica funciona como un “sistema cerrado” y autocontenido, y que en la medida en que las distintas instancias del proceso administrativo deben ser asentadas en formularios de solicitud, notificaciones varias, distintas encuestas, es posible observar la racionalidad burocrática actuando con todo rigor y en toda su extensión.



Que la implementación de procedimientos estandarizados y arreglos institucionales diversos fueron modificando la dinámica o la institucionalidad del parlamento, es un hecho manifiesto. No obstante, sería un equívoco afirmar que los cambios así generados comportaron la sustitución del modelo precedente. De aquí que, atendiendo a las perspectivas “nativas” y encontrando inspiración en las formulaciones de Leach (1996 [1964]), concluyo que es posible reconocer la vigencia de dos modelos ideales respecto a los cuales se adecúan las prácticas de los/as agentes; quienes al mismo tiempo que actúan en función de *habitus* y conocimientos adquiridos a lo largo de una trayectoria, van adecuándose a las nuevas rutinas, según sus evaluaciones morales y elecciones pragmáticas. En tal sentido, la *gestión legislativa estratégica* combina aspectos de ambos modelos. Si el primero aparece desplegado “desde arriba”, en un conjunto de normativas de calidad y lineamientos que deben ser ejecutados; el segundo se halla “encarnado” en disposiciones mediante las que se resuelven situaciones que requieren, por ejemplo, de la concertación de compromisos informales; la formalización de pedidos *a posteriori*, la entrega, recepción o reemplazo de documentación por fuera del plazo de tramitación, entre otras acciones. Entonces, si cotidianamente se siguen admitiendo desvíos a las reglas para encontrar una solución práctica a distintas situaciones, podemos concluir que ni el modelo gerencial deja de ser burocrático, ni el modelo tradicional pierde toda su eficacia en la búsqueda de soluciones legislativas.

Si, en el nuevo contexto, los agentes de trayectoria observan la instauración de una tendencia hacia una mayor *centralización* de funciones y decisiones, atribuidas a los equipos técnicos y las máximas autoridades, las valoraciones al respecto de este proceso pueden ser disímiles. Quienes valorizan positivamente la centralización argumentan que un mayor y mejor *ordenamiento* (normativo y funcional) ha sido su principal consecuencia; en cambio, para aquellos/as agentes que fueron entrenados/as según la lógica de la burocracia tradicional, este ordenamiento se produce a costa del fortalecimiento de los mecanismos de control social implementados con los procesos de auditoría y las distintas modalidades de registro (de personas, expedientes, trámites ordinarios, solicitudes internas y externas, entre otras acciones). En consecuencia, para este conjunto de agentes la nueva gestión los/as afecta, restringiendo aún más el limitado margen del que antes disponían para el ejercicio de su autonomía e iniciativa personal. No obstante, y pese a la extendida centralización, la iniciativa personal requiere ahora omitir o evadir deliberadamente (según las elecciones pragmáticas en situaciones concretas) nuevas reglas que han sido formalizadas como procedimientos.

Ciertamente, con el advenimiento de la nueva gestión, ésta y otras tensiones, más que resolverse, se profundizaron. Muestra de ello son los esfuerzos realizados por los equipos responsables de la implementación de los criterios de calidad (pautados por las normas IRAM ISO) que, entre tantas otras funciones debían auditar, controlar y aplicar acciones “correctivas” para optimizar el funcionamiento de los sistemas de gestión administrativo y legislativo. De este modo, por cuanto el gerenciamiento en la práctica funciona como un sistema cerrado y autocontenido, se procura instrumentar soluciones técnicas para resolver o subsanar diversos problemas emergentes, según lo preestablecido en el nuevo diseño organizacional. Pero, paralelamente a estos esfuerzos de estandarización, también fue posible observar la racionalidad burocrática “tradicional” y un plano de informalidad que se mantienen muy vigentes.

En el ámbito de las comisiones parlamentarias, la tensión configurada en torno a lo técnico y lo político afectaba especialmente al proceso legislativo y a las formas de entender, y desarrollar, la *práctica legislativa*. Empero, si la distinción entre lo técnico y lo político es intrínseca a la actividad parlamentaria –y la actividad burocrática cualquiera sea el ámbito institucional, como lo postuló Weber (1977)– para superar la mirada normativa, que suele afirmarse en aquella radical distinción, propongo reformular la cuestión atendiendo a la manera cómo ciertas orientaciones morales permiten a los actores definir lo que entienden por la *correcta práctica*. Siguiendo esta premisa, se fue haciendo inteligible el “sentido político de la práctica legislativa”, por el cual su realización se comprende como una combinación variable de criterios técnicos, políticos y éticos (donde la política es el factor dominante), y que está íntimamente condicionada por diversos grados de involucramiento, cognitivo y afectivo, desplegados por los agentes en la búsqueda de soluciones y respuestas eficientes.

Como resultado de todo el proceso reformador, fue configurándose un sentido normativo de la noción de calidad institucional que, si bien suele ser aludida por algunos analistas bajo el apelativo de “buenas prácticas”, en el contexto bajo estudio no se documentó el empleo de dicha expresión. Por ello, y entendiendo que la indagación etnográfica puede ofrecer una interpretación distanciada de la connotación moral que la misma vehiculiza, se trató aquí de poner de relieve que el proceso reformador puso en juego –y en tensión– los distintos sentidos atribuidos a las nociones de calidad y burocracia, por parte de los/as agentes de la Legislatura misionera.

Para aprehender los sentidos sociales y las modalidades cotidianas de gerenciamiento en contextos locales, valorizamos los aportes de la aproximación etnográfica. En tal sentido, el caso aquí abordado buscó elucidar las especificidades que pueden asumir los ejercicios de gestión en instituciones legislativas y, de este modo, contribuir al desarrollo de análisis comparativos que consideren otros referentes empíricos, en el contexto nacional y regional.

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# Expertos, trabajo relacional y la producción de evidencia en torno del Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia, Argentina (2015-2019)

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## Resumen

Este artículo se centra en las prácticas desplegadas por expertos/as en la conformación de una agenda sobre la primera infancia en Argentina, entre 2015-2019, en una coyuntura política signada por un doble cambio, de gestión de gobierno, y también de signo político del partido gobernante; como también por debates sobre el rol del Estado y de otros actores en la definición de lo público. A partir de una investigación doctoral de carácter etnográfico, los/as expertos/as fueron analizados/as como *knowledge brokers*, que mueven, traducen y ensamblan, saberes y agendas globales, y especialmente, redes de influencia y vínculos, por lo que sus prácticas conforman un particular trabajo relacional. La primera infancia, a su vez, apareció como un nodo crítico y polémico, que requiere de la producción de marcos interpretativos y de estrategias de persuasión, como también de la formación, sostenida en el tiempo, de alianzas y redes.

**Palabras clave:** expertos; *brokers*; políticas públicas; primera infancia.

# Experts, relational work and the production of evidence around the National Plan for Early Childhood in Argentina (2015-2019)

## Abstract

This article focuses on the practices deployed by experts in shaping an agenda on early childhood in Argentina, between 2015-2019, because it is a political juncture marked not only by the change of government management, but also of the political sign of the ruling party, as well as by debates on the role of the State and other actors in the definition of the public sphere. Based on ethnographic doctoral research, the experts were analyzed as knowledge brokers, who move, translate and assemble knowledge and global agendas, but above all networks of influence and links, so that their practices make up a particular relational work. Early childhood, in turn, appeared as a critical and polemic node, which requires the production of interpretative frameworks and persuasion strategies, as well as the sustained formation of alliances and networks over time.

**Keywords:** experts; brokers; public policies; early childhood.

# Especialistas, trabalho relacional e produção de provas em torno do Plano Nacional para a Primeira Infância na Argentina (2015-2019)

## Resumo

Este artigo focaliza nas práticas utilizadas pelos especialistas na formação de uma agenda para a primeira infância na Argentina entre 2015-2019, pois este foi um momento político marcado não apenas por uma mudança de governo, mas também por uma mudança de partido político, bem como por debates sobre o papel do Estado e de outros atores na definição da esfera pública. Com base em pesquisas etnográficas de doutorado, os especialistas foram analisados como corretores de conhecimento, que movimentam, traduzem e reúnem conhecimentos e agendas globais, mas acima de tudo redes de influência e vínculos, de modo que suas práticas constituam um trabalho relacional particular. A primeira infância, por sua vez, surgiu como um nó crítico e polêmico, que requer a produção de estruturas interpretativas e estratégias persuasivas, assim como a formação sustentada de alianças e redes ao longo do tempo.

**Palavras chave:** especialistas; *brokers*; políticas públicas; primeira infância.

# Expertos, trabajo relacional y la producción de evidencia en torno del Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia, Argentina (2015-2019)

Florencia Paz Landeira

## Introducción

En 2018, durante la presidencia argentina del G20<sup>1</sup>, el Grupo de Trabajo de Desarrollo (GTD)<sup>2</sup> definió el objetivo de promover un crecimiento económico inclusivo, haciendo foco en potenciar las habilidades de las personas. Para ello, se definió una agenda centrada en tres ejes: inversión en primera infancia; hábitat sostenible; y negocios inclusivos. El primero de estos tres ejes se fundamentó específicamente en la importancia de los primeros mil días de vida en el desarrollo humano de un país. Se argumentaba:

El primer eje prioritario reconoce el impacto que tienen los primeros 1000 días de vida de cada niña y niño en su futuro desarrollo. El desarrollo de la primera infancia, que por primera vez se trata en el Grupo de Trabajo de Desarrollo, es un tema global que contribuye a la construcción de capital humano, al ser la etapa en la que se adquieren habilidades que perduran de por vida. Es, por lo tanto, la mayor contribución a la adaptación de las próximas generaciones al futuro del trabajo, una de las tres prioridades definidas por la presidencia argentina para el G20 2018. Además, este tema influye directamente en la reducción de la brecha de género, al tiempo que genera mecanismos de inclusión y cohesión social, y mejoras en la calidad de vida. Supone, a su vez, una elección rentable, ya que la inversión en primera infancia tiene altos retornos económicos para los países.<sup>3</sup>

Esta iniciativa se enmarca en una agenda transnacional que coloca a la primera infancia como figura central de la agenda de protección social; a la vez, las intervenciones sobre los comportamientos parentales y la crianza se postulan como una estrategia para interrumpir la transmisión intergeneracional de la pobreza, y como vía para producir la sociedad futura a partir de la optimización de sus integrantes (Paz Landeira 2022a). Sin embargo, esta iniciativa no puede explicarse mecánicamente, por la globalidad del tema. Es necesario rastrear sus condiciones de posibilidad y el escenario concreto, social y político, en que se inscribe.

Para comprender la inclusión de la primera infancia en la agenda del G20 durante la presidencia argentina, estimo necesario reconstruir los debates desplegados en los años previos, en particular, aquellos en torno al Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia, lanzado por decreto presidencial en 2016, primer año de gestión de la Alianza *Cambiamos* en el país, como parte central de su agenda de gobierno. El Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia constituye un interesante punto de mira para dar cuenta de procesos locales de circulación, apropiación y resignificación de los debates transnacionales más amplios, sobre la centralidad de la primera infancia en las agendas de protección social.

Cabe señalar, a su vez, que la victoria electoral de *Cambiamos* se inscribió en el marco del llamado “giro a la derecha”<sup>4</sup> en la región, por lo que se trataba no sólo de un cambio de gestión, sino también de signo político

1 El G20 es un foro internacional para la cooperación económica, financiera y política.

2 En 2008, durante la crisis financiera internacional, las cumbres del G20 comenzaron a incluir reuniones a nivel de jefes de Estado y de Gobierno, y la agenda temática se amplió. Fue así que en 2010, a través del “Consenso de Desarrollo para el Crecimiento Compartido” (Seúl), se creó el Grupo de Trabajo de Desarrollo (GTD). Es el único que tiene como foco principal a los “países en desarrollo”. Además, es el guardián de la Agenda 2030 y sus Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible dentro del G20, desde 2016.

3 Disponible en: <https://shorturl.at/ptuDW>. Última consulta: 23/09/23

4 Los términos nativos serán colocados entre comillas, mientras que los conceptos de la bibliografía aparecerán en itálica.



del partido gobernante. Sus principales dirigentes auguraban políticas de ajuste, sobre todo por la vía de una reducción del Estado y del gasto social; a la vez, emprendieron campañas de desprestigio del empleo público y de las burocracias estatales, en un fuerte contraste con los gobiernos precedentes “kirchneristas” que habían apostado a la valorización y fortalecimiento del papel del Estado, muy especialmente en lo referido a políticas sociales.

Como parte de una investigación doctoral, de corte antropológico, sobre políticas para la primera infancia en Argentina (Paz Landeira 2021a),<sup>5</sup> en este artículo se indagan las prácticas de incidencia, la activación de redes y usos estratégicos de narrativas globales en torno a la primera infancia y su desarrollo, desplegadas por actores posicionados de forma variable, anclados en diversas trayectorias y saberes, que intervienen en la producción de dichas políticas. Me refiero a expertos locales de organizaciones no gubernamentales, de organismos internacionales y centros de expertos, que se caracterizan por traducir, mezclar y ensamblar saberes; unos saberes que, desmarcados de sus condiciones de producción, a la vez que borroneados sus matices, límites y dilemas, son transformados en evidencia.

Esta mirada sobre las prácticas y perspectivas de los/as expertos/as –con atención a los saberes desplegados, a las pertenencias institucionales y a los escenarios de interacción– habilita una comprensión acerca de las complejas y múltiples mediaciones que se ponen en juego en la producción de formas de gestionar las políticas hacia la infancia, en un contexto de redefinición de las competencias, y alcances, de lo público y lo estatal. Contexto, a la vez, de creciente individualización de la protección social, en el cual la primera infancia y el desarrollo infantil temprano se han constituido categorías de intervención nodales en agencias, proyectos y narrativas, vinculados al desarrollo y la modernización; dirigidos al Sur global que, en América Latina por su parte se condensan en el objetivo de combatir la denominada transmisión intergeneracional de la pobreza.

De esta forma, las necesidades y el bienestar infantil –ligados a determinadas nociones e indicadores acerca del cuerpo, el crecimiento y el desarrollo– aparecen en el centro de una serie de programas, recomendaciones, buenas prácticas e iniciativas de gobierno que buscan intervenir sobre (y mejorar) las prácticas de crianza dirigidas hacia los/as niños/as más pequeños/as en el núcleo familiar. Como argumenta Carli (2002), los discursos sobre la infancia desbordan la cuestión de los/as niños/as como sujetos, y se proyectan sobre las transformaciones de la sociedad como totalidad. Si, como señala Llobet (2020), la administración de la infancia es un sitio crucial donde se juega la tensión entre reproducción y transformación social, las definiciones sobre la “buena crianza” y los comportamientos parentales, adecuados y deseables, para el correcto desarrollo infantil constituyen vías para comprender los problemas sociales contemporáneos e intervenir en las relaciones intergeneracionales, a la vez que para producir imaginarios sobre el bienestar y la sociedad futura.

Desde un enfoque etnográfico sobre los procesos prácticos y relacionales en que determinadas formas de conocimiento son constituidas en saberes expertos y evidencia para las políticas –como también de los variados actores y espacios implicados en su gestión– los datos presentados aquí fueron producidos a partir de una revisión analítica de documentos institucionales y notas periodísticas; de entrevistas con expertos/as y profesionales de organismos, internacionales y no gubernamentales, centros de expertos y agencias estatales; y de la observación participante de conferencias y reuniones, entre especialistas y decisores políticos.

A partir de allí, en este artículo busco mostrar, desde la perspectiva de la mediación y el ensamblaje, los procesos prácticos y relacionales a través de los cuales el desarrollo en la primera infancia fue incorporado en

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5 La tesis indaga en saberes, discursos y narrativas, sobre la primera infancia y el desarrollo infantil que, en los últimos años, los han construido en tanto problema público y figura de ansiedades políticas contemporáneas; y en los procesos, semióticos y materiales, que en escenarios relacionales concretos, producen encuadres y marcos interpretativos para la gestión de políticas. La perspectiva antropológica en la que se enmarca se presenta, entonces, idónea para extrañar y situar tales discursos en su historicidad y politicidad, como también dar cuenta del modo en que tales discursos y narrativas moldean prácticas concretas. A su vez, este proceso se enmarca en mi participación en dos equipos de investigación, que desde hace años desarrollan investigaciones académicas y en consultoría en torno a las políticas de infancia: el Programa de Estudios Sociales en Género, Infancia y Juventud (Universidad Nacional de San Martín) y el Equipo Burocracias, Derechos, Parentesco e Infancia (Universidad de Buenos Aires).

una agenda electoral y de gobierno; y cómo ciertos saberes, retóricas y dispositivos fueron estabilizados como “buenas prácticas”, y evidencia para el diseño de políticas –no sin disputas ni tensiones–.

El artículo se estructura en un primer apartado de revisión analítica de las literaturas sobre expertos y *brokers* en relación al diseño de políticas. Los siguientes apartados se centran en el trabajo relacional y las prácticas de montaje desplegadas por expertos, en los distintos momentos de la cronología en torno del Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia, conjugando una mirada institucional con las perspectivas de los actores. El artículo cierra con una reflexión acerca de los principales hallazgos.

## **Expertos, *brokers* y el montaje de evidencia para las políticas**

La forma cómo la producción de ideas políticamente significativas pasa por actores, espacios y situaciones concretas, en modos que desafían clasificaciones rígidas de niveles y escalas, es una pregunta que ha ocupado a distintas áreas de las ciencias sociales. Desde los estudios interesados por el gobierno transnacional, la obra de Stone (2004) constituye una referencia ya clásica sobre la transferencia de políticas y, en particular, sobre lo que la autora denomina los *transfer agents*, entendidos como aquellos involucrados en las prácticas que mueven una política de un sitio a otro y que, lejos de ser actores individuales y aislados, son miembros encarnados de comunidades epistémicas, de expertos y de prácticas. Barnett y Finnemore (1999) se han detenido en el papel de los organismos internacionales y en cómo éstos estructuran activamente el conocimiento, en cuanto se comprometen en prácticas que clasifican al mundo, crean categorías de actores y de acción, sujetan significados y articulan, y defienden, normas y principios a través del globo. En sintonía, desde los estudios críticos del desarrollo, King y McGrath (2004) han advertido los mecanismos mediante los que las agencias de desarrollo se posicionan a sí mismas como agencias de financiamiento y de monitoreo, a la vez que de conocimiento.

Abordajes más recientes han instado a profundizar el enfoque relacional, de modo de concebir a estos actores como sociológicamente complejos, situados en campos organizacionales y políticos cambiantes, cuyas identidades y trayectorias personales suelen estar vinculadas con las posiciones políticas y soluciones que sostienen (Peck & Theodore 2015). Éste y otros trabajos también provenientes de la geografía política o de las políticas (Cook & Ward 2012; McCann 2008; Prince 2010) han forjado un pasaje a pensar en términos de movilidad y mutación, antes que de transferencia, en tanto esta categoría tiende a denotar unidireccionalidad y rigidez.

Retomando aquellos abordajes, Ball (2016) ha señalado que las políticas son móviles, no en formas compactas o como ‘paquetes’, sino de forma fragmentada, lo que a su vez habilita a considerar los procesos mediante los que son reensambladas, en formas, lugares y con propósitos particulares. Así, desde la sociología de la educación y los estudios sobre política educativa internacional y comparada, Ball propone pensar las redes globales de políticas como construcciones sociales y humanas, siempre en proceso. De allí que insista en detenerse en el trabajo de los actores que componen dichas redes, inspirado en lo que Ong (2007) ha denominado una analítica del ensamblaje, que crea formas de capital y valor específicos.

De lo anterior se desprende un interés particular por estas figuras intermedias que se mueven entre campos y escalas o, más bien, que evidencian su carácter contingente y relacional. Al respecto, desde la antropología, Merry (2006) ha analizado las prácticas de *knowledge brokers* en los procesos de vernacularización, es decir de las personas que están en el medio y traducen agendas globales de derechos y las reenmarcan en situaciones locales de demanda, en campos concretos de poder y de oportunidad. Su trabajo abreva sobre la categoría de *knowledge brokerage* propuesta por Liftin (1994) para pensar en los usos estratégicos de conocimiento y de conexiones por parte de los expertos para ganar apoyo político.

Una serie de trabajos también advierte que la creciente relevancia política de los expertos se inscribe en procesos políticos transnacionales, que han tendido a priorizar a la *evidence-based policy* (Wiseman 2010) y el *fast policy making* (Peck & Theodore 2015). Dichos procesos parecerían estar en relación con la pérdida de la

capacidad y/o legitimidad de investigación del Estado, lo cual constituiría un terreno fértil para la producción y diseminación de “ideas que funcionan” o *silver-bullet practice* por parte de estas figuras mediadoras.

En la academia argentina, Gutiérrez (2010) ha retomado esta discusión para problematizar miradas sobre burócratas y expertos en políticas, que tienden a considerarlos como apolíticos o instrumentales, como si se redujeran a la función de proveer la mejor solución técnica. Para el autor, los expertos *hacen política* cuando hacen uso de la *expertise* como un recurso político y negocian las relaciones políticas, burocráticas y sociales, a los fines de que sus propuestas sean aprobadas e implementadas. Por su parte, Morresi y Vommaro (2011) han propuesto pensar la *expertise* como una forma de intervención en el campo del poder mediante la producción de bienes simbólicos y materiales, mientras que Giorgi (2020) ha abogado por una mirada del “ser experto” desde las prácticas, como formas rutinizadas de actuar y de presentarse ante otros.

Badaró (2011), en su trabajo sobre la Organización Mundial del Comercio, advierte que “la oposición categórica entre técnica y política, escenario y bastidores, visibilidad e invisibilidad, no da cuenta de la naturaleza del régimen político bajo el cual se inscribe el trabajo de estos expertos” (2011:85). Por otra parte, una serie de trabajos ha explorado la constitución de “saberes de Estado”, en referencia a saberes expertos que forman parte del Estado moderno, al tiempo que son demandados por él (Bohoslavsky & Soprano 2010; Plotkin & Zimmermann 2012). Retomando esta discusión en torno a los saberes que nutren la acción estatal, Gené, Heredia y Perelmiter (2021) han propuesto pensar en términos de un “régimen de racionalidades” del Estado, más denso y complejo que las dicotomías con las que suele caracterizarse: ‘racional’ e ‘irracional’, ‘profesional’ o ‘político’, ‘especializado’ o ‘amateur’” (2021:14).

Aun cuando muchos de estos trabajos recuperan explícitamente las categorías de *broker* y *brokerage*, la literatura sobre expertos y su participación, en la producción y gestión de políticas, podría beneficiarse de establecer mayores diálogos con la tradición antropológica en torno a estas figuras. Tal como ha sido analizado por Lindquist (2015) en su revisión sobre la materia, la del *broker* es, en efecto, una figura clásica en la disciplina, asociada especialmente al estudio de relaciones políticas y económicas “al ras”. *Broker* ha designado habitualmente a actores sociales que se desempeñan como mediadores o intermediarios, entre espacios y lógicas disímiles, y que por lo tanto constituyen una potente puerta de entrada etnográfica, para iluminar contextos y procesos más amplios desde la perspectiva de la mediación.

El renovado interés por el estudio etnográfico del Estado ha propiciado una literatura crítica sobre el rol ubicuo de actores e instituciones con distintos grados de formalidad, de modo tal de incorporarlo en abordajes hasta entonces demasiado estado-céntricos (Meehan & Plonski 2017); lo que a su vez ha llevado a reflexionar sobre los *brokers* en estas formas de estatalidad negociada (Hagmann & Peclard 2010) y mediada (Raeymaekers et al. 2008).

Mientras que los distintos saberes y discursos que han reclamado valor de verdad sobre la infancia, sus necesidades y su bienestar, han sido objeto recurrente de estudio en modos que han iluminado su configuración histórica –como también las formas de gobierno y de regulación que la constituyen–<sup>6</sup> en este artículo recupero los aportes revisados en los párrafos precedentes para situar el punto de mira en las prácticas de expertos/as en cuanto mediadores en la producción, transacción y legitimación de saberes, racionalidades y lógicas que subyacen a los modelos de gestión y acción estatal. De esta forma, procuro mostrar cómo la institucionalización de narrativas y el uso de evidencia en la producción de políticas, buenas prácticas y modos de gestión relativos al desarrollo en la primera infancia, no pueden considerarse al margen de los equilibrios de poder establecidos mediante redes de influencia, de disputas epistémicas, de las historias institucionales y de los debates públicos que contornean las políticas.

El recorrido bibliográfico propuesto habilita la consideración de los expertos como *brokers*, en cuanto mediadores entre espacios y lógicas disímiles, lo que permite comprender los modos en que las políticas y las racionalidades

6 Me refiero especialmente a trabajos que, desde Argentina y Brasil, han las formas de regulación y gestión de la infancia y sus familias, con interés por los procedimientos burocráticos y ritualizados y las heterogéneas racionalidades políticas que las constituyen (Barna 2012; Fonseca 2002; Grinberg 2013; Llobet 2015; Lugones 2012; Magistris 2013; Santillán 2009; Vianna 2002; Villalta 2013).

subyacentes no son transferidas linealmente, ni viajan “en paquete”, sino que se mueven y mutan a través de prácticas agentivas, y en coyunturas socio-históricas concretas. Esto implica un desplazamiento, del contenido de discursos y saberes, a las prácticas y relaciones sociales, que los hacen circular y los reensamblan, legitiman y estabilizan como narrativas con eficacia política; para desde allí, explorar tensiones e intereses en competencia, en torno al desarrollo infantil y las formas de estatalidad asociadas a ellas. Asimismo, para definir fronteras y relaciones, entre el centro y los márgenes del Estado; entre la decisión política y la recomendación técnica.

## En busca de la decisión política

Durante las elecciones presidenciales de 2015, Agustina<sup>7</sup> trabajaba como voluntaria en el Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento (CIPPEC)<sup>8</sup> e integró el equipo que elaboró los documentos técnicos que marcaron los ejes del debate presidencial televisado, que tuvo lugar en las semanas previas al balotaje entre Daniel Scioli (Frente para la Victoria) y Mauricio Macri (Alianza Cambiemos). Uno de estos documentos se tituló “Primera Infancia”, y fue acompañado de una iniciativa digital llamada Primera Infancia Primero, con el objetivo de colocar a la temática en la agenda pública. El tema no era estrictamente novedoso para este *think tank*. Alrededor de 2008, empezaron a trabajarlo: pensaban que, a pesar de haber un marco normativo propicio para el desarrollo de políticas hacia la niñez, en las acciones concretas de la política pública no había un foco particular en el desarrollo de la primera infancia, sino que la educación y el cuidado de los/as niños/as más pequeños/as seguían siendo pensados partiendo de una lógica familiarista.

Desde dicha premisa, se desarrollaron investigaciones y compusieron un modelo tripartito de componentes claves, que dialoga fuertemente con los desarrollos de la economía del cuidado: las políticas para la primera infancia deben coordinar tiempo, dinero y servicios para cuidar. El otro eje de discusión giraba en torno a la institucionalidad necesaria para que esto se concretara, asunto que retomaré luego. Para comprender estos procesos de construcción de una agenda intra-institucional, que luego conduce a estrategias de incidencia en las agendas pública y política, conviene atender a la modalidad de trabajo y objetivos que constituyen a instituciones como CIPPEC.

Para Juan Pablo,<sup>9</sup> otro de los especialistas del centro, el trabajo se sintetiza como “investigación aplicada”: “Es decir, no somos un centro que hace investigación *per se*, sino que siempre tiene una lógica de incidir en una discusión de política pública presente o latente en el corto plazo” (entrevista, febrero de 2020). Primero, identifican un problema de política pública y a continuación, “la configuración de actores políticos”, para empezar a convocarlos. “Empezamos a reunirnos con estos actores o *stakeholders* para decirles ‘acá tenemos un problema’, y empezamos a co-construir con ellos soluciones” (entrevista a Juan Pablo, febrero de 2020). En paralelo, desarrollan investigaciones para la elaboración de diagnósticos, sobre cuáles son los déficits y las vacancias de política, los recursos presupuestarios, técnicos y humanos con que dicha política cuenta; y cómo realmente está funcionando, en términos de evaluación o monitoreo. A partir de allí, elaboran una serie de productos, de cierta extensión y lenguaje técnico, dirigidos a un público especializado, que denominan Documentos de Trabajo; y otros documentos de políticas públicas, más públicos y sintéticos, con un fuerte componente orientado a recomendaciones de política pública.

7 Todos los nombres de las personas entrevistadas son pseudónimos. En función del foco analítico, se hace mayor hincapié en sus adscripciones profesionales e institucionales, preservando su identidad personal. Agustina es Licenciada en Ciencia Política y Magíster, en Administración y Políticas Públicas. Trabajó en el Programa de Protección Social de CIPPEC entre 2011 y 2016.

8 En su sitio web <https://www.cippec.org/>, el CIPPEC se presenta como una organización independiente y sin fines de lucro, con el objetivo de producir conocimiento y ofrecer recomendaciones para mejorar las políticas públicas. Fue creado en el año 2000 y desde entonces se ha consolidado como un *think tank* líder a nivel nacional, con alto nivel de visibilidad. Recibe fondos de gobiernos (hasta un 30% de su presupuesto total) y organiza cenas anuales de recaudación, donde recibe aportes del sector empresarial.

9 Juan Pablo es Licenciado en Ciencia Política y Gobierno. Trabajó en CIPPEC entre 2014 y 2022, en los programas de Educación y Protección Social.

La producción de documentos aparece, de hecho, como una estrategia privilegiada para posicionar un tema en la agenda pública, a la vez que afianzar el andamiaje argumentativo que sostiene un enfoque particular sobre el mismo. La frecuencia y cantidad de publicaciones de CIPPEC sugieren un intento de sedimentar una prueba documental que hable por sí misma en el lenguaje de la técnica; los documentos se yerguen como particulares dispositivos socio-técnicos, con el potencial de mediar entre actores y burocracias (Hull 2012).<sup>10</sup> Este fue, en efecto, el esquema que desplegaron en relación a la primera infancia.

Y a partir de ahí hacemos “la gira”. Vamos y hablamos con el ministro de Desarrollo Social, con el secretario, el subsecretario... Si uno de los problemas que encontramos es la falta de articulación, por ejemplo, tratamos de invitar al referente de Educación y al referente de Desarrollo Social a tomar un café, un desayuno de trabajo, se conocen, vemos qué se puede hacer en conjunto. Y eso es básicamente lo que hacemos. (entrevista a Juan Pablo, CIPPEC, febrero de 2020).

La “gira” aparece como una metáfora que permite aprehender la dimensión práctica y espacial del trabajo de incidencia desplegado por actores como CIPPEC. Permite, a su vez, desnaturalizar imágenes homogeneizantes de los poderes ejecutivos y sus funcionarios que, lejos de encarnar mecánicamente una dirigencia política monolítica, están también atravesados por tensiones, disputas y distancias. Distancias que agencias como CIPPEC procuran acortar estratégicamente. La “gira”, considerada desde un abordaje relacional, debe ser comprendida a la luz de los recursos institucionales de los que dispone CIPPEC para constituirse no sólo en un interlocutor legítimo, sino en una suerte de *articulador* de la gestión de problemas públicos. A su vez, la dimensión cronológica no es menor, puesto que este trabajo fue principalmente desplegado en el inicio de la gestión de gobierno, un momento de mayor movilidad y ambigüedad respecto de los balances de poder y las formas de interacción entre agencias estatales.

Este trabajo de incidencia, que también se plasma en documentos e investigaciones, es centralmente un trabajo relacional. De acuerdo a la conceptualización de Zelizer (2009), el trabajo relacional es aquel desplegado por las personas para categorizar relaciones sociales, para lo cual se establecen límites, se designan ciertas clases de transacciones como apropiadas, en combinación con los medios considerados adecuados. Así, se establecen determinados vínculos, trazando fronteras entre relaciones distintas y definiendo formas, objetos y escenarios que se corresponden con uno y otro tipo de lazos. El trabajo relacional –en cuanto dimensión del *brokerage*– desplegado por estos expertos implica la activación de redes, conexiones y conversaciones de distintos grados de formalidad, en eventos públicos, como la cena de recaudación anual de fondos de CIPPEC, pero también en desayunos y pasillos. A su vez, implica una consideración cuidadosa de los términos de dichas relaciones, las formas de transacción de recursos posibles que permiten mantenerlas dentro de ciertos límites, como se verá a continuación.

Las redes de las que CIPPEC participa y contribuye a producir no se componen sólo de figuras políticas y funcionarios públicos, sino también de otros actores en las fronteras de la estatalidad: asociaciones civiles, oficinas locales de organismos internacionales, etc. Para Juan Pablo, estas relaciones también son activadas de forma estratégica, en función de los estilos diferenciales de cada entidad:

CIPPEC es una organización que trabaja muy en comunión con los estados y los gobiernos, tiende a tener un enfoque muy poco agresivo, entonces nunca vamos a judicializar –lo hemos hecho, pero creo que dos veces– un caso. o salir con una solicitada violenta. Que son estrategias súper válidas, pero que por ahí no son combinables con después invitar a alguien a un desayuno. Entonces lo que tratamos de hacer es combinar nuestras estrategias más como de “lobby cool”, que es juntarse a hablar y generar insumos a demanda de los políticos, con algo más agresivo que hacen otras organizaciones en alianza con nosotros. Entonces participamos de diferentes colectivos de los derechos de la infancia, donde tenés organizaciones que hacen cortes de calle y mandan cartas a los senadores,

10 Agradezco especialmente la sugerencia de uno/a de los/as evaluadores/as de este artículo por hacerme notar esta dimensión.

junto a organizaciones más parecidas a CIPPEC, que es más *research*, notas muy lavadas en los diarios. Y finalmente tenemos a la cooperación internacional, donde UNICEF juega un rol central y tiene la ventaja de tener mucha plata. Siempre tenemos proyectos anuales o bianuales con ellos en donde decidimos apoyar a un gobierno en una política particular (entrevista a Juan Pablo, CIPPEC, febrero de 2020).

El “lobby cool” permite aprehender este trabajo relacional, en el que aquello que se intercambia –y los modos, y espacios en que estas transacciones tienen lugar– se ajusta al tipo de relación que se pretende sostener. Se trata de un juego de proximidades y distancias que definen un particular estilo de conversación. Así como las modalidades del trabajo de incidencia no son azarosas, sino que son pensadas y producidas estratégicamente, la identificación de un problema tampoco es un proceso automático ni motivado únicamente por intereses personales, como los que refería Agustina al inicio de este apartado, sino que se enmarca en lo que denominan planeamiento estratégico. En una entrevista, la entonces directora ejecutiva de CIPPEC, Julia Pomares, expresaba:

Se supone que este tipo de organizaciones no piensa temas en el aire, sino que los piensa en relación a cuáles tienen más llegada al sistema político o cuáles se deben impulsar porque ese sistema no los toma. El proceso de repensar nuestra agenda estratégica ya había empezado antes del fin de la gestión de Straface, un proceso muy interesante de reflexión interna en el que nos apoyó McKinsey de manera pro bono y en el cual participaron todos los miembros de CIPPEC. Pensamos cuáles eran los desafíos, hicimos *benchmark* con otros *think tanks* a los que nos gustaría parecernos, otros que creemos similares, y pensamos cuáles deberían ser los objetivos a alcanzar. El resultado fue “CIPPEC 2020” (<https://shorturl.at/oqIV8>. Última consulta: 23.09.23).

Este fragmento permite complejizar el esquema trazado por Juan Pablo, a la vez que echa luz sobre las redes que vinculan a CIPPEC con consultoras globales, como McKinsey<sup>11</sup> y otros *think tanks*. En el 2015, entonces, que culminó con la victoria electoral de Cambiemos y la salida de CIPPEC de Fernando Straface –co-fundador y anterior director ejecutivo–, para asumir como Secretario General de Gobierno y Relaciones Internacionales del Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, a cargo del PRO<sup>12</sup> –otra muestra elocuente del papel de las redes personales en el trabajo de *expertise*–, la primera infancia fue seleccionada como uno de los ejes estratégicos de la agenda institucional. Así reconstruye Agustina aquel momento:

Yo creo que la primera infancia nos convocó a todos en el equipo, por esa lógica de ser un problema bien complejo, en el sentido de que nadie es dueño de ese tema, no es un tema sectorial, es muy transversal, entonces es muy desafiante, en el sentido de qué institucionalidad necesitás construir. Y, por otro lado, por la variedad de miradas que pueden confluir, más allá de que una acuerde más o menos ideológicamente con cada una. Había argumentos políticos, económicos, demográficos que lo hacían factible de entrar. Creo que ahí se abría una ventana interesante, en el sentido de la revalorización de un tema que quizás no estaba tanto en la agenda política antes (entrevista a Agustina, CIPPEC, junio de 2020).

Del relato de Agustina resulta interesante el análisis que hace de aquel año, en términos de una ventana para revalorizar y posicionar un tema en la agenda política, que a su vez, implicaba que la institución para la que trabajaba se posicionara como agente central en la construcción de una institucionalidad en torno a este dominio de indagación e intervención. A su vez, el desarrollo en la primera infancia aparece como un nodo crítico y polémico, que requiere de la producción de marcos interpretativos y de estrategias de persuasión, como también de la formación sostenida en el tiempo de alianzas y redes, y de la identificación del espacio idóneo dónde instalarlo como agenda. En este sentido, es posible hablar de un trabajo de dos dimensiones

11 McKinsey & Co. se fundó en 1926 y se ha constituido en una de las más influyentes consultoras en gestión y administración en el mundo. Para un análisis de sus prácticas de difusión de ideas, puede consultarse O'Mahoney & Sturdy (2016).

12 Fundado por Mauricio Macri en 2005, Propuesta Republicana (PRO) es uno de los partidos que integraba la Alianza Cambiemos.

entrelazadas: posicionar una agenda, a la vez que posicionarse como interlocutor legítimo y relevante, en la asesoría e influencia del desarrollo de las políticas que estarán asociadas a dicha agenda. Tal como emerge de la entrevista, las estrategias desplegadas para instalar a la primera infancia como un eje de debate –de forma literal, en relación con el debate presidencial, pero también en términos más amplios– implicó a su vez un trabajo de traducción y estabilización de distintas narrativas, que configurarían un marco interpretativo y habilitarían, en los términos de Agustina, “una alianza amplia de actores”. Al decir de Juan Pablo:

Se amplía el campo de acuerdo en el que la primera infancia es clave, pero por diferentes motivos. Te encontrás con diseños diferentes según desde dónde parte tu perspectiva. El BID tiene esta perspectiva más instrumentalizadora, por lo que apoya determinadas políticas y líneas de investigación, que son muy diferentes de las de UNICEF, [éste último] más vinculado al enfoque de derechos y a un desarrollo más integral (entrevista a Juan Pablo, CIPPEC, febrero de 2020).

Las narrativas en juego, que aparecen de forma recurrente y mimética en las entrevistas, son principalmente tres: la teoría del capital humano e inversión social; los argumentos basados en el cerebro; y el enfoque de derechos. En ocasiones, a esta tríada se le añaden aportes de la economía feminista y del cuidado, a los fines de conciliar la agenda de la primera infancia con la de los derechos de las mujeres. Entonces, por un lado, una narrativa económica, referida a inversiones y tasas de retorno que, a su vez, goza de legitimidad por haber sido “probada” en modelos de intervenciones con resultados,<sup>13</sup> por lo que aseguraría la racionalidad de la política. En segundo lugar, una narrativa de origen científico que, aun cuando se trata de un uso político de argumentos provenientes de las neurociencias que no gozan de consenso (Paz Landeira 2022b), le otorgarían un valor de verdad objetiva y neutral; y, en tercer lugar, el lenguaje de derechos que, a pesar de no ser considerado como suficientemente eficaz para movilizar actores y recursos, convierte a esta agenda en moralmente justa y vuelve tolerables las narrativas “utilitaristas” e “instrumentalizadoras”, en los términos de Agustina y Juan Pablo.

Sobre esta dimensión, que podría denominarse como usos estratégicos dentro de las prácticas discursivas desplegadas por estos expertos, reflexionaba también Eduardo<sup>14</sup> –consultor sobre primera infancia para centros de expertos, agencias estatales y organismos internacionales–, quien desempeñó un papel fundamental en el trabajo de CIPPEC en torno a la primera infancia:

Cuando me reúno con algún economista duro, le hablo de capital humano y tasas de retorno. Cuando me reúno con UNICEF, le hablo de derechos. Y no porque sea un mercenario, sino porque me parece que lo que hay que tratar es que cada uno sienta que se lleva de esa coalición un pedacito, que se queda en paz con su conciencia. ¿Querés lograr una coalición ganadora? Entonces necesitás hacer dialogar saberes (entrevista a Eduardo, julio de 2020).

La reflexión de Eduardo apunta de lleno a ese trabajo de mezcla, traducción y reelaboración del *knowledge brokerage* (Liftin 1994; Merry 2006), como también refrenda la tesis de Gutiérrez (2010) respecto de que los expertos *hacen política* al implicarse en estos usos estratégicos de saberes. A su vez, da cuenta de un uso estratégico de lenguajes y narrativas, que constituye una parte central del montaje de una agenda de intervención en la primera infancia y que apunta a la producción de un consenso ambiguo (Palier 2005), caracterizado por el apoyo activo de diferentes grupos, aun cuando están motivados por distintas razones e intereses. Estas dinámicas de coalición están, a su vez, mediadas por el poder relativo de los actores que las componen; poder que, a su vez, se sustenta en distintas fuentes: mientras que CIPPEC parece usufructuar principalmente sus redes interpersonales y su

<sup>13</sup> La evidencia más citada es James Heckman y deriva de tres estudios de costo-beneficio de largo plazo –Perry High Scope, Abecedarian y Chicago– desarrollados en Estados Unidos en los años 1960s, 1970s y 1980s respectivamente. De forma más reciente, el equipo de Heckman desarrolló una intervención similar en Jamaica, que se ha convertido en el modelo exitoso de la región. Desde entonces, agencias como el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID) desarrollan esfuerzos y promueven políticas que permitan estudiar cómo replicar a nivel nacional esta intervención de pequeña escala.

<sup>14</sup> Eduardo es Licenciado en Ciencias Políticas, Magíster en Administración Pública, en Gobiernos y Asuntos Públicos, y Doctor en Ciencias Sociales. Trabajó en el Programa de Protección Social de CIPPEC entre 2008 y 2015.

capacidad de apoyar la producción de políticas, otros actores –como el BID y UNICEF– se yerguen también como importantes fuentes de financiamiento, en adición a la legitimidad como voz autorizada sedimentada por su historia institucional.

Respecto de la dimensión discursiva del montaje –en cuanto proceso relacional de mezcla, traducción y reelaboración de conocimientos que, mediante un cambio de escala, son constituidos en evidencia técnica–, en efecto, a pesar del distanciamiento crítico que suele emerger en las entrevistas, estas narrativas aparecen de forma reiterada en los documentos de variadas instituciones, dentro y fuera del Estado. Esto parece señalar un punto interesante respecto de su eficacia simbólica, en tanto continúan legitimándose –a pesar de ser objeto de miradas críticas– como los lenguajes válidos y autorizados. Por otra parte, es relevante resaltar cómo esta interpretación de las narrativas que emerge en ambas entrevistas está acompañada de la producción de una cartografía de las agencias intervinientes, en tanto son diferencialmente identificadas como portadoras de algunos de estos argumentos.

Ahora bien, habiendo trazado ciertos elementos discursivos de este trabajo de incidencia, conviene no perder de vista su dimensión práctica, esto es, cómo se encarna en situaciones y actores concretos. En este sentido, el papel protagónico que CIPPEC asumió en la puesta en escena de los debates presidenciales de 2015 le habilitó una vía de acceso a los principales candidatos, clave para desplegar sus estrategias de persuasión. Igual de relevantes fueron las redes personales y políticas establecidas entre el equipo del candidato de Cambiemos, Mauricio Macri, y el CIPPEC, que aportaría algunos de sus expertos al gabinete del gobierno en ciernes.<sup>15</sup> No obstante estas vinculaciones, desde el *think tank* se esfuerzan en enfatizar el perfil técnico de su trabajo y su independencia política. Efectivamente, como habían hecho en las elecciones de 2011, en el marco de la iniciativa “Agenda Presidencial”, elaboraron un *memo* sobre primera infancia<sup>16</sup> y se lo llevaron a los principales candidatos del arco político. Eduardo recuerda que fue Macri el que les dedicó más tiempo, junto con Carolina Stanley, quien más tarde asumiría como ministra de Desarrollo Social. A partir de dichos encuentros de trabajo, Eduardo reflexiona y bromea acerca del peso de la argumentación y la evidencia:

Yo les digo medio en chiste a mis colegas, “acabemos con la farsa de la evidencia, bajémosle el precio a los saberes”. A veces se trata de llevarle el papelito a alguien en el momento justo. Lo que a Macri más le llamó la atención de nuestra presentación, que hizo que le dijera a Stanley “algo tenemos que hacer”, fue un mapa que armamos en CIPPEC en el que los países de América Latina –casi todos, incluyendo a Nicaragua– tenían política de primera infancia más o menos integral y Argentina no tenía nada. Entonces, Macri dijo: “¿cómo lo tiene Nicaragua y nosotros no?”. Si se rascaba un poquito el mapa, no era tan claro que Nicaragua tuviera eso. Pero el efecto de la evidencia mostrada en un mapa interactivo... No sé, jamás fue y le pidió a Carolina [Stanley] “asesorate de Nicaragua, Chile, Uruguay, Brasil”. Digo, pero entonces, los saberes... Yo creo que nosotros los que venimos del mundo académico, creemos que el saber es lo más importante, porque es nuestro negocio, ¿no? Y el saber es un recurso más de poder, que hay que saberlo jugar, digamos (Entrevista a Eduardo, julio de 2020).

Desde la provocación, Eduardo coloca, por un lado, la reflexión acerca de los grados de contingencia de la política, pero también acerca del carácter productivo de este trabajo de ensamblaje desplegado por los expertos que, si bien se monta sobre narrativas y modelos de circulación transnacional, éstos son reelaborados y desplegados localmente en función de escenarios relacionales y coyunturas políticas singulares. En el trabajo de unir elementos previamente desconectados, y en la forma singular en que eso se presenta, se produce algo nuevo, recubierto de un efecto de coherencia y verdad. La contingencia o “el papelito en el momento justo” se

15 Tres de los co-fundadores de CIPPEC y directores ejecutivos desde su creación hasta el 2015 pasaron a ocupar cargos públicos a partir de la victoria de Cambiemos en 2015 de los poderes ejecutivos nacional, de la Provincia de Buenos Aires y algunos de sus municipios, y de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Fernando Straface asumió como Secretario General de Gobierno del GCBA; Miguel Braun como Secretario de Comercio de la Nación; y Nicolás Ducoté como Intendente de Pilar (Provincia de Buenos Aires).

16 Estos documentos cortos elaborados por CIPPEC están inspirados en los Memos para el Presidente del *think tank* norteamericano Brookings.



sostienen en condiciones de posibilidad, sopesadas y producidas activamente por estos expertos. Es también de destacar que el *papelito* llegaba a manos del candidato presidencial, Mauricio Macri, pero también de Carolina Stanley, quien en su gestión en el área de desarrollo social del Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires había tomado a la primera infancia como eje de su agenda, a la vez que era conocida por su tránsito y vínculo con el mundo de las ONG's y los *think tanks*.

Así, lo azaroso y contingente se desdibuja, al situarse en una trama institucional y política más amplia. En definitiva, ésta constituye una de las escenas que van componiendo el trabajo de incidencia, aun cuando implique sobrentendidos y actuaciones. Por otra parte, un aspecto que emerge de la reconstrucción que Eduardo hace de esos encuentros, en las bambalinas del debate, es aquel que refiere al pretendido carácter fundacional que Cambiemos quería conferir a su programa de gobierno; de allí, la seducción de que “Argentina no tenía nada”, incluso cuando ello fuera difícil de verificar en los hechos. La eficacia del mentado *papelito* es sintónica con el gesto inaugural e innovador que la alianza gobernante quiso imprimir al período 2015-2019, retórica desde la que se construyó la idea de la “novedad”, a pesar de la institucionalidad y antecedentes preexistentes en la gestión de políticas para la primera infancia.

### **De un *papelito* a un decreto: el Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia**

Como ya se ha anticipado, las elecciones de 2015 dieron la victoria a la alianza Cambiemos, y a Mauricio Macri, como presidente de la Nación. En lo que pareció ser un logro del trabajo de incidencia de CIPPEC, pocos meses después de su asunción, el presidente Macri y la ministra de Desarrollo Social lanzaron por decreto (n° 574/2016) el Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia. El breve texto de la norma especifica que sus objetivos incluyen promover y fortalecer espacios, de cuidado y abordaje integral, de niñas y niños en sus primeros años, como también orientar y coadyuvar a las familias en su rol de cuidadoras.

Rápidamente, otro actor central apareció en escena. Un mes luego del lanzamiento, Macri y Stanley recibieron al presidente del BID, Luis Alberto Moreno, para la firma de un contrato de préstamo y el anuncio de la ampliación del crédito que ese organismo entregaría a la Argentina, destinado a fortalecer el Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia. El préstamo, de 1.200 millones de dólares americanos, tenía un doble objetivo. Por una parte, incrementar el acceso de los/as niños/as, de 45 días a 4 años de edad, que viven en situación de vulnerabilidad social a Espacios de Primera Infancia (EPIs) que cumplan con estándares de calidad, priorizando a las regiones con mayor prevalencia de pobreza en el país; y por otra, incrementar la efectividad de las intervenciones dirigidas a mejorar las prácticas de crianza en todo el país, a través del fortalecimiento de las intervenciones domiciliarias en el marco del Programa Primeros Años.<sup>17</sup>

Cada uno de estos dos objetivos tiene su historia. En relación al primero de ellos, si bien son variados los dispositivos no escolarizados dirigidos a niños/as en sus primeros años de vida existentes en Argentina y la región, el Plan Nacional y el financiamiento del BID que lo apuntalaba asumieron como modelo la experiencia de los Centros de Primera Infancia (CPIs) de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA), gobernada por el PRO desde 2007. La apuesta fue extender este programa a escala nacional, tal como constaba incluso en la plataforma electoral de Cambiemos, en 2015, en la que se comprometían a abrir cuatro mil CPIs en todo el país (renombrados en el decreto como EPIs), para que 400 mil niños menores de tres años en condiciones de vulnerabilidad social tuvieran la atención, alimentación y estímulo necesarios para desarrollarse plenamente. Una vez más, esta apuesta a nacionalizar el modelo de CABA se estructuró sobre la invisibilización y ruptura de otras políticas nacionales previas, como los propios Centros de Desarrollo Infantil, regulados por la Ley Nacional N° 26.233 sancionada en 2008, y la institucionalidad que generó dicha norma, esto es, la Comisión

17 Programa de apoyo a la crianza creado en 2006, en el marco del Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales (CNCPS).

de Promoción y Asistencia de los Centros de Desarrollo Infantil Comunitarios, en el Ámbito de la Secretaría Nacional de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia del Ministerio de Desarrollo Social.

En la CABA, el programa de CPIs<sup>18</sup> fue creado en 2009 mediante un decreto, donde se alega que responde a que:

En forma espontánea y consecuentemente con las necesidades sociales, los habitantes de las zonas de mayor vulnerabilidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires comenzaron en forma solidaria a brindar atención a niños y niñas menores de cuatro años generando un espacio de contención y ayuda a sus madres (Decreto GCBA - Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires N° 306/09).

De esta manera, el decreto era un modo de regularizar estos espacios e institucionalizarlos mediante la modalidad de la gestión asociada entre el GCBA –que aportaría fondos económicos, supervisión y asistencia en la formación– y organizaciones de la sociedad civil, a cuyo cargo quedaría la implementación y dirección de cada proyecto. Los CPIs se transformaron pronto en una de las insignias de la gestión del PRO, especialmente promovidos por María Eugenia Vidal y Carolina Stanley, sucesivas ministras de Desarrollo Social de la ciudad y luego gobernadora de la Provincia de Buenos Aires y ministra de Desarrollo Social de la Nación, respectivamente.

No obstante, es necesario retroceder aún algunos años más. En 2006, la Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia (ACIJ)<sup>19</sup> presentó una acción de amparo contra el GCBA, motivada por la falta de vacantes en el nivel inicial, instando a que se cumpliera con la “obligación constitucional indelegable de asegurar y financiar el acceso a la educación inicial de los niños y niñas de la Ciudad”, en referencia al artículo 24 de la Constitución porteña. En agosto de 2007, el Juez del Tribunal N° 3 del fuero Contencioso Administrativo y Tributario hizo lugar a la demanda presentada por ACIJ. En abril de 2009, la causa se elevó al Tribunal Superior de Justicia que, en julio de 2010, convocó a las partes a trabajar en un acuerdo, firmado finalmente en febrero de 2011. La cláusula sexta del acta acuerdo establece que, de forma provisoria y de acuerdo a la práctica habitual, se otorgarán vacantes en establecimientos dependientes del Ministerio de Desarrollo Social a niñas/os que hayan solicitado la inscripción en establecimientos educativos dependientes del Ministerio de Educación. Es decir, los CPIs. Existe, así, desde el origen de este programa, una tensión entre las áreas de educación y de desarrollo social respecto de la incumbencia sobre la primera infancia, que podría sintetizarse en la pregunta de si se trata de una forma de reproducir la estratificación social, o de reconocer formas, alternativas y comunitarias, de educación y cuidado a la primera infancia. Una de las principales dificultades para este debate se asocia con la profunda heterogeneidad de estos centros, como también con la precariedad de la infraestructura y las condiciones laborales que presentan muchos de ellos. De fondo, se encuentra la pregunta por la borrosa frontera entre educación y cuidado (Franco Patiño & Llobet 2019).<sup>20</sup>

El segundo objetivo que comprende el Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia lanzado en 2016 se centraba, como anticipara, en las políticas dirigidas a mejorar las prácticas de crianza a través de intervenciones domiciliarias. Los programas basados en visitas domiciliarias –también denominados programas de *parenting*– son regionalmente promovidos por distintas agencias internacionales, en particular el BID, tal como sucedió en Argentina a partir del convenio que dicho organismo firmó con el Ministerio de Desarrollo Social de la Nación. Estas intervenciones tienden a concentrar sus esfuerzos en propiciar parentalidades positivas, para lo cual buscan modificar las prácticas de padres/madres/cuidadores a cargo de la crianza de niños/as pequeños/

18 Para un análisis más detallado de este programa, véase Marzonetto (2016). Para una historización y análisis de la estrategia paralela a nivel nacional, los Centros de Desarrollo Infantil, se recomienda la lectura de Franco Patiño y Llobet (2019).

19 ACIJ fue fundada en 2002 y en su sitio web (<https://acij.org.ar/>) se presenta como una organización apartidaria, sin fines de lucro, dedicada a la defensa de los derechos de los grupos más desfavorecidos de la sociedad y el fortalecimiento de la democracia en Argentina.

20 Aunque profundizo en la trastienda de este proceso, es importante señalar que la disputa por las vacantes en el nivel inicial implica uno de los ejes del debate político en la Ciudad, escenario de múltiples actores y sentidos. A su vez, el caso brevemente presentado da cuenta de procesos más amplios de justiciabilidad y juridificación de políticas sociales, tal como ha sido analizado por Arcidiácono y Gamallo (2017). Los autores advierten un incremento de la participación del poder judicial como ámbito para dirimir la satisfacción de demandas vinculadas con derechos sociales, habilitado en parte por el creciente protagonismo del “discurso de los derechos” en el lenguaje político. Así, las acciones judiciales aparecen como una estrategia de acción política “por otros medios” y como vehículo de canalización de demandas frente al Estado.

as; o incluso desde la concepción y el embarazo, en tanto en la primera infancia el entorno es con frecuencia comprendido como equivalente de la familia o la madre, de lo cual deriva la intensa focalización en la crianza y la maternidad. La buena crianza se codifica, entonces, como capaz de ofrecer resiliencia ante circunstancias adversas. Este tipo de argumentos, y las políticas e intervenciones a las que dan lugar, han sido objeto de numerosas críticas: a la concepción de la primera infancia como un capital humano en el cual invertir (Hendrick 2016; Lister 2003); a la expansión de la *parentalidad* como nodo de regulación para garantizar el desarrollo infantil (Gillies 2005; Faircloth & Murray 2015); a la revigorización de la teoría del apego (Kanieski 2010); y a la neuro biologización del cuidado infantil (Fonseca 2019; Macvarish et al. 2015).

A pesar de estas perspectivas críticas, siguiendo dicho enfoque, se ha modelizado un estudio experimental comandado por el economista James Heckman, realizado en Jamaica y basado en visitas a hogares de bajos ingresos, para desarrollar intervenciones de estimulación temprana, como la estrategia a emular en los países latinoamericanos. “Jamaica” se ha transformado, de esta forma, en un referente con eficacia simbólica en las arenas de expertos y decisores políticos, a la vez que condensa un particular modelo de gestión y un modo de concebir la infancia. En este marco, la modalidad de intervención basada en las visitas domiciliarias es fuertemente propiciada por agencias internacionales. Sin embargo, aún no se han realizado suficientes evaluaciones de impacto de implementaciones a gran escala.

La traducción, vernacularización y promoción de este tipo de iniciativas, y argumentos, han sido emprendidas principalmente desde la División de Protección Social y Salud del BID, que reúne a expertos -en general, de formación en economía- que trabajan en proyectos de desarrollo infantil y de reducción de la pobreza. En los documentos producidos en el marco del préstamo del BID al Ministerio de Desarrollo Social de la Nación, y en las intervenciones públicas de expertos de este organismo internacional en los recurrentes eventos temáticos, reaparecen de forma explícita los argumentos en torno al capital humano y al desarrollo cerebral en la primera infancia como una ventana de oportunidad irremplazable. Desde ese enfoque, el BID financió no sólo la implementación de dicha modalidad de intervención en Argentina, sino también una evaluación del impacto en las familias alcanzadas por el Programa Primeros Años. El proceso, los debates y desplazamientos que provocó la adecuación institucional del Programa Primeros Años, a partir del Plan Nacional y el convenio con el BID, han sido objeto de otros trabajos (Paz Landeira 2021b).

La centralidad que adquirió el BID en los lineamientos que dieron forma al Plan Nacional suscitó miradas críticas por parte de otros expertos y organizaciones. Tal fue el caso de la Organización Mundial de Educación Preescolar (OMEP). Raquel<sup>21</sup> integra la Comisión Directiva de OMEP Argentina<sup>22</sup> y expresa que su trabajo está enfocado, por un lado, en la capacitación y acompañamiento de proyectos educativos; y por otro, en la incidencia de política pública en todo aquello referido a la educación en la primera infancia. Como entidad especializada, es periódicamente consultada por asesores de legisladores y de ministros, y también participa activamente en el diseño o implementación de políticas.

Para Raquel, la apuesta es a “*enredarnos* todo lo que podamos”. Ese hacer-red no implica necesariamente consensos ni armonías. De hecho, en particular en relación a los EPIs, para las expertas de OMEP, las instituciones dependientes de los ministerios de desarrollo social suelen constituir formas encubiertas de privatización y estratificación de la educación y el cuidado infantil. En el caso de OMEP, se evidencian los modos en que su saber experto se estructura fuertemente sobre una posición política, que llegan a definir incluso como una militancia, en particular del derecho a la educación.

21 Raquel es Profesora de Educación Inicial y Licenciada en Educación. Integra OMEP desde el año 2002.

22 OMEP es una organización internacional no gubernamental y sin fines de lucro, con Estatus Consultivo en Naciones Unidas y UNESCO. Fundada en 1948, reconoce como misión la defensa y promoción del derecho de niños y niñas a educación y cuidados, y apoya las actividades que mejoran la accesibilidad a la educación y a cuidados de más calidad. Su sede legal se encuentra en París, pero tiene Comités Nacionales -agrupados en regiones- en más de 60 países del mundo, entre los que se encuentra Argentina.

Una militancia de las convenciones y una militancia de las observaciones generales del comité de los derechos del niño. Yo digo que en primera infancia está todo inventado y que no tenemos que hacer como hace el Banco Mundial, el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo u otros organismos, que cada vez que hablamos de primera infancia redefinen. Y toman la etapa como les parece. Entonces, dentro de lo que es la política pública, primero vamos a hablar de cómo baja la Convención [sobre los Derechos del Niño] a los marcos legales y también las leyes de educación. Y el Estado tiene la responsabilidad primaria. Punto y a la lona. Después vienen todos los demás. Pero se inventan instituciones y programas, precarios, desfinanciados. Los famosos *on the shelf*, Jamaica... Cuando son países con otras historias. En las reuniones de ministros de educación, nos tenemos que poner de acuerdo cada vez que aparece la palabra “gratuidad”, “obligatoriedad” o “universalidad”, debates que acá están en otro lugar. Nosotras estamos haciendo *lobby* por pasillos mientras todos los ministros toman café, para que cambien las cosas vinculadas a primera infancia (entrevista a María del Carmen,<sup>23</sup> abril de 2019).

De ese lobby de pasillo, María del Carmen recuerda especialmente el trabajo desplegado junto a la Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación (CLADE) en la Reunión Regional de Ministros de Educación de América Latina y el Caribe, organizada por UNESCO con sitio en Buenos Aires en enero de 2017. El objetivo del encuentro era firmar acuerdos sobre las prioridades educativas para el 2030, en el marco de la Agenda de Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) adoptados en 2015 por la Asamblea General de Naciones Unidas. En relación a la primera infancia, el más referido es el objetivo número 4, que se propone “Asegurar que todas las niñas y todos los niños tengan acceso a servicios de atención y desarrollo en la primera infancia y educación preescolar de calidad, a fin de que estén preparados para la enseñanza primaria”.

Yo me acuerdo de haberlo agarrado en un pasillo a Francisco [Miguens; Director Nacional de Cooperación Internacional del Ministerio de Educación entre febrero de 2016 y diciembre de 2019] y decirle “Esto es un error conceptual. Desde el año 2010, UNESCO claramente adoptó el término ECCE [*Early Childhood Education and Care*], en español AEPI. No puede no estar”. Porque en los documentos decía “atención de la primera infancia”. No decía nada del derecho a la educación. Y, por supuesto, tomaba la preescolaridad no como algo con sentido en sí mismo, sino como preparatoria para el éxito escolar. Eso ya es un defecto que traen los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (Entrevista María del Carmen, abril 2019).

En esta escena que reconstruye María del Carmen nos aproximamos, una vez más, a ese trabajo relacional minucioso que los/as expertos/as despliegan, a los fines de contribuir a delinear los términos y sentidos que asume la agenda pública en materia de primera infancia; como también, a la dificultad para trazar fronteras claras entre la recomendación técnica y las decisiones políticas, e incluso la militancia. A su vez, emerge la alternancia entre la hipervisibilidad dada por el carácter ubicuo y persistente de estos actores –con temporalidades más extensas que las que rigen al funcionariado nacional– y la invisibilidad producida por un trabajo que suele realizarse y enraizarse por fuera del encuadre de la foto. Entre la asesoría, la incidencia y la militancia, expertas como las de OMEP hablan el idioma de las convenciones y los organismos internacionales, como estrategia para dotar a su posición de un carácter consensuado y legitimado. Posicionadas desde el derecho humano a la educación, discuten la perspectiva de la estimulación temprana que promueven organismos como el BID, y que quedó plasmada en los acuerdos que este organismo firmó con el Ministerio de Desarrollo Social. Como ya se ha dicho, se trata de las palabras, del enfoque, pero también de la institucionalidad estatal que implican.

Un posicionamiento similar al de OMEP es sostenido desde el Barómetro de la Deuda Social de la Infancia, un proyecto del Observatorio de la Deuda Social Argentina (ODSA) de la Universidad Católica Argentina (UCA).<sup>24</sup> Una de sus investigadoras reafirma –como lo hacen desde OMEP– la idea de educación infantil, a

23 María del Carmen es Maestra Normal Nacional y Licenciada en Educación. Integra OMEP desde 1999.

24 El ODSA se presenta como un centro de investigación, extensión y formación de recursos humanos de la UCA, cuyos orígenes se remontan al año 2001, y su establecimiento formal, a 2004. Su objetivo central es estudiar, evaluar y monitorear el estado del desarrollo humano e integración social en la Argentina,

partir de la cual sostiene que las políticas hacia la primera infancia deberían encontrarse en la órbita del Ministerio de Educación, con la colaboración de las áreas de Salud y Desarrollo Social. Programas como los financiados por el BID son, desde su perspectiva, “programas de reproducción de la pobreza”. Este debate no sólo tensiona la agenda del BID y de Cambiemos, sino también la impronta comunitaria que, durante las gestiones “kirchneristas” en el Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, se le quiso dar a los programas de crianza y de primera infancia.

Como veremos a continuación, las relaciones y articulaciones posibles –o insuficientes– entre los organismos implicados en las políticas para la primera infancia serán señaladas por los/as expertos/as como uno de los aspectos que obstaculizaron el éxito del Plan Nacional.

## **Un Plan en deuda: entretelones de la (fallida) articulación**

El Presupuesto Nacional de 2017 (el primero elaborado por la gestión Cambiemos en el Ejecutivo Nacional) indicaba, en la sección correspondiente al Ministerio de Desarrollo Social:

Uno de los objetivos fundamentales de la gestión será extender el acceso a los servicios de atención y desarrollo en la primera infancia, entendiendo esta etapa como una fundamental, ya que en ella se afirman las bases para las capacidades y las oportunidades que tendrán las niñas y niños en el curso de su vida. Está comprobado que implementar políticas de cuidado de calidad en la primera infancia trae aparejados beneficios para los niños y niñas así como para sus hogares. Es fundamental disminuir las brechas existentes desde los primeros años de vida para lograr igualdad real de oportunidades. Es en esta etapa en la que se logra el mayor desarrollo cognitivo y psicosocial (curiosidad, persistencia, autocontrol, perseverancia, disciplina, autoestima, confianza, habilidad socio-emocional, estabilidad, motivación, consistencia, mayor escolaridad, y mejores salarios en su adultez). Así es que se ha puesto en marcha el Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia (Decreto Nº 574/2016) cuyo fin es garantizar el desarrollo integral de niñas y niños en situación de vulnerabilidad social en su primera infancia en pos de favorecer la protección y promoción de sus derechos. Un componente central de dicho plan son los Espacios de Primera Infancia (EPIs) en todo el país.<sup>25</sup>

En el marco del Plan, se proponía conformar una red, coordinada por el Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, entre Estados Provinciales, Municipales y organizaciones comunitarias, a través de convenios para la construcción de nuevos EPIs y el fortalecimiento de los espacios existentes. Para ello, el Ministerio de Desarrollo Social transferiría una cuota a los Espacios de Primera Infancia, administrados por municipios, provincias y asociaciones civiles, para cubrir la asistencia de los/as niños/as. En el Presupuesto 2017 se indicaba que se encontraban aprobados los primeros 547 espacios en todo el país, para una población de 37 mil niñas y niños. A su vez, se estimaba la apertura de 4064 EPIs a nivel federal durante los cuatro años de gestión, en consonancia con la ya aludida plataforma electoral de Cambiemos. En adición, en el marco del mismo Plan, se firmó un convenio con la Cooperadora de la Nutrición Infantil (CONIN), fundada en Mendoza en 1993 por el Dr. Abel Albino, tomando como modelo el proyecto de Fernando Mönckeberg en Chile, con el fin de realizar acciones conjuntas relacionadas a la nutrición infantil y la planificación familiar, desde perspectivas que han sido fuertemente cuestionadas por su sesgo marcadamente conservador.

Sin embargo, hacia finales de la gestión –mediados de 2019– había sólo 1.614 centros en todo el país, de los cuales 243 se conformaron entre 2016 y 2019, en simultáneo al fortalecimiento de los espacios ya existentes. Por

a partir de parámetros normativos de aceptación internacional, constituyendo el incumplimiento de tales normas una medida de Deuda Social. En ese marco, se creó el Barómetro de la Deuda Social de la Infancia, centrado en producir conocimiento sobre el desarrollo humano y social de las infancias residentes en el país desde un enfoque de derechos humanos.

otra parte, no se había avanzado en la consolidación de una institucionalidad intersectorial que garantizara la jerarquía de la primera infancia en la agencia de gobierno. En relación a esto, la lectura de Eduardo, de CIPPEC, es que el Plan nunca tuvo realmente ese estatus, sino que quedó en una consigna de campaña. Para él, el principal problema fue la arquitectura institucional que estuvo detrás. Desde su campaña por instalar a la primera infancia en agenda en 2015, CIPPEC insistía en la creación de un órgano rector de jerarquía. Para los expertos de este centro, que el Presidente de la Nación lo asumiera como tema prioritario y designara un órgano de coordinación de jerarquía en su gabinete era una de las claves para el éxito de la política, como consideraban que había sido el caso de los programas Chile Crece Contigo y Uruguay Crece Contigo. “Se necesita integralidad”, asegura Eduardo, porque el problema de fondo es que “los organismos sectoriales, que son los que manejan los fierros realmente para primera infancia, es decir, Salud y Educación sobre todo y ANSES [Administración Nacional de Seguridad Social], en materia de transferencia, jamás se van a sentar a un área de Desarrollo Social” (entrevista a Eduardo, julio de 2020).

Su lectura es que no sólo la jerarquización política no ocurrió –y por lo tanto, imposibilitó el diseño de una política de primera infancia integral que coordinara las acciones de distintos ministerios–, sino que tampoco se dio una verdadera articulación entre áreas de la propia Secretaría Nacional de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia, dependiente del Ministerio de Desarrollo Social de la Nación. Lo mismo es señalado por Juan Pablo, para quien esta descoordinación, que ningún desayuno de trabajo pudo sortear, resultaba en intervenciones superpuestas, es decir, familias abordadas por efectores de los distintos programas sin ninguna pretensión de integralidad o de derivaciones consensuadas.

Para los/as expertos/as que participaron de distintos modos en su gestación, el Plan Nacional “quedó en la nada”. Así lo sintetiza Natalia,<sup>26</sup> especialista de la Fundación Bunge y Born,<sup>27</sup> que también estuvo implicada en el diseño. En particular, su aporte estuvo relacionado a la especificidad de atender al desarrollo infantil en zonas rurales. A través de sus contactos previos con escuelas primarias de comunidades rurales, se realizó un relevamiento de servicios para la primera infancia existentes, como también de la infraestructura disponible para desarrollar nuevos:

Entonces fue como un asesoramiento técnico enorme, porque relevamos presencialmente alrededor de 400 comunidades con un instrumento súper exhaustivo, para una aproximación sociodemográfica que hicimos con datos del censo. Este informe se lo presentamos al Ministerio de Desarrollo Social para que articule con el Ministerio de Educación, en el que concluíamos que se podían llevar adelante alrededor de 200 espacios para la primera infancia en comunidades rurales. Hicimos una recomendación específica por cada uno de los lugares y las cosas a trabajar. En los casos que no había espacio físico, recomendamos las visitas domiciliarias, como se hace en otros países. Nuestra idea era terminar esa fase y poder acompañar la implementación. Pero el Plan Nacional no se implementó, no sabemos tan en profundidad bien por qué, entonces nuestro proyecto llegó hasta la recomendación técnica (entrevista a Natalia, mayo de 2020).

La reconstrucción de los debates previos, el lanzamiento y la posterior implementación del Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia dan cuenta del carácter procesual, por momentos contradictorio e inestable, de la producción y la gestión de las políticas, y del lugar inestable, y ambiguo, que la *expertise* –atravesada y a la vez constituida por saberes, conexiones, posturas ético-políticas e imaginarios de bienestar– tiene en ellas. A su vez, ilumina cómo diferentes formas de poder habilitan y/o restringen la difusión, circulación y legitimación de ideas de

26 Natalia es Licenciada en Ciencias de la Educación y en Psicopedagogía. Trabajó en distintas áreas de la Fundación Bunge y Born entre 2012 y 2021.

27 La Fundación Bunge y Born es una organización sin fines de lucro fundada por el Directorio de la empresa Bunge y Born en 1963, para celebrar los 80 años de actividad del grupo económico en la Argentina. Actualmente es presidida por Jorge Born (V), descendiente de Jorge Born (I), fundador, junto a Ernesto Bunge, de Bunge y Born. Se financian con fondos propios, donaciones de benefactores privados, y acuerdos de inversión conjunta con otras instituciones y organismos, nacionales e internacionales.

gestión; como también la centralidad que las historias institucionales, las coyunturas y los desafíos de gobierno tienen en dichos balances.

Fue entonces en el marco de este descontento y distanciamiento por parte de los/as expertos/as respecto de la implementación del Plan que la presidencia argentina del G20 apareció como una oportunidad renovada para re-instituir esta agenda, erigida a su vez en la consolidación de nuevas alianzas. De hecho, amparados en los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible y en la Declaración de Líderes que se había conseguido en 2018, la Subsecretaría de Primera Infancia del Ministerio de Desarrollo Social de la Nación y UNICEF comandaron la construcción de la Estrategia Nacional Primera Infancia Primero. La iniciativa fue formalizada luego, mediante el Decreto 750/19, donde se plantea como una estrategia gradual, a comenzar en 2019 y extenderse hasta 2030, de modo de adecuarse al horizonte temporal de los ODS.

## Reflexiones finales

Me he centrado, en este artículo, en las prácticas desplegadas por expertos/as en la conformación de una agenda sobre la primera infancia en Argentina, con el recorte temporal del período 2015-2019, por tratarse de una coyuntura política signada por el cambio, no sólo de gestión de gobierno, sino también del signo político del partido gobernante, así como por debates sobre el rol del Estado y otros actores en la definición de lo público; por el pretendido carácter fundacional que Cambiemos pretendió darle a su agenda de gobierno para la primera infancia y por la retórica jerarquizante de la técnica y la *expertise* en el diseño de políticas.

Guiada por la hipótesis de que aun los más hegemónicos de los modelos y clasificaciones de intervención no son, simple y linealmente, “transferidos” de un sitio a otro, consideré que la coyuntura política de cambio de gobierno inmediatamente previa al lanzamiento del Plan Nacional de Primera Infancia era un interesante punto de mira, para dar cuenta de procesos locales de circulación, apropiación y resignificación de los debates internacionales más amplios sobre la centralidad de la primera infancia en las agendas de protección social. Atendiendo a estos procesos analicé, de forma situada, cómo las interpretaciones y usos estratégicos de las narrativas hegemónicas sobre el desarrollo infantil, así como su eficacia política para conformar una agenda y constituir una institucionalidad en torno a ella, están atravesadas por nociones en tensión sobre la infancia, por las tradiciones institucionales, como también por contiendas políticas más amplias en torno al Estado y la política social en la que se inscriben.

A partir de mi indagación etnográfica, los/as expertos/as fueron analizados/as como *knowledge brokers*, que mueven, traducen y ensamblan saberes, pero sobre todo redes de influencia y vínculos, por lo que sus prácticas conforman un particular trabajo relacional. El *brokerage* resultó una herramienta conceptual fructífera para iluminar el trabajo mediante el que se generan las condiciones de posibilidad para las prácticas de intercambio, transacción e incidencia. Enfoqué, en particular, en el trabajo relacional como una dimensión de dicho *brokerage*, de modo tal de iluminar y explicar las prácticas de incidencia, activación de redes y usos estratégicos de saberes que hacen al montaje de aquello que se presenta como evidencia para las políticas públicas. A su vez, ese abordaje relacional constituyó un aporte para pensar a los expertos como intermediarios particularmente significativos, que permiten el apoyo de diferentes grupos a una iniciativa política, aun cuando difieren en sus razones e intereses.

Fue el trabajo relacional –condensado en categorías nativas como “la gira” o el “lobby cool” y materializado en documentos de trabajo y *policy brief*– desplegado por estos expertos el que permitió, a su vez, aprehender como activamente producido aquello que se presenta como contingente y azaroso. En el trabajo de unir elementos previamente desconectados, y en la forma singular en que eso se presenta, se produce algo nuevo, recubierto de un efecto de coherencia y verdad. La contingencia o “el papelito en el momento justo” se sostienen en condiciones de posibilidad sopesadas y producidas activamente por estos expertos. La asunción de Cambiemos

en el gobierno fue leída como un momento auspicioso, por una renovada hipervisibilidad de organismos internacionales, *think tanks* y ONG en la producción de lo público, como también por la retórica refundacional que pretendieron dar a su agenda de gobierno, y por la sintonía, entre las lecturas individualizantes, del desarrollo infantil y la parentalidad con la retórica neoliberal meritocrática del partido gobernante.

El foco en las prácticas de mediación, traducción y ensamblaje de expertos habilitó una aproximación a los elaborados procesos de montaje y ensamblaje de narrativas, lo que permite pensar que el conocimiento y la evidencia sólo se constituyen en tanto tales una vez que dicho montaje se produce. A su vez, se explicitó su carácter siempre disputado y provisional, en tanto no hay un único montaje posible. A los fines de comprender este trabajo relacional y la práctica de montaje que producen estos expertos, consideré tres dimensiones: la cronológica/temporal, en tanto los expertos participan de diferentes maneras de acuerdo al momento de la política (tanto en singular y con mayúsculas como las políticas plurales y singulares); la discursiva, relacionada a las tensiones significativas alrededor de las definiciones sobre la infancia y su protección; y la institucional, en tanto la eficacia de dicho trabajo relacional y de los montajes producidos no puede escindirse de los recursos institucionales y de los balances de poder entre las instituciones a las que los expertos representan.

Por último, se evidenció el carácter relacional de la producción de conocimiento a la vez que la persistente politicidad de los saberes expertos en torno a lo infantil y la definición de sus necesidades, que componen un campo de fuerzas en el que también yo tengo un lugar. El desarrollo en la primera infancia aparece como un nodo crítico y polémico, que requiere de la producción de marcos interpretativos y de estrategias de persuasión, como también de la formación sostenida en el tiempo de alianzas y redes, y de la identificación del espacio idóneo para instalarlo como agenda. En parte, podría interpretarse que los usos estratégicos de las narrativas se dirigen a captar fondos o avales.

Sin embargo, el dinero no se mueve solo. Son ciertas intervenciones las que se financian, con propósitos prefigurados. Hay elasticidad, márgenes de maniobra; no obstante, hay lineamientos fijados. Aun cuando sea con fines estratégicos, por reiteración se configura un “lenguaje que hay que hablar” que termina legitimando la validez y universalidad de ciertas narrativas. No obstante, incluso frente a dicha cristalización, el abordaje relacional y procesual que ha guiado esta investigación permitió iluminar los constantes –y disputados– procesos mediante los que la política es hecha y rehecha a través de saberes, relaciones y experiencias históricamente situadas. Así, la condición disputada y conflictiva de la manufactura de esta política restituyó el carácter político de saberes que suelen apelar a lenguajes con pretensión de neutralidad, y se presentan como evidencia categórica.

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# From Creative Genius to Entrepreneurial Spirit: Architectural Mediations in the Formation of the Brazilian State

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## **Abstract**

The architectural field has performed a central mediating function in the process of formation of the Brazilian State through the formulation of mechanisms for control, ordering, and management of territories and populations. In the present article, we address three different scenarios in which architectural professional networks played a significant role: national-developmental projects implemented from the 1930s onwards; housing policies developed during the military dictatorship (1964 to 1985); strategic plans for the production of “global cities” following the redemocratization process (1985-today). From among the kaleidoscope of professional practices and meanings mobilized during these periods, we highlight situations and events that triggered the ideal types of the “creative genius”, the “engaged anti-designer” and the “entrepreneurial manager”. By analyzing the interactions between architects and public administration, we hope to contribute to the understanding of the population management technologies and business mechanisms that supported the neoliberal turn in the forms of government in Brazilian cities.

**Keywords:** State; Architectural projects; Land use planning; Population management; Brazil.

# Del genio creativo al espíritu emprendedor: Mediaciones arquitectónicas en la formación del Estado brasileño

## Resumen

El campo arquitectónico desempeña funciones mediadoras centrales en el proceso de formación del Estado brasileño, a través de la formulación de mecanismos de control, planificación y gestión de territorios y poblaciones. En este artículo, discutimos tres escenarios distintos en los que sus redes profesionales tuvieron un desempeño significativo: en los proyectos de desarrollo nacional implementados desde la década de 1930; en las políticas de vivienda elaboradas durante la dictadura militar (1964 a 1985); y en los planes estratégicos para la producción de “ciudades globales” que se extendieron después del proceso de redemocratización. En el caleidoscopio de prácticas y sentidos profesionales operados en estos períodos, destacamos en particular las situaciones y eventos que movilizaron a los tipos ideales del “genio creativo”, el “diseñador comprometido” y el “gerente de negocios”. Al analizar las interacciones entre los arquitectos y la administración pública, esperamos contribuir a la comprensión de las tecnologías de gestión de la población y los mecanismos empresariales que apoyaron el guiño neoliberal de las formas de gobierno de las ciudades brasileñas.

**Palabras clave:** Estado; Proyectos arquitectónicos; Ordenación del territorio; Gestión de la población; Brasil.

# Da genialidade criativa ao espírito empresarial: As mediações arquitetônicas na formação do Estado brasileiro

## Resumo

O campo arquitetônico desempenha funções mediadoras centrais no processo de formação do Estado brasileiro, por meio da formulação de mecanismos de controle, ordenamento e gestão dos territórios e populações. Neste artigo, abordamos três distintos cenários em que suas redes profissionais tiveram atuação significativa: nos projetos nacional-desenvolvimentistas implementados a partir dos anos 1930; nas políticas habitacionais elaboradas durante a ditadura militar (1964 a 1985); e nos planos estratégicos para a produção de “cidades globais” que se difundiram após o processo de redemocratização. No caleidoscópio de práticas e sentidos profissionais mobilizados nesses períodos, destacamos em especial as situações e eventos que acionaram os tipos ideais do “gênio criativo”, do “anti-projetista engajado” e do “gestor empresarial”. Ao analisarmos as interações entre arquitetos e administração pública, esperamos contribuir na compreensão das tecnologias de gestão populacional e dos mecanismos empresariais que sustentaram a guinada neoliberal das formas de governo das cidades brasileiras.

**Palavras-chave:** Estado; Projetos arquitetônicos; Ordenamento territorial; Gestão populacional; Brasil.

# From Creative Genius to Entrepreneurial Spirit: Architectural Mediations in the Formation of the Brazilian State

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Urban interventions are usually undertaken in the name of ideals of modernity and development, the rational use and interconnectedness of the territory, the ordering of flows, services, and people, and the creation of markets. In urban contexts, each question regarding the causes and responsibilities of a situation perceived as socially problematic leads to calls for new conceptions about society and the elaboration of solutions based on specialized knowledge. Only after the production of a common sense around a certain “public problem” can the creation of new management mechanisms and the carrying out of a set of State works become legitimized. It is in the search to understand the dynamics of how urban interventions are implemented that we take as our inspiration Cefaï’s (2017) analysis of the process of a public problem is constituted.<sup>1</sup>

Our analysis in the present article focuses in particular on the mediating role in Brazilian public administration that architects and urban planners have played in the problematization, publicization, and construction of the “problem of mass housing”. We begin with the idea that housing scarcity gradually became perceived as problematic within a state agenda ever more focused on development projects, which saw private construction initiatives as insufficient to meet demands linked to population growth and the acceleration of urbanization. Seen as a collective issue, the housing problem then became a political process, becoming disputed as a field of action for agents of – or accredited by -- the State.

In the present article, then, we seek to highlight how the experience of homelessness was transformed into a broader, collective experience, “with common sense ways of seeing, saying, and doing linked through a network of numbers, available categories, types, accounts, and arguments” (Cefaï 2017: 192). In this process, housing became an identifiable and recognizable problem, enabling the weaving of knowledge and techniques around existing organizations and professional associations, as well as the construction of a moral order based on aesthetic meanings, practical experiments, and interactional exchanges with different people and things. In this dynamic, the structuring of the architectural field came to the fore in promoting new State functions through the creation of laws, equipment, and specialists qualified to take on the problem of public housing.

The increase in public housing works by the Brazilian State thus involved the movement of administrative and legislative arrangements, the creation of regulatory frameworks for construction and planning, and the legal and economic establishment of various forms of partnerships between public and private entities. Through the expansion of the meanings and objectives of the works (which in the name of urbanization and popular access to housing began to cover issues relating to infrastructure, supply, and circulation), professional

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<sup>1</sup> The article is the result of research carried out within the scope of the “The mediations of architects and urban planners in the patrimonialization of spaces in Rio de Janeiro” project, coordinated by Roberta Sampaio Guimarães and supported by a Jovem Cientista do Nosso Estado grant from FAPERJ (2018-2022), and the master’s thesis “Architecture as a ‘state profession’: IAB-RJ, networks of relationships and administrative knowledge”, defended by Paulo Vitor Ferreira da Silva in the Postgraduate Program in Social Sciences at UERJ (2018). Part of the reflections presented here were debated at meetings of NESP - Center for Research and Studies in Space, Symbolism and Power (Department of Cultural Anthropology, IFCS/UFRJ). We are especially grateful to the readings and comments of João Paulo Macedo e Castro and the considerations on the field of architecture made by Antônio Agenor Barbosa. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers and dossier editors for their notes and contributions.

networks anchored in different fields of knowledge were set up within public administration, linking engineers, sanitation workers, economists, sociologists, lawyers, and etc.

Something beyond technical expertise was also expected in the conception of these public interest projects, however. Often, those involved in them referred to notions of harmony, order, and balance -- that is, to a moralizing and integrating vision of society (Guimarães, Barbosa & Moreira 2021). It is at this intersection between art, technique, and politics that architects began to assert their expertise as professionals recognized by (inter)national public culture. In this way, depending on the context of their actions, the “creative genius”, the “engaged anti-designer” or the “business manager” became increasingly evoked and recognized in the field of public housing.

Based on an analysis of the dynamics of the architectural field, we seek to illuminate the discourses and practices mobilized in the process of implementing state-based urban interventions, with an emphasis on interactions surrounding the construction of public housing as a political problem. The results presented in this article are based on bibliographical and documentary research, with special attention being paid to the controversies that permeated the constitution of the field of architecture as a form of knowledge that’s of the public interest. We also employ interviews with agents involved in the Favela-Bairro urban and housing program, implemented between 1994 and 2007 in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>2</sup> This program was paradigmatic in embracing communicative strategies for producing cooperation and consensus between different social actors, expanding the perception of popular housing as a problem while boosting professional careers and generating norms, rules, financial investments, and management technologies.

In presenting our analysis, we give pride of place to three distinct scenarios of State-driven urban intervention. Initially, we address policies with a national developmental bias that were implemented from the 1930s onwards and the controversies surrounding public competitions for architectural projects. These competitions led both to the projection of specialized knowledge in the public sphere and to the destabilization of the ideals of “creative genius” and the structuring of professional architectural bodies. Next, we deal with housing policies designed during the years of the military dictatorship (1964 to 1985), seeking to illuminate the contradictions and tensions faced by “engaged anti-designers” in the face of State apparatuses focused on territorial and population management. Here, we pay special attention to the pioneering case of the urbanization of the Brás de Pina favela, located in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Finally, we expose the discourses mobilized by architects and managers in the production of so-called “global cities” after the Brazil’s redemocratization process. These had the effect of increasing the influence within public administration of those architects who demonstrated “entrepreneurial spirit”. Within this concluding scenario, we discuss the assessments, experiences, and strategies of the agents involved in the Favela-Bairro program, which were included in the Strategic Plan of the City of Rio de Janeiro.

It is not our intention here to provide a comprehensive transversal account of the nuances of territorial and population management in Brazil. We are aware that our country’s many different regions have particularities related to both urban and rural contexts and that the analysis that we present here cannot possibly take all of these into account. We do hope, however, that the questions we raise below serve to inspire further research into the study of professional networks and their intersection with the State. We propose to shed light on those “at the top” (Nader 1972); that is, on those who, through the operation of different resources (economic, political, cultural, and etc.), hold the power to shape and control institutional structures that affect the quality of life of thousands of people. Ultimately, we seek to create knowledge about the dynamics that legitimize, organize, and sustain government policies and business initiatives such as those that permeate housing and urban planning policies, making these dynamics more accessible to the populations they supposedly serve.

By looking at the interactions between the fields of public administration and architecture, we seek to contribute – even if only more broadly -- to the understanding of the processes of the generalization of

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<sup>2</sup> We chose to use the real names of the people interviewed because their actions took place through institutions and organizations with a broad public impact. We hope that further research into the Favela-Bairro program will be able to use the present study as a reference and context for analysis.



mechanisms of territorial and population management that occur via contemporary business strategies. This is an area of study that, by penetrating into the dynamics of formation of “new elites” in the Brazilian neoliberal turn, faces a deep methodological challenge. It seeks to investigate extremely flexible networks composed of mobile, dynamic, and globalized groups which are not easily identifiable (Gomes, Motta & Souza Lima 2021: 16).

### **The political place of the “creative genius” in the formation of a State architecture**

The scientific conception of modern urban planning dates to the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and is deeply related to the social and aesthetic experiments carried out by the French government in colonial cities. Such experiments had as their main objectives the demonstration of political superiority, the support of certain forms of military control, the regulation of economic activities, and the segregation of populations, all while making public order increasingly legible. (Rabinow 2003). This does not mean that we are making the simplistic claim that every architectural form carries within its materializations a political symbolism. Rather, we want to emphasize architecture’s programmatic contents can be strategically manipulated in a given socio-historical context, creating broader processes of transformation in fields of power and knowledge (Foucault 1975).

It is in order to highlight the strategic contours of architectural and urban planning programs that we affirm that modernism was mobilized during the change in the political context of Brazil in the 1930s. This was when the country’s elite began to adopt a progressive, charitable nationalist model and a state agenda focused on development projects. Public resources became directed towards the materialization of new values of power and the establishment of spatial structures that supported water, road, and air transport systems that would enable the unification of economic, social, and cultural production regimes and the creation of markets. Urban planning was chosen as the form and ideology of social intervention. Within it, architectural modernism proposed guidelines relating to representation, monumentality, and identity as devices symbolizing national traditions in line with the demands for order and productivity emerging in the post-colonial capitalist world (Gorelik 2005).

The Brazilian federal government began promoting architectural competitions for the selection of projects aimed at public works as a way of both confirming the ideal of free expression and competition and of meeting the demands of the liberal heritage of the architectural professional field itself. This legacy was related to the intense cultural and political transformations that occurred during the French Revolution, when initiatives emerged to organize methodologies aimed at architectural practices. Among them was the defense of competition as a means of stimulating the debate of ideas and protecting government works from the “intrigues of public men” and the “cult of the king’s architect” (Quincy 1801; Sobreira 2018).

This liberal understanding of the competition inspired the professional imagination as a model for reality. It was based on the desire to promote impersonal selection processes that valued technical and artistic attributes and better distributed resources among architects, stimulating the improvement and consolidation of the field. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the practice spread in Brazil, which had its first public project competition held in the federal capital in 1857. This was the competition for the project for the construction of the Teatro Lírico do Rio de Janeiro.<sup>3</sup>

Competitions in Brazil only increased in number decades later. This was partially related to the modernization and structuring of new administrative frameworks during the 1920s and ‘30s and the creation of a federal law that made competitions mandatory for public works.<sup>4</sup> During these decades, a management pattern emerged based on specially trained public employees and a bureaucratic elite that aimed to manage and solve national

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<sup>3</sup> The competition was won by architect Carl Gustav Waehneltdt, but the project was not carried out due to financial difficulties. The construction of the theater only took place in the 1910s, following pressure by City Hall of the Federal District, which disregarded the results of the competition and contracted for another project to be built (Santos 2002: 89-90).

<sup>4</sup> In the 1920s, around 30 competitions were organized per year, the majority in the federal capital of Rio de Janeiro. After the promulgation of Federal Law No. 125 of 1935, which made it mandatory to hold project competitions for public works, this number increased to 50 per year over the course of the next two decades. The practice of calling for competitions also expanded to constructions carried out in the city of São Paulo (Santos 2002: 51).

problems through professional development (Gomes 1994).<sup>5</sup> Entities such as the Institute of Architects of Brazil (IAB) emerged. This was organized to bring professionals in the field together in order to demand the standardization of architecture and its recognition by the State as a form of specialized knowledge, particularly with regards to the process of selecting projects for public works.<sup>6</sup>

It was in this context that the rhetoric of “creative genius” in the selection of State intervention projects began to be consolidated and also destabilized. Several discontented sectors of the architectural field complained that the valorization of technical expertise appeared more in terms of government discourse than in terms of its operations. In this transition of meanings and practices, competitions continued to be permeated by personalist selection criteria, with personal or elective affinities regarding what would be understood as beautiful and functional, and personal ties and friendship influencing the choice of projects.

From the Estado Novo of Getúlio Vargas (1937-1945) to the government of Juscelino Kubitschek (1955-1961), competitions were carried out through interdependent modes of action involving a specific network of modernist architects and government officials, who operated through a model like patronage. The place of the “king’s architect” was occupied by architects who were symbolically invested with value through the rhetoric of “genius”<sup>7</sup>. These were professionals who, in practice, promoted certain visions and ideals of the world in their projects, brokering a union between politics and representation and the construction and the symbolization of power. This is clearly shown in the government preferences, widely recorded by historiography, in relation to the architectural and urban planning concepts of Le Corbusier, Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer.

Partnerships between modernist architects and government officials might be regulated through public competitions, but their results were not always subject to (or free from) disagreements.<sup>8</sup> Despite the visibility that the modernists brought to the architectural profession, advances in the organization of professional associations and the complexity of the agents involved in State interventions produced serious questions about the concentration of public works in the hands of a few “geniuses”. A landmark of these tensions and clashes of interests was the public controversy surrounding the competition for the pilot plan for the new federal capital of Brasília in 1956. During the competition, the president of the IAB and member of the jury, Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, was accused of presiding over a lack of fairness in the selection process. To the final

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5 This discourse of technical competence allowed subjects with new knowledge to access key positions in public administration and encouraged the creation of associations and corporate bodies. As Gomes (1994: 3-10) points out, the new approach emphasized knowledge such as engineering, sociology, and economics, to the detriment of the previous dominance of an “baccalaureate elite” originating, for the most part, in law schools and possessing both a humanistic culture and a family political tradition linked to land ownership.

6 As systematized by Moura (2021), Brazilian Institute of Architects (IAB) was formed with the objective of broadly representing and mobilizing professionals in the field. In the words of its members, the creation of the IAB and the Central Society of Architects (SCA) in 1921 are seen as milestones of the architectural profession’s myth of origin. Both were based in Rio de Janeiro and proposed the regulation of the profession. The entities merged in 1924, forming the Central Institute of Architects (ICA). This Institute’s capacity for action was expanded when it achieved recognition as a “public utility” through a municipal law of 1929, which allowed the Institute to become a privileged organizer of public architectural competitions and a provider of services to the State. Its first nationwide professional regulation was sanctioned in 1933 and, two years later, it began using the name Instituto dos Arquitetos do Brasil (IAB) to signal its desire for nation-wide representation.

7 The idea of *genius* is widespread in many texts in the architectural field. As an example, we remember that in his “Testimony of a Rio architect”, Lúcio Costa applied this term to Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer, comparing the latter to Aleijadinho (Costa 1952: 37). For those not familiar with the field of architecture, the French-Swiss Le Corbusier (1887-1965) was important for the formation of the modernist generation of Brazilian architects. In 1929, he visited South America and gave lectures in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. These events were fundamental for the spread of modernism in Brazil and, in the early 1930s, boosted the movement during the reform of the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio de Janeiro (then under the direction of Lúcio Costa (Leonídio 2007)). In addition to the determining role they played in the modernist conception of Brasília, both Lúcio Costa (1902-1998) and Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2012) had outstanding architectural works in their CVs. The first was responsible for projects such as the Gustavo Capanema Palace, the Plano Piloto da Barra da Tijuca, and the Pacaembu Stadium. The second designed the Niterói Contemporary Art Museum, the Copan Building, the Memorial da América Latina and participated in the project for the United Nations Headquarters in Manhattan, among other acts of architectural monumentalism.

8 To choose the architectural project for the Ministry of Education and Public Health, for example, the federal government called for a competition in 1936, but the project chosen by the jury was the Marajoara style designed by Archimedes Memória. This displeased Minister Gustavo Capanema, who paid the prize to the winner, but directly invited Lúcio Costa to develop something different and modern. The project was then prepared by Costa and his team, made up of Carlos Leão, Ernani Vasconcellos, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Oscar Niemeyer, and Roberto Burle Marx (Cavalcanti 1995; Lissovsky 1996). It is worth noting that not every competition held at the time by the public administration resulted in modernist projects winning and being put into operation, as confirmed by the construction in 1938 of the Ministry of Finance, a classic-style project designed by architect Luiz Eduardo Frias de Moura on the demand of minister Arthur de Souza Costa (Sobreira 2018: 118).

minutes of the judging committee, the architect attached a critique of the evaluation procedure for the 26 projects registered by the committee (which, by the way, were almost all modernist in design, confirming the establishment of a hegemonic bloc in the professional field), explaining that a pact existed between foreign jurors about the result of the competition (Braga 2011).

However, even after the arrangement was publicized, requests to review the competition were refused, and Lúcio Costa's winning plan enthusiastically received in the specialist press. Among those who supported the project was Oscar Niemeyer, who was also a juror and the person responsible for the Architecture Department of the recently appointed Companhia Urbanizadora da Nova Capital (Novacap). Niemeyer had already been selected to be the creator of the future Brazilian capital's most representative buildings: the headquarters of the Executive Branches, Legislative, and Judiciary. In a statement to *Módulo* magazine, Niemeyer not only praised the winning project but also emphasized that choosing a "young team" for 2nd place would act as an incentive for other professionals (Braga 2011: 35). Niemeyer thus actively employed the hierarchies of the architectural field. These had legitimized architects like him and Lúcio Costa, who had established themselves as "geniuses" in the process of institutionalizing architectural knowledge. This knowledge, linked to centers of power, constrained new professionals into copying architects like Niemeyer and Costa (Santos 2002: 85-86).

Despite the IAB's apparent political defeat, the competition for Brasília became a significant event for professional architecture networks, as these publicized indignant testimonials regarding the system of favors and prestige practiced by the government. The debate showed that the architectural field itself was polyvalent, composed of different action programs and, therefore, should not be centered on a single authorizing reference which, in this case, was composed of the networks of social relations linking rulers, their tastes and projects, and "geniuses". Those professionals not included in these networks argued that State interventions should be structured in a complex manner through interactions between different fields (administrative, political, economic, and professional) and their various associated bodies.

In this way, in addition to publicizing the importance of adopting competition as a method of selecting projects for public works, architects also began to demand control over the definition of the composition of the juries in these competitions, as well as the criteria for evaluating projects. This control was constructed via an IAB monopoly over the organization of competitions themselves. To use Bourdieu's terms (2012), these actors occupied a position as pertinent agents in the production of specific effects in a given field. In other words, in the context of a modernizing Brazil, the organization of the architectural professional field inaugurated a public agenda related to architectural projects produced for State interventions, the pertinent agents and powers in this field, and the structure of its balance of power. As we shall see, this maneuvering was essential for networks of architects to have the political strength necessary to guide public policy regarding Brazil's housing deficit as this became increasingly understood as a public problem to be solved by the State.

### **The "engaged anti-designer" and other solutions for mass housing**

The public works carried out between the Vargas and Kubitschek governments were, therefore, characterized by projects aimed at rationalizing and integrating the uses and functions of national territory. During this period, modern architecture was the preferred program of the center of power and this raised the professional field to unprecedented heights of prestige and social recognition. After the 1950s, architectural activities were no longer indexed as a subset of engineering or as a specialist field of the fine arts, but became increasingly seen as oriented towards the production and teaching of knowledge. This institutional autonomy of disciplinary knowledge was both a reflection of the political space conquered by architectural professionals and a driver of diversity in architecture's areas of activity.

After the civil-military coup of 1964, the increase in State intervention in the economy and the organization of strong conglomerates in strategic areas of industry accentuated differentiation within the civil construction sector. This led to many architects being hired to implement large development projects across Brazil. These professionals participated in the construction of industrial and hydroelectric facilities, freight and passenger bus terminals, airport and subway facilities, supply centers, university spaces, etc. (Segawa 2018).

Another important professional space was linked to the housing policy created by the National Housing Bank (BNH) and the Housing Financial System (SFH), whose express purpose was to “stimulate the construction of social housing and the financing of private home acquisition, especially by the lower-income brackets of the population” (Presidency of the Republic, Law No. 4,380, dated August 21 1964). This broad scope of action, allied with a powerful degree of social segmentation, gave architects numerous opportunities for professional advancement. They began to become involved in disputes regarding ways of governing the population generically classified as “poor”.

The “problem of popular housing” had been receiving attention since the Vargas government, which proposed a policy of eradicating houses built in favelas and along urban peripheries, which was linked to the production of housing complexes through subsidies to the construction industry (Bonduki 1994). The real estate portfolios of the Retirement and Pension Institutes (IAPs) were then created from 1933 onwards, based on the premises of modern urbanism, with the aim of financing these housing complexes and aiding lower-class Brazilians who had formal jobs. Shortly after this policy was established, the federal government used the 1937 Building Code to prohibit the construction of “unhealthy housing”. This placed countless urban residents in a marginal situation, leaving them vulnerable to urban removal initiatives. In these projects there was, on the one hand, the expectation of moralizing the working class through the promotion of such notions as “public and private spaces”, “community life”, and “the nuclear family”; on the other, there was an orientation towards encouraging industry and control the urbanization process.

Although initiatives promoting construction-protection seem to be antagonistic to those pushing for removal-repression, both sets of policies contained complementary meanings. Both stated that Brazilian cities were facing chaotic situations due to lack of housing and situated favelas and other forms of informal housing were a “social disease”. In this way, both pointed to the same solutions regarding the “development”, “control”, and “moralization” of the poorer sectors of the Brazilian population, whether these were discursively constructed in a positive manner as belonging to the “working class”, or negatively as inhabitants of “unhealthy housing”. The end result was the establishment of a social hierarchy that legitimized protective management modalities targeting this urban *other*, who did not have the economic resources to access the private real estate markets. In other words, it was the implementation of a form of domination that would be increasingly characterized by mediation between different social agents and contradictory principles of care and subjection (Souza Lima 2002; Pacheco de Oliveira 2014).

These policies of the 1930s began the process of social classification by standardizing and imposing housing practices on sectors characterized as “working class” and “inhabitants of unhealthy housing”. At the same time, specific government apparatuses brought together forms of knowledge regarding urban intervention, establishing elaborate procedures that could cope with Brazil’s large and growing urban population. To integrate the vast territory of the nation, the State needed to expand governmentality. This required both a centralization of administrative bodies and a general refinement and diffusion of government tactics (Foucault 2004).

The Casa Popular Foundation was created in 1946 with the aim of “providing Brazilians, or foreigners with more than ten years of residence in the country or with Brazilian children, the means to acquire or build their own home in an urban or rural area” (Presidency of the Republic, Decree -Law No. 9,218, of May 1 1946). The population segment that was to be served by this foundation was defined in broader fashion than in previous policies. Its new policies sought to favor those “most in need”, including “private sector workers”, “public or

local government employees” and “other people”, prohibiting only those public works that were not qualified as a “genuinely popular type” (*idem*). In practice, this initiative financed and brought together areas of urban policy that had previously been disjointed. These included policies related to the water supply and sewage network, the provision of electricity and social assistance structures, and credit for the construction material industry, among others (Azevedo & Andrade 2011).

Several bodies emerged with the purpose of acting locally on the housing problem. These included the Department of Hygiene, the Surveillance Police, the Health Department, and the Leão XIII Foundation. This set of actors was centralized in 1956 through the Special Service for the Recovery of Favelas and Unhygienic Housing (SERFHA), which proposed a different vision to the principle of favela demolition and removal, arguing that the segment most served by the policy, “favela dwellers”, could and should participate in the process of improving their structural and living conditions in the favela in cooperation with government bodies. This model of action that became known as *Operação Mutirão* (Leeds & Leeds 1978; Castro 2004).

This proposal to incorporate favela residents into government practices did not become the main policy adopted after the civil-military coup, however. The new government looked towards solving the “problem” poised by the growing demographic concentration in Brazilian urban centers was the regulation of BNH/SFH operations in 1964. Via the receipt of voluminous resources raised through compulsory payroll contributions and the management of deposits in the social security fund (the Time Guarantee Fund Service (FGTS)), this system strengthened construction projects for large housing complexes along the outskirts of Brazil’s main cities. Based on an elitist State conception of segmenting urban areas based on socioeconomic criteria, this policy was not sufficient to overcome the country’s housing deficit. Real estate interests influenced the allocation of resources, leading the financing system to mainly subsidize apartment construction for the middle classes. In practice, then, the new policy transferred State functions to the private sectors linked to national real estate capital and the civil construction sector. These experienced a *boom* during the dictatorship (Botega 2007; Campos 2010).<sup>9</sup>

In this context of large-scale housing production, two distinct movements occurred in the architectural field. One benefited from the professional opportunities opened up by the BNH/SFH system; the other “engaged” in defending an “anti-project”, arguing that it was possible to provide existing informal occupations with the necessary infrastructure and legality, operating through a model close to that proposed by SERFHA. Interventions implemented in the state of Guanabara (currently the state of Rio de Janeiro)<sup>10</sup> throughout the 1960s are paradigmatic of the different projects and worldviews revolving around State management of “low income” populations. Looking at the projects can help us understand the contradictions that permeated architectural practices.

Governor Carlos Lacerda (1960-1965) created a wide-ranging program to remove favelas from the Rio’s toney coastal neighborhoods. Some of the residents of these “unhygienic” areas were moved to housing complexes in peripheral regions. These measures were very unpopular, which led Lacerda’s political opponent, Negrão de Lima, to commit to ending removals. Sworn in as acting governor between 1965 and 1970, Negrão de Lima adopted an “on again, off again” model of intervening to eradicate favelas, promoting both removal and the development of an urbanization projects with the participation of favela residents (Heringer 2017).

We will look at the second type of initiative, as it was the one that most mobilized the field of “engaged” architecture. The pioneering case of the urbanization of the Brás de Pina favela, which occurred during Negrão de Lima’s administration, is particularly illustrative here. The proposal for this intervention arose from the

<sup>9</sup> The huge investments stimulated the creation of the Association of Directors of Companies in the Real Estate Market of Rio de Janeiro (Ademi-RJ) in 1971. This was also due to the departure of real estate builders from the Civil Construction Industry Union of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Sinduscon- Rio), whose interests were mainly oriented towards the work of construction companies (Sousa 2020).

<sup>10</sup> After the transfer of the federal capital to Brasília, the state of Rio de Janeiro was renamed Guanabara, holding this name from 1960 and 1975. Afterwards, it returned to the original name.

mobilization of residents threatened with removal by the Lacerda administration, representatives of the Federation of Favela Associations of the State of Guanabara (FAFEG), a priest of the Catholic parish that covered the area, and a small group of architects who yearned for social change in the broader context of the political repression of the times. As analyzed by Carlos Nelson Ferreira dos Santos (1981), one of the members of the Quadra architecture firm that intermediated urban planning actions with the employees of the recently created Community Development Company (CODESCO), the idea was to make use of the same weapons employed by the State by situating the demands of favela residents within the “language of urban design”.

For the architects involved in the project, the participation of residents in all stages of urbanization and home improvement would enable a kind of translation of architectural academic language into “local reality”, a term that Santos himself (1981) criticized as abstract and extremely idealized in the context of political tension then reigning in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil more generally. Santos’ remarks are very insightful regarding the ambiguous process of intervention that unfolded in the Brás de Pina favela. He claims that the architects had agreed to work with the project not only because it created the possibility of reacting against an authoritarian regime, but that they also saw a chance to change the practices of the architectural field itself (which, in this period, were still very much shaped by modernist planning ideals). Moreover, the architects understood that this unique experience of “engaged urbanization” could give them a degree of social projection.

As Santos (1981) demonstrates, although the action was successful in its urban objectives, mediation between the multiple interests involved in the project ended up individualizing the demands and the institutionalization of the social struggle. This occurred both through the bureaucratic incorporation of local leaders in the intervention procedures, and through the direct negotiations between families and constructions financing firms via operations between CODESCO and the BNH. The project thus rapidly incorporated the favela into the logic of the real estate market, with its residents operating at different levels according to the financial and construction capabilities of each family. Some residents even sought to profit from the sale of “vacancy rights” in the urbanist plan itself.

Paradoxically, despite having emerged as a response to a social struggle against eviction, the initiative ended up converging in its structural and socioeconomic aspects towards pushing favela residents into the real estate market and the BNH/SFH system – where many of them ended up in debt. Not only that the “anti-project” model reinforced discourses that the engaged architects themselves sought to combat, such as those that propagated the need for “integration” between the “formal and informal” cities that consolidated the establishment of inequalities and hierarchies among the urban population. The social identification of favela residents came to legitimize specific actions at the municipal administrative level and government incorporation of specialists to assume the organization of technical knowledge and methods of action especially aimed at this portion of the population. A new market for the architectural field was thus established via the incidence of State powers over space which sought the control, differentiation, and hierarchization of certain populations. These are all processes identified by Souza Lima (2002) as typical of management practices in the universe of public administration.

## **Consensus production as a strategy for urban intervention**

The re-democratization process that began in 1975 was marked by political transitions and the establishment of a new consensus around democratic ideals.<sup>11</sup> The military regime’s loss of legitimacy strengthened of left-wing parties, unions, and neighborhood, favela, feminist, ecological, and black movements, etc. Previously excluded from places of power, these social actors managed to pressure the new legislators to incorporate

<sup>11</sup> The Brazilian redemocratization process is dated differently in historiography, depending on each author’s interpretation of the political context. In this article, we consider the period to be from 1975 to 1985, which encompasses the end of censorship of shows and publications, the repeal of AI-5, the return of multi-partyism, the Amnesty Law, the campaign for Diretas Já and the election of Tancredo Neves, Brazil’s first civilian president since 1964.

popular demands into political agendas, a process symbolically marked in 1988 with the promulgation of a new Federal Constitution and the subsequent calling of presidential elections via direct voting. The resumption of the democratic political system took place alongside the sedimentation of a discourse about “modern Brazil”, whose driving force was the exaltation of a competitive social order and the so-called global market.

Beginning with the administration of President Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), a neoliberal logic began to consolidate in Brazil. A new governance pact was promoted among political and economic elites, marked by the accentuated Brazilian participation in the circulation of volatile capital and the molding of the State machine to meet the demands of transnational companies and financial markets. This increased internationalization of economic flows accentuated interdependence between national and global actors and reconfigured the arenas of political dispute and modes of State intervention. New models for managing populations and territories were experimented with, based on the circulation of reports and recommendations produced by international organizations and their agencies. These contained strategies for meeting demands and themes that were deemed to be universal, such as “cultural diversity, political democratization, and better distribution of resources”.

In the new proposals which bloomed after re-democratization, poverty became seen not as a problem originating in the individual (and which, therefore, should be criminalized and repressed), but as a consequence of insufficient social and economic development. Various segments that worked with the public administrations of so-called underdeveloped countries sought to align themselves with the resolutions of agencies that financed development cooperation programs, such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the United Nations (UN) (Escobar 1995; Dezalay & Garth 2002).

Poverty management thus began to appear in the diffuse domain of interventions regarding “social issues” and underdevelopment. Its actions focused on multiple fields: education, health, hygiene, morality, employment, housing, and etc. Global discourses and practices produced an understanding of the “poverty problem” as something that could not simply be addressed through administrative management, procedural solutions, and methodological innovations on the part of the State. As development programs became established as a means and end of obtaining resources for State social policies, business management models came to the fore, presented as efficient, neutral, and capable means of operating on any and all problems and spheres of action (Ferguson 1994; Dardot & Laval 2009; Montaña 2012).

Methods of business evaluation and productivity management captured the technical imagination of government actors in the public housing field and their private sector allies. These new methods became both a vector for the depoliticization of debates regarding development and for the legitimization of a standardization of the ways of evaluating the results of actions, allowing for their reproduction in different “backwards” countries and locations. Furthermore, the model presupposed a political balance and a form of domination based on consensus. That is, to function, it required a set of norms and institutions that were capable of absorbing tensions and conflicts. In the quest to legitimize themselves as “democratic practices”, State interventions became equipped with more complex procedures, such as “participatory forums”, “community management,” and “communicative actions”. They also incorporated methodologies and experts that continually performed what would or would not be considered by public power, producing symbolic boundaries between the spheres of action of the State, the market, and society (Baltar 2009; Castro 2002; Foucault 2004; Mitchell 2006).

This growing adherence to neoliberal rationality in political practices and grammars provoked a series of repositionings within the field of architecture focused on State works and projects. In statements collected by the IAB-RJ between 1976 and 1978,<sup>12</sup> nationally renowned architectural professionals expressed a critical stance in relation to modernist theoretical foundations and a growing interest in themes such as conurbation,

<sup>12</sup> The conversations were published by the IAB (1978) in the three volumes of the “Brazilian Architecture After-Brasília/Testimonials” series. The organizing committee was coordinated at the time by architect Sérgio Magalhães and was comprised of Cêça Guimaraens, Claudio Taulois and Flávio Ferreira.

megalopolis, and “social responsibility” (Guimaraens 2002). An inclination towards a broader management of territories and populations was also manifest in a significant decrease in calls for project competitions: as in the 1970s, there was an increasing propensity on the part of governments to once again invite renowned architects to carry out public works. The return to the system of influences and privileges of certain professional networks thus reinforced an “anti-modernist feeling” among architects, who criticized the movement as a “symbol of State bureaucracy and waste” (Santos 2002: 85-86).<sup>13</sup>

Another relevant topic brought up in the testimonies of architects of the period concerned the ongoing transformations in the ways in which architecture firms are organized. Specialization and professional expansion led to the gradual replacement of the old studio model, with a few architects organized around “masters”. The new format revolved around teams with multiple components, emphasizing greater incorporation of engineers and economists. There was also a marked integration of foreign firms, which, through partnerships and technical cooperation, strengthened discourses that attributed expertise to agents within the field and produced greater adherence to new lexicons of power (Guimaraens 2002).<sup>14</sup> Within this new profile, local offices expanded the scope of their actions in State governmentalization. Several professional networks began to offer a package of methodologies, skills, and intervention procedures for public administration that were in tune with international agendas and their models of action.

These new global guidelines and their associated practices configured cities as territories for disputes between agents acting on different scales. They promoted unprecedented relationships between architecture, governments, and business sectors. In certain contexts, architectural professionals presented themselves as both designers and managers of territorial planning and development. In the establishment of alliances and communication channels between localized action groups, governments, NGOs, universities, and international agencies, some architects became mediators of conflicts of interests, seeing opportunities to gain positions of power in the political machine. This dynamic led to the rise of professionals who were also “business-minded politicians” (Wolf 1956: 83).

Among the notions that began to circulate in the new political and procedural lexicons of global neoliberal logic was that of “strategic planning”. This was a set of studies and methods that proposed to assist municipal governments in attracting foreign investments through urban interventions, the promotion of major events, and the economic and legislative facilitation of the installation of high-tech companies. In Rio de Janeiro, the promotion of this type of planning initially occurred during Cesar Maia’s mayoral administration (1993-1997), based on an agreement signed by the Mayor with the Commercial Association of Rio de Janeiro (ACRJ) and the Federation of Industries of Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro (FIRJAN).

The Consortium Maintaining the Strategic Plan of the City of Rio de Janeiro (PECRJ) was formed by 46 companies and business associations.<sup>15</sup> It was responsible for financing the Plan’s activities and, through the appointment of the Municipal Secretary of Urbanism (architect Luiz Paulo Conde) for hiring the Catalan consultancy company *Tecnologias Urbanas Barcelona SA (TUBSA)*. This consortium then established a City Council made up of more than 300 members, associations, unions, academic institutions, experts, companies

13 For a study on the continuity of the legitimizing actions of “architectural geniuses” during the period of the civil-military dictatorship, see Alves (2021) regarding the elaboration of the Pilot Plan for the urbanization of the Baixada between Barra da Tijuca, the Pontal de Sernambetiba, and Jacarepaguá, commissioned by the government of Rio de Janeiro in 1969 from Lúcio Costa.

14 As an example of these technical cooperations with foreign offices, Cêça Guimaraens cites the Oriented Recovery Program (ProRio), developed between 1998 and 2000 on the Morro da Conceição in Rio’s port region. As analyzed by Guimarães (2013), the cooperation had the support of the French government via the Ministries of Equipment, Culture, and Foreign Affairs. The French provided consultants and specialists in heritage and rehabilitation, an action that later served as the basis for several reurbanization initiatives on the hill linked to the broader urban plans of the Porto do Rio and the Porto Maravilha. In the same post-redemocratization period, several other heritage policies were combined with urban actions in the city, composing a form of intervention justified by a discourse of “cultural valorization” and which acted to manage territories and redistribute resources between different regions of the city (Guimarães 2016, 2019).

15 Among the companies and associations were banks, real estate, and public works companies, shopping centers, federal-level state companies (Banco do Brasil, Petrobrás, Vale do Rio Doce and Embratel), a union of passenger transport companies, an association of tourism hotels, Texaco, Unysis, and *O Globo* newspaper (Vainer 2002).



and NGOs. These helped to prepare studies, evaluate proposals, and produce a “Diagnosis of the City.” The result was the creation of a discourse regarding the supposed history of Rio de Janeiro’s rise and decline, linking this to the formulation of a set of “strategic lines of action” that would guide the PECRJ (Rio de Janeiro City Hall 1996).

Although it included the participation of different social segments, the council relied mainly on “organized civil society” and “groups from the intelligentsia”, excluding political parties and popular social movements while establishing a “strategic agreement between elite groups” (Randolph 2001). The rituals it promoted aimed to build consensus around the “common objectives” that economic development and “social integration” programs should implement in Rio (Vainer 2002). Among them was the “normalization of the urban situation” of the favelas, which, it is worth noting, was already being carried out through the Favela-Bairro Program.<sup>16</sup> What the PECRJ did was to socially endorse this through the incorporation goal into one of the Plan’s strategic lines: that of an “Integrated Rio”.

The Favela-Bairro Program presented itself as a government project that reinforced the production of social and territorial hierarchies in the city. By assigning a form of technical knowledge and a method of action aimed specifically at favela residents, the Program created a differentiated statute for the execution of administrative procedures and urban treatments. A “kind of spontaneous symbolization of social space” and a “naturalization effect” of inequalities thus occurred, which, as discussed by Bourdieu (1993), legitimized the different opportunities in access to urban goods and services allocated to different populations and territories. It also reproduced in minds and in language oppositions that constituted principles of spatial and social division, seen in the apparently neutral identifications of places mobilized by the pairs of categories such as “asphalt and favela”, “integrated and non-integrated”, and “rich and needy”.<sup>17</sup>

In this neoliberal turn in the governance of Brazilian cities, the reasons for intervention, the scope of action, and the profile of the architects involved in the Favela-Bairro Program also proved to be different from the precursor urbanization project in Brás de Pina, which we discussed above. In this case, it was not residents threatened with removal that led to mobilizations to urbanize favelas: there were dozens of locations in the city classified as “informal” and “poor” that received infrastructure works financed by resources from city hall and the International Development Bank and which were guided by “development” actions prepared by a business consortium.

The much-ballyhooed innovative nature of the program resided in the fact that its projects would be designed by efficient commercial architectural offices that would be selected via competitions. These thus differed from the previous group of architectural professionals who implemented social housing policies. Up to the extinction of the BNH in 1986, these were almost entirely public employees who implemented out standardized housing projects. In the new Program, each favela where intervention was taking place would have their own project, which would ideally allow for greater adaptation to local needs and characteristics. (Brasileiro & Duarte 2015).

It is interesting to note that the idea of “creativity” attributed to the architectural field returned with a makeover in this corporate management of favela territories and populations. Here, however, creativity was longer concentrated in the exceptional figure of the architectural “genius”. Rather, it was used as a justification for the hiring of several architectural firms whose value was in their ability to bring together the knowledge

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<sup>16</sup> Randolph’s (2001) systematization of the priority programs of Rio’s municipal housing policies shows that the Ten-Year Master Plan of the City of Rio de Janeiro (Complementary Law No. 16, of 06/04/1992) provided for urbanization and land regularization in the favelas. The Favela-Bairro Program emerged in 1993, with its legal basis established by Decree 12,994, of 06/16/94. The Program proposed to “complement or build principal urban structures (sanitation and democratization of access) and offer environmental conditions for reading favelas as neighborhoods”. The following year, the Program was consolidated as the Rio de Janeiro Popular Settlements Urbanization Program (PROAP), which was linked to the Allotment Regularization Program.

<sup>17</sup> Categories of perception and appreciation of urban spaces in Rio de Janeiro have historically revolved around the gradations and nuances of such notions as “center and periphery”, with these being defined according to the production of urban hierarchies referring to where poor populations live. Thus, in addition to “favelas”, other specific forms of knowledge creation and government action aim at “suburbs”, “outskirts”, “occupations”, and etc. (Fernandes 2011; Guimarães & Davies 2018).

and technical skills of their teams and liberating these from the “chains” of public administration. In this way, the Favela-Bairro Program managed to meet the expectations of the city’s economic elites and the financing demands of the architecture market while, at the same time, particularizing and expanding interventions in favelas and expanding forms of control over urban territories.

### **Powers and procedures in the formulation of the Favela-Bairro Program**

The Favela-Bairro Program became a major government initiative resulting in the urbanization of more than 100 favelas during the course of four municipal administrations: the first term of economist César Maia (1993-1996), the government of architect Luiz Paulo Conde (1996-2000), and the second term of César Maia (2001-2008). However, in the space between the formulation of the “favela problem” as something the municipality should concern itself with and the creation of interventions themselves, carioca architecture played an important role. It organized methodologies and it formed teams of specialists working with City Hall and in coordination with the IDB (the multilateral agency that contributed the resources guaranteeing the program’s broad reach). Other studies have already addressed the effects of these interventions on the physical aspects of favelas and the lifestyles of their residents. Here, then, we shall focus the analysis of architects’ roles in structuring the program itself.<sup>18</sup>

Through documents, public statements, and dialogue with architects and managers who participated in the creation of Favela-Bairro, we can understand some of the meanings they attributed to their actions, as well as the practices of power that they helped to establish. There is insufficient space here to examine the coherence, awareness, or intentionality of these practices. We thus limit ourselves to highlighting certain sets of power relations in the institutionalization and subjectivation of State principles that functioned through the organization of norms, laws, and procedures guided by the business principles of effectiveness (Castilho; Souza Lima & Teixeira 2014). Here, we seek an understand of urban interventions that highlight the perspectives of the experts involved and their passage through public administration.

The Favela-Bairro Program has been described by the architectural field as mainly connected to a consolidation of the changing understanding of the favela issue by policy makers and the accumulation of professional experiences and expertise in favela management (Ferreira da Silva 2018). When talking about the Program, then, architect Maria Isabel Tostes<sup>19</sup> highlights the role of certain legal frameworks that made it possible. These include the Federal Constitution of 1988, the establishment of the Organic Law of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro (1990) and the city’s Master Plan (1992). She also emphasizes the perception that favelas were areas of the city “could be urbanized”: all that was needed was government action to create planning, development, and regulatory solutions. This understanding was endorsed by Pedro da Luz and Cêça Guimaraens, who characterize the Program as “the beginning of a new era in which the focus stopped being the removal of favelas, instead considering the need to urbanize them” (Guimaraens & Luz Moreira 2013: 19-20).

The ideology of democratic rule of law thus permeated the feelings of members of the field of architecture during the period. This ideology morally justified their participation in programs like Favela-Bairro that were intended to regularize housing while, at the same time, boosting the earnings and prestige of architectural professionals. Linked to the lexicons and procedures of business management, the Program’s operationalization took place through new management technologies, including those aimed at producing consensus. This can

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<sup>18</sup> Although it is not the objective of the present article to develop this topic, we highlight that the Favela-Bairro interventions generated a series of studies on popular mobilizations and the program’s effects on the localities in which it was active. See Burgos (1998), Castro (1998, 2002), Fiori, Riley & Ramirez (2000), Freire (2008), among others.

<sup>19</sup> Interview given to Paulo Vitor Ferreira da Silva in December 2017. Maria Isabel Tostes is an architect and urban planner, graduated from the Universidade Santa Úrsula (1982). She is currently a substitute for CAU/RJ on the Municipal Council for Urban Policy (COMPUR) and President of the Society of Engineers and Architects of the State of Rio de Janeiro (SEAERJ).

be seen in the process of unifying the architectural field around the Program, as exposed by Fernando Janot,<sup>20</sup> president of the IAB-RJ (1992-1993) during the Program's formative period. According to Janot, following the redemocratization of Brazil, control of the Institute was disputed between a "left-wing" group of architects linked to the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) and the Democratic Labor Party (PDT), and a more centrist group that was led "by the UFRJ people".<sup>21</sup>

The main [group] that I took over from was led by Adir Ben Kauss, a person who was perhaps not so well known in the architectural world, but who was well recognized in the political world. Adir was a leader four years younger than me. He came up through the student movement and was active in the Communist Party -- the PCB. Afterwards, he joined the group of [Governor of Rio de Janeiro] Brizola, of the PDT, and became president of FEEMA. (...) This is not to say that I was directly a member of that group, but they saw in me an opportunity to win a contestable election against the UFRJ group. This was composed of Conde (a professor at UFRJ), Milton Feferman, and others. (...) I think Conde already imagined that he would become Secretary [of Urban Planning] under Cesar Maia and he wanted to take charge of the IAB. He saw this as an opportunity. So much so that he put together an electoral ticket with people from UFRJ to take over the IAB (...) The Conde wanted to make the IAB a tool for developing the projects he designed for the city. Not as a puppet: he wanted it as support. Unfortunately, his side didn't win the election: I won. But I have a very open personality. I agreed with [Conde's program]. I thought it was good for architecture, good for everyone. So we implemented it here at the IAB. (Fernando Janot, interview with Roberta Sampaio Guimarães in October 2017)

Janot observed that after his election as president of the IAB-RJ, a confluence of events produced a certain level of consensus, clearly based on the distribution of functions and resources within the architectural field. Luiz Paulo Conde became Municipal Secretary of Urban Planning and he created the Rio Cidade<sup>22</sup> and Favela-Bairro Programs, both of which implemented by adopting public competitions for project selection, organized by the Institute. Janot's role in this mediation was confirmed by architect Fabiana Izaga,<sup>23</sup> who saw the new tone of the IAB's political activities being reinforced by linking the competitions to public administration, thus expanding the job market for architectural firms.

Janot was president of the IAB when the Favela-Bairro and Rio Cidade projects were carried out, for example. But in administrations prior to Janot' -- that is, back in the 1980s and 1990s, when there was very little work in Brazil -- the IAB was a nucleus of leftist resistance. Of the hard left! To fight the *status quo*, understand? So a lot depends on the tone that management has, but as the IAB organizes competitions, it has to negotiate with the public authorities. (Fabiana Izaga, interview with Roberta Sampaio Guimarães in September 2017)

20 Fernando Janot has a degree in Architecture and Urbanism from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (1966) and a master's degree in Urbanism from PROURB/FAU-UFRJ (1998). He is currently an assistant professor at FAU-UFRJ.

21 In Janot's description of this "other group" at UFRJ, he implies that it was composed of architects focused on working in the market via command of architectural offices. Although Janot did not mention this fact in the interview, Luiz Paulo Conde had already presided over the IAB-RJ during the redemocratization process, between 1974 and 1978, when he was still affiliated with the PDT. Antonio Pedro Alcântara (1979), Rui Rocha Veloso (1980-81), Claudio Cavalcanti (1982-83), Marcos Rissin (1984-85), Adir ben Kauss (1986-91) and André Solti (1991) preceded Janot in the presidency of the IAB-RJ. (Information contained in the "IAB-RJ Presidents Spreadsheet", provided by the institute's secretariat in March 2022.)

22 The Rio Cidade Project was carried out between 1995 and 2000. Like Favela-Bairro, it was part of the PECRJ initiatives. Implemented in two phases (Rio Cidade I and II), the project was implemented in a total of 30 different areas of the city. As Oliveira (2008) analyzes, the hallmark of the project was its scope and urban diffusion, although it did not actually constitute an urban reform plan. Its activities were restricted in time and space and took place along neighborhoods' commercial axes, promoting a spatial distinction both in terms of the elements that made up the urban network and the landscape in general, and the social control exercised by the police force over street commerce and street-based populations.

23 Fabiana Izaga has a degree in Architecture and Urbanism from Universidade Santa Úrsula (1991), a master's degree in Visual Arts from UFRJ (2001) and a PhD in Urbanism from the same university (2009). She is an associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at UFRJ and a permanent professor at the Postgraduate Program in Urbanism at FAU/UFRJ. She was General Secretary of the IAB (2014-2017), a member of the IAB Superior Council for Rio de Janeiro (2019-2017) and the Vice-President of the IAB-RJ (2012-2016).

Izaga's testimony also helps us to understand how Conde gained prestige in the architectural field by opposing, in his practice as the owner and director of an architectural firm, to the "creative geniuses" historically linked to the modernist movement. Conde's charismatic leadership was related to his trajectory of forming large professional teams in his firm, where he encouraged architects to carry out compositional experiments in their projects, freeing themselves from the obligations imposed by disciplinary matrices. This sort of thing expanded Conde's powers in different way It placed him at the center of a network of distribution of resources and projects, expanded his alliances and friendships, and symbolically reinforced his image as innovative and competent in relation to the architectural field itself.

[Conde] was a person who really liked this team thing. He didn't focus much on the genius architect, on the architect who conceived [whole projects]: he placed much more emphasis on the teamwork and the study of architecture. I think this the key to understanding what he did. When you produce an architecture that is created by a team, it comes from studies of other projects that give you different matrices of ideas. From these, you create a new composition which is not a given. Because in modernism, the design matrix was a given: it was a compositional lexicon that meant that you didn't even need to look at other ideas. You just needed to know how a staircase combined with the circulation of people. You already had that, it was a given! (Fabiana Izaga , interview with Roberta Sampaio Guimarães in September 2017)

For the Favela-Bairro Program's interventions to be effective, however, other political alignments and administrative arrangements were necessary in addition to consensus within the architectural field. Sociologist and architect Fernando Cavalieri, who was a fundraiser for the Municipal Finance Department at the time, had several comments to make about the changes city hall made in structure the Program. Cavalieri said that shortly after Conde took over as Municipal Secretary of Urban Planning, a set of diverse urban programs and initiatives were concentrated in the Executive Group of Popular Settlements (GEAP), under the coordination of architect Sérgio Magalhães.<sup>24</sup> It was from this base that the Municipal Housing Secretariat was then created, enabling the inclusion of a team of architects that had hitherto been unrelated to public service (Freire & Oliveira 2008).

According to architect Demetre Anastassakis,<sup>25</sup> one of the members of Magalhães' team, Conde formed the Secretariat with the urbanization of the favelas in mind because he wanted to hold the Olympic Games and "do something like Barcelona" in Rio. He realized that it was essential to promote government actions for population and territorial control that would provide security for the financial operations and public-private partnerships that would be mobilized to this end. In this way, the greater institutional weight of the housing issue of in City Hall was driven by its strategic importance in the economic enterprise. This made Favela-Bairro a privileged case for thinking about the processes of financialization of capitalism in Brazil.

The favorable context for entrepreneurial-minded architects in the halls of power made Magalhães a prominent mediator between the professional field, public administration, and funding agencies. He played a decisive role in obtaining the IDB loan for the Program. According to Cavalieri, financing a program aimed at upgrading the favelas had already been something attempted during the administration of the previous mayor, Marcello Alencar (1989-1993). The bank discarded this proposal as inconsistent, however. The situation only changed during the visit of a new IDB mission that came to Rio to evaluate another program relating to the cleanup of Guanabara Bay. At the time, Magalhães and Anastassakis had already organized the theoretical ideals

24 Sérgio Magalhães has a degree in Architecture and Urbanism from UFRGS (1967) and a PhD in Urbanism from UFRJ (2005). He is an adjunct professor in the undergraduate course at FAU/UFRJ and a professor in the Postgraduate Program in Urbanism at FAU/UFRJ. He was President of the IAB-RJ (2010-2013), president of the national IAB (2012-2014, 2014-2016), Undersecretary of Urbanism (1986-1988) and Municipal Secretary of Housing (1993-2000) for Rio de Janeiro, Director of Urbanism (1989-1992) of Niterói, Secretary of State for Special Projects (2001-2002) and Undersecretary of State for Urban Development (2003-2004) in the government of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

25 Interview given in October 2017 to Paulo Vitor Ferreira da Silva. Demetre Anastassakis was president of the IAB-RJ (1994-1995), president of the national IAB (2004-2006) and participated in several projects of the Minha Casa Minha Vida Program. In 2006, he received the Architect of the Year award from the National Federation of Architects and Urban Planners (FNA). He passed away in 2019.

of public competitions for architectural projects and had started the urbanization of 15 small and medium-sized favelas, using a small amount of money made available by City Hall to this end (Freire & Oliveira 2008: 250).<sup>26</sup> With the results of these first interventions in hand, Magalhães met with Bank representatives to present his methodological package.

So, instead of asking for all the money in the world, because I want to upgrade favelas, I upgraded 15 as pilot projects and I took the results of these and said: “Pay attention, there are 600 of these here. Will you finance me?” Then came the World Bank, the IDB... The IDB put in money and the first contract was signed for 300 [favelas]. Did something go wrong? Yes, but that’s another conversation. (Demetre Anastassakis, interview with Paulo Vitor Ferreira da Silva in October 2017).

At the end of the process, the number of actually favelas served by the program was 105, around 1/3rd of what had been expected. But aside from the practical results of the pilot intervention, the commitment to public competitions as a mode for choosing projects was a fundamental element for the success in finding financing for Favela-Bairro. As Cavalieri was keen to emphasize, this was because the Bank worked “on projects and not on ideas. You know, it analyzes projects -- things that are more developed” (*apud* Freire & Oliveira 2008: 251). The Program received a contribution of 360 million dollars from the IDB and another 240 million dollars in matching funds from the municipality of Rio de Janeiro.

The documents, testimonies, and interviews presented above suggest that a set of strategies was mobilized in the 1990s by certain networks of architects in Rio de Janeiro in order to expand their insertion in public administration and deepen their political influence. Part of these strategies crucially involved offering up methodologies that increased the State’s capacity to obtain financing for its “social policies” and to govern territories and populations. The success of these projects was thus due to new business management technologies and the procedural lexicon that this group of agents mobilized. The conceptual, technical, and political bases were established for what became Favela-Bairro: a wide-ranging favela urbanization program, promoted within the framework of a business consortium where the contracting of works was approved of by a professional representation entity.

## Discourses and practices in the field of architecture

In the present article, we have sought to highlight how the field of architecture adopted strategies to increase its political relevance and the recognition of its expertise in the governance of public affairs in different Brazilian scenarios and contexts. Our panoramic view is intended to offer multiple angles regarding the possible intersections between art, technique, and politics that architects and urban planners mobilized in the process of State formation, particularly during the consolidation of the “problem of popular housing” within the scope of public administration. In this kaleidoscope of practices and meanings, we have highlighted fragments of events and situations that helped to design the ideal types of the “creative genius”, the “engaged anti-designer” and the “business manager” in the field of public architecture.

At the beginning of the text, we situated the modernizing and developmental State project implemented from the 1920s onwards, analyzing how modernist architectural language was used to symbolically support the process of economic and social integration of Brazilian national territory. In this context, design competitions for public works were adopted by the federal government as a way of emphasizing technical skill. This modernizing

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<sup>26</sup> The sources consulted indicate that the number of favelas served by the program was inadequate before IDB financing. While Anastassakis indicates that 15 favelas were served, a document entitled “Evaluation of the Favela-Bairro Program: Evaluation of the receptivity of the communities included in the program”, prepared by the Institute of Culture and Continuing Education Studies, counted only 16 favelas in the program (Castro 1998). In his statement, Fernando Cavalieri mentioned that there were 15 teams designated to work in 23 favelas (Freire & Oliveira 2008).

bureaucratic utopia coexisted, however, with practices that favored certain relationships of friendship and alliance. The resulting contracts were morally justified by appealing to the figure of the architectural “genius”. With the greater institutionalization of the professional field and the increase in public controversies in relation to competition results, different action programs and agents involved in State interventions began to come to the fore. A lasting platform for political action by architects was created. This transferred the regulations and procedures involved in the selection of public projects from the hands of the State to the domain of the representative bodies of architectural professionals.

In the 1960s, the themes of popular housing and city planning emerged in government agendas as “public problems” that lacked a unified action plan aimed at the masses. The political, institutional, and economic rearrangement that accompanied the establishment of the military dictatorship between 1964 and 1985 brought large construction companies and financial agents to the center of the formulation of housing policies, through the creation of the BNH/SFH system. The increasing adoption of policies seeking to discipline urban spaces -- such as those removing favelas and displacing their residents to housing complexes along urban peripheries -- opened space for local political disputes. A pioneering initiative for the urbanization of favelas emerged. This was implemented in Brás de Pina, where a political struggle by residents against favela removal led to the emergence of the “engaged anti-designer” in the improvement and regularization of housing.

With the transition to democracy in the late 1970s and ‘80s, global development programs aimed at “underdeveloped countries” presented themselves as a way of obtaining resources. Business productivity evaluation methods began to appear as a response to all types of “social issues”, consolidating a way of strategically thinking about cities that sought to attract resources and facilitate public and private investments. Architects adopted new government technologies such as “participatory management”, developing methodologies and procedures for establishing communication channels with different groups such as residents’ associations, NGOs, universities, international agencies, and etc. From these connections, opportunities emerged to gain positions of power in the political machine. Certain architects thus became mediators of different conflicts of interests and managers of wide-ranging government projects.

It was in this context that the process of conception, standardization, and financing of the Favela-Bairro Program took place, implemented in the city of Rio de Janeiro between 1994 and 2007 and considered to be a milestone in the growth of the influence of the architectural field on State housing policy. So much so that, more than a decade after its last phase of the Program’s implementation, similar initiatives continue to be developed in Rio and the architects who participated in the design of the program continue to maintain their position as experts (whether as government consultants or as university professors) of favela upgrading projects in formulating procedures and methodologies for the management of territories classified by the State as “favelas”.<sup>27</sup>

We therefore conclude by drawing attention to the relevance of mediations in this professional field in the process of formation and governmentalization of the State. Through projects of construction and symbolization of spaces, architectural knowledge has directly or indirectly supported policies of categorization, regulation, and management of urban populations, continuously producing social hierarchies, contact borders, and unequal ways of distributing resources across different territories in Rio de Janeiro. In the context of the Brazilian neoliberal turn, the diffusion of business management technologies restructured the architectural field itself, encouraging the improvement of professional competition mechanisms and the adoption of a rationality aimed at maximizing profits through a variety of strategies and urban planning methodologies.

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27 Political changes in municipal management led to the program being renamed in Rio de Janeiro, where it became Morar Carioca (2010-2020). The manners in which the program was executed also underwent reformulations (Leitão, Barboza & Delecave 2014).

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# ‘I want to give myself the opportunity and be adopted’: the production of subjects and meanings in adoption processes in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires (Argentina)

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## Abstract

Based on the biographical accounts of young women who were adopted when they were children or adolescents, this work analyses the management techniques that are deployed in institutional care devices located in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, Argentina. These production processes of *adoptable* subjects can be considered in light of several techniques that operate through different logics of power and that unfold in the web of social relations that the children of said devices maintain with each other and with the institutional agents.

**Keywords:** adoption; management techniques; biographical stories; subject production.

# “Quiero darme la oportunidad y ser adoptada”: producción de sujetos y sentidos en los procesos de adopción en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires (Argentina)

## Resumen

A partir de los relatos biográficos de jóvenes mujeres que fueron adoptadas cuando eran niñas o adolescentes, este trabajo analiza las técnicas de gestión que se despliegan en los dispositivos de cuidado institucional ubicados en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires, Argentina. Estos procesos de producción de sujetos *adoptables* pueden ser pensados a la luz de diversas técnicas que operan a través de distintas lógicas de poder y que se despliegan en la trama de relaciones sociales que los niños y niñas de dichos dispositivos mantienen entre sí y con los agentes institucionales.

**Palabras clave:** adopción; técnicas de gestión; relatos biográficos; producción de sujetos.

# “Quero me dar a oportunidade e ser adotado”: produção de sujeitos e sentidos nos processos de adoção na região metropolitana de Buenos Aires (Argentina)

## Resumo

A partir dos relatos biográficos de jovens adotadas quando crianças ou adolescentes, este trabalho analisa as técnicas de gestão que são implantadas em dispositivos de atenção institucional localizados na região metropolitana de Buenos Aires, Argentina. Esses processos de produção de sujeitos *adotáveis* podem ser pensados à luz de várias técnicas que operam por meio de diferentes lógicas de poder e que se desdobram na teia de relações sociais que os filhos desses dispositivos mantêm entre si e com os agentes institucionais.

**Palavras-chave:** adoção; técnicas de gestão; relatos biográficos; produção de assunto.

# ‘I want to give myself the opportunity and be adopted’: the production of subjects and meanings in adoption processes in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires (Argentina)

Carolina Ciordia

## Introduction

Based on the biographical accounts of young women who were adopted when they were children or adolescents, this work analyses the population management techniques (Foucault 2007) that are deployed in institutional care devices located in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

According to institutional agents in the field of child protection policies, these devices – called ‘residential homes’ – house boys, girls and adolescents who were found to have had their ‘rights violated’, such that agents of organisations for the promotion and protection of rights determined they had to be separated from their families of origin. These interventions initiate the transfer of children or adolescents, in which the adults responsible for them change and their life trajectories can lead to a declaration of adoptability, the assignment of a guardian, their return to their family group, or their departure after reaching the age of majority, based on assessments made by institutional agents.

In this work, I am interested in focusing on one part of the process: children and adolescents enter an institutional care facility and begin to consider the possibility of being included in another family. The approach of this analysis is based on the lived experiences of ten young women who were adopted, since it enables the elucidation of the heterogeneous processes and practices through which, according to Rose (1998), human beings come to relate with themselves and with others as persons with certain characteristics, in this case, as subjects who are eligible for adoption. Here, I refer to techniques of power that operate in the constitution of the subjectivities of young women – formerly girls – from which they become *adoptable* subjects. These processes for the production of persons can be thought of in light of such techniques which operate on the web of social relations that the children and adolescents who circulate through these devices maintain with each other and with institutional agents.

Together with their effects, the techniques can be read based on the category of ‘governmentality’ (Foucault 2007) – understood as the art of ‘the conduct of conduct’ (p. 389) – since it enables the consideration that, even under certain rules, a game of freedoms occurs that empowers individuals to carry out a series of operations on their body and soul. These operations become necessary given that the adoption of children and adolescents – as a horizon of meanings and as a possible outcome – is constituted throughout a process at the end of which children gain their ‘status of adoptability’, as institutional agents point out.

Based on this approach, this article seeks to analyse different power techniques that are deployed in institutional care devices and whose purpose is the protection of children and adolescents. The methodological strategy is based on a body of data composed of ten biographical interviews with female adolescents (13 to 18 years old) who were adopted, or who are under the care of another domestic group that assumes the category

of guardian<sup>1</sup>. The field material was produced during 2019, in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, for the purpose of comprehending and documenting the ways in which children and young people experience these processes and give them meaning, in interactions with their peers, with adults who form part of their domestic groups, with judicial and administrative agents, and with institutional care devices. Given that the interviews were conducted in educational institutions, the consent of the school administration staff, the interviewees in question, and those responsible for the adolescents were required. In all cases, in order to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the participating institutions and persons, anonymity was maintained and the required identification data were modified to ensure individual identification was impossible.

### **The theoretical-methodological perspective: childhood and first-person accounts**

The interviewees whose accounts are presented in this work were adopted or transferred to another domestic group under the category of 'guardian'. Thus, their stories are traversed by the experiences they lived based on the intervention of institutional agencies (administrative, judicial, institutional care devices), which aimed to ensure their protection and considered adoption as a measure of protection for their childhood, much as this legal institution has been conceived since the twentieth century.

At this stage of the research<sup>2</sup>, I was interested in distancing myself from official documents – such as judicial, administrative and institutional files – in which children and adolescents appear as the object of administrative discourse (Favret-Saada, in Goldman 2005). Nor is it the purpose of this article to investigate an institutionalised narrative, that is, one that children and adolescents produce when they know that they are being assessed and recorded in an official report that shapes their lives (Elizalde 2004). Indeed, in family courts, in organisations for the promotion and protection of rights, and in institutional care devices, children and adolescents know they are subject to control and assessment by agents – whether they adapt to the new family configuration or remember and miss the previous family, whether they comply with the established parenting guidelines, whether their academic performance improves, whether their health and behavioural indicators improve, and so on – and therefore their responses are often configured in dialogue with the expectations of their interlocutors.

Moreover, in these institutional spaces, different social actors interact (including members of the family groups of origin of the children and adolescents and their adoptive parents) with different hierarchies, the capital of authority and legitimacy, together with perceptions regarding the needs of the children and adolescents, and significations regarding what a 'correct upbringing' is. Therefore, this process in which 'children are guided toward adoption' is one that is contested. In turn, principally in judicial spaces, and in residential homes, children and adolescents occupy a subordinate position in which adults define their 'best interests' based on what they evaluate as 'the good of the child'.

For these reasons, the interactions that I had as a researcher with children and adolescents within these institutional frameworks were coloured by suspicions: who was I? (Was I social worker from the court, the protection agency, and/or the home?) And what will this information be used for? Thus, I was interested in generating a relationship with children and adolescents that would not place me in the role of an authority who assesses 'their violated rights' in 'an interventionist tone' and then makes decisions about their future, as Silvia Elizalde (2004) warns in her works.

1 The female gender of the interviewees is not based on a specific research policy, rather it is due to the impossibility of interviewing male adolescents who have gone through an adoption process.

2 The previous stage of research refers to the field work conducted within the framework of my doctoral thesis (between 2007 and 2014) – in different institutions located in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires that conduct child protection policies: organisations for the promotion and protection of the rights of children and adolescents; and family courts and institutional care arrangements, in particular, residential homes, collective care establishments for children and adolescents when they are separated from their family environment. Although this work is based on interviews with young people who were adopted, it continues to dialogue with this prior stage of field work.



Due in part to these reasons, the methodological strategy elaborated sought to access the interpretations of children and young people in social spaces that were not linked to the institutions that intervened in the adoption processes. Their secondary school turned out to be a favourable space to establish such contacts with young people who had been adopted or whose guardians were changed through legal-administrative interventions. Although this choice did not allow me access to the daily lives of the homes or places of residence of the interviewees, it did facilitate a dialogue whose performativity collaborated with a presentation of themselves, without being surrounded by the expectations of institutional agents. The body of interviews was conducted during 2019 in the city of Buenos Aires. Following mediation by the school staff, I presented the objectives of the research to the adolescents and their guardians. Through one of the administration staff members at the first school, I was put in contact with more adolescents – students from other institutions – and this snowballed to the point that I was able to interview others in the school space, and some of their mothers. My presentation to the young women was based on an explanation of the network of relationships that enabled me to be at the school, the clarification of my professional insertion as a researcher, and my concerns regarding their experiences throughout the adoption processes, in order to understand these processes from the perspective of children and young people. In these meetings, I affirmed my commitment to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality regarding what they said, that is, no member of the school or their family groups would have any knowledge of what was discussed. In all cases, I clarified that they could always refuse to answer a question or ask me not to record any of the parts they wanted to disclose, but this did not happen on any occasion<sup>3</sup>.

Since the interviews were conducted following the logic of the institution that hosted us, the encounters were agreed according to the possibilities of the students: their class schedules, rotating the interview encounters so that they did not have to leave class during the same subjects, taking advantage of the absences of some teachers due to study trips or postponing the encounters due to educational outings, events or school celebrations. These moments of interaction with the interviewees were interrupted by typical school situations: adults or adolescents looking for other people, at breakfast or during lunch break; the bustle of recess, conversations in the hallways that diverted our attention outside the classrooms<sup>4</sup>.

The purpose behind considering the constructions of meaning elaborated by adolescents – inserted in numerous relationships that compose the social fabric of their existence – is for them to have a more direct voice in the production of social data (Pires 2008). From this perspective, I do not propose the autonomy of the universe of the child in relation to the universe of the adult, which would end up reifying such separation, but I do understand that a relationship of complementarity exists between these universes and that boys, girls and adolescents can strain the conventions of the adult world (Rifiotis et al. 2021). In this sense, research conducted with children and adolescents contributes to problematising aspects of social life that are central when addressing social issues (Milstein 2021).

In turn, this work considers that subjectivity is not exclusively an aspect of the individual, the personal, or the intimate, but something socially constructed, configured in the interaction and relationship with others (Abramovski 2017; Cabrera 2014). In particular, in the power relations in which the young women were involved in their process of being guided towards adoption. Therefore, although people can interpret the same experiences in different ways, or these can be expressed through psychological categories, this does not mean that they are exclusively private and singular in nature (Jimeno 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Although interviews with the mothers is not be the object of analysis in this work, it is worth clarifying that the vast majority were conducted at the time I met with them to explain the objectives of the research and my institutional references; therefore, they constituted a step prior to contact with the young women. On only one occasion was the interview conducted subsequently, and I had the approval of the young adopted woman.

<sup>4</sup> The intersubjective relationship that was established at the time of the interview was influenced by the abilities of some of the young women. This is highlighted by Leonor – a 17-year-old in the care of a guardian – who, when I asked her if she wanted to participate in the initial interview, said ‘Yes, I’m used to telling my story’.

This work also ascribes to the performative character of language, in the sense that saying something again means living it again and this enables an action of self-affirmation (Arfuch 2018) in the face of experiences that sought to deny or undermine the interviewees' exercise of agency. As Bourdieu (2000) poses, the interview can be used by some interviewees as a moment to make themselves heard, to bring their experience into the public sphere, 'an opportunity also to *explain themselves* in the fullest sense of the term, that is, to construct their own point of view both about themselves and about the world and to bring into the open the point within this world from which they see themselves and the world, become comprehensible, and justified, not least for themselves' (p. 615; emphasis in original). Therefore, being able to count on their constructions of meaning and respond to their subjectivation processes collaborates in giving entity to those 'protagonist voices in their immediacy' (Arfuch 2018) and understanding the adoption processes from another perspective, focusing on the regulations that are put into effect in institutional care devices.

However, as numerous authors propose, the stories developed in the social interaction of biographical interviews do not have one author, but rather two: the narrator and the researcher (Bertaux 1984; James 2000; Piña 1989). In this sense, the 'data' produced in the social relationship involved in the research encounter are formed in a process of synthesis and attribution of meanings in which the reflexivity (Batallán & García 1992) of the researcher and that of the adolescents interviewed are combined. In the relationship and dialogue that occurs in the interviews, they do not recite their life, but rather reflect on it while telling it, and they do so from their current 'biographical situation' (Piña 1989). Therefore, the interviewees construct a discourse about themselves from their present, inserted in a new family configuration. In the co-production of such stories, a process of *semanticisation* of the past opens up, operationalised through memory and modelled by what is omitted, silenced, and not evoked (James 2000). The stories thus produced in these interviews recreate the pre-adoptive past of the young women – which includes the period of circulation through temporary places of care, such as hospitals, orphanages, foster families and families of origin (Yngvesson 2013), especially those techniques of power deployed in the institutional care devices through which they 'were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognise and acknowledge themselves as subjects' (Foucault 1978: 5).

To conclude the section, I briefly resume the analytical strategies of the material produced. The content was processed from categories constructed based on previously defined dimensions of analysis – according to my prior knowledge constructed in the previous stages of research – and others that arose from reading the material, finding similarities and differences between the answers prepared by the young women, and between these and my previous knowledge. In addition, analysis of the material involved identifying the social relations which the young women participated in, the assessments they made of these, and the reconstruction of small plots of stories within the accounts they offered. Likewise, another of the analytical operations was the reconstruction of the biographical trajectories of the young women given that, in some cases, the accounts were told in a fragmented manner due to the dynamics of the interview. Thus, it was necessary to re-establish transits not only through families or care devices, but through the social relations that were central for the young women in the process of shaping themselves. In addition to the narratives, institutional routines and organisational forms that collaborated in the contextualisation of the experiences lived by the young women were identified, since this assists in determining possible margins of action.

### **The management of childhood and families: selected lines of analysis**

In studies concerning interventions on children and their families – which in recent years have demonstrated high growth and diversification – different lines of analysis converge, in some cases inspired by Foucauldian

notions or derived from them<sup>5</sup>. Many of these studies pursued Donzelot's (1979) seminal work on the discipline model of French families, as well as introducing other interesting problematisations.

In our latitudes, one of these lines of research focuses on the exercise of power that follows a 'tutelary' logic in which an educational, pedagogical dimension is highlighted that permeates the relationship between tutor and ward (Pacheco de Oliveira 2011). Along similar lines, Souza Lima (2002) postulates two dimensions in the exercise of power: 'gestating', which points to a constitutive, pedagogical function, of 'mothering', of 'teaching to be' that is based on the desire for 'good'; and 'managing', which refers to the daily control in administration over segments of the population. For her part, Adriana Vianna (2002; 2010) pursues the approach of these authors in her analysis of the tutelary facets of contemporary childhood management and maintains that it is based on the complementarity between the bureaucratic apparatus and the domestic units in which the children are inserted, or rather to which their direct control is transferred, pairing them in asymmetric relationships. The work of María Gabriela Lugones (2012) is situated among these themes, since she assumes the proposal discussed by Souza Lima and Vianna to analyse 'the modalities of the management of minors' in the *Tribunales Preventivos de Menores* [lit. Preventive Juvenile Courts] of the city of Córdoba (Argentina), through the deployment of 'techniques of minorisation' to which both administered children and adults are subjected. Among these, the 'forms of advice' stand out as being 'difficult to resist because they carried with them the premise of good intentions, that they were done in the "best interests" of the counselee; while also reinstating asymmetric ties, because only those who have (or are attributed with and are recognised as an) authority can advise.' (Lugones 2012: 176). Together with the 'commitment formulas' that are formulas based on which state action and its presence are virtually extended, reproducing obligations that enable it to take certain measures and achieve certain resolutions (Lugones 2012: 187).

Another line of research conducted by Carla Villalta (2013; 2021) postulates the 'state administration of childhood', which aims to analyse the 'management techniques of poor children since, by modifying their living conditions, their relationships and in some cases the adults who are considered guardians and representatives of the children are directed towards transforming these subjects into others' (Villalta 2013: 259). This line seeks to analyse the legal-bureaucratic devices intended to manage childhood, moving away from approaches that privilege the repressive facets of the exercise of power to advance a perspective that includes disputes of meanings, the deployment of negotiation, convincing and persuasion strategies that are embodied in a moral language (Villalta & Martínez 2022; Ciordia & Villalta 2012).

A third set of works pursue Foucault's studies on the government of populations (2007), and the reformulations performed by governmentality studies (Rose 2006; Rabinow & Rose 2006; Rose & Miller 1992) who served the rationalities of government, and the technologies to develop them. This perspective focuses on technologies of power read as forms of intervention intended to guide, direct, orient, train and regulate persons, populations and issues (Fonseca et al. 2016). These are deployed in a range of actions that target children, youth and families, including public policies aimed at the protection of children, their care and their upbringing; the tensions generated in the administrative and bureaucratic devices intended to restore the rights of children and adolescents, and their effects on the realisation of citizenship (Schuch 2009; 2010; 2012; Fonseca & Schuch 2009; Fonseca 2009; 2011a; 2011b; Ribeiro 2011; 2015; Grinberg 2016; Llobet 2011; 2013; Barna 2014a; 2014b; 2015; Magistris 2016; Larrea 2021; Aydos 2016; Sabarots 2017; Rifiotis 2019).

In summary, the numerous lines of inquiry placed emphasis on diverse categories – tutelary logic, disciplinary operations, modes of subjectivation, and self-government – that provided numerous keys to analyse distinct exercises of power aimed at controlling, caring, including, and punishing, which are implemented in the daily routine of legal-administrative devices and policies. These categories are amalgamated and combined with each other to carry out the intended protection of children and adolescents.

<sup>5</sup> Such as biopolitics, pastoral power, governmentality, technologies of the self, processes of subjection and subjectivation (1978, 1982, 1988, 2007).

At the intersection with the literature that analyses the regulation of family relationships in general, and adoption processes in particular, studies on kinship practices are a vitally important antecedent. Since the 1970s, anthropological analyses of kinship destabilised its conceptualisation in terms of descent and consanguinity, advising us with regard to its ethnocentric character (Schneider 1984; Strathern 1992). Nurtured by gender studies and feminism, the field of kinship studies underwent a renewal: it moved away from the classical ('genealogical') paradigm and the opposition between the biological and the social, to consider 'native' ways in which kinship relationships are established and signified in terms of cultural constructions of connection (Carsten 2000; Fonseca 2003). Based on these approaches, kinship refers to modes of being related, forms of 'relatedness' that are produced by the practices of creating kinship (Howell 2006). These new approaches enable kinship to be characterised with a certain 'plasticity', since it has the capacity to adapt and relocate (Thompson 2005). Different authors have formulated categories to account for the 'work' required to form kinship ties between people: kinning (Howell 2006)<sup>6</sup>; but which also work in the opposite direction: the 'detachment from relatives' (Yanagisako 2002). Following this line of research on the social relations that constitute kinship as a process – thus avoiding its conceptualisation as immanent and permanent – the work of Claudia Fonseca (2011c) regarding the 'de-kinning' of biological mothers is an important precedent, that is, the institutional effort invested in undoing the naturalised category of biological motherhood in cases of adoption in Brazil. She argues that full legal adoption emerges as a form of bureaucratic violence in which, although all participants in the adoption triad (the children, the adoptive parents, and the biological fathers and mothers) go through suffering, the plasticity of kinship in this type of state intervention assumes a differentiated modality that alleviates the suffering of some and ignores or intensifies that of others, more specifically that of the biological mothers. Like Fonseca, Jessaca Leinaweaver's (2008) work with Ayacucho families and children in Peru is inspired by Howell's concept of kinning (2006) and suggests that in the movement of children analysed in the Ayacucho area, '*acostumbrar*' [to get accustomed] is generated. This is a process in which boys and girls transform the behaviour, treatment and feelings inherent to kinship relationships by getting accustomed to new practices, social relationships and new or rearranged physical locations. This process is distinguished by 'the young person's memories of origins, self-awareness, and insecurity in the new setting' (Leinaweaver 2008: 100). Getting accustomed coexists with a feeling of fear at the loss of treasured social relations from the previous family configuration. Thus, the counterpart of this process is 'to get disaccustomed' to your social origins, becoming unrelated (de-kinning) to your original family group, which may involve distancing yourself from or deliberately breaking off other relationships.

These works are fertile background from which to advance in the approach of this article. The following section seeks to analyse the deployment of a set of power techniques and their effects, which give life to the institutional care devices in which boys and girls go through the separation from their domestic groups and begin to think about themselves and imagine themselves as subjects who are eligible for adoption.

### **Becoming an adoptable subject: techniques of power, social relations, and regions of experiences signified by adopted young women**

To begin this section, it is important to refer to the origin of the young women interviewed. All of them report that at the beginning of the institutional interventions in their domestic groups, they were not free from all social ties, rather they recognised themselves as members of a family configuration and during this process,

6 Signe Howell describes the 'kinning' process as that in which a person with no ties to a certain group of people is included in it through a significant and permanent relationship, expressed in the language of kinship. This process occurs through what she calls 'transubstantiation', that is, the effort of adoptive families to find and build a substantial, or substantive, connection with their adopted or future child through the 'construction' of similarities, abilities, qualities and interests or the existence of a predestination that reunited that child with those adoptive parents, and not others, transforming a stranger into one of their own.

at the very least, those ties become 'breakable' (Ciordia 2014) and, in some cases, ruptured. During this process, the young women also modified the way they thought about themselves and the people with whom they were associated. This work is based therefore on the premise of considering the process of guiding of children towards adoption as a process that produces specific subjects, in particular, *adoptable* subjects. Thus, this section seeks to analyse through what techniques of power, social relations, and regions of experience this type of subject is formed, based on the ways in which the young women experienced it and attributed meaning to it.

One of the modalities that the regulation of the adolescents' behaviour assumed, as I argued in another work (Ciordia 2022), is linked to physical punishment and the suffering inflicted as a pedagogy to create obedient wills (Das 2008)<sup>7</sup>. Hence, physical punishment and the promotion of certain relationships between peers – based on stigmatisation and rivalry – become modalities through which the bodies of children and adolescent are made docile, willing to accept new authorities, a subordinate position in these spaces in a manner that promotes the acquisition of – supposedly – poorly learned behaviours and accept new outcomes for their destinies, even when these were not initially desired by them. Indeed, according to the young women interviewed, in some residential homes, physical punishment was sometimes promoted by the institutional agents who were in charge of caring for these young women, even though it ended up being carried out by other boys or girls. In other reported experiences, the institutional violence – physical, verbal and psychological – exercised by the people in charge of their care was replicated in the relationships between the children and adolescents, to the extent that many conflicts ended in blows, shoves and insults. In others, punishment was associated with the performance of certain tasks that was overly gruelling for the young women's bodies and wills.

While not overlooking the disciplinary nature, the logic of punitive action, the logic of the child's welfare (Llobet 2015), the search for social control by many of these devices and the repression of certain behaviours and the ordering of others (Daroqui & Guemureman 2001), incorporating the fissures, interstices, and agencies that children and adolescents can generate in these institutions and processes into the analysis is essential. In this manner, recollecting Certeau's 'ways of operating' (1984), silent and cunning practices and actions from which the young women take advantage of the punishment by occasionally turning it to their own benefit can be identified. One 16-year-old, Aldana<sup>8</sup>, thus recounts how she used certain punishments and how her reappropriation of the categorisation that institutional agents had placed her in, 'misbehaving', could be converted into access to more and better food:

Aldana: They always chose me [to pick up the bread they ate in the residential home]. Going to the bakery meant walking two blocks, to the back of the home, to reach one of the corners of the property. It was, go there, pick up the huge bags of bread and bring them back. Or go and look for the sources of croissants or buns. I remember that I took great advantage of going to the bakery, because the person who cooked them would say to me, 'Shhh! They're going to tell me off!' And he would sit us down, sometimes he would wait for us with breakfast prepared.

Researcher: Ah! Then they could have breakfast there and they'd repeat breakfast.

A: Of course, I took advantage of it since they always told me that I behaved badly, 'so, I behave badly'.

R: It was a kind of punishment.

7 These practices could indicate a legacy regarding the exercise of discipline and control of these populations, sediments of the tutelary model in force until the beginning of the twenty-first century (Daroqui & Guemureman 2001). Thus, in child protective policies, logics associated with the language of human rights coexist with others linked to punitivism and welfare.

8 The interviewees names have been changed to protect their identities and to respect their privacy.

A: Of course, they sent me to get the bread in the rain, whether it was hot, or cold, or whatever, I had to go get the bread or the buns from the bakery. And... the baker sometimes gave us two extra buns to eat on the way back and he added more *dulce de leche* [caramel spread]. We got along very well with him. And we made little drawings for him, we hid them in our clothes and then we gave them to him. But it was heavy for us, sometimes he accompanied us with the heavy bags to where they couldn't see him, because there was a kind of small wood, because if they did see him, they'd tell him off or they could even throw him out and... then we continued our journey alone. But it took us about an hour because it was heavy for us. We were still girls, there were three of us, and there were two bags of bread. Sometimes one went back to look for the other because we couldn't... (Aldana, 23 Oct., 2019)

The imposition of certain punishments, as Aldana relates, is accompanied by a differentiation from the other girls and a classification regarding her behaviour, in her case, she is the bearer of the label 'bad behaviour'. Do these institutional classifications – which girls know and learn in these devices – represent a totalising configuration of their subjectivity? Following Nikolas Rose (1998) – who in turn is inspired by Gilles Deleuze's (1993) notion of folding –, I begin by considering the interiority of people without essences, a folding of the exterior, where the folds incorporate without totalising, internalise without unifying, while discontinuously bringing together the experiences they live in social space in the form of folds. Therefore, subjectivity is shaped by all these experiences and through contact with the exterior. The concept of fold enables an understanding that the classifications received are not simply accepted by the young women and that they do not determine their subjectivity in a totalising manner, since they coexist with other social relations that dispute the meanings of these classifications and they eventually enable them to put into practice micro-resistances and establish *affective ties* with other adults.

In this sense, it is possible to locate the episode recounted by Aldana within a broader web of relationships in which care and affection also take place. Although Aldana refers to the relationship developed with the baker – the drawings given as a token of gratitude – other young women referred to operators with whom they developed emotional relationships, either because they identified their actions as signs of care, because they held them in situations of a lot of anguish, or because, as other works maintain, they assumed the role of their guardians so that the young women could 'leave' the care system (Salazar 2018). Thus, through 'emotional work' (Hochschild Russell 2003) in which they invest affection and dedication, the operators act in the management of the affections of girls and adolescents, work that is no less important insofar emotionality is a central component in the process of becoming related to (Howell 2006) other adults, as underlined by the young women in different passages of the interviews.

Although practices linked to punishment that are intended to regulate conduct and obedience to the authority of institutional actors can be identified – as we saw in Aldana's account – this should not lead to crude images of constant, excessive surveillance, nor the simple imposition of an adoptive project. Rather, I propose that since the regulation of conduct within residential homes is chiefly concerned with provisions related to thinking of yourself as a person eligible for adoption, its practice is achieved through the co-existence that takes place in these devices, sociability among peers, the sharing of common socio-biographical experiences and, therefore, with relative margins of freedom and capacity for manoeuvre.

It is essential to consider the intramural universe as a producer of new ties (Prestes 2011), principally regarding the social relations of friendship, solidarity and camaraderie that are formed between boys, girls and adolescents. Through these relationships, adoption takes shape as a possible alternative to life in the residential home, since the vast majority of the young women interviewed stated that they knew of the existence of this kinship relationship from observing what happened to other children in the homes or thanks to the relationships of friendship they maintained with their peers.

The generation of new ties with other adults consequently constitutes one of the practices through which the possibility of integrating with a new family is presented as something desirable, such that giving boys, girls

or adolescents up for adoption or the possibility of transferring them to another family group is celebrated and promoted in many of these care institutions, as I addressed in a previous work (Ciordia 2020). One of the ways to encourage this is to ensure that the possibility of connecting with other adults outside their family groups is made available to the children and adolescents – people who are known as ‘volunteers’, ‘godparents’ or ‘collaborators’ in institutional jargon – who are not part of the permanent staff of the residential home, but contribute to the work of the institution by performing different tasks: they provide school support, organise weekend outings, attend school events, accompany them to the doctor, and they also open up their domestic groups so that some of them can spend the end of year parties and vacations with such groups, and so on. The relationship between collaborators and boys, girls or adolescents is (re)created from the interactions and activities involved in raising them and involves sharing and exchanging elements that refer to the symbolic sphere (affective, emotional, moral, cognitive) and the material sphere (different resources). In some cases, through these activities between the collaborators and the boys, girls or adolescents, solid, lasting emotional relationships can be built that may eventually result in an adoption.

Offering these opportunities for bonding – necessary for the children’s upbringing – sometimes occurs in a diffuse manner through existing social ties between peers, rather than vertically, through the planned intervention of institutional agents. Thanks to the girls’ capacity for action and initiative, a more economical management of these adoption processes occurs, anchored in affinities, relationships, desires, and wills shared between the children. Ileana, a 17-year-old girl who was adopted by a couple after living in a residential home for three years, told me how thanks to Bárbara, a companion in the home, she began to bond with other adults as a prior step to her transfer to a new family:

I remember that we had a classmate named Barbara. That girl, I don’t know why, people always came to visit her, and I asked her ‘And are they your family?’ ‘No’, she told me, ‘they’re people who want to take me home’. I said, ‘Ah, but that’s what I want’. Then I discovered that at the home, I could choose a family and a family could choose me. [...] Once, Barbara asked me ‘Do you want to come with me when the man comes to pick me up?’ ‘Sure,’ I told her. She took me with her and I remember that she ended up going back inside the home and I stayed with the man and we talked and played, and he brought delicious things to eat.... (Ileana, 10 Oct., 2019)

This paragraph from Ileana’s interview also enables the affirmation that the management of life in residential homes and the adoption processes that take place in these devices are based on a certain degree of the young women’s autonomy and self-management. The young women demonstrate their ability to evaluate institutional logic, appropriate these guidelines, interact with them and comply with the expectations of these devices while deploying practices that demonstrate their creativity and their ability to act. As Vaucher (2020) suggests, this concerns a relatively regulated autonomy, since it forms part of the institutional daily life that values behaviours that are consistent with institutional functioning. These institutional strategies that promote, or tolerate, self-regulation can be linked to neoliberal rationality that postulates choice as a fundamental value of government (Rose 2006) and that encourages people to subjectively review their life circumstances (Gaitán et al. 2015) and constitute themselves as subjects based on the governance of their capabilities, competencies and desires (Schuch 2008).

On the other hand, the new ties and social relations between peers also take on another character in light of the management processes that I seek to explain here. Indeed, in institutional care devices, together with the spaces of sociability that these devices institute, the relationships between the children and adolescents themselves result in modes in which girls and young women experience, understand, judge, and conduct themselves in relation to their future. In effect, knowledge of the experiences of other companions reflects on their own, generating a subjective reflection on themselves, on their kinship ties of origin and those that could be generated through adoption, as well as on their future and the possibilities of their ‘departure’ from these

institutions. In this assessment of the possible ways in which protection measures can be triggered – when adolescents get close to the age of majority (18 years old) –, while the experiences of their peers have some weight, their own biography also carries weight: the members of their family configuration at birth and their personal desires, as stated very clearly by 17-year-old Macarena, adopted at the age of 14 by a married couple:

[My mother] never changed, and I saw the kids who left with other parents, and it was like I wanted to give myself the opportunity to experience something better, knowing that my mother wasn't going to change.

R: What did you see that seemed good to you, that made you want to have the same experience?

M: The kids from the home told their stories, they were feeling bad and, suddenly, they began receiving visits, they went out, they came back happy, they told us about their families, and it was like... 'I want that, I don't want to stay locked up here, forever' (...) I didn't want to miss the opportunity to experience something better, knowing that my mother was not going to change, so I said, I want to give myself the opportunity and be adopted.

R: Well, because the options were those, be adopted or stay at the home.

M: Yes, because I wasn't going to go back to my mother, that was for sure, it was something that I already knew wasn't going to happen. And my brothers weren't going to take care of me either, so... I had to leave the home or live in it. (Macarena, 13 Dec., 2019)

In this case, she fully understood that her stay at the home would necessarily end when she was 18 years old and, therefore, it became necessary to manage her time and her future. Thus, as mentioned above, adolescents narrate experiences that allow them to think about forms of self-regulation, which sometimes occur with a certain autonomy from the group of adults, as noted with Ileana. While some protection policies seek to ensure that the children reflect on their life circumstances, make rational choices about them, and establish themselves as responsible, self-governing persons, in this search, it is also important to highlight that sometimes individual, psychological characteristics prevail in interventions that culminate in holding boys, girls and adolescents responsible for structural issues or definitions of protection policies that extend beyond their individual circumstances (Villalta & Borzese 2020; Gaitán et al. 2015; Llobet 2009; Fonseca et al. 2009). This individualising perspective reduces a social-political issue to a psychological problem, thus making the political nature of such interventions invisible, together with the contexts of inequality in which they take place.

Essentially, living in the residential home encourages young people to lead their lives in a certain way. It stipulates that upon reaching the age of majority a young person in these institutional care arrangements must manage to build an 'autonomous life project' composed of a job and a place to live. What is interesting to highlight here are the effects on the way these young women lead their lives, which are corroborated by how they transfer the norms that govern this institutional field to their family life, once they enter a new family group. Macarena, adopted at age 14, thus describes how the same 'autonomous life' project that she incorporated during her stay in the residential home, was present in the early days of her life with the adopting couple:

At 18... being at home, you always consider that at 18 you already have to do everything by yourself, because by 18 you have to have a job, continue studying if you can, and prepare yourself for where you're going to live. So, it was like... paying attention to all that and... and when I arrived here [her new family], my idea was to work at 16, continue studying, maybe look for an apartment. (Macarena, 13 Dec., 2019)

The practical precepts that are mobilised in these institutions and that serve to organise the lives of girls and young women within the residential home and orient their departure, also shape their subjectivity and forge



an understanding of themselves, of their unique characteristics, and of what an *adoptable* child means based on the expectations of one of the participants in the adoptive triad: the adopters. Hence, the young women, who defined themselves as 'adolescents' at the time of being adopted, throughout their experience – which was intersubjective –, conceived a way of understanding themselves in opposition to younger children who represent the ideal for adoptions. According to Camila, an 18-year-old girl adopted by a couple at the age of 13, adopters have a preference for younger children who 'they can take by the reins, adding customs or things', while adolescents are already 'assembled/equipped'<sup>9</sup>.

And it was also complicated to adopt a 13-year-old girl because normally everyone prefers smaller kids, who they can take by the reins, adding customs or things, and I was already upright and assembled [laughs] [...] Let's be clear, if the adoptee is a teenager, it is even more complex because you're already developed, you have an idea and you have loads of complexes and fears, and you go to a world where you don't know anyone, a family can accept you or not... (Camila, 5 Sept., 2019)

The idea that underlies Camila's story of younger children being malleable and incomplete – aspects that are also components of social representations of childhood that inform common sense –, and its opposite, the idea of the 'assembled' adolescent – their completed constitution and as bearers of tools and instruments – somehow suggest that the difficulties in the parenting process are greater in adoption of adolescents. Knowing that you are 'loaded with complexes and fears' is a form of judging and understanding yourself, and of submitting more rigorously to self-government during the beginning of relationships with adoptive parents. Thus, the expression 'a family can accept you as not...' reflects the feeling of vulnerability in which she found in herself, at least in the initial period of forming ties with the adoptive family. For her part, Macarena puts it in these terms:

R: And from the experience of being adopted, how would you explain it if you had to explain it to someone?

M: It's a complex thing but... [...] I think it's taking the risk of being adopted, you can't turn back [...] it's like going for a walk 'starkers' [naked] and seeing what life brings.

R: Well, you have to have a lot of courage, right?

M: Yes... it is something that I think... as you say, you need a lot of courage but... in the case of being in a home, it's an experience that must be lived, if there's no possibility of going with the family, it's an experience that must be lived. (Macarena, 13 Dec., 2019)

In short, young women actively participate in the construction of the outcomes of separation from their family environment within a limited range of alternatives that become even more limited when none of the members of the families of origin can assume responsibility for their care. The resolution of the process that began with the separation from their family groups, in many cases – as Macarena pointed out – ends in being 'trapped': the more or less forced departure from care facilities or inclusion in an adoptive family, which is even more pressing in the case of adolescents when they come of age. Thus, the way in which age is socially processed in this institutional setting is very significant: reaching adolescence – a category that the interviewees contrasted with younger children – means that those identified in this age group gain greater autonomy,

9 As a good judge of the institutional field, Camila's conceptualisation regarding the 'adoptive suitability' of people registered in official records as guardians for the purposes of adoption is not wrong. According to the statistical information provided by the national organization that compiles these registrations in said registries (*Dirección Nacional del Registro Único de Aspirantes a Guardas con Fines Adoptivos; Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos del año 2023* [National Directorate of the Single Registry of Aspirants as Guardians for Adoptive Purposes; Ministry of Justice and Human Rights 2023]), more than half of these potential guardians are concentrated in the age group of children from 1 to 5 years old, decreasing to almost single digits from the age of 9 onwards. See: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/justicia/adopcion>

becoming 'individuals' – situated in the contemporary notion of being the agents in their own lives and the relationships that have meaning for them (Cadoret 2012). This obscures how the institutional process itself constrains the alternatives and further places them in a position of vulnerability and insecurity – returning to Leinaweaver's (2009) analysis – or of bureaucratic violence, as postulated by Fonseca (2011c).

## Final considerations

The decision to analyse the stories of adolescents who were adopted allows us to understand how adoption becomes 'a possible solution' (Fonseca 2019; Villalta & Giordia 2011), one that is desirable not only for those interviewed, but also for institutional agents. In this process, a linear domination is not imposed, it is not a question of the simple imposition of the norm, but rather – to paraphrase Foucault (2007) – the possible field of action of boys, girls and adolescents is structured, beginning by offering adoption as an alternative to the measure of being separated from their family group, and aligning their wishes, hopes and desires for themselves with government objectives, such as the proclaimed 'protection' of childhood. Thus, adoption is configured as one of the forms that 'departure' from these institutions takes within a limited range of options. The social processing according to age that occurs in this institutional field accounts for a childhood classification that further narrows the field of action for those who are considered 'adolescents'.

Based on the stories of the interviewees, I show that in these institutional care devices the relationships between boys, girls and adolescents themselves become an instrument of government, from which different experiences linked to the creation of ties with other adults are fostered and a subjective reflection operates on their wills, the management of their emotions, and their potential perception as *adoptable* subjects. Based on the experiences of their peers, boys, girls and adolescents understand the need to self-regulate their conduct within the home, to incorporate practical precepts in the configuration of their lives (maximised when they reach the age of majority) and to define what it is that they want for their lives and how to achieve it. In this sense, coexistence between peers is in itself an instrument of 'economic' government, since it uses the experiences of other boys, girls and adolescents to model conducts and discourage others. This work enables us to perceive how conditions are created for the emergence of certain ways of becoming a subject: both in an 'adoptable' child or adolescent, and in a young person who must graduate from these devices based on an 'autonomous life project'. Hence, a way of regulating the lives of children and adolescents emerges that uses their capacities for action and creativity, and, in certain situations, their vulnerability. Knowing that they could 'stay locked up' there – as Macarena suggests –, the mistreatment received by their peers or institutional agents, the discouraging horizon of coming of age (since they have no other network of relationships to embrace them), establishing relationships with adults outside their family groups without the supervision of institutional agents, together with the insecurity they feel when deciding to accept integrating into a new family through adoption, are all experiences of precarity that more clearly indicate the production of defenceless rather than 'assembled' subjects, as Camila suggests.

I am not suggesting ignorance of the capacity to create micro-resistances and ways of moving forward with their projects, as Aldana and Ileana reported, despite the techniques of power that seek to produce subordinate positions and reproduce asymmetric relationships, which reveal the permanence of certain logics linked to the tutelary complex of yesteryear. From their current biographical situations, these young women provided accounts of the different ways in which they overcame such experiences. As Rose states, 'Human beings are not the unified subjects of a coherent regime of government that produces persons in the form in which it dreams. On the contrary, they live their lives in a constant movement through different practices that subjectify them in different ways' (1998: 35). Based on the stories of these young women, a kaleidoscopic aspect can be reconstructed regarding the different modalities of the exercises of power that are employed in

the processes of child protection. Through these operations, the girls – now young women – were producing an understanding of adoption as a feasible alternative – given the few that existed –, while also constituting a way of understanding themselves and the social relations through which they were transiting. This enabled an active process that involved the 'distancing' (Leinaweaver 2008) of members of their families of origin – in some cases definitively – and kinning (Howell 2006) with other family groups.

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# Una nueva estética para luchar contra la desnutrición: miradas antropológicas sobre las intervenciones hacia el cuidado infantil en la provincia de Salta, Argentina

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## Resumen

En la provincia de Salta (Argentina), la desnutrición infantil constituye un problema de salud pública que afecta especialmente a las poblaciones infantiles de comunidades indígenas. Desde el gobierno provincial, el programa de Atención Primaria de la Salud implementa acciones socio-sanitarias hacia la población infantil desde los años 1980, mientras que más recientemente diversas Organizaciones no Gubernamentales (ONGs) adquirieron un fuerte impulso para dedicarse a la prevención y el tratamiento de déficits nutricionales. En este escenario, se realizó una investigación antropológica en sectores rurales de los departamentos de Orán, Rivadavia y Capital, con el objetivo de indagar en los modos de gestionar el cuidado de la población infantil. A través del análisis de registros etnográficos originales y fuentes secundarias, se describen las acciones que se implementan en la lucha contra la desnutrición, así como también los significados en torno al cuidado, la niñez y la “novedad” involucrada en las intervenciones de ciertas ONGs. Desde ambos espacios, encontramos tecnologías de gobierno que se inscriben en la gubernamentalidad neoliberal y sentidos similares en torno al cuidado infantil, sin embargo la perspectiva etnográfica permite encontrar tensiones en torno a los modos de comprender la alteridad cultural y diferencias entre los perfiles de quienes implementan las intervenciones.

**Palabras clave:** cuidado infantil; políticas gubernamentales; desnutrición; etnografía.

# A new aesthetic to fight malnutrition: anthropological views on child care interventions in the province of Salta, Argentina.

## Abstract

In the province of Salta (Argentina), child malnutrition is a public health problem that particularly affects children in indigenous communities. The provincial government's Primary Health Care programme has been implementing socio-health actions for children since the 1980s, while in recent years several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been working on the prevention and treatment of nutritional deficiencies. In this scenario, anthropological research was carried out in rural areas of the departments of Orán, Rivadavia and Capital with the aim of investigating the ways of managing the care of the child population. Through the analysis of original ethnographic records and secondary sources, we describe the actions implemented in the fight against malnutrition, as well as the meanings surrounding care, childhood and the "novelty" involved in the interventions of certain NGOs. From both spaces, we find technologies of government that are inscribed in neoliberal governmentality and similar meanings around child care; however, the ethnographic perspective allows us to find tensions around the ways of understanding cultural otherness and differences between those who implement the interventions.

**Keywords:** child care; government policies; malnutrition; ethnography.

# Uma nova estética para combater a desnutrição: pontos de vista antropológicos sobre intervenções de cuidados infantis na província de Salta, Argentina

## Resumo

Na província de Salta (Argentina), a desnutrição infantil é um problema de saúde pública que afeta particularmente às crianças das comunidades indígenas. O programa de Cuidados de Saúde Primários do governo provincial tem vindo a implementar ações sócio-sanitárias para crianças desde os anos 1980, enquanto nos últimos anos várias organizações não governamentais (ONG) têm vindo a trabalhar na prevenção e tratamento de deficiências nutricionais. Neste cenário, foi realizada investigação antropológica nas zonas rurais dos departamentos de Orán, Rivadavia e Capital com o objetivo de investigar as formas de gestão dos cuidados da população infantil. Através da análise de registos etnográficos originais e fontes secundárias, descrevemos as ações implementadas na luta contra a malnutrição, bem como os significados em torno dos cuidados, infância e a "novidade" envolvida nas intervenções de certas ONG. De ambos os espaços, encontramos tecnologias de governo que se inscrevem na governabilidade neoliberal e significados semelhantes em torno dos cuidados infantis; contudo, a perspectiva etnográfica permite-nos encontrar tensões em torno das formas de compreensão da alteridade cultural e diferenças entre os perfis de quem implementa as intervenções.

**Palavras-chave:** cuidados infantis; políticas governamentais; malnutrição; etnografia.

# Una nueva estética para luchar contra la desnutrición: miradas antropológicas sobre las intervenciones hacia el cuidado infantil en la provincia de Salta, Argentina

Pía Leavy

## Introducción<sup>1</sup>

*Ahí llegan, ¿los ves?, ahí están las changuitas de la camioneta, descargan nomás, ¿qué vienen a hacer aquí sin decirnos?*<sup>2</sup> dice Mercedes, observando, por la ventana, la camioneta blanca que estaciona frente a su centro de salud. Al escucharla, Marina apoya el mate sobre los formularios y carpetas del Programa de Atención Primaria de la Salud de la Provincia de Salta (PROAPS) y se pone de pie para asomarse a ver qué pasa afuera. Las dos, vestidas de ambo celeste, el pelo negro recogido, miran por la ventana a las dos muchachas de afuera: una rubia, el cabello recogido, tiene un buzo blanco; la otra es una morocha de pelo corto. Las chicas de la camioneta comienzan a bajar bolsas con paquetes de comida con el sello del Ministerio de Desarrollo de la Provincia de Salta. *¿Eso no es para que trabajemos nosotros?*, pregunta Marina en voz alta al resto de presentes en la sala (fragmento registro de campo, Chaco salteño, agosto de 2014).

Mercedes era enfermera y Marina agente sanitaria. Ambas, empleadas municipales del PROAPS en una localidad de la región del Chaco salteño. *Las changuitas de la camioneta* eran Camila, psicopedagoga, y Florencia, trabajadora social, que llegaban para poner en funcionamiento el centro de una ONG dedicada a la lucha contra la desnutrición. Su llegada concitaba entre las trabajadoras del PROAPS sensaciones contradictorias. Como empleadas municipales de la salud, las agentes sanitarias siempre denunciaban la escasez de personal y de insumos para la atención sanitaria en estas latitudes. Sin embargo, la llegada de esta ONG no necesariamente venía a fortalecer y/o acompañar a las trabajadoras de la salud pública en sus tareas cotidianas, que eran discutidas en la arena pública (Czubaj 2015), sino más bien a ofrecer intervenciones que se presentaban como novedosas y prometían resolver definitivamente el problema de la desnutrición.

En este sentido, la articulación entre el gobierno de Salta, el sector empresarial y ONGs como la Fundación Cooperativa para la Nutrición (CONIN) fue anunciado como “ejemplo para el país” (Gobierno de Salta 2013a) y presentado como un avance en materia de políticas hacia la primera infancia y las gestiones en torno al cuidado infantil. De este modo, se configuró una suerte de dicotomía en el debate público en torno a las intervenciones que buscaban luchar contra la desnutrición: por un lado, las acciones estatales, implementadas desde hace

<sup>1</sup> Este artículo fue elaborado en el marco de la formación postdoctoral de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, realizada en el proyecto FiloCyT 19-015 titulado “Políticas públicas, territorialidades y dispositivos tecnológicos: un análisis antropológico comparativo de procesos sociales de producción, demarcación y representación espacial en Argentina”. El proceso de investigación que se analiza en el mismo se enmarca en otros: el Proyecto de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica 02264: “El cuidado infantil en contextos de desigualdad social y diversidad cultural. Un análisis antropológico del caso Salta y la Estrategia Nacional de Primera Infancia como insumo del Mapa Federal de Cuidados”; y el proyecto “Infancias diversas y desigualdades educativas en Argentina a partir de la Pandemia / Diverse Childhoods and Educational Inequalities in Post-Pandemic Argentina”, financiado por el programa British Academy GCRF “Humanities and Social Sciences Tackling Global Challenges”.

<sup>2</sup> Las frases en cursiva pertenecen a fragmentos de entrevistas y observaciones de campo. Los nombres son ficticios, para preservar la confidencialidad de los participantes durante el proceso de investigación.

décadas por agentes sanitarias del PROAPS, en articulación con hospitales y centros de salud públicas; y, por otro lado, las “nuevas” [acciones], desarrolladas por ONGs que comenzaban a desembarcar en la provincia.

En este artículo proponemos analizar desde una perspectiva antropológica las acciones, tanto desde el PROAPS como desde ciertas ONGs, que buscaron intervenir/gestionar/resolver el problema de la desnutrición infantil de las poblaciones infantiles en la provincia de Salta en la última década. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo que, a través de la observación de las prácticas que organizan las intervenciones y de entrevistas a quienes las implementan, busca indagar los sentidos sobre el cuidado, la niñez y la “novedad” involucrada en ciertas acciones; así como también explorar las tensiones en torno a las discusiones sobre cómo gestionar, a través de políticas gubernamentales, el cuidado infantil de las poblaciones con derechos vulnerados.

El estudio aquí presentado se basa en materiales etnográficos originales de una investigación iniciada en 2010 –aún en curso– en los departamentos de Orán, Rivadavia y Capital de la provincia de Salta (Leavy 2018)<sup>3</sup> y en fuentes secundarias (informes ejecutivos, epidemiológicos y notas periodísticas) elevados por la autora. En este trabajo, analizaremos los materiales empíricos que pertenecen a las prácticas y discursos de las trabajadoras<sup>4</sup> del ámbito sanitario dedicadas a la salud infantil, en el período 2010-2020. Se utilizó el enfoque etnográfico al acompañar agentes sanitarias en sus visitas domiciliarias y rondas sanitarias en diversas zonas operativas, así como también para realizar observaciones y entrevistas con trabajadoras de diversas jerarquías en centros de desarrollo humano de ONGs dedicadas a recuperación nutricional infantil, y Centros de Primera Infancia del Ministerio de la Primera Infancia de la provincia de Salta.<sup>5</sup>

En las próximas páginas, caracterizaremos las acciones contra la desnutrición infantil en el contexto particular de la provincia de Salta. En primer lugar, describiremos de forma sintética el panorama salteño, en vistas a introducir el análisis de las acciones estatales “clásicas”, que vienen desarrollándose desde principios del siglo XXI, a partir de la articulación de programas nacionales, provinciales y municipales. En segundo lugar, describiremos las “nuevas” acciones, que cobraron mayor impulso a partir de 2013 y surgían de convenios entre el sector privado, el tercer sector y el gobierno nacional y/o provincial. Por último, indagaremos en las similitudes y las divergencias entre ambas acciones, explorando los sentidos en disputa en torno al cuidado, la infancia y “lo novedoso” en el ámbito de las políticas gubernamentales.

## La gestión del cuidado infantil en Salta

En vistas de introducir a un estudio sobre políticas gubernamentales (Foucault 2008 [1978]) en el contexto salteño, es importante considerar algunas características del escenario nacional y provincial. Si bien Argentina es retratada desde el sentido común como una nación “blanca”, cuyos habitantes “descendieron de los barcos”, el último censo realizado permitió observar que el 2,38 % del total de la población (955.032 personas) se identifica como descendiente de pueblos originarios (INDEC 2010). Esto la ubica en una posición superior a Brasil en términos de cantidad de población indígena, ya que dicho país posee un 0,4% de habitantes que se identifican como parte de algún pueblo originario.

Por su parte, la provincia de Salta, ubicada en el noroeste de Argentina, constituye uno de los territorios con mayor diversidad cultural: el 6,5% (79.204 personas) de su población total se identifica dentro de alguna de las

3 La etapa doctoral de dicha investigación se desarrolló entre 2010 y 2017. La misma tuvo por objetivo analizar, desde una perspectiva antropológica, el cuidado y la nutrición infantil en familias criollas e indígenas del departamento de Orán, Salta (Leavy 2018).

4 Decidimos utilizar dicha categoría en femenino –agentes sanitarias y trabajadoras– con el objetivo de destacar lo generificado que estaba el ejercicio de la atención territorial destinada a salud y la nutrición infantil en el contexto salteño; mientras que los cargos médicos en las salas de salud, o los cargos jerárquicos, tanto de los organismos de niñez como de las ONGs, estaban ocupados mayoritariamente por personas de género masculino.

5 El Ministerio de la Primera Infancia fue creado en 2014 por el entonces gobernador provincial Juan Manuel Urtubey (Partido Justicialista), y fue disuelto el 10 de diciembre de 2019 cuando asumió el cargo Gustavo Saénz (Identidad Salteña). En la actualidad, la gestión de los centros de Primera Infancia dependen de la articulación entre los ministerios de Educación y Desarrollo Social de la provincia.

etnias chané, chorote, chulupí, diaguita calchaquí, guaraní, tapiete, toba, kolla y wichí, atacama, iogys, lule, tastil y/o weenhayek; de los cuales el 70% carece de obra social, cobertura prepaga o plan estatal de cobertura de salud (INDEC 2010; ACIJ 2021). En particular, los pueblos originarios que habitan las tierras bajas de los departamentos de Rivadavia, Orán y San Martín, que pertenecen mayoritariamente a las etnias wichí, avaguaraní, chorote y toba, han sufrido en los últimos años el avance de los desmontes en sus territorios, lo que generado una multiplicidad de efectos perjudiciales en sus vidas cotidianas.

Como consecuencia de la amplia aceptación del paquete soja-transgénica propia de la agricultura intensiva, se activó el mercado de tierras, lo que generó la expulsión de las poblaciones indígenas de sus territorios y su migración forzada a los cordones periurbanos de las ciudades locales, como Orán (Naharro & Alvarez 2011; Klarik 2019). La pérdida del monte y de los territorios empobreció especialmente a las comunidades indígenas, afectando la calidad de su alimentación y limitó el acceso a fuentes seguras de agua, lo que se agudiza con las altas temperaturas y los ciclos de sequías que aumentan año tras año (Tejerina et al. 2018; Hirsch & Alonso 2020).

Diversos informes han retratado el racismo y la discriminación que sufren las poblaciones indígenas (ACIJ 2021; Sorucco & Ferrer 2015), así como también las condiciones sociales y ambientales afectan especialmente a las infancias: en 2018 se detectaron 1.640 casos de niñas y niños (de 0 a 5 años) con desnutrición, de los cuales el 47% (768) vivía en los departamentos del norte provincial donde se realizó el trabajo etnográfico que aquí se analiza (ACIJ 2021). Los casos fatales de desnutrición infantil, ocurridos entre 2019 y 2020, movilizaron acciones de emergencia (Ley N° 8217, Ley N° 8283) y sus respectivas prórrogas (Decreto 140/20, 443/20). Sin embargo, los pueblos originarios continúan viviendo en condiciones de pobreza, mientras sus derechos permanecen vulnerados, lo que afecta especialmente a los modos de criar y cuidar a niños y niñas. En resumen, no podemos observar la diversidad cultural salteña sin su intersección con las tensiones interétnicas históricas, las desigualdades sociales de clase, edad y género que intervienen en las disputas de la lucha contra la desnutrición.

### ***Las acciones “clásicas”: atención primaria de la salud y asistencia alimentaria***

Desde sus inicios a fines de la década de 1970, el Programa de Atención Primaria de la Salud Provincia de Salta (PROAPS) tuvo como objetivo brindar una atención biomédica a aquellas poblaciones que vivían en zonas de difícil acceso geográfico. Es decir, nunca estuvo pensada para ofrecer una cobertura al 100% de la población, sino para proveer una atención biomédica a poblaciones que no tenían otra vía de acceso al sistema de salud (Torres Aliaga & Torres Secchi 2010), con una especial injerencia en las poblaciones indígenas (Hirsch & Lorenzetti 2016).

En la actualidad, las acciones de Atención Primaria se nuclean en el PROAPS, donde las agentes sanitarias brindan cobertura sanitaria domiciliaria, mientras que los médicos atienden, o bien en el hospital, o en los Centros de Atención Primaria de la Salud (CAPS) ubicados en las zonas donde viven las poblaciones más pobres, incluidas en ellas comunidades indígenas. En éstas, los programas implementados fomentaban la participación de la población destinataria y de este modo, “intentaban reducir la preponderancia del equipo de salud y lograr una articulación entre promoción, prevención y curación que modificara el peso de la práctica médico asistencial” (Hirsch & Lorenzetti 2016:34).

La marca distintiva de la Atención Primaria de la Salud (APS) estuvo siempre –y continúa estando– en promover una atención en territorio a las poblaciones más pobres de la provincia. Para desarrollar dicha atención territorial, fue necesaria la construcción de una gran cantidad de puestos y centros de atención primaria. Estos enclaves territoriales constituyen el primer nivel de atención sanitaria, desde donde las agentes sanitarias se erigen como nexo entre los pacientes y los niveles de atención de mayor complejidad. De este modo, el PROAPS constituye la puerta de entrada al sistema de salud público, “así como también implica una relación continua de intervención de las poblaciones rurales –incluidas en ellas las poblaciones indígenas– y

de las mujeres y niños en particular” (Hirsch & Lorenzetti 2016:35). Así, en términos generales, la tarea del PROAPS consiste en realizar un diagnóstico de la población, siguiendo determinados criterios normatizados y brindando a las poblaciones con mayor cantidad de derechos vulnerados el acceso a determinados programas sociales (Lorenzetti 2013).

Entre estos programas sociales, destacamos el Plan Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria (PNSA), implementado luego de la crisis socioeconómica de 2001, a través de la sanción de la Ley N° 25.724.<sup>6</sup> En sus inicios, dicho Plan focalizó sus acciones sobre embarazadas y niñas hasta 5 años de edad, adultos mayores a partir de los 60 años, sin cobertura social y población con distintos grados de desnutrición.<sup>7</sup> En la actualidad la población objetivo está constituida por “niños hasta 14 años, embarazadas, discapacitados y adultos mayores de 70 años en condiciones socialmente desfavorables y de vulnerabilidad nutricional” (SIEMPRO 2020:8). El PNSA organiza diversas acciones de intervención: la entrega de tarjetas magnéticas –incluida en ellas la Tarjeta Alimentar– que habilitan la compra de alimentos en comercios; la asistencia alimentaria por medio de la entrega de módulos alimentarios; la promoción del programa Pro-Huerta (el incentivo y la capacitación en autoproducción de alimentos); los subsidios a comedores escolares y a proyectos especiales presentados por comunidades (SIEMPRO 2020).

El PROAPS tiene a su cargo una de las principales tareas para la lucha contra la desnutrición: los controles nutricionales, que implican la medición<sup>8</sup> de la talla y el peso de todos los menores de seis años y la consiguiente identificación de los pacientes en riesgo de desnutrición. Cada agente sanitaria tiene a su cargo un sector de salud, integrado por aproximadamente 120 hogares, que deben ser censados y clasificados: sólo aquellos que estén integrados por menores de seis años y presenten mayor cantidad de “factores de riesgo”<sup>9</sup> van a ser los más visitados. Esto significa que la atención de los niños de las zonas rurales y aquellas denominadas “vulnerables”, ubicadas en los cordones periurbanos, están a cargo de agentes sanitarias. Sin embargo, hemos observado que en ciertas zonas rurales, donde las comunidades se encuentran dispersas y alejadas de los centros urbanos, la cobertura del PROAPS presenta serias dificultades, pues sus trabajadoras sólo llegan a los establecimientos de salud con vehículo propio, que suele ser una bicicleta o una moto. Si bien el sistema sanitario público posee vehículos para emergencias, no provee de movilidad para la atención territorial, lo que puede explicar la mayor presencia de ONG en estas zonas.

El año laboral de las agentes sanitarias se organizaba en rondas sanitarias y pre-rondas. Las pre-rondas se realizaban cada tres meses y consistían en encuentros donde las trabajadoras de una misma subárea operativa se reunían a sistematizar los datos recolectados en el formulario 1 y pasarlos al formulario 2. Las agentes llaman a esta actividad “*paloteo*”, porque consiste en contabilizar cada riesgo con una línea escrita, de a unidades de a cinco, que forman cuadrados con una línea diagonal dentro. Mediante el “*paloteo*” se establecía el estado de salud de un sector, es decir, la cantidad de riesgos de sus integrantes.

La jornada de una agente sanitaria comienza llegando a su centro de salud de referencia, donde retira las herramientas que necesita para hacer las visitas domiciliarias. Si es el día de colocar inmunizaciones, la agente

6 La ley 25.724 se considera un antecedente clave de la Ley de Protección Integral de la Infancia (N°26.061), ya que es la primera en la legislación argentina en ubicar a los niños como titulares de derechos. Para profundizar la comprensión sobre la crisis social en Argentina en 2001 ver Giarraca (2002).

7 Este plan se implementó luego de la declaración de la Emergencia Alimentaria Nacional en el año 2002. Si bien fue elaborada por especialistas en problemáticas alimentarias, la ley 25.724 se denominó “El Hambre más Urgente”, gracias a gestiones de ONG como Poder Ciudadano, medios de comunicación como La Nación, el canal América TV, así como algunas empresas privadas, como Metrogas, Metrovías y Fundación Andreani, que consiguieron el número de firmas equivalente al 1,5 % del padrón electoral y consiguieron su reglamentación en abril de 2003, a través del Decreto N° 1018/03.

8 Estas medidas se clasifican siguiendo las tablas de NCHS (National Center for Health Statistics Service) y fueron validadas por la Organización Mundial de la Salud y la Sociedad Argentina de Pediatría (Calvo et al. 2009).

9 Los factores de riesgo son: “Grupo integrado por menores de 6 años”; “Desempleo y/o ingreso económico inestable (trabajo irregular, jornalero)”; “Ausencia de Padre o Madre (Padre o Madre soltero/a- Viudo/a)”; “Carencia de Obra Social”; “Enfermedades crónicas en la familia”; “Enfermedades Sociales”; “Niños menores de 6 años con déficit nutricional”; “Embarazada”; “Tratamiento Inadecuado de Agua, Residuos”; “Analfabetismo de la persona a cargo de los menores”; “Mortalidad Infantil/ Materna”; “Recién nacido/Puérpera” (Formulario N°1 – PROAPS, año 2015).

debe retirar las vacunas de las heladeras (si es un puesto sanitario con electricidad; o deben organizarse con otros trabajadoras de un CAPS que acerque las vacunas necesarias); cargar su conservadora de tégopor y visitar las viviendas de los niños que deben ser vacunados. Si toca realizar controles nutricionales, las agentes deben cargar la balanza de pilón, junto con las mochilas que portan los formularios que deben completar de cada paciente. Las agentes sanitarias caminan los territorios, a veces los recorren en moto o bicicleta, cargando las carpetas repletas de formularios en bolsos que –a veces– les proveen las gestiones municipales, provinciales o nacionales.

Las agentes sanitarias pertenecían a las comunidades en que trabajaban o vivían en localidades cercanas. Esto les permitía poseer un conocimiento del territorio y de sus habitantes, ubicándolas como intermediarias entre las intervenciones estatales y las poblaciones más vulnerables (Lorenzetti 2013). La promoción de hábitos saludables involucra recomendaciones sobre pautas de crianza y alimentación, especialmente hacia las madres. Muchas agentes sanitarias señalaban que esta parte era la que generaba más tensiones en el trabajo cotidiano:

...ahí es donde me gusta darle charlas a las mamis, porque a veces no saben y además acá los chicos se crían solos, están todo el día solos y eso está mal, por eso nuestro trabajo es muy difícil, a veces la gente no está convencida, no escucha (entrevista, agente sanitaria, Orán, septiembre 2013).

En esta línea, María (41 años), una agente sanitaria ava-guaraní, explicaba: “*me entiendo más con las mamis guaraní y kolla, las mamis wichí no están convencidas, no quieren escuchar y siempre traen problemas*” (entrevista, agente sanitaria, Orán, octubre 2015). Por su parte, Sara (28 años), agente sanitaria criolla, decía que en su sector de salud había muchos “*hijos de bagayeros*”,<sup>10</sup> que los dejaban solos todo el día, entonces, “*con tanto abandono esos chicos están en peligro, por eso nuestra tarea es bien importante*” (Grupo de discusión, agente sanitaria, Orán, agosto 2014).

Las referencias a su tarea cotidiana estaban plagadas de sentimientos morales que atribuían significados a la infancia y su salud: “*Nuestra tarea son los niños, ellos son lo más importante que tenemos, son el futuro, si ellos están mal, el futuro está mal*” (entrevista agente sanitario, Orán, septiembre 2013); “*yo me dedico a esto porque quiero construir un futuro mejor*” (entrevista, agente sanitaria, Orán, septiembre 2013). Estos sentimientos convivían con otros no tan agradables, como la frustración y la impotencia ante la situación social: “*yo ya no se si sirve lo que hacemos, no veo los resultados, veo que siguen habiendo desnutridos y que yo sigo trabajando, no quiero que me gane la tristeza pero es muy difícil el día a día*” (entrevista en profundidad, agente sanitaria, Orán, octubre 2015).

## Las “nuevas” acciones: franquicias solidarias para el desarrollo humano

El Ministerio de la Primera Infancia de Salta se creó en 2014 con el objetivo coordinar y articular las acciones estatales que tuvieran como destinataria a la población de 0 a 5 años. Si bien esto ubicaba a las agentes sanitarias en un rol protagónico,<sup>11</sup> las acciones de dicha cartera se caracterizaron por la articulación con organismos internacionales, empresas y ONG. En términos generales, dicho Ministerio, se distinguió por implementar programas focalizados, hacia embarazadas y niños durante los mil primeros días de vida, con el argumento de que “*el umbral para el desarrollo humano se determina en los primeros años de vida*”.<sup>12</sup>

Antes de su creación, el gobierno provincial ya había firmado convenios con organizaciones no estatales, como la Fundación Cooperativa para la Nutrición (CONIN), en 2011, para el asesoramiento y la asistencia en

<sup>10</sup> Se denomina localmente *bagayeo*, al trabajo que consiste en transportar grandes cargamentos de mercaderías de Bolivia a Argentina, por caminos que evitan los controles aduaneros.

<sup>11</sup> “Los agentes sanitarios fueron calificados por el ministro de Salud Pública, Oscar Villa Nougués, como la piedra angular para que los objetivos anunciados por el Gobernador se cumplan. Reforzó que los primeros años de vida son fundamentales para el desarrollo de las personas e hizo mención a la cantidad de chicos de 0 a 2 años y de 2 a 5 años que reciben controles, la reducción de la desnutrición con curvas descendentes constantes desde 2007” (Gobierno de Salta 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Bernardita Ponce Mora, “Primera Infancia es el Ministerio que defiende a los niños desde su concepción”, *El Tribuno*, 27 de marzo de 2019. Disponible en: <https://www.eltribuno.com/salta/nota/2019-3-27-0-39-0—primera-infancia-es-el-ministerio-que-defiende-a-los-ninos-desde-su-concepcion>. Consultado el 02.04.2022.



comedores provinciales de la provincia (Gobierno de Salta 2013b). En este sentido, las acciones de CONIN se solapaban con aquellas desplegadas por agentes sanitarias; de hecho, la población destinataria de las acciones de recuperación nutricional estaba compuesta por pacientes del PROAPS. Ahora bien, la fundación se caracterizaba por organizar centros para la nutrición infantil a través de “*franquicias solidarias*”, que eran conveniadas con miembros de la sociedad civil que tuvieran la iniciativa de armar dichos centros. Las personas que integrasen estas organizaciones, debían capacitarse en la sede central de la fundación, en la provincia de Mendoza. Esta capacitación los habilitaba para constituirse como “*centros de promoción del desarrollo humano*” que se organizaban siguiendo una determinada metodología.

Un aspecto central de la “*metodología CONIN*” se basaba en la asistencia de las madres y sus hijos a los centros de Desarrollo Humano. Una vez que llegaban al centro, los niños iban a las salas, con las maestras jardineras, mientras sus madres debían asistir a talleres de formación y/o talleres de oficios, entre los que se encontraban gastronomía, reciclaje, costura, huerta, jardinería y alfabetización, entre otros. En línea con lo que se planteaba institucionalmente, durante un “*día modelo*”, los “*pequeños en sus salitas*” recibían el “*programa de alimentación complementaria*”, el desayuno, la colación y un almuerzo, mientras eran estimulados en “*juego, estimulación y socialización*”.<sup>13</sup>

En otro momento de la jornada, los niños debían asistir a controles médicos con sus madres. Todo esto debía ocurrir en simultáneo, siguiendo la idea de que “*no se puede sacar al niño de la desnutrición, sino se convierte a esa mamá en la estimuladora, cuidadora y responsable de su hijos.*”<sup>14</sup> Cuando finalizaba la jornada con el timbre de salida, “*cada mamá debe retirar su bolsón de alimentos y volver a su casa*” (Entrevista referente centro CONIN, agosto 2016). Quienes organizaban la “*franquicia solidaria*”, eran responsables de organizar al personal especializado (pediatras, psicopedagogos, psicólogos y fonoaudiólogos) y además debían llevar el seguimiento de cada paciente y reportarlo a la sede central de la cooperativa mediante el software que proveía la fundación.

Las madres cumplen un rol fundamental en la metodología CONIN: en palabras de la responsable de una franquicia solidaria, era necesario

... comprender a la madre como el agente de cambio, como el motor de cambio del crecimiento del propio niño, sin ella no se puede hacer nada, y pasa que el chico queda encerrado en un circuito donde no puede terminar el colegio nunca, porque su cerebro no tiene cableado [...] porque la desnutrición viene siempre de contextos de pobreza, de contextos donde todo es gris, todo está sucio, los chicos son sucios, las madres son sucias, todo es gris, falta color, falta amor, y bueno no sé, él [Abel Albino] lo explica mejor, pero es que falta estimulación, falta amor, faltan caricias, faltan besos y ahí pasa que el cerebro no termina de hacer cableado, el chico no tiene conexiones neuronales y si no recibió la cantidad de comida que necesitaba en el primer año de vida, imaginate que en el segundo ya es todo mucho más grave y no se puede recuperar el cableado, y ya no hay vuelta atrás... (entrevista, directora franquicia solidaria, Salta Capital, julio de 2016).

En estas coordenadas se desplegaba el discurso de ciertas referentes que estaban a cargo de centros CONIN y se sentían parte de una familia, cuyo “padre” era el pediatra Abel Albino. Otras referentes contactadas trabajaban en centros donde la “*metodología CONIN*” no resultaba adecuada, porque las poblaciones destinatarias vivían muy lejos y no tenían cómo visitar periódicamente el centro de desarrollo humano. Tal es el caso relatado al comienzo, de Mercedes y Marina, mirando desde la ventana del centro de salud. Quienes estaban a cargo de la puesta en marcha de este nuevo centro de desarrollo humano eran tres jóvenes: una trabajadora social, una psicopedagoga y una psicóloga. Éstas dos últimas vivían en Salta capital y viajaban al centro todas las semanas.

13 Al respecto, véase: ¿Cómo funciona un centro CONIN?. Disponible en: <http://www.conin.org.ar/contenidos/conoce-conin/centros-modelo/>. Consultado el 02.04.2022.

14 Véase: ¿Cómo funciona un centro CONIN?. Disponible en: <http://www.conin.org.ar/contenidos/conoce-conin/centros-modelo/>. Consultado el 02.04.2022.

Cuando ingresé allí, con intenciones de conocer el funcionamiento del centro y a sus trabajadoras, fui recibida amablemente. Luego de presentarme y relatar mis intereses como investigadora, la psicopedagoga me expresó:

¿Sos antropóloga? Ay por favor, necesito que me des una mano, no sé qué hacer con los wichis, siento que les hablo a una pared, no sé cómo trabajar, yo siempre trabajé con poblaciones necesitadas, pero ellos son especiales, a veces quiero llorar... (entrevista, mujer criolla, Centro de Promoción de Desarrollo Humano, agosto de 2014).

Ante este pedido, pedí a la joven profesional que me relatara sus actividades como integrante del centro. Concurría allí dos veces por semana: en una de ellas, debía hacer tareas en el centro, recibiendo pacientes; en la otra “*salían al campo*”, es decir, iban a buscar a población/paciente. Si bien el municipio había donado el espacio para la construcción del centro, y la Provincia la había financiado, en aquel momento ellas preferían, para llegar a la población destinataria, no articular con actores estatales. Una de ellas tenía vínculos con otras integrantes de ONG de la zona, y a través de dichos contactos, procuraban la llegada de pacientes al *centro de promoción de desarrollo humano*.

Es importante considerar que esta observación se realizó en los tiempos iniciales de la creación del centro. En otros centros visitados, que ya contaban con algunos años de funcionamiento, observamos que se habían implementado estrategias para asegurar la concurrencia de las madres y lxs niñxs. En uno, por ejemplo, ubicado en la ciudad capital, se habían firmado convenios con municipios cercanos para que brindaran movilidad para asegurar que la población paciente infantil –y sus cuidadoras madres– pudieran asistir semanalmente al centro de desarrollo humano, para realizar controles nutricionales –y que las madres puedan participar de los talleres–. En este centro, una de las trabajadoras con cargo jerárquico explicó enfáticamente: “acá no recibimos financiaciones o ayudas de nada estatal, todos nuestros vínculos son con empresas y con entidades que voluntariamente nos hacen donaciones” (entrevista, Salta, agosto de 2019). En otros centros hemos observado que la atención se realizaba tres días a la semana y por demanda espontánea.

En los próximos apartados indagaremos una serie de continuidades entre ambas intervenciones, para luego enfocarnos en lo “novedoso” de la alianza de focalizaciones hacia la primera infancia y organizaciones no gubernamentales.

## Gubernamentalidad y sentimientos

La asistencia alimentaria y los tratamientos para prevenir la desnutrición, pueden comprenderse dentro del campo de gestiones del cuidado infantil, que implican “un conjunto de prácticas materiales y simbólicas socialmente producidas y organizadas, orientadas a mantener la vida de los niños y su bienestar” (Colángelo 2018: 198). Si bien en los últimos años, gracias a la influencia de la teoría y el movimiento feminista, se ha discutido el rol feminizado de las tareas de cuidado y se sugiere comprender el cuidado infantil como una organización social y cultural (Faur 2014), las acciones analizadas comparten una mirada hegemónica sobre el cuidado y la niñez.

Las prácticas y los discursos de ciertas trabajadoras de las ONG presentaban algunas diferencias con los desplegados por las agentes sanitarias, y se enmarcaban en disputas que se daban en la arena pública. Desde el PROAPS, las trabajadoras acompañaban los controles nutricionales con charlas para las *mamis*: en ellas se incluían recomendaciones de rutinas y comidas para cada etapa del crecimiento de lxs niñxs. Por su parte, las ONG tenían un referente mediático, Abel Albino, quien entre 2011 y 2015 se transformó en un portavoz de la infancia (Rabello de Castro 2001), que hacía declaraciones públicas afirmando que “los niños desnutridos, no sólo están en riesgo, sino que son un riesgo, ya que constituyen un “futuro ejército de débiles mentales” (Infobae 2017). Es importante señalar que, en esta línea argumentativa, la desnutrición no sólo se originaba en

la pobreza sino en la corrupción política, que era sinónimo de los gobiernos de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2011/2011-2015) y de la gestión estatal, caracterizada por ineficiente y vetusta.<sup>15</sup>

Ahora bien, concebir a las madres como *agentes de cambio* –al igual que lo hacen ciertos organismos internacionales–<sup>16</sup> que es necesario empoderar para que aprendan a cuidar correctamente a sus hijxs, reactualiza el discurso maternalista más tradicional en relación al rol de la mujer en la sociedad (Nari 2004). La dinámica de los *centros de desarrollo humano* no contemplaba que las madres tuvieran un trabajo rentado u otras actividades, aparte de criar. Tampoco aludían a la responsabilidad paterna. Del mismo modo, desde la mirada de ciertas agentes sanitarias, que las madres *salieran a trabajar* constituía un obstáculo para acceder a una crianza adecuada. Así, tanto en el PROAPS como en el universo ONG, persiste el argumento de que lxs niñxs no acceden a una nutrición adecuada porque sus madres no saben cumplir acabadamente con la tarea de maternar; por lo tanto, las intervenciones deben enseñar a hacerlo.

Esto nos lleva a señalar que, tanto las intervenciones del PROAPS como las de CONIN, comparten técnicas de gobierno características de la gubernamentalidad neoliberal (Foucault 1994 [1977]; Gago 2014; Souza Lima & Macedo e Castro 2015). En ambos casos hemos observado metodologías que focalizan en las poblaciones más vulnerables y fragmentan la exposición a situaciones perjudiciales para la salud en comportamientos individuales. En el caso del PROAPS, los riesgos sanitarios se comprenden como experiencias individuales. De este modo, se fundamentan modelos de gestión que distribuyen de modo focalizado los recursos, “mediante un cálculo de paquetes y planes de atención básica” (Lorenzetti 2013: 68) que no logran incidir sobre los determinantes políticos-económicos-sociales de los índices de las problemáticas sanitarias, en este caso, la malnutrición.

Al ser políticas hacia niñxs, estas tecnologías de gobierno se aplican sobre las personas adultas cuidadoras, más precisamente sobre las mujeres madres, y constituyen gestiones estrechamente ligadas con determinadas concepciones de maternidad (Nari 2004; Lugones 2017). Por un lado, las intervenciones hacia las poblaciones más pobres, tanto desde trabajadoras estatales como de las ONG, configura actuaciones que pueden comprenderse como “maternales, bienintencionadas, persuasivas y pedagógicas, a favor de sus destinatarios” (Lugones 2017). Por otro lado, las intervenciones se enmarcan en el maternalismo político señalado por Nari (2004), en tanto comprenden que la desnutrición se origina en el ámbito doméstico y privado, lo que lleva a que dicho problema se comprenda como un descuido materno, no sólo en el contexto salteño (Ortale 2002). Esto genera que se invisibilicen los procesos sociales, territoriales, económicos y políticos involucrados que se implican en la inseguridad alimentaria. De este modo, quedan opacados los motivos por los cuales lxs niñxs indígenas son los más afectados en relación a la población total nacional.

No podemos dejar de mencionar que las miradas simplificadas sobre la problemática nutricional fueron acompañadas por un abordaje sensacionalista del sufrimiento infantil en la esfera pública (Infobae, 30.01.2015). Con vistas a intentar comprender la proliferación de discursos sentimentalistas en torno a los déficits nutricionales, recuperamos el trabajo de Fassin (2016) sobre el lenguaje humanitario de los gobiernos neoliberales. El autor señala que es necesario analizar la dimensión moral de las políticas propias de la gubernamentalidad neoliberal, ya que son los sentimientos morales los que nutren los discursos y legitiman ciertas prácticas. Comprendiendo al gobierno en un sentido amplio, incluye organismos internacionales, colectividades, organizaciones no gubernamentales, medios de comunicación e instituciones diversas que procuran colaborar con la finalidad de “gobernar a los otros” por medio de un “lenguaje de lo humanitario

15 El video “Convenio Fundación CONIN-Salta”, publicado en octubre de 2015, muestra “cómo en la Provincia de Salta se está llevando adelante una gran red de colaboración entre diferentes actores de la sociedad (Estado, ONG, empresariado, comunidad, etc.) para solucionar problemas de pobreza y su consecuencia más directa: la desnutrición infantil”. Mediante dibujos, se explica que “hoy las alarmas se prenden cuando un ciudadano no paga sus impuestos, en lugar de atender a la infancia más pobre” Disponible en: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PoXhAkX21g>. Consultado el 7/10/2023.

16 “Madres guerreras contra la desnutrición infantil”: allí se cuenta el caso de “Fátima y Giovanni”, madres de una “república centroafricana” –no se especifica cuál– que “pudieron acabar con la desnutrición infantil y nos demuestran que se puede acabar con la desnutrición infantil de sus hijos”. Disponible en: <https://www.unicef.es/blog/madres-guerreras-contr-la-desnutricion-infantil>. Consultado el 21/8/2023.

que une de modo inextricable sentimientos y valores” (Fassin 2016:11). Así, observamos discursos, tanto de referentes de ONG como de funcionarios públicos, donde la pobreza generaba *tristeza*, mientras la nutrición era promovida a través de *colores, caricias y amor*, allí donde reinaban las carencias materiales.

Según Fassin (2016) estos discursos deben ser analizados y discutidos porque son profundamente eficaces en términos políticos. Los mismos permiten evitar las discusiones sobre justicia social y habilitan la construcción de una “teoría moral de la elección” a partir de explicaciones esencialistas de los comportamientos “...que terminan convirtiendo a las víctimas en culpables” (Fassin 2016:246). Así pues, en diversas oportunidades, las muertes de niños indígenas fueron comprendidas como el resultado de prácticas de cuidado inadecuadas, derivadas de costumbres culturales (La Izquierda Diario 2016).

El estudio de la dimensión moral de las técnicas de la gubernamentalidad neoliberal implica el análisis de los sentimientos que “nos conducen sobre el malestar de los otros y nos hacen querer corregirlo, especialmente cuando estos se dirigen a los desposeídos y a los dominados” (Fassin 2016: 11). La labor cotidiana implicada en gobernar las vidas de los más pobres “implica tensiones entre desigualdad y solidaridad, entre relación de dominación y ayuda” (2016: 12-13). Algunas de estas tensiones pudieron ser observadas en los sentimientos ambivalentes que despertaba la niñez vulnerable para las trabajadoras entrevistadas. Si bien la infancia era significada como el futuro, la piedra fundacional de la sociedad cuyo valor afectivo resultaba inconmensurable, algunas trabajadoras expresaban sensaciones de duda por la labor desarrollada y, en algunas ocasiones, frustración. A medida que avanzaban las acciones, la nutrición infantil se observaba como un horizonte cada vez más lejano, tanto para agentes sanitarias como para algunas integrantes de la familia CONIN.

Si bien comprendemos las acciones desde el gobierno provincial –como las del PROAPS– y las de las ONG como CONIN como parte de un “gobierno humanitario” (Fassin 2016), consideramos necesario realizar una serie de distinciones. Las agentes sanitarias del PROAPS contactadas eran originarias de las mismas comunidades de las poblaciones pacientes que atendían, mientras que las trabajadoras de las ONG no lo eran.<sup>17</sup> Ellas vivían en otras ciudades y pertenecían a una clase social más alta. Las trabajadoras de las ONG tenían estudios universitarios completos, mientras que las agentes sanitarias contaban con el secundario completo y habían realizado los estudios correspondientes para poder ser parte del PROAPS.<sup>18</sup>

Ahora bien, la pertenencia a una clase social más alta y la formación universitaria no eran garantía para acceder a un trabajo registrado. Las trabajadoras de ONG contactadas tenían contratos temporales con empresas que articulaban acciones de responsabilidad social con CONIN, pero no eran empleadas registradas de dicha fundación ni de las empresas para las cuales trabajaban. Aquellas que se quedaban a cargo del funcionamiento general de los centros, viviendo en esas localidades, tenían mayores remuneraciones que las que viajaban semanalmente.<sup>19</sup> Por su parte, las agentes sanitarias pertenecían a diversos regímenes de contratación de los municipios en los que trabajaban. Sus sueldos eran mucho más bajos, lo que las llevaba a estar permanentemente involucradas en reclamos por mejoras salariales y el pase a la planta permanente.<sup>20</sup>

Excede a los objetivos del presente trabajo abordar la diversidad de tipos de contrataciones y remuneraciones que existen en las intervenciones para el cuidado infantil, así como las múltiples tensiones y significados en

17 En este sentido, el Aislamiento Social Preventivo y Obligatorio (ASPO) tuvo efectos determinantes sobre el funcionamiento de los centros CONIN que, en algunos casos, no pudieron continuar con sus actividades, porque al estar vedada la circulación de la población paciente, no pudieron atender durante varios meses en durante 2020.

18 El curso para obtener la formación de agente sanitario es gratuito y se enmarca en áreas de gestión de los Ministerios de Educación y Salud de la provincia de Salta (Resolución N°70/21). Está estipulado que las/os agentes deben realizar cursos de formación todos los años, durante los períodos de pre-rondas, que se desarrollan semestralmente. Disponible en: <http://www.edusalta.gov.ar/index.php/informacion/partes-de-prensa/6628-con-modalidad-virtual-y-totalmente-gratuito-se-desarrolla-el-curso-de-agente-sanitario>. Última consulta: 17/10/2023.

19 En 2014, una trabajadora social a cargo de un centro de promoción de desarrollo humano cobraba 35 mil pesos argentinos mensuales, mientras una psicopedagoga cobraba 15 mil por atender dos días por semana (en 2014, 1 dólar estadounidense equivalía aproximadamente a 14 pesos argentinos)

20 En promedio, las agentes sanitarias contactadas, cobran un salario básico de 3700 pesos argentinos. Esta cifra se veía aumentada según la zona de trabajo, los cursos de formación y la antigüedad, entre otras variables (Depto. Orán 2014).

torno a la identidad de sus trabajadoras. No obstante, nos parece importante señalar que la gubernamentalidad neoliberal no puede ser pensada como una doctrina compacta ni homogénea que se implementa “desde arriba”, sino como una compleja tecnología de gobierno, que opera en múltiples niveles, articulando diversos saberes y formas de hacer de manera desigual (Gago 2014). Así, no podemos dejar de mencionar que la mayoría de trabajadoras del PROAPS y de ONG eran mujeres y que las mismas se desempeñaban en tareas vinculadas al cuidado infantil, favoreciendo su desjerarquización como actividad profesional, lo que se traduce en sueldos más bajos. En este sentido, Cutuli (2017), señala que existe una paradoja entre discursos hipersensibilizados sobre la afectividad necesaria para trabajar con niños, en contextos donde las “políticas públicas destinan limitados recursos económicos a la desmaternalización del cuidado de la primera infancia en el espacio público” (2017:51).

Hasta aquí hemos identificado una serie de similitudes entre las intervenciones del PROAPS y de ONG vinculadas a las tecnologías de gobierno propias de la gubernamentalidad neoliberal, que habilitan la comprensión simplificada e individualizada del problema de la desnutrición infantil. Si bien encontramos varias similitudes, no podemos dejar de mencionar que, en la arena pública, la firma de convenios para impulsar el funcionamiento de los “centros para el desarrollo humano” se presentó, al interior de la política pública, como el oasis redentor.<sup>21</sup> La posibilidad de organizar “franquicias solidarias” aportó además esperanzas a una diversidad de colectivos de la sociedad civil que buscaban “hacer algo” para cambiar los destinos de los niños más pobres del país. En línea con estos sentidos, se comprendió a estas acciones como innovadoras y marcadamente distintas de aquellas implementadas por el gobierno provincial. Ahora bien, ¿cómo es posible entender como novedoso el intervenir sobre la población materno infantil en el contexto argentino de principios del siglo XXI? Nos parece importante detenernos en las “novedades” que implicaban las acciones de estas ONG en la lucha contra la desnutrición, pues las mismas deben ser entendidas como parte de procesos que se desarrollan más allá de las fronteras provinciales.

## Una nueva estética para el cuidado infantil

Según el antropólogo Andrew MacDougall (1999), “frecuentemente las características estéticas de una sociedad se asimilan con demasiada facilidad en otras categorías, hasta tal punto que se convierten en invisibles o se ignoran” (MacDougall 1999:7. La traducción me pertenece). Recuperando a Ruth Benedict, quien explicaba que la “sensibilidad estética” era un componente clave de la configuración cultural de una sociedad, las referencias a la estética en los estudios de MacDougall poco tienen que ver con las connotaciones de belleza o arte, sino con un alcance mucho más amplio de una gama de experiencias sensoriales que están moldeadas culturalmente: se trata del modo en que nuestros sentidos experimentan la vida social, y que la mayoría de veces pasa desapercibido. Estas ideas nos permiten pensar una característica insoslayable de los centros de promoción del desarrollo humano acompañados: estaban recién construidos. Por su parte, los espacios del PROAPS tenían al menos una década y generalmente habían servido para otras funciones estatales: uno de ellos, por ejemplo, era una escuela, que luego fuera acondicionada para funcionar como CAPS. Esta diferencia estética no era únicamente visual, implicaba acceder a otras experiencias como paciente.

Diversas escenas permiten iluminar la experiencia estética de esperar ser atendido en un centro de salud del PROAPS: los perros que entran y salen de las esperas, y miran a los pacientes a ver si les dan comida; paredes color marrón claro, con afiches impresos o escritos manualmente con informaciones diversas: campañas de inmunización, calendarios de vacunación, efemérides sanitarias; hábitos para prevenir el dengue, los horarios de los distintos profesionales de la salud, reclamos sindicales del personal sanitario, números de teléfono

21 El fundador de CONIN dio múltiples declaraciones públicas celebrando los convenios firmados con el gobierno provincial. Ejemplo de ello: “Salta está dando un ejemplo de civilidad” (El Intransigente, 18.09.2015). Disponible en : <http://www.elintra.com.ar/salta/2015/9/18/abel-albino-salta-esta-dando-ejemplo-civilidad-nunca-antes-90121.html>. Última consulta: 7/10/2017.

para contactar cuidadoras, cartulinas con recomendaciones escritas en lengua wichí para promocionar la leche materna, entre otros. En la penumbra marrón se ve, hacia el fondo del pasillo, un altar con flores de tela y cartas que dejan pacientes, a una Virgen del Milagro vestida de dorado y encerrada en una caja de vidrio.

Los puestos sanitarios rurales, por su parte, son espacios pequeños, con apenas uno o dos ambientes, algunos sin baño o incluso sin agua corriente, donde no hay espacio para que la población paciente espere dentro. Allí se escucha permanentemente un sonido de ventiladores y de radios portátiles, o música salida de los celulares. Adentro hace un par de grados menos que afuera, pero todo debe permanecer abierto porque el aire acondicionado no funciona.

En tanto, los centros de desarrollo humano recién construidos tenían paredes blancas que reflejaban la luz, aberturas con ventanas de doble vidrio, ambientes con marquesinas de plástico que decían “Pediatra”, “Psicopedagoga”, “Administración”; pasillos vidriados y un ambiente destinado a la cocina, con un espacio para la heladera. Agua corriente y electricidad: aire acondicionado. En algunos de ellos, incluso, había un espacio central, con un patio y juegos infantiles multicolores.

Es en estos patrones estéticos de los centros de promoción de desarrollo humano que encontramos una novedad, en los colores y características de los espacios en que se organizaban los ya conocidos controles pediátricos de la población materno-infantil. Volviendo a MacDougall, lo interesante del punto de vista sociológico, es observar “la medida en que los patrones estéticos pueden influir en acontecimientos y decisiones de una comunidad, junto con otras fuerzas sociales comúnmente reconocidas de la historia, la economía, la política y la ideología” (1999: 7). No sabemos si estos nuevos patrones estéticos definían las elecciones de quienes formaban parte de la población materno infantil, pero sí podemos decir que la “novedad” era estética y también discursiva: las agentes sanitarias del PROAPS no hablaban de *desarrollo humano* ni de *cableado neuronal*.

Alternativamente las características estéticas pueden verse simplemente como la expresión de fuerzas profundas (como la historia y la ideología) en lugar de comprenderse influyentes con derecho propio. Aunque la estética puede no ser independiente de otras fuerzas sociales, no es simplemente residuo de ellos (MacDougall 1999: 5).

Podíamos observar una experiencia novedosa al ingresar a un edificio recién construido en el Chaco Salteño, pero ello no implicaba una “nueva financiación” ni un abandono de la financiación estatal; tampoco una nueva concepción del cuidado infantil. Los edificios de las ONG observados –que no eran recién construidos y habían sido acondicionados para ser consultorios pediátricos o centros de recuperación nutricional– ofrecían las posibilidades de establecer “nuevos vínculos” entre el sector privado y las poblaciones más pobres. Este fue el caso del Ingenio Tabacal, que en 2013 se incorporó al listado de empresas subsidiarias de CONIN, inaugurando un centro de prevención de la nutrición en el sector de viviendas de la empresa.<sup>22</sup> La misma, que tenía un litigio con una comunidad de la zona y que intermitentemente asediaba a los integrantes de la misma, tenía una fundación de responsabilidad social, que en aquel año gestionó su propio centro CONIN, a pocos metros de las viviendas de trabajadores del Ingenio.

La modernidad de los edificios nuevos y blancos sintonizaba con los seguimientos de los pacientes en el software de la fundación CONIN, en contraposición al “paloteo” bajo clima subtropical y zumbido de ventiladores de las agentes sanitarias. Ahora bien, estos centros hermanados con la responsabilidad empresarial, no estaban “privados” de financiación estatal. En varios casos, el gobierno provincial facilitaba los predios, mientras que el nacional aumentaba la financiación, o los módulos alimentarios, tal como hemos presentado en la primera escena de este texto.

22 Desde 2007, CONIN realiza campañas de capacitación con la Fundación Banco Galicia y la Fundación Solidaridad de Carrefour. La llegada del gobierno de la alianza Cambiemos (entre la Unión Cívica Radical - UCR, y el partido Propuesta Republicana - PRO) en diciembre de 2015, significó el incremento exponencial de convenios de CONIN con el sector público. En la actualidad, CONIN posee convenios con la ciudad de Buenos Aires, el Ministerio de Desarrollo de la Nación, la provincia de La Rioja, Salta y Misiones (Ingenio San Martín de Tabacal 2013).

En ese sentido, en 2016, los *centros de promoción de desarrollo humano* recibieron fuerte impulso del gobierno de UCR-Cambiamos: Carolina Stanley, Ministra de Desarrollo Social de la Nación, firmó un convenio con la Fundación CONIN, por el cual aportó 100 millones de pesos (en aquel momento, unos 7 millones de dólares) para la apertura de 30 nuevos centros de atención a la primera infancia y el fortalecimiento de otros, ya existentes, como aquellos que estaban en Salta (Paz Landeira 2018). En el convenio se estipulaba que la formación de los profesionales de cada centro, junto con la metodología de intervención, era definida por la fundación.<sup>23</sup> En aquel momento, la ministra declaró:

Los dos primeros años de vida del niño son centrales para el desarrollo y el crecimiento; por eso queremos acompañar ese crecimiento cuidando la salud y la estimulación temprana de todos los chicos en situación de vulnerabilidad en nuestro país (Télam 2016).

En línea con las palabras de referentes de CONIN contactadas, los primeros años de vida se destacaban como un momento clave del desarrollo humano, allí donde se realiza el *cableado neuronal* y está la “llave para cortar con la pobreza” en el ámbito de las políticas públicas (Cipri 2017). Según Paz Landeira (2018), estos discursos pueden ser comprendidos como parte de la agenda de desarrollo transnacional de la primera infancia, que señala que las inversiones más “costo-efectivas” para que un niño logre su “desarrollo adecuado” son aquellas que se realizan entre los 0-5 años de vida.

Con el objetivo de combatir la “transmisión intergeneracional de la pobreza”, diversos lineamientos de organismos internacionales, como el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, “demarcan intervenciones centradas en actuar sobre el cuerpo, los caracteres biológicos y la psiquis” (Paz Landeira 2018:10). Esta tendencia puede ser comprendida en términos de una “neuropolítica” (Rose 2012) que define al cerebro como locus de intervención y explicación del desarrollo humano. Así pues, esta nueva estética podía ser observada en los edificios, pintados de blancos y decorados con murales de sonrisas y flores que, a su vez, ofrecían nuevas narrativas para explicar las intervenciones hacia la infancia pobre y vulnerable.

Así como hemos observado que las mamis eran comprendidas como “agentes de cambio”, los niños y las niñas no eran concebidos tanto como sujeto de derechos, sino más bien como individuos que debían ser correctamente estimulados y así obtener mejores herramientas para enfrentar las situaciones de riesgo. En este sentido, coincidimos con Paz Landeira (2018), cuando sostiene que en estos discursos se advierte

(...) una creciente individualización de la protección social y una apropiación restrictiva del ‘lenguaje de derechos’ en tanto los proyectos se sustentan en apuntalar individuos con mayores y mejores recursos cognitivos y emocionales para enfrentar las situaciones de riesgo y explotar las oportunidades (2018: 11).

Así, estos nuevos discursos se sustentan en las concepciones más hegemónicas de infancia, aquellas que la conciben como una etapa meramente biológica y universal, por fuera de condicionamientos históricos y sociales (Rabello de Castro 2001). No pretendemos con esto abonar explicaciones relativistas sobre el desarrollo infantil: la disciplina antropológica posee una larga trayectoria en explicar que las diferencias en el crecimiento humano no responden únicamente a una combinación genética sino también a condiciones materiales de vida.<sup>24</sup> Lo que nos interesa, más bien, es señalar que son intervenciones que se despliegan sobre las poblaciones más pobres –como las indígenas, en el noroeste argentino– sin atender a los procesos sociales que generaron, y continúan configurando, sus actuales condiciones de vulnerabilidad; ni a su diferencia cultural, que permanece como una incógnita para ciertas referentes del universo ONG.

23 Al respecto, puede consultarse la información publicada por CONIN en su website. Disponible en: <https://www.conin.org.ar/el-gobierno-nacional-reconoce-y-adopta-la-metodologia-conin/> Última consulta: 02.08.2020.

24 Es inevitable la referencia a Boas (1909) y su crítica hacia el racismo, a través del estudio donde comparó la primera y la segunda generación de más de 18.000 inmigrantes en los Estados Unidos. En ese estudio, encontró que la segunda generación, con mejores condiciones de vida y alimentación, lograba superar las medidas craneales y la talla, transcurrida apenas una generación. Hasta entonces, la antropometría se utilizaba sólo como marcador poblacional y racial.

Nos parece entonces importante señalar que, en estas nuevas narrativas sobre el cuidado infantil o la primera infancia, la interculturalidad es poco mencionada.<sup>25</sup> Esto resulta llamativo, porque estas acciones suelen cobrar más impulso cuando los casos fatales de niños indígenas adquieren mayor visibilidad mediática. Se podría pensar que, ante tales situaciones, las estrategias buscan adoptar un enfoque intercultural, que intentaría comprender los contextos sanitarios de los pacientes más afectados, como aquellos que pertenecen a la etnia wichi. Pero no: la diferencia cultural indígena es entendida como sinónimo de pobreza y falta de desarrollo.

Y esto es otra cuestión que permite encontrar similitudes, y divergencias, entre las intervenciones del PROAPS y las de las ONG. Desde fines del siglo XX, el PROAPS fundamenta, en sus manuales, sus intervenciones focalizadas con las Declaraciones de Derechos Especiales de los Pueblos Indígenas y ha incorporado personal indígena al sistema sanitario<sup>26</sup>. Si bien la perspectiva intercultural en las políticas de gobierno merece una discusión que excede a los objetivos de este artículo<sup>27</sup>, nos parece importante advertir que, en las intervenciones de ONG observadas, la diferencia cultural emerge como un obstáculo en la comunicación, y el concepto de interculturalidad no aparece ni por corrección política.

Estas cuestiones dan cuenta de las tensiones implicadas en las relaciones interculturales en el contexto argentino, donde históricamente se han negado los legados indígenas, mestizos y afroamericanos, o se los tiene como “atrasados”, desde una perspectiva evolucionista profundamente naturalizada en el sentido común. Dicha perspectiva también carga sus tintas sobre la noción de desarrollo que orientan las prácticas biomédicas, que comprenden a la infancia como una etapa universal y natural (Rabello de Castro 2001). Lo problemático de concebir a niños únicamente en sus dimensiones biológicas es que recorta el entramado de relaciones sociales que permite el crecimiento infantil, y obtura la posibilidad de pensar intervenciones más allá de los cuerpos de la población paciente. No se trata de caer en una mirada relativista sobre el desarrollo humano, sino de entender que el crecimiento infantil no es un fenómeno meramente biológico, sino también social y cultural; pues el acceso a territorio y las vulneraciones de los derechos indígenas son cuestiones que afectan el acceso a una nutrición adecuada.

## A modo de cierre

En este artículo nos propusimos explorar aspectos similares y divergentes entre las intervenciones hacia la población infantil, que se realizan con el objetivo de tratar y prevenir déficits nutricionales. El material etnográfico analizado en este trabajo fue recabado en un contexto donde las acciones de las ONGs se presentaban como modernas y en tal sentido como opuestas a las intervenciones estatales. El abordaje antropológico sobre las intervenciones de ONG buscó problematizar esta supuesta oposición e indagar en aquello que representaba una “novedad” en la lucha contra la desnutrición. Este último apartado, más que un cierre, constituye una reflexión para plantear nuevos interrogantes que abran discusiones y próximos pasos en la investigación.

En primer lugar, consideramos que las intervenciones hacia la infancia y el problema de la desnutrición constituyen un núcleo problemático de la agenda salteña, y su estudio permite abrir una serie de interrogantes en torno a lo que implica la definición de un *problema social*. En este sentido, recuperamos a Souza Lima y Castro e Macedo (2015), cuando señalan, respecto de las políticas sociales en Brasil, que:

25 A excepción de los informes en coautoría entre organismos internacionales y agencias del gobierno provincial, que tienen por objetivo explicar las prácticas de crianzas de ciertos pueblos originarios (Gobierno de Salta & UNICEF 2021), no encontramos experiencias que busquen abordar problemas sanitarios desde una autoría compartida con referentes de comunidades indígenas.

26 Existe una diversidad de trabajos que analizan las implicancias de la estrategia intercultural en el ámbito del PROAPS. Recomendamos la lectura de Lorenzetti (2013; 2015), para el caso Salta. En la actualidad, diversas organizaciones civiles reclaman por la reglamentación de la Ley n° 7856 de Red de Apoyo Sanitario Intercultural e Interinstitucional, que tiene por objetivo garantizar una adecuada y equitativa atención médica a los pacientes de pueblos originarios.

27 En la actualidad, las políticas gubernamentales hacia pueblos originarios se enmarcan en las áreas de salud comunitaria y/o territorial del Ministerio de Salud y de Desarrollo de Nación. Allí podemos encontrar publicaciones elaboradas por pueblos originarios en articulación con organismos estatales, con el objetivo de difundir conocimientos wichi sobre alimentación (SENAF 2023). Disponible en: [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2020/09/recetario\\_alimentos\\_que\\_nos\\_dan\\_vida.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2020/09/recetario_alimentos_que_nos_dan_vida.pdf). Última consulta. 29/11/2023.



(...) la identificación de los *problemas sociales*, la formulación de *planos de acciones de gobierno*, se dan concretamente en múltiples escalas espaciales, con temporalidades variables, en el entrecruzamiento de amplios espacios de disputa, muchas veces aparentemente desconectados entre sí, mientras su implementación más directa puede estar (y hasta depender de fuerzas sociales más allá de lo local y nacional) circunscripta a un espacio más restringido, y la evaluación de sus resultados, ni siquiera ocurrir (lo más común, especialmente en las políticas sociales) en Brasil (Souza Lima & Castro 2015:35. La traducción me pertenece, el énfasis es de los autores).

Lo señalado por los autores nos permite evitar una mirada dicotómica en torno a aquello que se realiza desde la órbita estatal y lo que ocurre en las ONG, así como también alejarnos de una mirada racional en torno al estado y sus gestiones. No obstante, el trabajo etnográfico y las fuentes secundarias exploradas nos permitieron observar que quienes trabajaban en las ONG enfatizaban sus lazos con el ámbito empresarial en detrimento del estatal; mientras que los centros visitados se construyeron con financiación del gobierno provincial y nacional; así también, en muchos casos, lo que se repartía a la población paciente tenía sellos de ministerios públicos. En este sentido, observamos que las intervenciones que buscan luchar contra la pobreza derivan de enredos institucionales, entre organismos estatales y agencias privadas ubicadas en múltiples latitudes (Morawska Vianna 2014), por lo que resulta difícil encontrar acciones “privadas” de lo “estatal”. Más allá de estas apreciaciones, resulta preocupante la falta de evaluación de este tipo de acciones de asistencia alimentaria en el marco de declaraciones de emergencias sanitarias, que vienen implementándose en forma ininterrumpida desde hace más de una década.

En segundo lugar, resulta preocupante que las intervenciones para “resolver” el problema de la desnutrición infantil sigan siendo circunscritas al ámbito doméstico, entendido también como privado. Con esto no estamos diciendo que la asistencia alimentaria no sirva, sino que no puede ser la única intervención posible de ser pensada; ni que la desnutrición infantil constituya un problema que atañe únicamente a las carteras de Salud, Desarrollo Social o Primera Infancia. La discusión sobre la alimentación y la nutrición infantil implica procesos políticos, económicos, ambientales y territoriales, sobre todo cuando hablamos de poblaciones indígenas.

En otros trabajos (Leavy 2018; 2022) hemos identificado que lxs niñxs indígenas que pertenecen a comunidades que tienen títulos de posesión de sus tierras, presentan menos riesgos de padecer déficits nutricionales. Ahora bien, es importante destacar que esto ha sido posible con la intervención de políticas estatales, que brindaron subsidio y financiación para la producción de alimentos. En un país con una gran concentración de tierras, y ante el avance de frentes extractivos sobre las tierras indígenas, los pequeños productores necesitan ser subsidiados; de lo contrario, peligran su producción y sus fuentes de trabajo (Leavy 2018). Estas cuestiones nos permiten preguntarnos por qué se pone el foco en la cuestión del cuidado infantil y no en el cuidado del ambiente de las poblaciones más pobres. Consideramos que es necesario pensar el cuidado infantil más allá del espacio privado/doméstico, como organización social y cultural que está estrechamente vinculada a aquello que ocurre en lo que comprendemos como “público”. En este sentido, la lucha indígena por el acceso al territorio es una lucha contra la desnutrición.

Por último, resulta preocupante la tendencia de los nuevos discursos sobre primera infancia que, además de utilizar un discurso individualizante del lenguaje de derechos humanos, niegan la diferencia cultural indígena. Por diferencia indígena no nos referimos sólo a las particularidades de una cosmología en particular, sino a una historia en común y al modo en que se articulan las desigualdades sociales e interétnicas en el contexto salteño y argentino. En este sentido, resulta también alarmante que en recientes iniciativas para “resolver” el problema de la desnutrición, las voces de referentes indígenas resultan ausentes en los procesos de diseño, discusión y evaluación de políticas públicas.<sup>28</sup> La (des)nutrición no puede entenderse sólo como resultado de

28 <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/argentina-contr-el-hambre/mecanismos-participacion>.

decisiones individuales de una madre, o una comunidad étnica, pues las condiciones de vida, las desigualdades de género y la relación con la tierra constituyen aspectos centrales, si se quiere abordar el problema con seriedad.

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## Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding: ethnographies with ‘uncomfortable otherness’

# 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 identity 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; Pasiëka 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 (Luhmann 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.

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Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding:  
ethnographies with ‘uncomfortable otherness’

# The person in contemporary contexts of right-wing populism: An uncomfortable study

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## **Abstract**

This article arises from the authors’ common concerns for the intense dissemination of versions of right-wing populism in Brazil over the preceding decade. The challenge of contemporary anthropology in relation to ‘uncomfortable’ phenomena, such as right-wing populism and the construction of the person involved in it, was the methodological and ethical focus adopted for this work. To achieve this, the historical antecedents of the phenomenon are revisited, and an overview of classical and contemporary theories and hypotheses are discussed—which enables us to recognise a structured pattern of affects, values, representations and practices that are reactive to enlightened Western modernity. As part of the epistemological and ethical responsibility of anthropological research, this framework offers elements of understanding of the processes through which people are constructed with worldviews that differ from the ideal-typical modern model, centred on the notion of the individual and the universal values involved in the recognition and promotion of human rights.

**Keywords:** Populism; Person; Right-wing; Individualism; Conservatism; Otherness.

# A pessoa em contextos contemporâneos de populismo de direita: Uma pesquisa incômoda

## Resumo

Este artigo decorre das preocupações comuns dos autores com a intensa disseminação de versões de populismo de direita no Brasil ao longo dos dez anos anteriores. O desafio da antropologia contemporânea em relação aos fenômenos “incômodos”, como o populismo de direita e a construção da pessoa nele envolvida, foi o foco metodológico e ético escolhido para o trabalho. Para isso, revisita-se os antecedentes históricos do fenômeno, e se oferece um panorama das teorias e hipóteses clássicas e contemporâneas a respeito – o que permite reconhecer aí um padrão estruturado de valores, representações, afetos e práticas, reativo à modernidade ocidental ilustrada. Como parte da responsabilidade epistemológica e ética da pesquisa antropológica, esse quadro oferece elementos de compreensão dos processos pelos quais se constroem pessoas com visões de mundo que discrepam do modelo moderno ideal-típico, centrado na noção de indivíduo e nos valores universalistas envolvidos no reconhecimento e promoção dos direitos humanos.

**Palavras chave:** Populismo; Pessoa; Direita; Individualismo; Conservadorismo; Alteridade.

# La persona en contextos contemporáneos de populismo de derecha: Un estudio incómodo

## Resumen

Este artículo surge de las preocupaciones comunes de los autores con la intensa difusión de versiones del populismo de derecha en Brasil durante los últimos diez años. El desafío de la antropología contemporánea en relación con fenómenos «incómodos», como el populismo de derecha y la construcción de la persona allí presente, fue el enfoque metodológico y ético elegido para el trabajo. Para ello, se revisan los antecedentes históricos del fenómeno y se ofrece una visión general de las teorías e hipótesis clásicas y contemporáneas al respecto, lo que permite reconocer un patrón estructurado de valores, representaciones, afectos y prácticas, reactivo a la modernidad occidental ilustrada. Como parte de la responsabilidad epistemológica y ética de la investigación antropológica, este marco ofrece elementos de comprensión de los procesos mediante los cuales se construyen personas con visiones del mundo que difieren del modelo ideal-típico moderno, centrado en la noción de individuo y los valores universalistas involucrados en el reconocimiento y promoción de los derechos humanos.

**Palabras clave:** Populismo; Persona; Derecha; Individualismo; Conservadurismo; Alteridad.

# The person in contemporary contexts of right-wing populism: an uncomfortable study<sup>1</sup>

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—Socrates: Therefore it is clear that those who do not recognize bad things as bad do not desire bad things, but they desire those things which they were supposing to be good, the very things which are, in fact, bad; so that not recognizing bad things to be bad and supposing them to be good, it is clear that they desire good things. Is it not so?

—Meno: These, at any rate, probably do.

Plato (2004), *Meno*, 77

## Introduction

As one more front of the constant, delicate advancement of Western anthropological knowledge, here we present those phenomena from the very societies of origin of its practitioners that in some manner are configured as uncomfortable, embarrassing, painful, repugnant, detestable or abject in the light of enlightened, progressive consciousness, almost unanimously characteristic of contemporary humanities.

Many of these phenomena, both public and private, provided the very foundations of modern social thought, from the misery of the proletariat—explained by Karl Marx—to suicide—analysed by Émile Durkheim. Ethnology arose from the challenges of understanding the cultural difference radically represented by small-scale societies (involving ‘uncomfortable’ themes, including trance, sorcery, immolation, fetishism, headhunting, cannibalism), while psychoanalysis was originally forged to determine this other radical difference that is the unconscious (dealing with the equally uncomfortable madness, nightmare, hysteria, delirium, perversion).

The challenge of contemporary anthropology in relation to uncomfortable phenomena is distanced from sociological thought and continues the ethnological and psychoanalytic adventures, since it is tasked with understanding them from within—and not merely as supposedly objective external data. There has been a great deal of reflection on what this ‘inside’ knowledge might mean and how it might work, giving rise to several valuable interpretative lines. Without going into details, it is sufficient here to highlight the interest and need to extend this disposition—*sine ira et studio*—to the study of the phenomena that concern us here: right-wing populism and the construction of the person involved in it.

The central axis of modern Western cosmology is the rationalist heritage of the Enlightenment, with its complex political-ideological apparatus (liberalism, individualism, egalitarianism, citizenship, democracy) and its techno-scientific instruments. It is based on doubt (Descartes) and uneasiness (Locke), and operates within the framework of an open temporality, always ready for transformation and improvement (Rousseau)

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<sup>1</sup> This text arises from work conducted for a subject within the Post-graduate Programme in Social Anthropology at the National Museum/Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, entitled ‘*Configurações da pessoa em contextos contemporâneos de populismo de direita (com vistas ao caso brasileiro)*’ [Configurations of the person in contemporary contexts of right-wing populism (regarding the Brazilian case)], and taught jointly by the authors in the first half of 2023, due to common concerns with the intense dissemination of versions of right-wing populism in Brazil over the previous decade. The authors are grateful to the students for their contributions to the debate and to Wagner Alves da Silva for the stimulus represented by his dense ethnographic thesis in this regard (2023).

– the sting of the ideas of progress and avant-garde. Since the eighteenth century, the historical experience of Western culture is the result of this disposition; however, always in an approximate form, never completed, and rather permanently contradicted by real circumstances.

The human sciences, established from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, inherited the impulse of general Enlightenment action, but were committed precisely to the challenge of understanding the ‘residues’ of the great project, its external and internal borders and fringes. Therefore, they are essentially sciences of the negative, the opposite of hegemonic or official self-consciousness—a constant, delicate project, as we have said. Constant, because not only does social life move without ceasing, but both life and understanding are driven by the peculiar dynamism of modern Western culture. Delicate, since inverted attention always requires ample vigilance regarding the resilience of the weave of this rare double-sided fabric.

As a counterpoint to the later defence of axiological neutrality, *Wertfreiheit*, formulated by Max Weber (1949 [1904], 2004 [1919]), we find in a text by Émile Durkheim (apud Lukes 1969 [1898]) what could be considered the first clear demonstration of the double-sided thinking: the scientist has to analyse the values at play in the phenomena they focus on, even those closest to them, observing them as strange, while understanding that they carry their own values—and that these cannot be discarded, but rather respected in a challenging, ambivalent game. Durkheim did so precisely in relation to ‘individualism’, both an object of analysis and a foundation for the action of modern intellectuals—including the author himself.

It can be reasoned that a certain symmetry retains that ‘valuable’ object with the ‘uncomfortable’ object, since they are both challenging—which reveals that the discomfort is not intrinsic to the object, but arises from the attitude with which it is observed. In the case of ‘individualism’, it consists of focusing on what is valuable as ordinary; while in the case of the ‘misery of the proletariat’ (Marx 2009 [1852]), for example, it consists of focusing on the ordinary as valuable. The uncomfortable objects that are faced here are rather similar to Durkheim’s attitude, since we seek an ‘emic’ rather than ‘etic’ approach (Hahn *et al.* 2011), which seeks to understand the motives of its agents.

At the time Durkheim analysed it, individualism was a negative trait, synonymous with ‘egoism’. Despite this, the analytical attitude observed it not merely as negativity, but as a structuring value of meaning and action in the world. Similarly, in our time, the category ‘populism’ is negative; however, the analytical attitude that we favour seeks to recognise it as a structured core of values, which cannot be reduced to folly or hallucination. The difference is that Durkheim rightly perceived that his attitude was inseparable from a positive dimension of individualism itself; which is not reproduced in our case—because of how significantly distant we feel in relation to populism (particularly in the case of right-wing populism).

Thus, it is important to begin to discern how this challenging phenomenon can be recognised, which includes the issue of distinctions between ‘right-wing’ and ‘left-wing’ populisms—canonical in the contemporary imagination and pre-eminent in our analytical option.

In their now highly respected work on the risk of death of democracies, Steve Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt provide the following definition: ‘Populists are anti-establishment politicians—figures who, claiming to represent the ‘voice of the people,’ go to war against what they describe as a corrupt and conspiratorial elite’ (2018: 22). Furthermore, they define certain signs of populist risk to democracy:

We should worry when a politician 1) rejects, in words or action, the democratic rules of the game, 2) denies the legitimacy of opponents, 3) tolerates or encourages violence, or 4) indicates a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media. (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018: 22)

Some of the essential features are outlined: a fundamentally ‘political’ configuration that involves authoritarianism, as opposed to democracy; arbitrariness, to the detriment of the due course of current law; violence, outside the state apparatus, or even occasionally and illegitimately within it. What completes the

characterisation, however, is the justification in the name of the ‘people’—as opposed to the ‘elites’ or the ‘system/establishment’. If all this is then combined with the delegitimisation and systematic persecution of opponents, ideologically defended and justified in a fight against democracy—fascism is already being formed.

These characteristics are common to populist movements that conform to the right and left of the political spectrum. The difference is found in the way in which the justifying rhetoric (and the resulting policies) are constituted, sometimes indicating the conservation or restoration of historically situated differentiating hierarchical values, and the promotion of freedom in relation to the state and the market; sometimes indicating the renewal or replacement of the current socio-political system, with a view to a universally progressive horizon of freedom, equality and autonomy.

In this paper we deal almost exclusively with right-wing populism, since not only is it that which has been most widespread (as a reality or as a programme) in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is also that which most unanimously troubles our enlightened, progressively inclined conscience. Despite this, some of our literate references treat these alternatives as variants of the same phenomenon; just as much of that presented here as characteristics and interpretations is also applicable to left-wing populist regimes and programmes<sup>2</sup>.

By highlighting the fact that right-wing populism proposals are currently becoming widespread, through our choice, we explicitly take into account the impact of Brazil’s specific historical experience between 2019 and 2022, in which a federal government elected at the end of 2018 inspired and sought to put the model in question into practice.

The theme of populism, although paradigmatically political, is also inevitably cultural, in the broadest sense of the theme; it involves values, affects, representations and practices. Like every ideological system, it permeates the very constitution and agency of the subjects of the public arena, legally recognised persons.

The debate regarding the configuration of the person constitutes a classic thread of anthropological investigation, either explicitly or as an underlying dimension of practically all themes and analytical investments. There is no socio-cultural experience without its agent supports, whether we call them individuals, persons, subjects, selves or actors. Briefly, it is worth clarifying that the convention used here when navigating a multivocal and controversial nomenclature is one proposed by Louis Dumont in his theory of hierarchy and his analysis of the ideology of individualism (Dumont 1986a; Duarte 2012): ‘person’ is the designation of each and every entity that has the capacity for agency, both those that Dumont calls ‘biopsychological’ and all those that each culture considers similar, equivalent or substitutes. ‘Individual’ is the designation of an ideal model of person characteristic of modern Western culture, composed of the complex (and not always synchronous and univocal) bundle of values of freedom, equality, autonomy, and uniqueness.

On an ethnographic level, what most encouraged us to author this text was precisely the understanding of the processes through which people are constructed with worldviews that differ from the ideal-typical model of enlightened Western modernity, characteristically centred on the notion of the individual. This discrepancy has regularly resulted in the disqualification of those who express it, as an expression of savagery, ignorance and backwardness, imposing serious discomfort on those who endeavour to understand it and not just belittle or denounce it.

Both of us have already dedicated ourselves to the subject of the person in previous works, whether in relation to models of physical-moral suffering, relationships between family and religion, or internalisation mechanisms – in the case of Luiz F. D. Duarte (2009; Duarte & Menezes 2017; and others)—or in relation to intra-domestic violence and the work of inculcating modern values in men who abuse women—in the case of Marco J. Martínez-Moreno (2024; 2022a & 2022b).

<sup>2</sup> The dichotomy between left and right, on a political and ideological level, is a matter of constant discussion and controversy. In a canonical work, Norberto Bobbio (1997) seeks to de-reify these terms, drawing attention to the relational and situational character of the classification. See also Chantal Mouffe (2002), *inter alia*, on ‘right-wing populism’.

## The challenge of anthropological research on right-wing populism

Since the 1980s, anthropology has focused its attention on the vulnerable, subaltern and, fundamentally, suffering subject. This is a shift resulting from decolonisation movements and criticisms of ethnographic authority that possess an implicit sense of justice, inspiring critical anthropological work conducive to the transformation of the social, economic and political conditions that reproduce colonialism. Joel Robbins (2013) relates this shift to anthropologists' interest in documenting the 'subjectivity' of their now research interlocutors—leaving behind reflections on the 'culture' of natives located in the antipodes. This is a transformation in the politics of knowledge production that, moreover, transferred the geographical imagination concerning the good and bad savage to the ethnographer's own society (Trouillot 2003).

This change made it easier to conduct ethnography at home and assign relevance to reflections on the forms that relations of power and domination acquire in the anthropological agenda (Ortner 2016). Thus, researchers began to participate in a public anthropology agenda that sought to understand processes of victimisation, participate in the resolution of 'social problems', and contribute to the consolidation of identity politics.

Within the economy of knowledge production in social sciences, this framing relinquished the oppressor or perpetrator of violence, with whom the anthropologist was unable or unwilling to establish the much-appreciated bond of 'empathy' during fieldwork (Shoshan 2016, 2024—in this issue; Martínez-Moreno 2022a). This had methodological consequences in the description and analysis of the contexts studied: that of not contemplating the meaning of the practices of the agent who exercises power, whose position is unacceptable for the ethnographers, given their political and affective commitments to their interlocutors. On the other hand, its visibility in anthropological works is subject to 'orientalising' (Harding 1991) descriptions – which reproduce the imaginary on the bad savage, those who do not recognise the true causes that animate the world, whose practices eventually reveal irrationality when confronted with the objectivity of scientific knowledge (Winch 1964).

Saba Mahmood (2001) draws attention to the fact that the secular-liberal 'architecture of the self', implicit in the conceptualisation of the human person in modern law (Mahmood 2009; Dullo 2019) and the anthropological agenda described above, reveals methodological problems in the description and analysis of the agency of subjects who offer no signs of resistance to domination. The approach to right-wing populisms, then, faces the challenge of understanding forms of person that do not correspond to the discrete unity privileged by science and modern law (Duarte & Menezes 2017). This is not a moral relativism nor a nihilism, which refuses to criticise the inequalities prevailing in the world. It is an exercise in analysing and understanding ideologies and practices that seek to preserve old values and institutional arrangements as a 'reaction' to political, economic and social interventions focused on consolidating the paradigm of liberal, 'modernising' citizenship.

It seems to us that this is a question of method that seeks to elucidate what Thomas Cortado (2023) calls 'progressive prejudice'—also a subject of reflection by Eduardo Dullo (2015), under other categories—and take the political discourses of the 'conservative Other' seriously, much like anthropology deals with themes like the place of animals and humans in the cosmos. This disposition includes the way in which this Other may or may not appropriate progressive notions and values, such as equality and democracy. Faced with this challenge of understanding, Tim Ingold's proposal for anthropology as 'philosophy with the people in' is shown to be relevant, in that it asks us 'to share in their presence, to learn from their experiments in living, and to bring this experience to bear on our own imaginings of what human life could be like, its future conditions and possibilities' (Ingold 2018: 9).

Agreeing with the need expressed by authors who have recently taken on the challenge of 'understanding' an emic point of view of the conservative Other, which makes us uncomfortable, forms part of the ethical responsibility of anthropology to present the profile and nuances of these actors, though without idealising them (Harding 1991; Shoshan 2014, 2016, 2021, 2024; Pasieka 2017; Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco 2021; Coelho 2023; Martínez-Moreno 2024).

The panorama presented here seeks not only to understand the form of the person within the configurations of right-wing populism, but to provide elements of academic and political judgment of expressions of agency that cannot be understood without reference to their progressive or liberal counterpart. As Jimeno (2018) previously expressed in relation to the practice of anthropologists in Latin America, research involving the conservative Other, which makes us uncomfortable, expresses a tension between the theoretical orientations of our discipline and the practical engagements that make authors citizen-researchers.

The methodological and ethical dilemma thus defined is expressed in this same text: the authors felt constantly challenged to create a more emic perception of the right-wing activist, knowing themselves incapable of transcending their antipodal position to this configuration at every stage. This is an insurmountable condition – and its effects form part of this analytical contribution.

## Historical summary

The political phenomena examined here are characteristically ‘modern’, that is, they arise from the ‘great transformation’ (Polanyi 2001) that characterised social relations in the Western world from the eighteenth century onwards, involving the Industrial Revolution, the Scientific Revolution, the predominance of a (liberal) mercantile economy, the constitution of a ‘public sphere’ relatively independent of the state, the growing prestige of a democratic political order (based on representation), and—although in a sphere only apparently diverse—a deepened feeling of personal uniqueness and the need for its autonomous cultivation (including both rationality and sensitivity).

The capitalist mode of production, which became largely hegemonic, imposed a radical modification of relations between classes, with the expropriation and pauperisation of the popular classes, the expansion of the middle classes, and the enrichment of the elites. It was also a time of a planetary consolidation of the colonial enterprise, involving the stabilisation of shared world markets along the Euro-American axis.

Large cities, swollen by expulsion from the fields, began to contain growing contingents of proletarians and sub-proletarians, available for a new type of political action, of which the preliminary popular movements of the Glorious Revolution and, later, those of the French Revolution were early manifestations. Urban mob uprisings became continually possible in the new social ecology.

Located among these masses and the economic and political elites, the middle classes grew in number, quality and influence, associated with the spread of literacy and high culture. They functioned as a fundamental piece in the new public order, since they included liberal professionals, technical specialists and ‘intellectuals’, who, for the most part, controlled the notable expansion of education, collective communication resources<sup>3</sup>, and the artistic production, which was increasingly organised and prestigious.

Political life had been profoundly challenged by new conceptions of ‘representation’, characteristic of the democratic and ‘republican’ order. The contractualist theories of the modern state postulated the participation of each citizen in the management of the common thing, although in highly varied and inevitably conflicting ways.

The parliamentary form, particularly that elaborated in British history, would regularly impose itself based on individual voting, though this was still census-based and androcentric. The subject of political representation was an ‘individual’ endowed with the ideal properties of freedom and equality, which would guarantee them the necessary discernment to participate in the collective order. The liberal political model tended to follow liberal economic theory, favouring the expansion of capitalism, while sharing with it the most varied historical vicissitudes.

It was in this context that the first manifestations emerged of what would eventually be recognised as ‘populism’ and ‘right-wing’. The phenomena that came to be described by the first category were those in

<sup>3</sup> On the emergence and influence of theatre, cafes and newspapers in the new configuration of the public sphere and the modern moral subject, see the classic *La Souffrance à Distance* by Luc Boltanski (1993) [Distant suffering: morality, media, and politics].

which political men made use of the new means of communication and the high concentration of urban masses to publicise their programmes, invoking the pre-eminence of the actor ‘the people’ in dissensions and contentions regarding public governance. In the French Revolution, some politicians, such as the Count of Mirabeau, Maximilien Robespierre and Georges Danton, specifically expressed this praise of the people against the unworthiness of the elites (Dudley 2016). This concerns ‘left-wing’ populism, if we adopt its general contemporary meaning, since it abhorred the past and aimed to build a universal future.

As is well known, it was in this very context that the opposition between a ‘left’ and a ‘right’ was formalised, depending on the position taken by the parties in relation to the presiding board of the *États Généraux*—which later became the *Assemblée nationale*—in which the revolution took place. Formalisation regarding the constitutional powers attributable to the king occurred on August 28, 1789: on the right were those who defended their preservation; on the left, those who stood against these powers. Right then, the opposition between ‘conservation’ and ‘renewal’ was already emerging, in a configuration that would prove to be lasting.

A genealogy of the general possibilities of modern politics, and within it, of the manifestations of the ‘right’ in the contemporary world, thus crystallized. The most general trait is that of the ‘reaction’ to signs of the dissemination of the modern, revolutionary, progressive or liberal worldview—leading to the stabilisation of accusatory categories: ‘conservatism’, ‘reactionism’, and ‘authoritarianism’.

Still in the nineteenth century, two other model manifestations of populism emerged: Russian and American. The first, which emerged in the middle of the century, praised the Russian people, against the cosmopolitan westernisation of the elites and in favour of a type of agrarian socialism—respectful of peasant forms of production. It obeyed a general romantic influence and, particularly in its initial phase, was carried by intellectuals and artists (*narodnichestvo* movement). Its influence only ended with the victory of the Russian Revolution and its ‘modernising’, collectivist policy for the countryside.

The second emerged towards the end of the century—although President Andrew Jackson can be considered an emphatic precursor, in the 1830s—based on a revival of the tradition of local American ‘communities’, with a strong emphasis on small property and opposition to state and large economic corporations. The political party that represented the movement at the end of the century (the People’s Party) quickly ceased to exist—and the most recent manifestations of populism in the US political scene are of a very different order.

In both cases, there are characteristics of general (including political) praise for ‘the people’ and a conservative disposition in relation to pre-modern conditions of property and work. Rural life plays a fundamental role in this, with everything leading to the characterisation of a ‘right-wing’ movement. This type of populism has since appeared in other forms and local contexts, without the same political importance, until the emergence of Latin American variants and major right-wing political movements, both occurring between the world wars.

The ideology of the right was expressed in several other ways until World War I: racism, conservatism, reactionism, authoritarianism, ultramontanism, and degenerationism are several of the descriptive categories. All were eventually associated with populist perspectives, whenever they inspired effective political programmes. After the war, Italian Fascism and German Nazism came to be established and implemented, along with numerous additional movements of very similar political content in other countries. All contained a populist dimension (*völkisch* in Germanic thought; from *Volk*, meaning people), including the dictatorial regimes implemented in Latin America during this period, such as those of Juan Domingo Perón, in Argentina, Getúlio Vargas, in Brazil, and Lázaro Cárdenas, in Mexico.

The main ideological emphasis of populism consists of advocating the virtues of ‘the people’, as a repository of traditional wisdom, more or less linked to a heritage of blood, territory and customs (including religious practices). This creates an opposition to the elites, who are considered cosmopolitan—not rooted; degenerate—not authentic; pretentious—not spontaneous; artificial—not ‘natural’. Opposition can affect the political classes



as a whole (the political ‘system’), intellectuals (artists, journalists, scientists, teachers) or large institutional forms (the state, the press, the banks, large industry, religious institutions, the justice system).

Before moving on to our examination of classical theories on populism, it is worth presenting an anthropological hypothesis consistent with the historical circumstances that we have briefly reviewed. The coincidence between the advancement of egalitarian and liberalising dispositions characteristic of ‘modernity’ (like those of contractualist theories and the French Revolution) with the emergence and proliferation of conservative movements, such as right-wing populism, suggests the convenience of evoking the hypothesis of anthropologist Louis Dumont on the resistance of the ‘hierarchical principle’ in the implementation of social forms inspired by the ‘ideology of individualism’. According to the author, hierarchy, as a cosmological principle and social system based on the ‘difference’ between the terms of any relationship, consists of a universal property of the human condition. In some rare sociocultural formations, ideal models of ‘equality’ between the terms have emerged, with maximum expression in the ‘ideology of individualism’, another name for the configuration that we evoked just now under the species of values of equality, freedom and autonomy of social subjects and the segmentation of the domains of knowledge and practice. In his 1983 article on racism and individualism in Adolf Hitler, Dumont (1986b) applied this analytical scheme to understand one of the most radical and devastating manifestations of populist reactionism, demonstrating how the conservative position is fundamentally a reactive manifestation of the hierarchical principle grappling with its individualist antagonist—but within a socio-historical context already marked by the hegemony of the ‘individualist’ order. Reaction and resistance are clear notes of this social form.

Ernesto Laclau (2005), in his canonical work on populism, found a similar analytical disposition in the work of Hippolyte Taine (1875), although merely descriptive:

for Taine, society can only open the doors to homogenising forces at the expense of its internal cohesion. The equalisation of conditions can only mean the breakdown of all hierarchy and differentiation, that is, the collapse of the social order (Laclau 2005: 85).

For an author who is himself conservative, the result of the dissemination of individualism could only redound to the ‘anarchy’ that he perceived at home in republican France. This diagnosis was frequently repeated in the justification for implementing right-wing regimes, attributing the expectation of order to a mandate of the people.

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A section—like this one—dedicated to the ‘historical’ contextualisation of uncomfortable phenomena is relatively sheltered from the effects of such a condition. The distance in time and ethics interposed between the facts evoked, their coeval and contemporary interpretations, produces an effect of cushioning the bad feeling. In truth, the greatest risk are anachronistic assessments, motivated by hostile feelings arising from current coexistence with continued variations of the phenomena studied.

### **‘Classical’ theories**

There is a set of analyses of right-wing populism to which the quality of ‘classical’ can be attributed, since these have propagated for a long time in erudite circles, enjoy widespread respect, and mark many of the interpretative possibilities still ongoing today. We refer, exemplarily, to the century-old ambit that extends from Karl Marx [1852] to Hannah Arendt (1973 [1951]) and Theodor Adorno (1950), passing through Gustave Le Bon (1895), Sigmund Freud (1949 [1921]) and Max Weber (1978 [1922])—and among which we shall highlight the main analytical clues.

Despite the great difference in their analytical matrix and the historical materials they wrote about, both Marx and Weber discern a specific societal location for the bearers of right-wing ideology. Marx describes what he calls *lumpen* groups (in principle, but not only, the *lumpenproletariat*) with considerable precision; while Weber points to 'subordinate groups' in modern societies.

Among Marx's works, the one that best addresses the immediate political practice of his time is *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (2009 [1852]). It is an analysis of the construction of the coup through which Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew transformed himself from president to emperor of France, in 1851; emulating the analogous act of his ancestor on the fateful date of the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire. Driven by the populism of L. Napoleon, the *lumpenproletariat*, the 'scum' of social life, appears as an indispensable actor in the events, whose importance was then seen to have increased due to the systematic policy of the atomisation of society, undertaken through the systematic voiding of political representation by class.

In several texts, Weber dealt with personal feelings that tended to respond to conservative demands in the context of religious life, the main axis of his mature analyses. He was probably the first to highlight the psychosocial condition of 'resentment'—associated with the life of a pariah people—as a driving force behind that reactionary moral configuration. He emphasised the 'moralism' that tends to characterise the configuration, together with a strong desire for 'revenge' against those allegedly responsible for their disadvantage. He stressed the importance of anti-rationalist resistance from subordinate groups, arising from the way modern intellectualism despises and represses magical beliefs. He also evoked the 'need for just compensation (...) involving reward for one's own good deeds and punishment for the unrighteousness of others' (Weber 1978: 492).

Another fundamental theme of classical analyses of populism is that of 'suggestion' or 'influence'. Its most notable systematiser was Gustave Le Bon, who published his *Psychologie des Foules*<sup>4</sup> in 1895. As mentioned, the emergence of the urban masses as an important social phenomenon was still recent and raised widespread questions and concerns, in the frequent category of 'crowd' (Le Bon's *foule*). In *Psychologie des Foules*, Le Bon analytically systematised an abundant literature on the emergence of the phenomenon of 'masses' in Europe, from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. The author describes the mechanisms of influence, suggestion and leadership involved, highlighting the unconscious and intellectually impoverished nature of the crowd's behaviours—full of illusion, exaggeration, affective mobilisation, conservatism and intolerance. However, he sought to understand and not merely judge the phenomenon—a fact that has made him rightly renowned to this day.

As part of his research in psychopathology, Sigmund Freud described a complex psychic apparatus in the states of crowds, with correlated characteristics of inner dynamics, seeking to articulate the social and individual dimensions of the phenomenon, as suggested by the two-part name of his main work on the subject, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1949 [1921]). He made extensive use of Le Bon's indications, returning to themes on the prevalence of feeling over reason and the loss of cognitive and moral discernment. His analysis focused on childhood processes of 'identification' and 'object cathexis', leading to eventual collective 'idealizations' in adulthood, such as identification with a leader. The two main processes are those of 'identification of the ego with an object and the replacement of the ego ideal by an object'<sup>5</sup>.

Hannah Arendt dissected the phenomenon we discuss here in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973 [1951]), from different angles and with great analytical acuity, relying on the abundant material (and personal experience) of Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism. She returned to Marx's characterisation of the 'rabble' to distinguish it from the 'mass', describing the latter's characteristics of fanaticism and 'stubbornness of conviction' as those

4 The book was quickly translated into English as *The Crowd: A study of the popular mind* (1896).

5 The themes on the crowd—and the influence that animates it—intensely permeated the literature of nascent social psychology, from Hippolyte Taine and Gabriel Tarde, on the more sociological side, to Jean-Martin Charcot, Hippolyte Bernheim and William McDougall, on the psychiatric and psychological side—cf. Laclau 2005: 49-56.

who ‘can be reached by neither experience nor argument’, detailing the effects of the ‘breakdown of the class system’ (to the detriment of the ‘masses’) and the consequent ruin of the party system, exploring the effects of the atomisation and individualisation of mass elements and, finally, describing the temporary alliance between the elites and the rabble as part of a movement of those outside of history that legitimise populist regimes—among many other topics of permanent relevance.

Theodor Adorno revisited the theme of ‘ignorance’ and ‘confusion’ prevailing among those who cultivate an ‘anti-intellectualism’—‘the stubborn refusal intellectually to penetrate reality’—in his classic book *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), based on extensive and multifaceted research conducted in the United States. He explored the childish nature of the ‘anguish’ that prevails therein, which simultaneously leads to a comforting stereotype and a feeling of ‘magical omnipotence’. He discusses several of the morphological traits that we examine later (particularly that of the atomisation of social subjects due to the rupture of traditional relationality) and elaborated complex psychosocial interpretations of behaviour that he calls ‘pseudo-conservative’, associated with fascism—as an extreme political form of reactionism.

As far as we can ascertain, Georg Simmel did not directly study the phenomenon of the crowd (and its possible political corollaries), but he clarified what he called the ‘soul life’ of city dwellers in so many ways that much can be learned of his analyses, particularly in *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* (1903) [*The metropolis and the life of spirit* (apud Boy 2020)]. The point that seems most pertinent to us is his analysis of the contrast between the ‘intellectualist’ character of life in the metropolis and the ‘sentimental’ character of the spirit and relationships in small towns. When reading it, you can project an analogy between the inhabitant of the small town he had in mind, in Germany, and those on the outskirts of large cities (like Herbert Gans’ ‘urban villagers’), where masses of ‘sentimental’ and ‘anti-intellectualist’ people in the works of previous authors were already growing.

This review of the main relevant classical theories ends with a work of fiction by Jean-Paul Sartre, which we consider exemplary in its embodied dissection of the psychosocial evolution of a subject who embraces fascism in a context that immediately precedes World War II: the novel *La naissance d’un chef* (Sartre 1981 [1939]), published in the *Le Mur* collection. Sartre demonstrates a process of increasing psychological ‘inauthenticity’, inseparable from various family and socioeconomic characteristics, which leads the subject to join youth groups animated by the reactionary messages of the time, ready to join any mass populist call. The theme of inauthenticity is inseparable from the way in which Sartre more abstractly developed that of ‘bad faith’, especially in *L’Être et le Néant* (Sartre 2000 [1943]). These themes of ‘inauthenticity’ and ‘bad faith’ vividly pertain to the consistently evoked ‘resentment’.

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A relative shelter from the ‘discomfort’ of themes like fascism, populism, and reactionism can also be encountered in this century of critical analysis of modernity and anti-modernity, as we perceived with respect to the historical review: even though there is no temporal distance between the event and the interpreter, a powerful ethical and cognitive alibi prevails. It is thus necessary to describe and analyse the events that are considered dangerous in such a way that any personal feelings and sensations contribute to and do not hinder their exposure. It is true that the conditions of analysis of Marx, Weber, Simmel and Le Bon, on the one hand, and of Freud, Arendt, Adorno and Sartre, on the other, are very different. The latter group had to deal directly with Nazi fascism, the most radical and virulent version of right-wing populism, feeling its effects in the flesh—so to speak. This is how the first symptoms of the malaise of self-experimentation appear with regard to the resentful ‘discomfort’ with the phenomena analysed and with the very act of focusing on them – which Sartre developed more explicitly. As Marx said in *Das Kapital*, albeit in relation to other dimensions of the social world, ‘*de te fabula narratur*’.

## Contemporary descriptions and interpretations

Contemporary descriptions and interpretations of phenomena linked to right-wing populism are abundant, drawn from a broad literature, from which we now highlight the main clues organised in recurring themes.

It is important to clarify that in this analysis—following a trend in the literature reviewed—we essentially focus not on the social segments from which the great ideological configurations of ‘reactionism’ originally emerge (in principle, the intellectual fractions of conservative socioeconomic elites), but rather on the ‘popular’ segments, which adopt and re-elaborate them creatively and situationally.

The first theme is the very general characteristic of phenomena of a global nature, organised in a multiplex or multi-scalar approach, taking advantage of the recent, intense and widespread reorganisation of the media through the virtual world. This does not imply homogeneity; on the contrary, this multiplex or multi-scalar character points precisely to the intense flexibility (and eventual fragmentation and encystation) of this global current.

The second theme is the sociogenetic hypotheses for understanding the phenomenon. Classical analyses had already prompted them, beginning with Marx and Weber, highlighting the dynamics between social classes throughout the modernisation processes. Now, explanatory characteristics have reinforced or added to these, including radical changes in the labour market in late capitalism (outsourcing, atomisation, precariousness, depersonalisation, commodification), the experience of precarious life on the outskirts of large cities (stigma, misery, violence, lack of life perspectives), and exposure to situations of rupture in relationality and social expectations (unlike mere lack, this concerns the feeling of frustration regarding possibilities that seemed to be emerging). This topic also includes the observation that the growing integration of peripheral populations into the capitalist order is not accompanied by access to fuller citizenship—quite the opposite (Gracino *et al.* 2021).

The feelings of injustice, frustration and humiliation felt by certain social groups tend to provoke an emphasis on radical antagonism and the search for the destruction of others, through attitudes of verbal aggressiveness and physical violence towards groups seen as favoured (Castro Rocha 2021). Scapegoats can be sought (Cesarino 2022), feeding a ‘rhetoric of hate’ (Castro Rocha 2021), with the consequent suppression of the basic political antagonism necessary for modern public order (Mouffe 2002).

In the case of Brazil, over the last decade, the experience of antagonism between groups or classes involves the emerging resentment against the egalitarian policy of supporting the emergences of minorities and defending ‘human rights’: the poor, women, LGBTQIA+, Black people, Indigenous people, peripheral populations, foreigners, and so forth. Gracino *et al.* see in this a constant ‘criticism of inclusion discourses and policies, aimed at minorities (symbolic, economic and demographic)’ (2021: 549)<sup>6</sup>.

The third theme is that of contrastive reaction, mentioned in the Introduction. In effect, the constitution, diffusion and complexification of the phenomenon is characterised by a term-by-term opposition to the structuring values of the liberal, individualistic worldview, which is considered the very core of modernity. There is a more objectivist dimension, which is opposed to socioeconomic characteristics like ‘globalisation’ or ‘transnationalism’ (sometimes involved in values like ‘nationalism’ or ‘xenophobia’); and a more subjectivist dimension, which opposes systematic resistance to the liberalisation of customs, with the denunciation of the moral individualisation implied by the ideal model of modernity—the equality of women, the right to divorce, contraception and abortion, the autonomy of sexual experiences and gender identities, and so forth. The tightening of restrictive moral codes is often associated with the experience of conservative religious ideologies—one of the spearheads of ‘reaction’ since the nineteenth century—which constantly tension the boundary between the public sphere and a certain private dimension.

<sup>6</sup> It would be interesting to examine this psychosocial process in light of George Foster’s (1965) analysis of the mechanism he called ‘the image of limited good’. It was the prevailing conception in a rural community in Central America that any economic improvement in the condition of any of its members necessarily implied harm to the remainder.

There are two bifurcations within this third theme that deserve special attention. The first is the extent of the reaction to any egalitarian policy of inclusion of minority (or subaltern) populations and to ‘human rights’ in general. Resistance here is fuelled by feelings of ‘limited good’ and ‘injustice’ on the part of those who are not ‘benefited’, associated with the theme of ‘frustration’.

The second bifurcation is one that verifies how the reaction tends to manifest itself in the form of ‘antagonism’, marked by virulence and high aggression, using what has been called ‘rhetoric of hate’, in the pursuit of the ‘elimination of the other’, through the institution of ‘scapegoats’. Some analyses highlight the climate of ‘paranoia’ that permeates these movements, due to the strong component of ‘fear’ and ‘insecurity’ detectable under the threats and insults (Alves da Silva 2023; Dunker & Kupermann 2023).

The fourth theme is the reaction against the power or hegemony of erudite, academic, scientific, and university knowledge. The mode of relating to the world characteristic of the literate layers of Western societies—with their blasé or highbrow attitude towards moral values—is pejoratively felt as an arrogant ‘intellectualism’ (Feltran 2020). This is yet another manifestation that can be attributed to ‘resentment’.

According to Weber, a corollary of this theme is how this device of ‘disenchantment’ with thinking elites implies defensive conservative attitudes on the part of those who yearn for a palpable ‘meaning’ in life. Other authors further reflect on how the difference between the modern conception of ‘representation’ (distanced) and the mode of communication of ‘transport’ (entrenched in the body and lived experience) correspond to two antipodal aspects of the cultural configuration of the modern West (Latour 1990; Ingold 2007; Duarte 2016). Hence, the conservative reaction to ‘intellectualism’ perceived as alienation from lived experience.

A fifth theme, parallel to the fourth, establishes the existence of two conceptions of temporality in confrontation. In counterpoint to the progressive linearity of modern time (Koyré 1957), imbued with the ambition of permanently overcoming the present, resists a closed conception of time that is associable with traditional Christian cosmology. This time is contained within the limits of a pristine genesis, a permanent source of ‘nostalgia’, and of a terminal, redemptive future that is predicted by ‘prophecy’. It is not merely an analogy of traditional Christian times, but an effective contemporary update of this form, cultivated by conservative Christian churches, particularly the Pentecostals, in which prophecy is current and through which the leading role of political entrepreneurs and charismatic leaders articulate local social bases with economic and political powers on broader, globally connected scales. The reaction to progressive time reinforces adherence to ‘nostalgic’ moral guidelines, inseparable from a confidence in the final destiny of ‘good people’<sup>7</sup>.

The sixth section of these considerations is perhaps better thought of as a dimension rather than a theme. It concerns the emotions associated with all these conservative movements and dispositions. References to several of them have appeared here before. Anger, envy, anguish and anxiety should be added to fear and resentment – in an ample articulation resulting from uncertainty, and feelings of injustice, frustration, humiliation and inferiority that affect the social segments most typically conveying the conservative reaction (Mouffe 2002)<sup>8</sup>. The emotion most frequently recognised in the literature in this configuration is that of ‘resentment’, from Weber to the most contemporary (Weber 1978 [1922]; Mouffe 2002; Gracino *et al.* 2021; Castro Rocha 2021; Cesarino 2022; Dunker & Kupermann 2023).

The focus on feelings of anger, envy, injustice, frustration, humiliation and inferiority is repeatedly brought to the fore, with the constant recognition of their serious attribute in the social reproduction of numerous social segments. As mentioned here, however, the intensity of these feelings is not directly proportional to

<sup>7</sup> The theme of temporality is very important, but not univocal. Part of the contemporary revived evangelical worldview endorses progressivism under the figure of ‘prosperity theology’, for example—expression of an intra-worldly pragmatic disposition, of entrepreneurship, which possibly corresponds to the upwardly mobile or upwardly disposed segments of subordinate classes. However, this disposition coexists with a strong moral conservatism, though not necessarily ethical.

<sup>8</sup> Following the typology of public relational orders proposed by L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot (1987), these are feelings characteristic of what they call the *cit  domestique*, as opposed to those of the modern, enlightened *cit  civique*.

the weight of the needs, but rather mediated by the circumstances of expectation involved—which allows us to understand that they also emerge among better established classes. For example, Norbert Elias and John Scotson suggest that:

The higher they rise above the subsistence level, the more does even their income—their economic resources—serve as a means of satisfying human requirements other than that of stilling their most elementary animalic or material needs; the more keenly are groups in that situation liable to feel the social inferiority—the inferiority of power and status from which they suffer. (Elias and Scotson 1994: xxxii)

The focus on feelings of fear, anxiety and anguish, on the other hand, inspires specific psychosocial interpretations of the opposition between conservatism, especially moral conservatism, and progressivism. Christian Dunker and Daniel Kupermann analyse these feelings in the dichotomous key of unrest and appeasement: ‘the greater the anguish experienced by society, the more conservative discourse tends to be appeasing for the individual’; or ‘progressive discourse is less encouraging because it brings to light deep concerns, which add to the dominant anguish’ (2023: 1). These authors consider that many of these manifestations can thus assume a ‘paranoid’ condition.

It is important to recognise that the emotional complex involved in these phenomena also involves feelings that could be considered affirmative or ‘positive’, in the emic sense, since they are felt in this way by the protagonists.

The militaristic ethos, of violent antagonism, repression, the elimination of otherness (Feltran 2020), certainly offers a basis of self-affirmation to those who experience it, however uncomfortable this fact may be for modern, progressive sensibilities. It is, whether we like it or not, ‘empowerment’, a feeling of dominance in the field of political struggle. Indeed, it characterises not only segments of the popular classes, in the strict sense, but the fringes of the most varied social layers that are socialised and organised within the scope of the Brazilian Armed Forces.

This feeling also presents itself as a domain of the informational field. Wagner Alves da Silva’s (2023) digital interlocutors present themselves as ladies with a confident, aggressive knowledge, drawn from right-wing social networks, supported—as they argue—by a disposition of active knowledge, of searching for rational explanations for life’s challenges. They challenge the researcher, seen as an unsuspecting university student, from a position of moral and intellectual superiority. From a scholarly point of view, João Cezar de Castro Rocha (2021: 41-2) calls this attitude ‘erudite idiocy’, the result of an excess of poorly processed information that creates increasingly elaborate conspiracy theories on social media. This renders the digital public space ‘a succession of islands that reject the idea of an archipelago’, a mass with ‘seismic power’ comparable to the urban masses of the beginning of the twentieth century.

The feelings involved in what has been called ‘entrepreneurship’ also form part of this configuration, with a strong basis in the dispositions of intra-worldly affirmation characteristic of much of the evangelical world—however, this will be discussed later, since it involves other structural conditions.

A seventh theme could be the willingness to react to all resentful threats through enlistment in niches of relationality and ‘personalisation’, organised as religious communities, criminal organisations, internet groups, and so forth (Mouffe 2002). The effect of group cohesion thus obtained is highlighted as an important element of the continuity of the reactive attitude, implying the resurgence of the aforementioned ‘antagonism’ in relation to opposing groups or situations.

These relational plots in a state of structural ‘antagonism’ are nourished by affective-cognitive strategies considered characteristic of the conservative reaction: denialism, conspiracism, mental operation through a patchwork of rumours, denunciation of the ‘system’, the repetition of ‘empty signifiers’. The reflexive reaction to ‘intellectualism’ leads to a disposition of ‘erudite idiocy’, seen as immune to doubt and dialogue outside the organised niches.

Elias and Scotson describe this relational effect as:

the degree of group cohesion, the collective identification, the commonality of norms, which are apt to induce the gratifying euphoria that goes with the consciousness of belonging to a group of higher value and with the complementary contempt for other groups. (Elias & Scotson 1994: xviii)

Given due consideration, the intensity of the fraternal bond corresponds to that of the bond between the group itself and its populist leader, following the suggestion that Letícia Cesarino added to Ernesto Laclau's observations on the equivalence between leader and people and on the construction of antagonisms outwards: an 'inverse mimesis' occurs when 'the enemy appears as an inverted mirror of the leader-people identity' (Cesarino 2022: 149).

## Structural hypotheses

We now address what we call 'structural hypotheses', given their greater degree of systematicity in relation to the plethora of signs, symptoms and analytical perceptions that have accumulated in our material.

The first section is that of socio-morphological hypotheses, that is, relating to the location of the conveyors of the conservative reaction in the usual class typologies. As stated, we are concerned here with the 'popular' segments that adopt conservative ideologies and adapt them to their survival devices. There is much insistence in the literature on locating these movements in segments ranging from the 'middle class' in general to the 'proletarian layers' or the 'lumpenproletariat', passing through the 'lower middle classes' or 'petty bourgeoisie' (more refined characterisations exist, such as those of the 'lower upper middle class'—cf. Nunes 2022—or the 'lumpen-bourgeoisie'). These morphological characterisations were examined in Marx and Weber, with great emphasis—and they return repeatedly. There, as here, morphological classifications do not dispense with a dynamic, relational understanding of types, like when Weber discusses the role of the 'threats of proletarianisation'.

A novelty in contemporary analyses is the observation of the importance of provisions that could be described as 'affirmative' in these underprivileged segments. Above all, this concerns the dissemination of the ideology of autonomous work or 'entrepreneurship', in which the personal effort of self-affirmation or social ascension (the strivers in American sociology) justifies a consistent defence of the status quo, resistant to egalitarian interventions by the state or compensation policies. This attitude is correlated with that which motivates most priestly careers in the popular evangelical world (and the preaching of 'prosperity theology') and, for various reasons, cannot be dissociated from the careers of criminal leaders—both in gangs and para-police militias. In all three cases, there is a kind of 'empowerment' or assumption of a 'place of speech' inseparable from the feeling of belonging or communion with an ethos group. The same spirit of aggressiveness and antagonism reigns there, a clear mirroring between the economic struggle and the political struggle<sup>9</sup>.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx (2009) characterises the conservative movements that lead to the authoritarian coup d'état as coming from the 'refuse of bourgeois society' (11), the 'people's unorganic masses' (22), the 'unripe masses' (45), of the 'middle class, that is to say, a Transition Class' (35), of the slum-proletariat (*Lumpenproletariat* in the German original), 'the high as well as the low' (48). This combines the classificatory criteria of disorganisation (including those of immature and transitional character) and marginality<sup>10</sup>.

9 Gabriel Feltran (2020) presents and discusses a highly exemplary Brazilian ethnographic case of what he calls 'entrepreneurial monetarism'.

10 The category of the lumpenproletariat reappears with emphasis in Laclau (2005: 180), but it is encompassed at a more macro level of interpretations of late capitalism and neoliberalism (including entrepreneurship).

The lumpenproletariat is also invoked by Weber (1978), as an alternative to ‘the masses’, ‘petty bourgeoisie and proletarian strata’ or ‘negatively privileged strata’. The dimension of ‘instability’ appears there, but the main criterion is the involvement in all cases of ‘a reaction against the development of modern rationalism’ (471)<sup>11</sup>.

The second section is the hypothesis that we have called ‘contrastive reaction’ or ‘dialectical agonism’<sup>12</sup>, summarising sparse indications from some literature (Duarte 2009; Gregori, in press). This is an analytical configuration influenced by the concept of schismogenesis elaborated by Gregory Bateson (1936), and which has been characterised through expressions like backlash or ‘escalation’. It consists of the tendency presented by certain types of social relations, in which one of the elements of a dyad (personal or collective) seeks to reinforce its distinctive characteristics from that of the opposing element, thus, tending to establish an ever-increasing differentiation, until it is interrupted or contradicted by some other force or social situation. This analytical scheme could account for the more formal properties of ‘antagonism’ or cognitive dissonance between those who convey liberal ideology and those who fly the flag of conservatism—as has been verified in Western modernity and, somewhat surprisingly, in the entire contemporary world.

Besides the socio-morphological hypotheses, there are hypotheses that we call ‘psychosocial’. The first is the hypothesis of frustration with political representation in situations of hegemony of a governing party system (Mouffe 2002). The permanence of the same democratic governmental configuration for long periods could produce an association of concerns and frustrations that always inevitably exist with the form of government itself (and not solely with the party), allowing a permeation of relatively conjunctural authoritarian dispositions.

A very peculiar hypothesis was raised by Thomas Cortado (2023), concerning the persistence of an anti-slavery cultural background among the popular classes in Brazil—which had previously been proposed by Otávio Velho (1987). This trait enables an association of possible links between progressivism and some form of ‘communism’ or ‘socialism’ (as right-wing populist propaganda often conveys) with a threat to freedom. In the author’s terms: ‘the persistence of the Bolsonarist phenomenon is also due to the realisation of a certain democratic imaginary, deeply rooted in Brazilian history’ (Cortado 2023).

The last of these hypotheses—of enormous importance—is the one that involves the current circumstances of social communication, with the proliferation of mass, cybernetic, digital media. The almost universal availability of the internet, with the massive production of non-face-to-face ‘social networks’, allows much faster and more comprehensive flows than any other previous vehicle, meaning that the logic of algorithms, fake news, and now—though still incipiently—AI (artificial intelligence) applied to communication, radically interferes with forms of public influence (in particular, cf. Engesser *et al.* 2017; Cesarino 2020, 2022).

This psychosocial hypothesis presupposes the radical institutional changes that have occurred in the structure of mass communication in recent decades, particularly with regard to the ‘participatory internet’ and so-called ‘platformisation’. None of the contemporary analyses fails to include this dimension of contemporary social relations as crucial to understanding the dynamics of our object. An important researcher on the subject speaks of ‘digital populism’ and a ‘king’s digital body’ (Cesarino 2019, 2022), as signs of the crucial intersection between the two phenomena. This includes almost all the characteristics we discussed above, maximised by the articulation, flexibility, universality, capillarity and velocity of these ‘networks’, capable of producing ‘mass’ effects in non-face-to-face contexts. Moreover, one of its characteristics is that it can produce circulation segmentations (through logarithms and other technical resources) that favour the encystment of values and

11 ‘The lowest and the most economically unstable strata of the proletariat, for whom rational conceptions are the least congenial, and also the proletaroid or permanently impoverished petty-bourgeois groups who are in constant danger of sinking into the proletarian class, are nevertheless readily susceptible to being influenced by religious missionary enterprise. But this religious propaganda has in such cases a distinctively magical form or, where real magic has been eliminated, it has certain characteristics which are substitutes for the magical-orgiaic supervision of grace. Examples of these are the soteriological orgies of the Methodist type, such as are engaged in by the Salvation Army’ (Weber 1978: 486).

12 The category ‘agonism’, in contrast to ‘antagonism’, is examined more narrowly in the work of Chantal Mouffe: ‘what is important is that conflict does not take the form of an “antagonism” (struggle between enemies) but the form of an “agonism” (struggle between adversaries)’ (Mouffe 2013: 7).



attitude systems. Here we find another thread of ‘empowerment’: the affirmative feeling of political agency that people from the popular classes experience thanks to new forms of communication, with the feeling of being in direct contact with the leader with whom they identify (the ‘disintermediation’ to which Cesarino refers) and actually doing politics, a privilege seen as previously restricted to literate segments.

Many of the interpretations of the phenomenon of right-wing populism rest on the recognition of the strategic nature of new digital mass communications, with palpable implications for the functioning of the political order. In Brazil, suffice to mention Castro Rocha’s timely quote from a literal phrase by right-wing influencer Olavo de Carvalho: ‘The secret was the careful planning of the flow of information, calculated to paralyse consciousness through contradictory stimulation’ (2021: 90). In the US, Levitsky and Ziblatt cite how one of the factors that made the election of President Donald Trump feasible included ‘the explosion of alternative media, particularly cable news and social media’ (2018: 56).

There is an invariably individualistic bias in approaches to the issue of right-wing populism, which tends to present any characteristic that does not enter into the matrix of intelligibility of the legal and psychological dimensions of the modern individual as error, excess or residue. Hence the importance of psychosocial hypotheses to explain the phenomenon through its emotional dimensions. In line with Cortado, when drawing attention to ‘progressive prejudice’, Vladimir Safatle (2023) warns that the use of ‘psychological’ categories to explain conservative behaviours, particularly in relation to ‘resentment’,

serve more to hide the impotence of progressive policies than to analyse the real motives that lead some workers and precarious groups to convert to the far right. Moreover, such explanations end up producing a moralisation of social conflicts that personalises focuses of action, rather than getting to their objective structural causes. At most, they serve to be applied to ourselves, in a continuous exercise of self-suspicion and self-inspection. Or to strengthen a feeling of moral and intellectual superiority that only helps to mask our real political impotence. (Safatle 2023:6)

The phenomenon called ‘resistance’ by psychoanalysis can be invoked here. In this case, the resistance to understanding the other on their terms, being able to create empathy and implementing the various methodologies of ethnographic monitoring developed since the ‘shift’ towards pain, emotions, and suffering that anthropology has adopted since the 1980s—when an anthropology of the subject (universalist) emerged that critically opposes the anthropology of the person (which, among other things, aims to account for native notions of good and justice; cf. Robbins 2013). Resistance had already been analysed by Georges Devereux, Vincent Crapanzano and Antonius Robben, when they talk about certain countertransference phenomena that the anthropologist does not control, which is why they end up working only with those who they identify with. We argue that the angle of the anthropology of urban religion (Birman 2012, 2019; Birman & Machado 2012; Bonfim 2016; Esperança 2022) is that which best accounts for this popular, populist individual—without naming them as such, with the exception of Bonfim (2020).

## Final observations

This investigation resulted from perplexity with regard to the fate of the so-called ‘modern’ public order in the face of the growing presence and protagonism of right-wing populism in the contemporary world.

In addition to the ruinous nature of the economic and socio-political circumstances currently faced by human societies, in the most varied cultural contexts and political regimes, it is considered indispensable to understand how the condition of person is articulated, the indispensable means of any living experience, mobilisation and concerted action. To achieve this, we reviewed part of the extensive literature available and, little by little, ended up returning to the classic structural tension between ‘freedom’ (liberalism) and ‘equality’ (democracy) in the dynamics of societies inspired by the ideology of individualism (Dumont,

1986a). Right-wing populism touts the virtues of economic and political ‘freedom’—in its current alliances with neoliberalism—at the same time as it remonstrates against all moral liberality. The free-contracting individual is a person who fears the modernisation of customs as a perverse imposition of elites. They also oppose the progressive, egalitarian policies of the left, since they experience them as a restriction on their status as a free contractor. Policies of social compensation or protection of underprivileged populations and the environment are particularly abhorrent—resented at times as injustice, at times as undue constriction.

We also reviewed how this configuration of person has manifested since the mid-nineteenth century, in the midst of the broad transformations brought about by liberalism, capitalism and romanticism—that is, by quantitative and qualitative individualism (*sensu* Simmel 1950 [1917]). These transformations occurred—and continue to occur—in very different rhythms and forms of dissemination, producing a generalised ideological cacophony. Even in societies most structured according to the ideology of individualism, different ways of being a person began to coexist, no longer necessarily restricted to assigned statuses, but—which could, in principle, be acquired—as objects of confrontation, transformation and conflict.

As a universal conscience currently dictates, we reiterate the extreme deepening of these contradictions in the context of the digital revolution, which gives rise to forms and conditions of circulation of information and social mediations completely different from those that had characterised modernity up to the end of the twentieth century, influencing the construction of the person beyond the traditional circuits of family, religion and formal education.

All political ideologies are nourished by such conditions, including right-wing populism. Its appeal finds an echo in mentalities where the standard of the modern ‘individual’ does not thrive in its ideal-typical form. This does not only concern the popular classes—particularly in the pockets that our authors sought to define. They are also found among the elites, possibly for motives and in different forms than the lumpenproletariat or the small, rising middle classes. Perhaps it is better to say that these mentalities tend to be the majority—the ideal modern model circulating solely among the highly literate segments of the middle classes. And even there with noticeable exceptions!

The anthropological disposition to disclose the multiple alterities that surround the progressive modern core does not simply aim to illustrate the enlightened: it also aims to enable the imaginary of ideological producers to conceive alternatives to this impasse. Is it possible to project a future in which liberal, progressive universalism remains hegemonic but comes to embrace the many lines of difference that now threaten it? Contemporary identity movements were certainly proposed and cultivated with a benevolent intention of this kind. Unfortunately, they have not worked for this purpose: the differences that are encysted tend to violate the universalist ideal without enriching it.

One of the most stimulating theories towards a possible articulation between universalism and differences is that formulated by Chantal Mouffe in a series of works on what she calls ineradicable political ‘agonism’. She advocates for the construction of a more complex representation of the modern political order: ‘it is high time for left-wing intellectuals to adopt a pluralist approach and to reject the type of universalism that postulates the rational and moral superiority of Western modernity’ (Mouffe 2013: xv; also cf. 2002).

As previously mentioned, Dumont’s theory of hierarchy is another analytical possibility for dealing with the challenge of the permanence of different forms of person (like those that nourish right-wing populism) alongside the universalist, ‘individualist’ ideal. Dumont himself considered that anthropology had a similar disposition to the hierarchical principle: that of ‘uniting through differences’ (Dumont 1986a: 233). Perhaps this was the appropriate motto to construct a new political horizon.

Given these conditions, for now, we cannot help but close the text with a renewed awareness of the magnitude of the enigma that lies before us, with the underlined combination of gravity and perplexity that

imposes the question concerning the general destiny of Western culture: a 'malaise of civilisation' that like a novel sinister spectre, haunts more than ever the fate of our 'civilising process'.

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Hacia la ampliación de horizontes de la comprensión antropológica:  
etnografías con «alteridades incómodas»

# La guerra anglo-argentina de 1982. Los incómodos límites auto-impuestos por una antropología conformista

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## Resumen

Este artículo analiza cómo las reflexividades generadas en las investigaciones antropológicas están modeladas por los valores de cada época histórica. Ese análisis puede enseñarnos a los investigadores sociales a comprender los modos en que el trabajo analítico académico suele exotizar las alteridades que deseamos conocer, aunque esas exotizaciones se sostengan en razones de afinidad política y/o conciencia humanitaria. La autora analiza aquí su propia trayectoria entre 1989 y 2022 como investigadora del conflicto armado de 1982 entre la República Argentina y el Reino Unido, conocido como la guerra de Malvinas (eng. *Falklands*), un hecho bélico protagonizado, del lado argentino, por militares profesionales y soldados conscriptos. A través de una caracterización dinámica de su propia trayectoria, ella nos muestra cómo los sucesivos climas político-morales de la posguerra fueron autorizando formas de conocimiento académico, fundadas en moralidades supuestamente ahistóricas que restan historicidad a las experiencias de los combatientes argentinos. Para restituirles a esos climas su dinámica histórica, la autora analiza las reflexividades puestas en juego entre académicos y militares argentinos, a lo largo de tres décadas de investigación antropológica, atravesadas por procesos globales, nacionales y personales que obligaron a sucesivas reelaboraciones de un hecho social único en todo el siglo XX para la República Argentina: el involucramiento estatal-nacional como principal contendiente en un campo de batalla internacional.

**Palabras clave:** Conocimiento; Guerra de Malvinas; Argentina; Fuerzas Armadas; Etnografía



# A guerra anglo-argentina de 1982. Os desconfortáveis limites autoimpostos de uma antropologia conformista

## Resumo

Este artigo analisa como as reflexividades geradas na pesquisa antropológica são moldadas pelos valores de cada época histórica. Esta análise pode ensinar-nos, investigadores sociais, a compreender as formas como o trabalho analítico académico tende a exotizar as alteridades que desejamos conhecer, mesmo que essas exotizações sejam apoiadas por razões de afinidade política e/ou consciência humanitária. A autora analisa aqui sua própria trajetória entre 1989 e 2022 como pesquisadora do conflito armado de 1982 entre a República Argentina e o Reino Unido, conhecido como Guerra das Malvinas (eng. *Falklands*), guerra protagonizada, do lado argentino, por soldados profissionais e soldados recrutados. Através de uma caracterização dinâmica de sua própria trajetória, ela nos mostra como os sucessivos climas político-morais do pós-guerra autorizaram formas de conhecimento académico, baseadas em moralidades supostamente a-históricas que desvirtuam a historicidade das experiências dos combatentes argentinos. Para devolver esses climas à sua dinâmica histórica, o autor analisa as reflexividades postas em jogo entre académicos e militares argentinos, ao longo de três décadas de pesquisas antropológicas, atravessadas por processos globais, nacionais e pessoais que forçaram sucessivas reelaborações de um fato social único. todo o século XX para a República Argentina: o envolvimento estatal-nacional como principal concorrente num campo de batalha internacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Conhecimento; Guerra das Malvinas; Argentina; Forças Armadas; Etnografia

# The Anglo-Argentine War of 1982. The Uncomfortable Self-Imposed Limits of a Conformist Anthropology

## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes how the reflexivities raised during anthropological research are shaped by the values of each historical era. This analysis can teach us social researchers to understand the ways in which academic work tends to exoticize the alterities that we wish to know, even if these exoticizations are supported by reasons of political affinity and/or humanitarian conscience. The author presents her own trajectory between 1989 and 2022 as a researcher of the armed conflict between Argentina and the United Kingdom of 1982, known as the Malvinas War (eng. Falklands), a war carried out, on the Argentine side, by officers, non-commission officers and conscript soldiers. Through a dynamic characterization of her own trajectory, she shows us the ways in which political-moral climates during the Argentine postwar have authorized academic perspectives, based on supposedly ahistorical moralities that erase the historicity of the Argentine combatants' experience. To restore these environments to their historical dynamics, the author describes the reflexivities put into play between Argentine academics and military personnel, throughout three decades of anthropological research, crossed by global, national, and personal processes that have forced successive reworkings of a social fact unique in the entire 20th century for the Argentine Republic: its involvement as the main contender on an international battlefield; the involvement of conscript soldiers together with their Armed Forces; and the political and civil society's support to the military initiative of a harsh military dictatorship.

**Keywords:** Knowledge; Malvinas/Falklands War; Argentina; Armed Forces; Ethnography

# La guerra anglo-argentina de 1982. Los incómodos límites auto-impuestos por una antropología conformista

*Rosana Guber*

Hablar de «antropologías incómodas» nos hace preguntarnos dónde reside la incomodidad, quién la provoca y quién la percibe y experimenta. Por definición, las ciencias debieran tender a incomodar el sentido común y el saber establecido, tanto como conmover las certezas y los acuerdos de una cierta época, cierta clase, cierta región. En el caso de la antropología que practicamos, donde sea, el punto es más crítico. Las incomodidades que históricamente ha provocado el saber antropológico al estudiar «culturas exóticas» han conducido a relativizar el absolutismo de ciertos modos de vivir y de pensar, particularmente de los occidentales. Esta historia, más que centenaria, nos ubica a quienes hacemos antropología en un lugar de «incomodadores seriales». Siempre tenemos, a flor de labio, un contraejemplo de cualquier ley social. Siempre matizamos, relativizamos y complejizamos, mientras otros colegas de las ciencias sociales tratan de estandarizar y regularizar.

Ahora bien. Esta condición, que muchos juzgamos nuestra principal virtud, no es permanente. A través de algunas situaciones de mi trayectoria como investigadora de una misma temática a lo largo de 35 años, me gustaría referirme a instancias que juzgo claves, en que «nos, los antropólogos» devenimos en sujetos conformistas, es decir, en científicos sociales renuentes a desafiar las certezas y a formular buenas preguntas. Y ya que quienes practicamos la disciplina somos, también, sujetos sociales, me gustaría señalar cómo, en algunos temas y con respecto a ciertos sectores sociales, nos las arreglamos para mantenernos dentro de los márgenes de nuestro sentido común. Esto sucede cuando se trata de sectores sociales distantes y juzgados como opuestos a, y hasta enemigos de aquéllos otros a los que sí solemos estudiar con frecuencia y a quienes decimos (y más bien deseamos) representar.

En otras palabras, este artículo analiza cómo, lejos de lo que solemos creer, las reflexividades generadas desde las investigaciones antropológicas producen marcos interpretativos que se ajustan a los valores de una época histórica. Aunque resulte difícil, reconocerlas podría enseñarnos no sólo acerca de ciertas alteridades que suelen estar ausentes del mapa antropológico, sino acerca de las mismas alteridades que indagamos más habitualmente y a las que deseamos comprender. Mientras que a éstas, supuestamente, les corresponde un ejercicio de des-exotización, a aquéllas las preservamos en la caja negra del exotismo. ¿Será que nuestras herramientas teóricas y metodológicas son formidables sólo para un sector de la humanidad contemporánea? ¿Por qué no sospechar que nuestra persistente evitación de reconocer a ciertos sujetos como objetos antropológicos esconde una mirada sesgada, y por lo tanto etno-socio-céntrica que se extiende, también, a los que más habitualmente seleccionamos? En el caso que me ocupa, el fundamento de esas persistentes exotizaciones se argumenta como de simpatía política y conciencia humanitaria, aunque probablemente se trate de otra cosa. El problema es el conocimiento y su contracara. La contracara del conocimiento no es la ignorancia. Es el des-conocimiento.

Empezaré hablando de un tema evitado por las ciencias sociales en general, y por las humanidades en particular, siempre desde un caso argentino, que vengo trabajando desde distintos ángulos desde 1989, cuando empecé mi primer trabajo de campo en la temática. Luego, me referiré a una instancia de campo académico en que hice la presentación de resultados al cierre de un evento científico, y a un par de situaciones periodísticas calificadas por sus organizadores como espacios de periodismo dedicado al mundo intelectual y profesional. Finalmente, dejaré planteada una pregunta que, quizás, dé cuenta de las incomodidades narradas.

## Tema: la guerra de Malvinas

Para comprender el objeto de conocimiento que aquí propongo, debo comenzar por el tema que perseguí en este tiempo: el conflicto armado entre la Argentina y Gran Bretaña esbozado hacia fines de marzo de 1982, e iniciado prácticamente sin camino de retorno el 2 de abril de ese año. Dicho conflicto giró en torno a la soberanía sobre los archipiélagos Malvinas, Georgias del Sur y Sandwich del Sur, reclamada por la Argentina a Gran Bretaña. El 2 de enero de 1833, los hombres de una pequeña corbeta inglesa ocuparon la pequeña aldea rioplatense e hispanoparlante Puerto Luis, un establecimiento cabecera de distintos asentamientos extensivos de ganado bovino y caza marina mayor, dispersos por la isla Soledad (East Falkland).

El conflicto, que evolucionó hacia una confrontación armada abierta protagonizada por las Fuerzas Armadas de la Argentina y Gran Bretaña, comenzó con una operación militar pretendidamente secreta de la Argentina. El desembarco se produjo en la madrugada del 2 de abril; el contingente tomó el cuartel de los Royal Marines en Moody Brook y la gobernación de las islas en su capital Port Stanley, y deportó a militares y a funcionarios británicos de la jurisdicción que en el mundo angloparlante se conoce como *Falkland Islands*. El plan inicial de lo que los argentinos llamamos «recuperación» de las Malvinas, y los británicos llaman «invasión», databa de fines de 1981, y consistía en ocuparlas para forzar al Reino Unido a negociar. Sin embargo, por distintos motivos a los que aludiremos más adelante, ese plan se fue transformando en ocupación permanente de carácter militar y mayores proporciones. Mientras, la reacción británica, con suma inmediatez, reunió y movilizó a sus fuerzas navales, aéreas y terrestres y las dirigió hacia el Atlántico Sur para recuperar sus dominios. Los ataques navales y aéreos comenzaron en la madrugada del 1° de mayo; el desembarco británico se inició el 21 de mayo en la margen oriental del Estrecho de San Carlos que separa las dos islas mayores, Gran Malvina (West Falkland) y Soledad (East Falkland). Después de varios combates y numerosas pérdidas por ambas partes, el 14 de junio las fuerzas británicas recuperaron la capital isleña, que re-bautizaron Port Stanley. Durante los dos meses previos había llevado el nombre de Puerto Argentino.

La guerra propiamente dicha se extendió por 45 días, con avances y retrocesos en cruentos combates terrestres, aéreos y marítimos. La mitad de los 649 muertos argentinos se produjo el 2 de mayo con el ataque de un submarino al Crucero ARA General Belgrano. Allí mismo y en las balsas de rescate fallecieron ahogados, quemados y asfixiados 323 argentinos de los 1093 tripulantes del buque de guerra estrenado en la Guerra del Pacífico (como US Phoenix). Los 255 muertos británicos durante todo el conflicto, que incluían personal chino de servicios a bordo de los buques, eran marinos, paracaidistas, infantes e infantes de marina, pilotos y soldados. En la contienda, la Argentina enfrentó al segundo poder naval de la Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte. El Reino Unido perdió hombres, buques destructores y logísticos, y aviones. La batalla, entonces, tuvo una magnitud innegable para ambas partes, y efectos políticos inmediatos. La primera ministra Margaret Thatcher, del Partido Conservador, se aseguró un nuevo mandato pese a las condiciones generales de recesión, desempleo y profunda reforma estatal. Del lado argentino, la Junta Militar, tercera administración desde el golpe de estado del autodenominado «Proceso de Reorganización Nacional» en 1976, fue reemplazada por un presidente militar que se encargaría de llamar a elecciones democráticas en todos sus niveles y más de un año después. Las elecciones se realizaron el 30 de octubre de 1983, y el 10 de diciembre finalizó la última dictadura argentina. Mientras tanto, la posguerra continuó.

La guerra de Malvinas generó numerosos escritos a modo de informes o reportes institucionales y judiciales, ensayos periodísticos, autobiografías, relatos y películas de ficción, novelas, cuentos, poesías, y algunos artículos que dan un perfil laudatorio a la «gesta heroica». Pese a la estentórea circulación de textos, fotografías y entrevistas, Malvinas sigue ausente de los análisis académicos, particularmente los procedentes de las ciencias sociales y las humanidades. En la escueta bibliografía al respecto se cuentan menos de diez investigadores dedicados de manera continua y consistente en estos cuarenta años, al conflicto bélico propiamente dicho. De ellos, al menos la mitad no son diplomados en estas disciplinas universitarias. Ciertamente, hay colegas que han hecho alguna investigación y, también, quienes se han dedicado a aspectos periféricos al conflicto

(memorias de posguerra, legislación para veteranos de guerra, historia de alguna unidad o cuerpo militar que también se desempeñó en los combates de las islas, la guerra en el sistema educativo, tratamiento de *stress* post traumático, etc.). Sin embargo, por el momento, la guerra de Malvinas ha generado muy pocas preguntas teóricamente relevantes para la historia, la antropología, las ciencias políticas, la geografía, las ciencias de la comunicación, la psicología, la sociología y, notablemente, para el campo de los estudios militares. Con esta falta me refiero a líneas de investigación que correspondan estrictamente al hecho bélico-militar, es decir, a la guerra. Nos siguen faltando las islas como campo de batalla y en todos sus medios (marítimo, aéreo y terrestre). Ahora bien. Esta falta no es casual, especialmente si se compara a éste con el otro gran legado político de la última dictadura: los crímenes clandestinos de argentinos y extranjeros, representados en la figura de «los desaparecidos» y las organizaciones nominadas según el parentesco matrilineal ascendente, esto es, las madres de los desaparecidos y las abuelas de nietos nacidos en cautiverio clandestino y entregados ilegalmente a familias adoptantes, tras el asesinato de sus madres después del parto.

No voy a referirme a las posibles razones de esta desigual atención pero, en las páginas que siguen, trataré de caracterizar la renuencia al tema «guerra de Malvinas» en términos de un desconocimiento activo y premeditado. Para ello analizaré matices y acepciones del término «conocer» tal como la antropología lo empleó para comprender los encuentros de Occidente con otros seres humanos. Quizás así se ponga de manifiesto una profunda incomodidad asociada no tanto a un tema específico, sino al conocimiento que generalmente producimos ... con las mejores intenciones.

### ¿Cómo estudiar la guerra (de Malvinas)?

Permítaseme empezar con mi progresiva<sup>1</sup> elaboración de algunas posiciones con respecto a estas cuestiones, teniendo en cuenta el desarrollo simultáneo de tres líneas «argumentales». Dado que la guerra tuvo lugar en mi primer año de graduada de la Licenciatura en Ciencias Antropológicas (Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1982) y que comencé a dar vueltas con el tema cuatro años después, en 1986, es evidente que el desarrollo de aquella posguerra de cuatro años fue paralela a mi propio desarrollo profesional y académico. En adelante, ambos estarían atravesados por mi evolución etaria y la de los veteranos de guerra, sus protagonistas directos y, desde entonces, mis interlocutores. Todos nosotros fuimos contemporáneos de gruesos cambios políticos y sociales en la Argentina, la región y el mundo, particularmente la caída del Muro de Berlín y la URSS, pero también el restablecimiento de relaciones diplomáticas entre la Argentina y Gran Bretaña (en 1992) y la sucesión de políticas nacionales, provinciales y municipales destinadas a los veteranos de guerra y sus familias. De manera que la posguerra se convirtió en un contexto variado y cambiante que me permitió diseñar cuestiones a investigar, hacer trabajo de campo, y aprender a pensar sobre la guerra, la posguerra, sus protagonistas directos e indirectos (los que estuvieron involucrados en operaciones o en el área bélica, y los que no). También me obligó a aprender sobre mi propia disciplina en mi país y en relación al tema Malvinas. Es que la antropología que yo llevaba conmigo, recién graduada, me había acercado a algunas perspectivas y distanciado de otras. ¿Cómo daría sentido a mi trabajo de campo con una estricta formación etnológica y folclorológica, si yo quería entender la guerra desde la formación de grupos sociales institucionalizados al nivel del Estado argentino? Más aún. La antropología social, hasta entonces de trayectoria discontinua en el país, parecía constituir un campo propicio para encarar mis trabajos, pero sus áreas de interés se vertían a sectores económica, social y jurídicamente vulnerables y subalternos. ¿Era ese el caso de los protagonistas directos del conflicto?

Cuando empecé a explorar nuestra guerra como campo de investigación, me encontré con pequeñas viñetas y anécdotas que apuntaban a formar una concepción acerca de lo ocurrido y, sobre todo, criterios de referencia

<sup>1</sup> Obviamente, no me refiero a un sentido evolutivo ni al ideológico, sino al aspecto procesual de la elaboración temática y conceptual que implica el posicionamiento de esta investigadora.

que permitían encuadrar cualquier narración. Ahora bien: aunque los «cuentos» se repetían, no necesariamente estaban fundados en hechos probados<sup>2</sup> (Lorenz 2017).

¿Qué sabía yo de la guerra? Bien poco y sólo algo de «público conocimiento». Con mis 25 años por cumplir, no tenía compañeros de secundaria que hubieran sido reclutados como soldados, por ese entonces, a los 18 y 19 años de edad. Como mujer estaba excluida del servicio militar, y habiendo nacido en 1957, de ser hombre hubiera estado excluida por pertenecer a una de las dos clases (con la 1956, los nacidos en 1956) exceptuadas de la conscripción (cuando se modificó la edad de sorteo de 20 a 18)<sup>3</sup>. Por mi contemporaneidad al hecho y por mi nacionalidad argentina, yo estaba un poco adentro y un poco afuera del tema. Recientemente graduada, creía que la antropología social, mi disciplina y profesión, debía servir para entender qué y cómo había sucedido esa guerra y qué huellas nos había dejado, además de la obvia caída del régimen y la apertura electoral hacia una democracia que aun perdura, con todas sus imperfecciones.

Malvinas era, por lo tanto, un hecho del pasado que perduraba en quienes habían participado, en sus familiares, en los deudos y en las Fuerzas Armadas. Es que la guerra de Malvinas había sido un hecho eminentemente militar y para el cual se forman los militares: hacer la guerra. Como antropóloga suponía que a ese hecho eminentemente castrense debía abordarlo accediendo a los conocimientos, la organización, las prácticas y la jerga de ese oficio. Difícil misión para las ciencias sociales y las humanidades argentinas, en los epígonos de una cruel dictadura que había terminado, en distintos escenarios, con numerosos académicos exiliados, y estudiantes presos, muertos y desaparecidos en condiciones dignas de horror y que, sin embargo, se siguen reproduciendo en regímenes auto adscriptos de derecha e izquierda en la región.

Los estudios sobre militares en la Argentina abordaban a este sector en su función política, y sus conclusiones ya estaban preestablecidas (la condena a lo castrense en tanto golpista, represor y lesivo a los derechos humanitarios). La asociación entre lo militar y la crueldad hacia los connacionales era bastante natural, dada la historia reciente. Sin embargo, varias cuestiones derivaban de ella: si la crueldad es inherente a los militares argentinos (y del Cono Sur), ¿por qué fueron respaldados por todos los sectores políticos ante la recuperación de las Islas Malvinas, en pleno régimen de facto en abril del '82? ¿Por qué los padres y madres de los jóvenes permitían que fueran enrolados? ¿Por qué, además, aceptaron que fueran llevados al frente de batalla? Abordaré estas preguntas más adelante, pero por ahora digo que, ante mis dificultades formativas y conceptuales, decidí hacer mi doctorado en una universidad estadounidense (Johns Hopkins) cuyo departamento de antropología estaba compuesto por colegas extraordinarios que trabajaban sobre poblaciones nativas, estados nacionales, regímenes políticos, sistemas productivos, raza/color/clase social, arte y sistemas de conocimiento. Y aunque no estudiaban las guerras ni a los militares, conocían los temas, sabían cómo funcionaban los sistemas políticos de partido único en que el Estado define la vida de los habitantes y, también, los temas y los conceptos de sus investigadores. Particularmente, Katherine Verdery, experta en el Este europeo, fue mi directora de tesis y venía trabajando sobre la Rumania del dictador Nicolás Ceaucescu. Sin embargo, los temas bélicos y de militares contemporáneos no les interesaban demasiado a los antropólogos. A lo sumo, me recomendaban *papers* sobre violencia o guerra primitiva (Ferguson & Whitehead 1991).

2 El interesante estudio de Federico Lorenz trata sobre la «anécdota» del soldado, amputadas sus piernas, quien, desde el hospital y su silla de ruedas, llama por teléfono a su familia. Le cuenta a su madre que un camarada había perdido sus piernas y le pregunta si podrían albergarlo, a lo que su madre se niega. El soldado, su hijo y verdadero discapacitado, corta el teléfono y se suicida de un tiro. Lorenz encuadra su estudio desde la perspectiva del rumor de guerra.

3 La mayoría de los soldados conscriptos llevados a las operaciones tenían entre 19 y 20 años, y pertenecían a la «clase 62», esto es, los nacidos en 1962. Hubo algunos nacidos en 1963 que llevaban tres meses de instrucción, y también otros mayores que habían solicitado prórroga por estudios universitarios. Dichos soldados cumplieron su servicio militar con mayor edad incluso que los oficiales y suboficiales jóvenes, y pertenecían a las clases 1954 y 1955. El dato de la excepción a las clases 1956 y 1957 (la mía) hace que, en mi imaginación hipotética, no haya participación posible en el hecho bélico. No más de cinco mujeres, en general enfermeras y una comunicante, participaron en el teatro de operaciones. Sólo una de ellas estuvo unas horas en Puerto Argentino. Las restantes estuvieron embarcadas en un buque hospital y en un buque mercante.

Ante mi carencia de elementos conceptuales para abordar la guerra, decidí tomar uno de los temas dominantes de la agenda académica del Norte: la memoria social. Todo el mundo escribía, discutía, proyectaba e investigaba la memoria social de masacres (principalmente del Holocausto) y de guerras, pero desde el punto de vista de las víctimas. Con el tiempo aparecieron algunos estudios sobre los escuadrones de la muerte, agrupaciones armadas irregulares que mataban activistas o enemigos interétnicos. Estos nucleamientos, tristemente célebres en América Latina, no correspondían exactamente a las Fuerzas Armadas, ni a los niveles institucionalizados de «mi guerra», aunque algunos de sus miembros participaron en la Alianza Anticomunista Argentina, por citar a los más conocidos. Ahora bien: mi decisión de estudiar Malvinas por su memoria presentaba una complicación: si la memoria es un producto del presente y no la duplicación del pasado (el modelo de memoria como archivo, como lo llamaba mi profesor Michel-Rolph Trouillot, especialmente en su *Silencing The Past*, 1995), enfocar la guerra de Malvinas por su memoria me obligaba a mirar 1982 desde mis sucesivos presentes, siempre posteriores al evento. Tomarnos en serio el estudio de la memoria social nos lleva a desplazar el foco hacia otro tiempo que el del evento mismo, nos hace concentrarnos en el tiempo en que se produjo el recuerdo, no el evento recordado. Con esta perspectiva me dediqué a trabajar «las memorias de la guerra de Malvinas».

Cabe aclarar que mi posición como tesista era un tanto problemática, quizás como la de todos, pero en un sentido particular. Mi regreso coincidió a principios de los 90s con la expansión de internet y los correos electrónicos, y los archivos adjuntos no demoraron en llegar. Por alguna razón yo preveía que encontraría una preocupación de las ciencias sociales argentinas por la memoria social, aunque suponía que el sentido de este concepto no sería el académico, sino el de no olvidar los «crímenes de lesa humanidad» durante la dictadura. Mientras el norte académico buscaba conocer qué hacían los pueblos y también los Estados con sus pasados, en términos sociales, culturales y por supuesto políticos, en la Argentina la agenda era llevar a los militares ante los tribunales y lograr su condena a prisión. La diferencia era crucial, pero no tanto por la bibliografía consultada que, como suele ocurrir, venía del norte hacia el sur: Halbwachs, Agamben, Pollack, Ricoeur, Passerini, Portelli, etc. Con todo y estos autores, en la Argentina la memoria debía replicar los hechos del pasado, porque su propósito era judicial, la denuncia y la testificación. Artículos y tesis se llenaron de las llamadas «disputas por la memoria» o «memorias en disputa», una expresión que dejó de ser una invitación a la investigación y se transformó en un postulado. Efectivamente, las «memorias en disputa» venían a enseñarnos que los sectores sociales y políticos manipulan el sentido del pasado para sus propios fines actuales. ¿Pero qué más podía decirnos la memoria? En la Argentina y en otros países del Cono Sur, ese sentido del pasado debía servir para confirmar la ocurrencia de hechos (aberrantes) del pasado, de manera que los científicos sociales debíamos servir para exponer, en nuestros escritos, lo ocurrido entre 1976 y 1983. Así, formaríamos parte de las luchas por la memoria (correcta) y convertir a nuestras indagaciones en verdaderas denuncias (de lo realmente ocurrido). Esta postura se afirmó en la oposición moral entre (puros) criminales y (puras) víctimas, lo cual podría ser funcional a un argumento frente a los estrados judiciales, pero no necesariamente a los procesos históricos, generalmente más complejos. La antinomia moral entre víctimas y victimarios, un planteo nada nuevo en la historiografía argentina, ocultaba lo que toda antinomia encierra: lo que ambos términos de la oposición tienen en común. Probablemente había más que una disputa de sentido, que es a lo que suelen reducirse los estudios de este tipo<sup>4</sup>. Daré más adelante una hipótesis al respecto. Pero interesa, por el momento, resaltar que esta lógica moralizante de las memorias en disputa pasa por alto un punto destacado por la antropología: los dualismos se organizan en función de una pertenencia común y por objetos comúnmente apreciados. Cada polo es necesario para el opuesto, aunque en este caso la concepción dualista no reside en polos complementarios (como en el Yin y el Yang) sino excluyentes (como en el Cristianismo) (Visacovsky & Guber 2005; Neiburg 1998).

4 La filósofa Hannah Arendt, tan vanamente citada por su noción de «banalidad del mal», da algunas pistas. En la Argentina, Claudia Hilb (2013) recupera inteligentemente su pensamiento para pensar el terrorismo de Estado y las políticas humanitarias seguidas en los gobiernos democráticos. Quien, a mi juicio, mejor ha tratado la categoría de «víctima» en la Argentina «reciente» es la colega Virginia Vecchioli (2018).

Ahora bien: pese a sus diferencias, norte y sur compartían el mismo interés en el sujeto mnemónico: los actores sociales clasificados como víctimas.

Mi tesis doctoral pudo haber estado cerca de estos planteos, pero el campo no me lo permitió. Ninguno de mis interlocutores se me presentaba como víctima ni en demanda de lástima. Por el contrario, tanto oficiales, como suboficiales y sobre todo exsoldados se referían a sus experiencias con orgullo y afirmando sus conocimientos de primera mano. Aun cuando hubieran padecido (algo propio de todas las guerras), expresaban el sufrimiento desde la autoafirmación, tanto que uno de ellos, al culminar una conversación, me agradeció por ser la primera vez que no le preguntaban «matate-tuviste-hambre-tuviste-frío». Como todo lo que sonaba a guerra de Malvinas era de mi interés, había empezado a hablar con aquéllos que se definían como veteranos de guerra, incluyendo a exsoldados, suboficiales y oficiales de las tres fuerzas armadas y de seguridad. Entre ellos a veces coincidían en sus puntos de vista, otras veces no, pero las memorias de todos diferían del sentido común de la memoria social como exclusiva prerrogativa de las víctimas, es decir, de los que habían sido conscriptos. Además, sus perspectivas me indicaban claramente que Malvinas había sido un hecho militar en un campo de batalla entre dos fuerzas regulares de dos naciones distintas. Es decir, no se trataba de un acto de represión política o gremial. Esto desafiaba el sentido común de cómo las ciencias sociales intentaban acercarse al tema desde la memoria social.

Fue entonces que empecé a pensar a nuestras estructuras mnemónicas o memorísticas como las capas geológicas que se suceden unas a otras (Guber 1996). Inspirada en cómo funcionaba la memoria histórica en los países del este europeo, donde primaba la pertenencia a la facción gobernante del Partido Comunista (Verdery 1991), en la Argentina esa adscripción facciosa tenía menos tiempo para asentarse y daba lugar a lo que el politólogo argentino Juan Carlos Portantiero llamó «empate hegemónico», el veto entre contendientes políticos que él databa de 1955, pero que probablemente haya sido bastante anterior. Dicho mecanismo se fundaba en la secuencia de golpes institucionales desde 1930 y la sustitución de gobiernos donde (aparentemente) todo cambiaba de signo de manera absoluta, y donde los expulsados se sentaban a esperar (y a propiciar activamente) la caída de quienes los habían depuesto. Este sentido práctico no terminó con los golpes de Estado, sino que perdura hasta hoy, con 40 años de democracia, tema que daría para otro artículo. Lo cierto es que, cuando la facción depuesta regresaba, procedía igual que su predecesor, tratando de retomar allí donde había dejado y como si no hubiese pasado el tiempo. En el decurso, las facciones contrarias cada vez se parecían más entre sí, aunque el modo de diferenciarse se actuara y representara como catástrofe. Precisamente, la ficción de la oposición encarnizada se expresaba en una lucha a muerte (dualismo excluyente) similar a una sucesión de capas geológicas tal como la había formulado en su teoría «catastrofista», el teórico-geólogo Georges Cuvier, en el siglo XVIII.

¿Qué tenían en común las facciones antinómicas? Un proceso de adaptaciones recíprocas que, entre régimen y régimen, entre gobierno y gobierno, debían asegurarse la continuidad de un país que se formulaba como en permanente refundación. Esa refundación se expresaba en las denominaciones de cada nueva gestión («Revolución Libertadora», 1955; «Revolución Argentina», 1966-1973; «Proceso de Reorganización Nacional», 1976-1983), asumiendo el apoyo de «la sociedad». Estos re-comienzos no se aplicaban sólo a los regímenes de facto, sino también a los más breves lapsos democráticos. Desde 1945 todos fueron fundacionales, y todos quisieron serlo «para siempre».

La guerra de Malvinas puso a prueba este mecanismo en dos momentos: el primero, y más importante, con la toma-recuperación de las islas para la Argentina. Todos los sectores políticos y económicos, militares y civiles, la sociedad en pleno, los presos políticos y los exiliados argentinos respaldaron explícitamente la operación. El segundo momento, bastante previsible (una vez ocurrido, claro), fue con la rendición ante las fuerzas británicas. Todos los sectores políticos y económicos, militares y civiles, la sociedad en pleno, y quizás los presos políticos y los exiliados, confirmaron que aquello había sido una aventura, el manotazo de ahogado de un general borracho y un régimen en caída libre.



El respaldo expresado durante los 74 días de presencia argentina en las islas con eventos conjuntos entre militares y civiles, muchos de ellos políticos que habían sido derrocados por el general con el que compartían el acto patrio, pretendía dar vuelta la página al «todo o nada», como si se tratara de una nueva capa geológica. Finalmente, la unión de los argentinos se había concretado. Pero la guerra terminó en una derrota militar de la Argentina y, de la noche a la mañana, el tema quedó clausurado. Los ahora «exsoldados» quedaron en un limbo que incomodaba a una sociedad que se quería pensar distante de lo ocurrido. Nuevamente, la Argentina se pretendía dividida en dos y solamente en dos: civiles y militares, dictadura y democracia. Y para los conscriptos recién llegados a sus vecindarios y a sus parajes, la división de edad entre niños y adultos se erigía como relevante. Sin embargo, y esta fue precisamente la novedad, los exsoldados deambulaban entre los dos polos de estas antinomias y performaban la bipolaridad argentina incomodando a todos: civiles y militares, jóvenes y adultos, amantes del régimen de facto y de la democracia, partidarios de la derecha y de la izquierda. Los exsoldados no cabían en ninguna clasificación (Guber 2004). Veamos cómo funcionó esta imagen.

La solución que la sociedad civil y política encontró para explicar y, sobre todo, fundamentar su estrecho, visible y estentóreo involucramiento en la «gesta patriótica» conducida por la dictadura fue convertir a los exsoldados en la prenda de unidad del pueblo argentino y en su avanzada en la defensa de la soberanía en las islas. Sin embargo, a su regreso, la mayoría de aquellos jóvenes mostraba una inquietante comprensión del mundo militar. Su reciente pasado castrense y bélico les había dejado indumentaria, terminología, conocimientos, experiencias. Ahora regresaban a la vida civil los únicos civiles que habían atravesado una guerra al lado de sus FF.AA. y en contra de las fuerzas regulares de otra nación. La sociedad civil y la sociedad política hizo de sus «hijos conscriptos en el frente y la recuperación de soberanía insular» a sus representantes, es decir, representantes de aquel respaldo que sociedad civil y política le habían ofrecido a las FF.AA. (función militar) y a la tercera administración del régimen de facto (función política), por una noble causa de unidad nacional (como había quedado claro en el despliegue callejero y financiero durante los días de presencia argentina). Así, los exsoldados se convirtieron en la única figura aceptable de la primera posguerra. Ellos no eran los culpables de la derrota, y por su intermedio la sociedad, «el pueblo argentino», ratificaba su participación y, por lo tanto, su derecho al reclamo.

La figura del ex soldado tuvo varios desempeños gracias a su extraordinaria flexibilidad: demasiado civiles para los militares, demasiado militares para los civiles. Habían ido como menores de edad, pero regresaban con necesidades y trámites que sólo podía gestionar «un tutor» legalmente adulto. La mayoría cumpliría la mayoría de edad a los 21 en 1983 y, por lo tanto, tendrían dificultades para recibir compensaciones por discapacidad, decidir tratamientos y, paradójicamente, ¡comprar armas! Esto sólo podía gestionarlo un adulto de la caaa o un tutor legal.

Ahora bien: la flexibilidad que la sociedad les había reconocido no debía ser tanta como para que los jóvenes quedaran identificados con las Fuerzas Armadas. El gran problema de la sociedad civil y, sobre todo, la sociedad política era aparecer como colaboradora de un régimen ahora en caída libre. Más aun, cerrado el tema Malvinas, la campaña electoral empezó a retomar los temas relativos a los crímenes de lesa humanidad. La solución para habilitar hablar de la guerra internacional fue, para amplios sectores identificados con el mundo universitario, particularmente golpeado por las desapariciones forzadas, concebir a los exsoldados como las víctimas de los militares argentinos (no de los británicos). El campo de batalla internacional se convirtió en un campo de conflicto interno y de represión ilegal que se formulaba en continuidad con el conflicto interno argentino de 1976-1980. Y como los militares eran generacionalmente los mismos, el desempeño militar en Malvinas empezó a caracterizarse como una manifestación más del terrorismo de Estado. La imagen de este giro fue presentar al soldado como la víctima de sus superiores, los cuadros militares argentinos, con la figura del «estaqueo», una típica medida disciplinaria al soldado en el campo argentino: extendido en el suelo, en posición horizontal y con las extremidades extendidas por un tiempo prolongado, sometido a la meteorología y a las alimañas. Técnicamente, el estaqueo es lo que los militares llaman en su jerga el «calabozo de campaña», y

consiste en «un paño de carpa»<sup>5</sup> dispuesto bajo el cuerpo extendido del infractor, con sus extremidades atadas al suelo con estacas, y otro paño que lo cubre. El custodio levanta al soldado de esa posición cada dos horas para que camine y se desentumezca. Esta caracterización militar difiere de quienes identifican el estaqueo con la victimización de los civiles-conscriptos por parte de oficiales y suboficiales. Aunque hayan existido numerosos casos de castigos arbitrarios, el estaqueo no es un apremio ilegal para extraer información, sino un medio disciplinario militar que se aplica a los tantos motivos que provocan las circunstancias de guerra: evasión, dormirse en las guardias, robar comida u otros objetos a los camaradas, desconocer la jerarquía, desobedecer, etc. La concepción que, sin embargo, ancló en la sociedad argentina y, sobre todo, en los escritos académicos, fue la del estaqueo como un subtipo de «los crímenes de lesa humanidad» durante el lustro anterior.

Cuando empecé mi investigación en 1989, las denuncias formales de estaqueo eran muy pocas, probablemente no tanto por el temor a la retaliación de los militares o las fuerzas de seguridad. Ya existían organizaciones de veteranos de guerra y exsoldados combatientes y, por lo tanto, ya hablaban con voz propia. Además, en nuestras conversaciones apenas se hablaba de esto. La figura del estaqueo se hizo famosa desde 2007, para el 25° aniversario de la guerra, cuando el gobierno nacional reabrió los juicios por crímenes de lesa humanidad. Fue entonces que algunas organizaciones de exsoldados, junto a funcionarios de dependencias nacionales y provinciales de Derechos Humanos comenzaron a tomar declaraciones y hacer denuncias formales. Nuevamente, la memoria cobró el sentido de la denuncia y sostén para el aporte de pruebas para un posible juicio por crímenes de lesa humanidad, ahora concernientes a la guerra de Malvinas.

La mayoría de los exsoldados no se plegó a esta victimización respaldada desde la esfera oficial, pero el gobierno, dueño de la maquinaria estatal, se había apropiado de la causa de los derechos humanos y ahora procedía con las causas legales por Malvinas.

Mi tesis doctoral *De chicos a veteranos* (2004) analizaba esta posición de víctima y su contraria, la de los soldados como héroes y representantes del pueblo unido y defensor de la soberanía, y descubría un punto en común. La figura del primer veterano de guerra civil propiamente de una guerra moderna protagonizada por la Argentina era la de un ser liminal (noción propiamente antropológica) que no permitía encuadrarlo en las categorías que los argentinos creíamos «muy claras» durante la primera posguerra y la transición democrática. Como señalé más arriba, esa figura era extremadamente flexible, pero no llegaba a anclarse en ninguna categoría discreta. Por lo tanto, los exsoldados tampoco se comportaban como encerrados en la categoría de víctimas, aunque hablaran de padecimientos y necesidades, incluso de abusos de autoridad y de castigos inmerecidos. Su victimización los identificaba lisa y llanamente como un subtipo de los desaparecidos y detenidos-desaparecidos, cosa que muy pocos estaban dispuestos a admitir.

Ahora bien. Los desaparecidos en el «terrorismo de Estado», «guerra sucia» o «guerra antisubversiva», según el hablante, y los exsoldados de Malvinas constituyen el principal legado político del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional. Ambos, efectivamente, comparten un rasgo, aquella liminalidad que resulta de no haber completado el pasaje completo de una condición social a otra. Al carecer de los rituales funerarios que dan cuenta de ese pasaje ante la sociedad, los desaparecidos no completaron su paso al mundo de los muertos. Por alguna razón que expongo en *De chicos a veteranos*, los exsoldados de Malvinas no lograron pasar de adolescentes a adultos masculinos, pese a haber cumplido con el rito de paso de la conscripción que, además, involucró su participación en una guerra. Así, las víctimas del conflicto interno quedaron fijadas en la fase liminal del paso de la vida a la muerte, como «desaparecidos». Los soldados quedaron fijados en la fase liminal como los «chicos de la guerra», jamás adultos.

Publiqué mi tesis en 2004 sin mayores efectos. Quizás porque estaba escrita para un lectorado intelectual académico que, para entonces, estaba muy ocupado con el otro legado político de la dictadura, los desaparecidos.

5 El paño de carpa es, en realidad, un rectángulo de tela resistente que, atravesado en su doblez medio, forma dos aguas, con un parante o palo en cada extremo, y estacas en los cuatro vértices. Ese mismo paño se ubica debajo del castigado, lo cual no es un detalle menor en un suelo mojado y helado como el de abril-junio de 1982.

Por lo tanto, a veinte años de la guerra el concepto hegemónico de «memoria» seguía siendo el jurídico-político, no el sociocultural. Ante esta relativa falta de interlocución científica, y aunque no resolví este problema, decidí abocarme al gran ausente del conflicto bélico en los estudios académicos: el protagonista militar. A eso me dediqué desde entonces.

## La experiencia y la inexperiencia

Tuve una gran oportunidad cuando Antonio ‘Tony’ Zelaya, piloto de caza de Skyhawk A-4B de la V Brigada Aérea de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina (FAA) y capitán durante la guerra, me invitó a recuperar su «experiencia y la de los que allí quedaron». Pensé que era una circunstancia única y acepté, aunque no sabía nada de aviación militar. Tampoco de la oficialidad militar. Además, mis sujetos de estudio anteriores, los soldados, casi no habían participado en las misiones que encumbraron a los pilotos al reconocimiento mundial: hundir fragatas misilísticas británicas con bombas como las que se usaban en la segunda guerra mundial.

¿Cómo trabajar con ellos? Como si fueran nativos y, por lo tanto, aprendiendo sus normativas, sus lenguajes, sus valores, sus historias institucionales, su organización formal e informal, sus leyendas, es decir, sus modos de hacer, de decir y de pensar. Avanzar en este sentido me permitiría no caer en el pecado capital de la antropología, el etnocentrismo o, para este caso, en el socio-centrismo civil.

Entender ese mundo me introdujo en otro término, el de experiencia, donde la memoria se juega con el aprendizaje y, en este caso, con el conocimiento corporizado. Aquella investigación me llevó siete años de cierta soledad, pues carecía de interlocutores académicos que trabajaran la guerra y, particularmente, la guerra aeronáutica desde la antropología o desde las ciencias sociales. Decidí tomar la palabra «experiencia» que Tony había usado, como mi eje conceptual. Me valí de las aproximaciones de Tim Ingold, muy de moda en aquellos años (2007-2015), quien señalaba a conocimiento por la experiencia como un saber devaluado ante el crecimiento del razonamiento y el conocimiento científico y tecnológico (2000).

Aunque pronunciado por un lego, Tony, el término experiencia se reveló fundamental, porque los pilotos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina no la tenían. Carecían de experiencia en operaciones sobre el mar, un dominio naval por excelencia en la división de ambientes entre las fuerzas armadas argentinas, división de contornos político-militares, por momentos muy conflictivos, desde la caída de Juan Perón en setiembre de 1955. Publiqué *Experiencia de Halcón. Ni héroes ni kamikaze: pilotos de A-4B* en 2016, con una prosa destinada al gran público y, también, al mundo aeronáutico. Obviamente usaba y elaboraba conceptos teóricos que llevaban la trama del libro, pero sólo los aclaraba brevemente o en una nota al pie.

Para difundir su lanzamiento, la editorial logró que algunos medios me entrevistaran. A continuación, expondré un par de los encuentros periodísticos que promovió la editorial, atendiendo a la relevancia por la magnitud y prestigio de los entrevistadores, todos ellos contemporáneos de la guerra y reconocidos periodistas de investigación.

El primer encuentro estuvo a cargo de dos periodistas que me entrevistaron por Radio Nacional, la emisora estatal argentina, en un programa dedicado a mi trabajo y con una hora de duración. Supuse que me preguntarían sobre qué hace una antropóloga en temas aeronáutico-militares y cuestiones malvineras. Pero estos asuntos no se tocaron, pues sus preguntas eran otras. En vez del libro, prefirieron indagar en la improvisación militar y en los argentinos exiliados en México conocidos como «argenmex», que habían apoyado explícitamente la recuperación territorial del ‘82.

El programa se emitía en vivo, de manera que los periodistas recibieron comentarios de un par de oyentes que celebraron mis respuestas y mis «conceptos sobre nuestra guerra de Malvinas». Era costumbre del programa que, una vez emitido, los periodistas guardaran sus emisiones en un sitio web propio. No fue mi caso, probablemente porque el encuentro había transitado de manera accidentada, por una serie de explícitos

desacuerdos entre sus preguntas y mis negativas a responderlas. Mis respuestas los ofuscaba, especialmente a uno de ellos que, al término del programa, se fue sin saludar<sup>6</sup>.

También en 2016, otro periodista de radio me entrevistó debido a la solicitud editorial. Bastante secamente, inició la entrevista explicándome a mí y a los oyentes sobre la aviación aeronáutica en la guerra, por ejemplo, con los Super Etendard y los Exocet, alardeando un poco de su pretendido saber. Me permití acotar que los Super Etendard y sus misiles, los Exocets, que él tomaba como de la FAA, pertenecían a la Armada, y que mi libro trataba de la primera, cuyo empleo de misiles fue mínimo durante la guerra del '82. Además, aclaré, los SUE (tal la abreviatura de aquellos aviones franceses) habían sido fabricados para operar desde portaaviones, como el ARA 25 de mayo, la última pista en el mar que tuvo la Argentina<sup>7</sup>. Un par de acotaciones por el estilo le permitieron al entrevistador empezar a preguntar y a escucharme con más atención. Así, pudo reconocermelo como alguien con un saber distinto al suyo y distinto del tipo de saber que esperaba obtener en el encuentro. El frío 'Sentate ahí' del principio se convirtió en su acompañamiento a la puerta del estudio, al final.

Estos ejemplos que protagonicé con tres periodistas en dos encuentros son interesantes en varios sentidos. Al comienzo, estos periodistas no tenían mucho para preguntar, convencidos como estaban de que la guerra de Malvinas era algo que dominaban por contemporaneidad y por lecturas. Podríamos suponer que los periodistas son una subespecie humana vanidosa y empecinada. Pero quizás podamos extender este supuesto a otras subespecies intelectuales, como la gente de ciencias sociales. Veremos.

En todo caso, y siendo que los llamados «medios hegemónicos» penetran la configuración ideológico-política de aquéllos a quienes alcanzan, debemos aclarar para los dos casos expuestos que no se trataba de periodistas del *establishment* multimediático, sino de intelectuales que, en uno de los tres casos al menos, había ostentado una posición contraria a la última dictadura militar argentina, y que se desempeñaba en un medio que nació como alternativo ya en democracia. Las situaciones descritas denuncian una extraordinaria uniformidad para hablar de la única guerra internacional que protagonizó la Argentina en el siglo XX y la única en la cual participaron soldados junto a sus fuerzas armadas. Esa uniformidad se erige gracias a un consenso al que logra consolidar, y del cual participan, muy especialmente, las universidades, los académicos y las organizaciones humanitarias. Ese consenso sostiene que Malvinas fue un manotazo de ahogados de los militares que torturaron a los soldados argentinos, mientras los abandonaban en medio del combate.

Previo a la publicación del libro sobre los pilotos de la Fuerza Aérea, presenté su segundo capítulo como conferencia de cierre de unas Jornadas de Investigación en Antropología Social, de la Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, en Olavarría. El capítulo me venía bien para mostrar cuestiones relativas al método etnográfico, el tema por el cual me habían invitado. La exposición transcurrió y al auditorio le pareció interesante porque no sólo no abandonaron la sala, sino que la rebalsaron. Sin embargo, cuando tocó el turno de las preguntas, no hubo ninguna que requiriera la explicación de un concepto y de su aplicación, el enfoque teórico, ni de qué manera los materiales etnográficos venían a completar mi interpretación. Nuevamente aparecieron el manotazo de ahogado, el abandono de los soldados, etc. etc. etc. El debate académico antropológico parecía imposible.

6 Quizás, mis entrevistadores tuvieron otro problema, y es que el conocimiento periodístico standard sobre la guerra no les servía demasiado para mi tema. Los pilotos monopla (una persona por avión) tenían preocupaciones distintas a andar estaqueando soldados. Además, la proporción de caídos en Malvinas de la Fuerza Aérea desmentía la habitual afirmación de que los soldados fueron la carne de cañón de los oficiales argentinos. Este postulado, factible en la guerra terrestre, no se aplica a la aeronáutica militar donde los soldados sólo hacen tareas de carga y descarga, y servicio en hangares. En el combate los protagonistas son bien otros, tal como lo demuestran los fallecimientos: 36 oficiales, 16 suboficiales y 5 soldados (que estaban en tierra cuando un pequeño aeródromo del oeste de la isla fue bombardeado). Así, las proporciones de fallecidos revelan y dependen del tipo de trabajo que hace cada fuerza y cada arma.

7 Según aprendí en mi investigación siguiente, en la Armada hay soldados, suboficiales y oficiales, pero su distribución varía según se trate de un buque, un submarino, un avión de transporte, uno de caza y ataque, o una sección de una compañía de un batallón de infantes de marina. Cada uno vive la milicia y la guerra de maneras totalmente distintas. Por eso, referirse a alguien como «marino» o «piloto» es apenas designar su dependencia institucional general. Hay aviadores en el Ejército, la Marina y la Aeronáutica. Un marino se sabe relacionado con el mar, pero casi de inmediato surgen las diferencias (Guber 2016). Yo empezaba a aprender que Malvinas no fue lo mismo para sus tipos de protagonistas.

Aunque publiqué un artículo reflexionando sobre aquella instancia (Guber 2019), propongo aquí otra lectura. Las preguntas se me formulaban desde el más craso sentido común argentino que, como suele ser el caso, abrevaba en algunos hechos verdaderos. Lo llamativo eran las formulaciones extremadamente reiterativas y sin sustento en investigaciones académicas, más bien en comentarios ocasionales, algún artículo periodístico, y sobre todo rumores. Esto sucedía en un medio académico que se jactaba de ser creativo, comprometido y crítico.

Pienso, y pensé entonces, que las preguntas que se me hacían desde el público tenían la función performativa de alinear a su emisor con una posición definida sobre el mundo militar, posición que debía ser aceptable para el ámbito universitario en que se formulaba. Así, y aun cuando las observaciones tuvieran elementos de verdad, las preguntas venían a afirmar una afiliación de tipo político-ideológico, cuando lo que correspondía era proponer abordajes que abrieran nuestras nociones acerca de aquella guerra escasamente analizada. Viniendo de un encuentro entre practicantes de la antropología, me resultaba extraño que ni siquiera se me cuestionara mi disposición a utilizar la disciplina para reconocer la perspectiva de los actores, esto es, los militares aeronáuticos. Evidentemente, yo estaba sosteniendo que para entender qué fue la guerra de Malvinas, necesitamos reconstruir y entender la perspectiva práctica y teórica militar de aquella época.

En suma, la ausencia de la guerra de Malvinas de la agenda de investigaciones de las ciencias sociales y las humanidades en la Argentina fue una parte necesaria del armado de una lectura uniforme y maniquea por parte del periodismo y, mal que nos pese, del mundo universitario y académico. Esto supuso, y aun supone, un profundo desconocimiento de cómo fue aquella guerra. Pero ese desconocimiento no es sinónimo de ignorancia.

### **Descubrir, clasificar, recordar, reconocer**

El conocimiento y el desconocimiento son problemas inherentes a la antropología. No me refiero a la ignorancia o a la falta de educación; ni siquiera me refiero al olvido, porque en la Argentina nadie ignora que hubo una guerra en 1982 y que en ella murieron muchos compatriotas, generalmente muy jóvenes. Nos lo recuerda, año tras año, el ciclo de conmemoraciones malvineras en plazas, monumentos, escuelas, medios masivos, redes sociales, etc., entre el 2 de abril y el 14 de junio. Sin embargo, este conocimiento tiene sus particularidades y a ellas me voy a referir desde una disciplina que se ocupó, sistemáticamente, de encarar procesos de conocimiento de lo profundamente diferente o, dicho de otra manera, que se dedicó al conocimiento de la otredad cuando es identificada con lo exótico.

Cuando se habla del «descubrimiento de América» o de la «exploración del África y de Oceanía», se alude a encuentros recíprocos entre seres que se veían por primera vez y se mostraban ostensiblemente diferentes. Mi tesis en estas páginas es precisamente que la guerra de Malvinas es básica, profunda y vastamente desconocida por los argentinos académicos en este mismo sentido. Con esto puedo referirme tanto a la perspectiva de las academias civiles y de las militares, aunque en esta oportunidad lo haré sólo con respecto a la científica universitaria civil, que es la mía. Esta tesis—la academia ha decidido des-conocer la parte argentina de la guerra de Malvinas—admite la existencia de retazos de conocimiento que venimos sosteniendo por la repetición, desde la segunda mitad de 1982 hasta la actualidad. Así, desde la apertura de la actividad política y el anuncio de las elecciones para el 30 de octubre de 1983, es decir, aun bajo el régimen de facto, esos retazos continúan operando en nosotros para llegar a las mismas conclusiones que entonces.

Cuando empecé este escrito señalé que los universitarios argentinos, en general, sabemos demasiado poco de Malvinas. También, señalé que sabíamos más o menos lo mismo. Sugerí que parecíamos estar de acuerdo en lo poco que sabemos y que, aparentemente satisfechos con esto, no tenemos demasiadas preguntas que hacernos y que hacerles a los sobrevivientes (¿mataste-tuviste hambre-tuviste frío... te estaquearon?). Así

que no sólo sabemos lo mismo entre nosotros; sabemos lo mismo a través del tiempo, es decir, pese a los ya 41 años que nos separan del evento.

Volviendo a mirar el concepto, aparentemente «conocer» tiene dos antónimos: ignorar y desconocer. Es verdad que conocer de guerra es sumamente difícil para una población que no la había experimentado desde 1870. Sin embargo, estoy hablando aquí de universitarios y periodistas, de gente formada que sabe de historia y de actualidad, que lee y escribe libros, que va al lugar de los hechos, que indaga y que estudia. Entonces, ¿a qué no-conocimiento/desconocimiento me estoy refiriendo?

Hablo de cuatro sentidos que el colega germano-polaco Johannes Fabian formula en su libro *Anthropology with an Attitude* (2002). El primero es el de la cognición, es decir, reconocer algo nuevo, un nuevo dato. El segundo es el de la cognición que opera mediante la clasificación, es decir, cuando ubicamos a Malvinas como una clase de hechos (p.ej., una guerra, un acto represivo, el capricho de un General, etc.). El tercero es el conocimiento-memoria, basado en la memoria intelectual y corporal de un evento del pasado que se fue haciendo significativo en algún momento de ese pasado: conozco a esta guerra porque es como tal otra, o se parece a otro evento que atravesé o le sucedió a alguien que me lo transmitió. Finalmente, el cuarto sentido es el de reconocimiento, conceder un trato o tipo de atención que nuestro interlocutor o que el tema merece.

Como vemos, ninguna de las cuatro acepciones se opone a ignorancia. El rechazo a incorporar un dato como nuevo puede deberse a la necesidad o al prejuicio. La cognición por la clasificación se opone a la confusión. El conocimiento-memoria o experiencia se opone al olvido y el reconocimiento al des-conocimiento, es decir, a ser ignorado o ignorar a otro.

Estos cuatro pares de opuestos estuvieron presentes en las instancias de radio que describí, pero no en la misma magnitud. El gran organizador, el que permite ubicar a los demás modos de conocimiento, fue el «conocimiento-memoria». Así, por ejemplo, los primeros dos periodistas no podían preguntarme nada acerca de los pilotos, y preguntaban por lo único que les interesaba saber (o que ya «sabían»), «los argenmex». Yo conocía este tema, pero no por haberlo estudiado. No iba a comentar el tema sino como una ciudadana más. Ante mi renuencia, fui «des-conocida». A ellos no les importó que yo hubiera escrito un libro; me des-conocieron como intelectual en aquello que yo pretendía mostrarles a ellos y a la audiencia y, de paso, desconocieron como relevante o significativo mi tema de investigación y mi enfoque antropológico a él aplicado. En cambio, el periodista de la segunda entrevista pudo preguntarme por algo que tuviera que ver con la aviación de la guerra pero, al comienzo, mostraba ignorar (ahora sí en el sentido de «no saber») sobre otra cosa que no fuera del dominio o jurisdicción naval. Precisamente porque ignoraba y porque aceptó que ignoraba, pudo hacerme preguntas a mí y a mi tema. Su ignorancia provenía de su imposibilidad de encontrar dónde anclar sus ideas-memoria en mi tema del libro. Pero al encontrarse con mis respuestas acerca de que los SUE (Super Étendard) y los misiles Exocet AM no pertenecían a la Fuerza Aérea, entreabrió la puerta de su comprensión para conocer algo nuevo y, sobre todo, para desarrollar la entrevista, cosa que a los otros dos les había resultado imposible. Es evidente que los periodistas no sabían qué preguntarme, probablemente porque estaban más familiarizados con las entrevistas a soldados enfocados como «víctimas». Cuando un periodista entrevista a oficiales o suboficiales lo hace en tanto protagonistas de alguna acción destacada y con ribetes heroicos. Es decir, el entrevistado aparece ligado a un hecho pre-moralizado y que es leído conforme a su individualidad, no a su formación militar, ni a sus ejercicios como infante, artillero, comunicante, ingeniero, mecánico, etc. en operaciones. Si un oficial o suboficial aparece, entonces, como objeto de entrevista periodística, se debe a su excepcionalidad que, por eso mismo, contrasta con la supuesta medianía, cobardía y autoritarismo atribuidos a sus camaradas y a la Fuerza. Mientras tanto, los soldados aparecen como referidos a una normalidad: la de haber sido carne de cañón, «chicos de la guerra»; casi nunca como tiradores, como aprendices eficientes, como plenos combatientes.

En suma: el menú de la buena entrevista en el tema Malvinas debe proporcionar platos que permitan confirmar los padecimientos de guerra (las guerras son malas) y la victimización (de argentinos por otros argentinos). Pero esto no responde a la ausencia de conocimientos, sino al posicionamiento premeditado del entrevistador que se afirma en su pregunta, como si fuera un arma en el combate. Ubicado, posicionado en el «lugar correcto», el periodista debe indagar en ciertas cuestiones que consoliden la condena a la dictadura (sistema político), y debe hacerlo explícitamente mediante su desempeño como interrogador. Si bien es bastante probable que los periodistas no hayan sabido qué preguntarle a esta antropóloga que investigó a los «halcones de Malvinas», sí parecían (y afirmaban) saber de otras cosas que, a lo largo de la posguerra, les planteaban preguntas o cuestiones más relevantes, tanto para su posicionamiento ideológico, como para mostrarse como personas informadas por las novedades que trajo nuestra guerra: los argen-mex, los Exocet y, ciertamente, los estaqueos que ya, para 2016, estaban en pleno auge fundando causas judiciales por crímenes de lesa humanidad en las islas. Así, en sus largas trayectorias profesionales de una posguerra de casi medio siglo, estos periodistas le daban prioridad a cierta memoria que asimilaba/clasificaba a la guerra de Malvinas como subtipo del terrorismo de Estado. Jamás pensaron, jamás quisieron pensar que desde el punto de vista militar el terrorismo de Estado podía ser un subtipo del hecho «guerra», precisamente porque la historia de las denuncias por crímenes de lesa humanidad se contraponen a la posición que esgrimen sus acusados y las FF.AA. de entonces: lo ocurrido entre 1975 y 1980 fue, para los militares, una «guerra contra la subversión». Esta perspectiva inconveniente para la argumentación legal de las organizaciones humanitarias y los sectores progresistas de la sociedad argentina, particularmente de sus universidades, es sin embargo compartida, aunque calladamente, por quienes participaron de organizaciones armadas que actuaron en el centro-norte del territorio argentino durante la década de los 70s. Según quienes integraron las organizaciones armadas revolucionarias de aquellos años, ellos no fueron reprimidos; fueron vencidos por las armas (y claro que por un cruento sistema de delación).

Entonces, esa prioridad en el enfoque de lo que debe saberse EN TÉRMINOS de lo que el público debe recordar O NO OLVIDAR, es lo que permite clasificar «debidamente», aprender detalladamente y, finalmente, reconocer. El conocimiento-memoria sobre aquella guerra de Malvinas no incluye a los pilotos, probablemente porque sus trayectorias bélicas no se prestan a los decursos habituales de los debates sobre los militares de la dictadura (quizás por eso acepté la propuesta del Tony. Pero claro, me enfrentaba a una limitación: en estos temas, así enfocados, los periodistas tendrían dificultades para aplicar sus conocimientos-memorias. Por eso no podían entrevistarme (en verdad, las entrevistas sobre mis investigaciones fueron bien pocas y, generalmente en emisoras muy menores). En consecuencia, no podían reconocerme ni como investigadora ni como una entrevistada capaz de aportarles nuevos conocimientos. Después de todo, no es extraño que alguien que efectivamente me des-conoció, no me saludara al finalizar el encuentro. No sé si pensó que yo simpatizaba con los militares, pero era evidente que mi conocimiento no tenía ningún valor para él.

Todo desemboca, entonces, en la misma constatación: nadie necesita nuevos datos, porque «todo el mundo sabe» qué pasó en Malvinas. Por eso no hay nuevas preguntas. Tampoco hay nuevos datos. Este panorama se refuerza en el medio académico, por demás afín a aquella constatación, por demás apegado a des-conocer ciertas cuestiones. Por eso, a mis presentaciones en un medio académico no le siguen preguntas antropológicas, ni siquiera metodológicas. Le siguen preguntas-comentarios que reiteran los lugares comunes elaborados durante la primera posguerra a través del rumor, mientras se derrumbaba el régimen político que descansaba en los militares.

En esta trama, la agenda de quienes emplean la noción de memoria es vital, porque opera como un arsenal académico que garantiza ser parte de una cosmovisión autosuficiente y, por lo visto, atemporal<sup>8</sup>. Por eso, nuestro conocimiento sobre la guerra de Malvinas entre la Argentina y Gran Bretaña es anacrónico y socio-céntrico, y aunque esgrime hechos puntuales que pueden ser verdaderos, no logra ni desea interpretarlos dentro de la lógica que los produjo, una lógica que era ciertamente más compleja y que fue previa a cualquier intento de apertura democrática.

Señalé páginas atrás que los términos supuestamente irreconciliables de las antinomias o los dualismos guardan un escondido acuerdo. Ese acuerdo, ese puente entre ambos términos debe ser lo suficientemente incómodo para mantenerse bajo la alfombra durante 41 años. Los mismos 41 años en que me hice antropóloga, incomodando mis propias certezas de universitaria e incomodando crecientemente a mis colegas. ¿Dónde reside, entonces, esa incomodidad? Probablemente en que la guerra de Malvinas, con todo y la derrota, demuestra la posibilidad de acuerdo entre el régimen y su sociedad civil y política. Una forma de explicar ese acuerdo ha sido consignar la oscilación «exitista» o el «espíritu veleta» de la sociedad argentina y sus políticos: hoy se recuperó Malvinas y apoyamos al «gobierno»; mañana somos derrotados y rechazamos a la «dictadura genocida». Por mi parte, prefiero señalar el puente entre posiciones aparentemente contrapuestas e irreconciliables, animándome a transitarlo y descubrir, quizás, que a comienzos de 1982 el régimen, tan resistido, pudo ganar un alto grado de consenso, en nombre de una bandera que los argentinos creían y siguen creyendo propia.

Transitar los puentes, abrirnos a todas sus direcciones posibles, permitir que el campo conmueva nuestras convicciones, puede generar una incomodidad constructiva que mantenga vigente la crítica que el trabajo etnográfico plantea a nuestra experiencia, que mantenga siempre viva a nuestra disciplina.

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8 Aunque excede el espacio y objeto de este artículo, no quiero pasar por alto que una cosmovisión tal se expresa en la creación de un campo historiográfico que lleva la denominación de «Historia Reciente». Bajo este rótulo se estudian las dictaduras argentinas y regionales de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, principalmente desde sus crímenes y persecuciones. Sus objetivos, se dice, son no sólo «el estudio de pasados próximos», a contrapelo del requerimiento historiográfico tradicional que sólo permite el abordaje de objetos distantes en el tiempo, para garantizar la objetividad y la formación de archivos. También, una posición de «ruptura con los pasados considerados cercanos», la interdisciplinariedad, la incorporación sistemática de la historia oral y, significativamente, los «procesos históricos cuyas consecuencias directas conservan aun fuertes efectos sobre el presente, en particular en áreas muy sensibles, como el avasallamiento de los derechos humanos más elementales. [...] Tal es el motivo por el que este tipo de historiografía surge, generalmente, en países que atravesaron situaciones de enorme violencia social o estatal -tales como contiendas bélicas o guerras civiles, formas de terrorismo estatal y situaciones de victimización de una parte de la sociedad- que generaron demandas de reparación y justicia de los sectores afectados y que continúan vigentes como problemas del presente incluso muchas décadas después de ocurridos los acontecimientos. Esta es también la causa por la cual suele existir una estrecha relación entre esta manera de hacer historia y las demandas de justicia, los movimientos sociales que las sustentan y las formas de memoria social que contribuyen a configurar su identidad. Así, buena parte del impulso para la investigación y las preguntas que orientan a este campo encuentran su origen en este vínculo, a la par que la memoria -entendida como las sucesivas y fragmentarias capas de significación que le otorgan diversos grupos a aquel pasado- se convierte en ocasiones en fuente y objeto de estudio a la vez. Dados estos motores de origen, se hace particularmente necesario afianzar la reflexión crítica y la vigilancia epistemológica de los historiadores acerca de los vínculos entre lo que se ha dado en llamar la cultura de la memoria y los intereses investigativos que orientan la tarea profesional». Sin embargo, o quizás por eso mismo, los autores señalan «la evidente dimensión política del campo de la historia reciente. Un vínculo no solo explícito sino consciente entre el objeto de conocimiento, la actividad de conocimiento y la búsqueda de ciertos objetivos éticos, como 'verdad y justicia'. Este espíritu -que podríamos llamar «militante»-, muchas veces empático con determinados actores a los que se estudia, y manifestado también en la voluntad de muchos de convertir ese saber en un arma de intervención social ...» (Franco & Lvovich 2017).



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Hacia la ampliación de horizontes de la comprensión antropológica:  
etnografías con «alteridades incómodas»

# La traducción y la empatía en la comprensión de las fuerzas militares colombianas: Hacia una expansión de los horizontes antropológicos

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## Resumen

Atendiendo a la invitación que este dossier extiende: 'reflexionar sobre los desafíos teóricos, metodológicos, morales y éticos cuando se trabaja con las alteridades incómodas', me ocuparé de la siguiente pregunta: ¿Qué consecuencias tiene para la antropología social asumir las demandas de escucha de grupos incómodos? Para responder a esta pregunta me valdré del material etnográfico construido entre los años 2005 y 2008 con oficiales historiadores del Ejército Nacional de Colombia. Además, sostendré que la empatía y el respeto a las demandas de escucha son condiciones imprescindibles para la etnografía; esto se debe, a que al detenerse en la comprensión del 'otro incómodo' se amplían los horizontes disciplinares y se multiplica el conocimiento sobre las diferentes formas de estar en el mundo.

**Palabras clave:** Antropología de la incomodidad; Ejército Nacional de Colombia; traducción cultural; escritura antropológica; política-ética-estética

# Translation and Empathy in the Understanding of the Colombian Military Forces: Towards an Expansion of Anthropological Horizons

## Abstract

In response to the invitation extended by this dossier: 'to reflect on the theoretical, methodological, moral and ethical challenges when working with uncomfortable alterities', I will address the following question: What are the consequences for social anthropology when we properly assume the listening demands of uncomfortable groups? To answer this question, I will use the ethnographic material constructed between 2005 and 2008 among historian officers of the Colombian National Army. Furthermore, I will argue that empathy and respect for the demands of listening are essential conditions for an ethnography; this is due to the fact that by stopping to understand the 'uncomfortable other', disciplinary horizons are broadened and knowledge about the different ways of being in the world is multiplied.

**Key Words:** Anthropology of discomfort; Colombian National Army; cultural translation; anthropological writing; politics-ethics- aesthetics.

# Tradução e empatia na compreensão das forças militares colombianas: Rumo à ampliação dos horizontes antropológicos

## Resumo

Em resposta ao convite feito por este dossiê: 'refletir sobre os desafios teóricos, metodológicos, morais e éticos ao trabalhar com alteridades desconfortáveis', abordarei a seguinte questão: Quais são as consequências para a antropologia social quando assumimos adequadamente as demandas de escuta de grupos desconfortáveis? Para responder a essa pergunta, utilizarei o material etnográfico construído entre 2005 e 2008 entre oficiais historiadores do Exército Nacional Colombiano. Além disso, argumentarei que a empatia e o respeito pelas demandas de escuta são condições essenciais para uma etnografia; isso se deve ao fato de que, ao nos dedicarmos a entender o 'outro desconfortável', os horizontes disciplinares se ampliam e o conhecimento sobre as diferentes formas de ser no mundo se multiplica.

**Palavras-chave:** Antropologia do desconforto; Exército Nacional da Colômbia; tradução cultural; escrita antropológica; política-ética-estética.

# La traducción y la empatía en la comprensión de las fuerzas militares colombianas: Hacia una expansión de los horizontes antropológicos

Ana María Forero Angel

## Introducción

Los esfuerzos recientes de la antropología latinoamericana han madurado en interesarse por las llamadas minorías. En las agendas de investigación, la paulatina preocupación por hacer visibles las injusticias que padecen los indígenas, afrodescendientes, miembros de las comunidades LGBTIQ+ y las mujeres, ha traído consigo la necesidad de comprometerse con el bienestar de dichas poblaciones; más concretamente, con llevar sus exigencias a oídos del Estado. Así las cosas, los antropólogos colombianos, por ejemplo, han desempeñado un papel fundamental al idear y ejecutar políticas públicas que tienen el objetivo de hacer realidad los mandatos que impuso la reforma constitucional del 1991 al reconocer el carácter pluriétnico y multicultural de Colombia.

En pocas palabras, una parte importante de los antropólogos colombianos ha asumido el papel de antropólogos – ciudadanos<sup>1</sup> (Jimeno & Arias 2011); en esta línea, muchos de ellos han abanderado batallas por el reconocimiento y reparación por parte del Estado de las diferentes violencias/injusticias sufridas dentro de la sociedad. En su quehacer, los antropólogos ciudadanos establecen dicotomías claras en las que se legitima la función social de la disciplina: «víctima-victimario», «opresor-oprimido», «sujetos de reparación-sujetos punibles»; en cualquier caso, con sus prácticas y narrativas, esta orientación de la disciplina empatiza sólo con la parte que considera más débil de la dupla y, en consecuencia, la naturaleza de esta tarea termina excluyendo la comprensión antropológica de los llamados ‘victimarios’<sup>2</sup>. El compromiso moral con las víctimas ignora a ‘los perpetradores’ quienes son descritos exclusivamente en virtud de los actos atroces cometidos. En la agenda antropológica, entonces, se configuran subjetividades dignas de comprensión/empatía y subjetividades repugnantes que no son dignas de ser incluidas en los ejercicios investigativos (Dullo 2016:130)

Mi interés con este artículo es detenerme en ese punto y ocuparme de las siguientes preguntas: ¿Qué sucede cuando se hace del ‘otro incómodo’ un sujeto de indagación etnográfica? ¿Cómo se afectan los límites

1 Myriam Jimeno y David Arias en su artículo ‘La enseñanza de antropólogos en Colombia: una antropología ciudadana’ (Jimeno & Arias 2011) rastrean, en la historia de la enseñanza de la disciplina, la consolidación del compromiso del antropólogo con la comprensión de los conflictos sociales. Este compromiso se concreta al poner al servicio de la mejora de las condiciones sociales de los interlocutores los conceptos y metodologías de la disciplina. Retomando a Cardoso de Oliveira (Cardoso de Oliveira 2019), Jimeno y Arias hacen énfasis en que el trabajo del antropólogo latinoamericano es el de investigar su propia sociedad y el de velar por la mejora de las condiciones de vida en la misma, siendo ‘siempre diligentes’ con la comprensión de la sociedad y su transformación. Krotz (Krotz 2019) por su parte en su texto del 2019 ‘El caminar antropológico: ensayo sobre el trabajo de campo y la enseñanza’ argumenta que es ineludible experimentar, cuando se comprenden las injusticias presentes en la realidad estudiada, la necesidad de modificar las condiciones de esa realidad. Para Krotz el quehacer antropológico debe llevar a un compromiso político. Más precisamente: la observación participante debe responder al reto de la transformación social. Esta misma idea está presente en el trabajo de los investigadores Cesar Abadía, Héctor Ruiz Sánchez y María Yaneth Pinilla Alfonso (Abadía et al. 2019) quienes, en su artículo ‘Etnografía como acción Política: articulación del compromiso antropológico a estrategias contrahegemónicas’ del 2019, asumen ‘el indisoluble vínculo existente entre la ‘vocación crítica’ de la antropología y su compromiso con realizar acciones coherentes en contra de las lógicas de sumisión, sometimiento y reproducción subjetiva que sustentan jerarquías y desigualdades estructurales para hacer de la etnografía una herramienta de lucha política’ (p. 111). Otros antropólogos como Cardoso de Oliveira (Cardoso de Oliveira 2019) y Alcida Rita Ramos (Ramos 2008) defienden el vínculo entre la etnografía y la acción política. En todos los casos, los autores coinciden en señalar cómo el estudio de las condiciones de vida, lejos de llevar a un conocimiento objetivo de la realidad, conduce a la mejora de las condiciones de quienes habitan dicha vida.

2 En este texto se adoptará la definición de narrativa antropológica que la introducción al libro de Myriam Jimeno ‘Etnografías contemporáneas III’ (Jimeno, 2016) nos ofrece: «Las narrativas definen los términos de pertenencia al grupo, la inclusión o la exclusión, el rechazo o la aceptación. [la narrativa] Se entiende como una forma particular del discurso, cuyo interés para el antropólogo y otros científicos sociales consiste en permitirles ahondar en la perspectiva de distintos sujetos sobre sus experiencias a partir de sus propios relatos» (12-16).

morales de la antropología? A este respecto, sostendré que la empatía y el respeto a las demandas de escucha son condiciones imprescindibles para una etnografía; cuando nos detenemos en la comprensión del 'otro incómodo' se amplían los horizontes disciplinares y se multiplica el conocimiento sobre las diferentes formas de estar en el mundo. Cuestión que, por lo demás, no implica disolución alguna de los códigos morales de nuestra disciplina.

Para la elaboración de mi argumento estructuraré el escrito en tres secciones. La primera se titula 'Empatía, traducción y etnografía': en esta sostendré que el trabajo etnográfico es sobre todo empático y, por ende, está comprometido con dar cuenta de los incuestionables<sup>3</sup> de los interlocutores que nos interpelan. De ahí, argumentaré que este ejercicio empático abre al investigador a una comprensión de formas de vida ajenas que deben ser traducidas al mundo al que el antropólogo pertenece. Basada en Venuti (2019), argüiré que la traducción es un «ejercicio extranjerizante» (Venuti 2019) que obliga al antropólogo a ajustarse a las extrañezas del mundo social que lo interpelan, así como a favorecer la incorporación de nuevas categorías de análisis que den cuenta, precisamente, de esta extrañeza. En la segunda sección titulada 'Empatía, traducción y el miedo al relativismo moral' argumentaré que preocuparse por la comprensión de los incuestionables del 'otro incómodo' no implica cancelar los propios límites morales. Por el contrario, explicaré que la fusión de horizontes<sup>4</sup>, resultante de la traducción extranjerizante, no es sinónimo de la disolución de las concepciones de bien y de mal de quien investiga. Finalmente, en la tercera sección 'Traducciones' expondré un ejercicio de escritura en el que doy cuenta de la imagen del mundo militar, argumentando que es urgente que los antropólogos exploremos distintos registros en la expresión de nuestro quehacer.

## Empatía, traducción y etnografía

Martha Nussbaum (2014) define la empatía<sup>5</sup> como la capacidad de imaginar la situación del otro, tomando con ello la perspectiva de ese otro. No se trata simplemente del conocimiento de los estados del otro (algo que en principio podríamos obtener sin necesidad de un desplazamiento de perspectiva; por ejemplo, mediante una inferencia obtenida a partir de sucesos pasados). La empatía, aclara la filósofa, no es un mero contagio emocional, pues requiere que nosotros nos introduzcamos en el problema o la dificultad del otro; dicho coloquialmente, la empatía permite «ponernos en los zapatos del otro» (Nussbaum 2014) para así conmovernos<sup>6</sup> y disponernos a comprender sus acciones.

La empatía es característica del trabajo de campo de los antropólogos quienes nos desplazamos a las formas de vida de nuestros interlocutores para asir sus incuestionables. En nuestro quehacer construimos una cierta intimidad etnográfica que es, valga la redundancia, una condición indispensable para ponernos en los zapatos del otro. Nuestras metodologías de trabajo apuntan a poder entrar y permanecer dentro de los horizontes ajenos en los que viven las prácticas sociales que nos conmueven. El trabajo etnográfico es innegablemente empático en tanto nuestra misión es hacer comprensibles en nuestros horizontes las «extrañezas» de los otros que nos

3 En «Sobre la Certeza» Wittgenstein afirma: «yo no tengo mi imagen del mundo porque me cerciorara de su corrección; ni lo asumo porque esté convencido de su corrección. No: es el telón de fondo a partir del cual distingo entre lo verdadero y lo falso (...) Las oraciones que describen esta imagen de mundo podrían ser parte de una especie de mitología. Y su papel es como el de las reglas de un juego; y el juego puede ser aprendido en la mera práctica, sin tener que aprender explícitamente regla alguna» (Wittgenstein 2014: numeral 94). La etnografía debe dar cuenta de los telones de fondo sobre los que las personas edifican sus concepciones de bien, de mal, sus prácticas y sus narrativas. Los antropólogos, lejos de evaluar la corrección de una creencia, deben aprehenderla, y esto significa asir las reglas que rigen sus formas de vida, adentrándose en las realidades de sus interlocutores.

4 Explicaré este concepto a lo largo de la segunda sección.

5 Justificar por qué elijo la definición de Nussbaum sobre empatía en relación con las que ofrecen otros autores, excede el objetivo de este texto. Basta mencionar que privilegio el punto de vista de Nussbaum por el énfasis que da al desplazamiento imaginativo que no se agota en un mero suponer qué siente, vive, imagina la otra persona. El desplazamiento imaginativo lleva, como sostendré a lo largo del texto, a aprender las formas de vida.

6 A lo largo del texto recuperaré la definición de conmovir: verbo transitivo, sinónimo de perturbar, inquietar, alterar y mover fuertemente con eficacia a alguien o algo.

han inquietado. Los antropólogos traducimos lo que nos interpela y, como señalé en la introducción, asumo que esta labor ha de ser extranjerizante<sup>7</sup>.

Lawrence Venuti, historiador de la traducción que inscribe su trabajo en la hermenéutica heideggeriana y gadameriana, afirma que traducir es un acto de interpretación que inevitablemente altera el significado de aquello que se traduce (Venuti 2019: 6–9). El traductor irremediamente interpreta lo traducido de acuerdo con sus intereses, valores y creencias. Él *inscribe* lo interpretado en su forma de vida. De ahí que, Venuti invite a quienes nos ocupamos de la interpretación de otras formas de vida a asumir una reflexión crítica, es decir, a dejar de lado la pretensión de «representar» de manera inalterada a la alteridad que nos interpela. El ejercicio de la traducción implica poner en crisis nuestras categorías y darnos cuenta de su insuficiencia explicativa. Venuti llama a este ejercicio reflexivo «el imperativo ético de lo extranjerizante» (Constantine 2017) que, de seguirse, impide la asimilación de las prácticas y narrativas de nuestros interlocutores con los valores de nosotros los antropólogos encargados de registrar la diferencia cultural. El imperativo extranjerizante nos obliga a lidiar con los límites de los valores y creencias de nuestras formas de vida. El antropólogo, entonces, en la medida en que se vale de metodologías inmersivas, empatiza con sus interlocutores y traduce de manera extranjerizante (Venuti 2019: IX). Esto, a su vez, trae como consecuencia hacer inteligible a quien nos interpela y poner en crisis nuestras formas de describirlo. En palabras de Gadamer (1977) el encuentro con aquello que nos inquieta produce una «experiencia de choque», puesto que nos encontramos con algo cuyo sentido desafía nuestras expectativas, creencias y/o prejuicios previos (Gadamer 1977: 334). Como resultado, este encuentro provoca una interrupción en nuestra comprensión habitual del mundo y este choque es una oportunidad para un entendimiento profundo y enriquecido del sentido de aquello que buscamos entender. La «experiencia de choque» es esencial para el proceso de comprensión, ya que nos obliga a revisar nuestras formas de interpretar

7 La reflexión sobre la importancia de la traducción en antropología no es nueva. En la introducción a la antología «Translating Cultures, perspectives on translation and anthropology», los editores Rubel y Rosman (Rubel and Rosman 2003a) señalan la importancia que para Bronislaw Malinowski (Malinowski 1972 [1922]: 23–24 en Rubel & Rosman 2003a) y Franz Boas (Boas & Hunt 1905, 1906, en Rubel & Rosman, 2003) tuvo el aprender el lenguaje de las comunidades estudiadas; ambos antropólogos rechazaron comunicarse con sus habitantes en inglés pidgin o en lenguas francas, privilegiando la comunicación en las lenguas nativas ya que, según estos antropólogos, sólo a través de ellas podían acceder al mundo de las comunidades estudiadas. Boas publicó sus resultados de investigación transcribiendo fonéticamente el lenguaje nativo y reconociendo que el lenguaje del «Nuevo Mundo» tenía estructuras diferentes a las de las lenguas europeas y a las del latín (Rubel & Rosman 2003:3–4). Igualmente, Malinowski en la introducción a *Argonautas del Pacífico Occidental* advertía que dominar el lenguaje nativo es indispensable para adentrarse en la cultura que se estudia. Sorá (2017) recuerda que, por su parte, Evans-Pritchard, en la conferencia Marret de 1950 en Oxford afirma que, al interpretar, el antropólogo traduce de una cultura a otra, y no se limita a encontrar meras equivalencias lingüísticas. En los años 70, Clifford Geertz (Geertz 1995) describe a la cultura como una superposición de textos escritos en lenguas extrañas «en caracteres borrosos, cuya lectura e interpretación exigen traducción» (Geertz 1994 [1983]: 45, en Sorá 2017). La tarea del antropólogo es, entonces, interpretar el texto/cultura que tiene delante de sí para traducirlo y hacerlo comprensible entre quienes comparten la cultura del investigador. En su proyecto interpretativo Geertz subraya que la antropología es una disciplina que busca significados y no una ciencia que pretende acceder a leyes culturales universales (Geertz 1995). Por esto mismo, la labor del antropólogo es inmersiva: éste debe vivir en la cultura ajena para aprender los significados de las prácticas a los que asiste. La traducción no es un mero ejercicio textualista, no es una búsqueda de correspondencias lingüísticas. Talal Asad en su texto «The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology», afirma que la traducción cultural no es un proceso en el que palabras o conceptos se trasladan de manera neutral de una cultura a otra. Para este autor la traducción no es un intercambio neutro de significados, sino que está inmerso en relaciones de poder. Los significados y valores de la cultura dominante (la del antropólogo) se imponen sobre la forma de vida descrita. Asad critica, con esto, el concepto de «traducción cultural» en la tradición antropológica británica, pero no niega la posibilidad de traducir; en cambio, advierte que la traducción debe estar precedida por una labor crítica en la que los investigadores abandonen el uso de sus categorías de análisis y asuman las de sus interlocutores; cuestión que termina por desequilibrar el proyecto científico occidental marcado por una descripción colonialista de las formas de vida diferentes. Talal Asad remite a la «Tarea del traductor de Walter Benjamin» (Benjamin 1962, en Asad 1986)

*El lenguaje de la traducción puede – y de hecho debe– conducirse por sí sólo, pero dando intensión y armonía al original, sin suplantarlo [una buena traducción] debe ir precedida de una no menos extremada crítica. Para lo cual habremos de considerar que esa crítica feliz, será una crítica interna, una crítica acerca de la propia tarea de traducir, una crítica, pues, basada en el agudo entendimiento; o, mejor dicho, en el anhelo de la coherencia y de la fidelidad como divinas.*

Asimismo, James Clifford reconoce la importancia de la traducción en el trabajo etnográfico, y advierte el carácter traicionero de la misma «The translator is a traitor» (Clifford 1999: 235). Este antropólogo asume la imposibilidad de que la traducción cultural «represente» a la alteridad, siendo un espejo de la misma, e insiste en que el traductor inevitablemente traiciona la tarea de una representación fiel. La riqueza del ejercicio radica en encontrar las formas correctas de narrar el encuentro (no de reproducirlo). Para Clifford, durante la traducción cultural el mundo del antropólogo cambia, porque amplía el repertorio para comprender prácticas y narrativas ajenas. Recientemente, en la introducción de la ya mencionada antología Paula Rubel y Abraham Rosman (Rubel & Rosman 2003b), ellos analizan las consecuencias que la traducción cultural ha tenido para el desarrollo de la antropología y subrayan, siguiendo a Clifford, que el etnógrafo tiene la disposición de dejarse transformar por el contacto con otros textos y culturas. Rubel y Rosman insisten en que la traducción no es una transformación mecánica de un lenguaje a otro, sino que esta implica «viajes a través de universos verbales y no verbales»; por ende, los componentes invisibles de la traducción incluyen no sólo las capas de las complejidades lingüísticas y de los aspectos cognitivos, sino también de los componentes culturales y políticos.

al otro para adecuar nuestras traducciones a sus demandas de escucha. Gadamer explica que quien está delante de una experiencia de choque debe volver a dar sentido (recomponer el significado) de aquello que la provocó, y este dar sentido lo obliga a incorporar las exigencias del otro, sus valores y sus creencias. Cuestión que, como se verá más adelante, no implica el auto-cancelamiento del investigador. Por ahora, me detendré en explicar cómo ha sido el proceso de traducción de la forma de vida militar.

En el año 2005 adelantaba mis estudios doctorales y me acercaba al Ejército Nacional de Colombia para entender cómo era el proceso de formación entre los militares: me interesaba explicar la manera en que un ciudadano civil se transformaba en soldado; me inquietaban los textos que leían, la disciplina corporal en la que se entrenaban y su preparación para llegar al área de combate. En ese mismo año, generales, coroneles y soldados profesionales coincidían en señalar la inutilidad de mi pregunta y subrayaban la importancia de que me ocupara de 'la verdadera historia de la institución'. Insistían en que la voz de los militares no había sido escuchada y que por eso mismo rápidamente su figura se asociaba con violaciones de derechos humanos y vejámenes en contra de la población civil. Los soldados con los que entraba en contacto insistían en que el Ejército era una institución herida, y reclamaban la necesidad de ser comprendidos. El coronel N. afirmaba:

La historia de la institución es una historia de heridas. De nada han servido veinte años en el monte, haber sufrido de malaria y haber perdido la vida de muchos hombres, si el conflicto sigue. Si las FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) siguen. Esta, Ana María, es una institución herida por el desamor de la sociedad civil y el desapego del Estado (Coronel N, comunicación personal, 2005) (Forero Angel 2017).

La afirmación del coronel carecía de sentido en mi horizonte. Recordemos que hasta que se promulgara la Constitución de 1991 Colombia vivió en un estado de sitio permanente (García Villegas y Uprimny 2005; Iturralde 2002). Basta mencionar que, de 1958 a 1991, diferentes gobiernos, amparándose en el artículo 121 de la Constitución de 1886, declararon el estado de excepción que daba autonomía al Ejército para la recuperación del llamado 'orden público'. Es decir, que por más de 17 años consecutivos se usaron a las fuerzas militares para acallar las protestas sociales. En su columna del periódico *El Espectador*, escrita el 10 de octubre del 2008, el abogado Mauricio García Villegas afirmó:

Tres períodos [con respecto del estado de sitio] pueden ser diferenciados. El primero de ellos se inicia en 1957 con la instauración del Frente Nacional y llega hasta el fin del gobierno del presidente López Michelsen en 1978 (...) Inicialmente el estado de sitio fue utilizado en las ciudades para reprimir –en un principio tímidamente– las manifestaciones de descontento, así como para resolver problemas derivados de la crisis económica heredada de la época de La Violencia. En el campo se vivía una situación de guerra contra la subversión guerrillera naciente y contra los pocos reductos de la violencia. Mientras en las ciudades se restringían los derechos ciudadanos con el fin de contrarrestar las manifestaciones políticas, en las zonas rurales se mataba para reprimir a la subversión. De otra parte, la intervención de los entes encargados del control –tanto constitucional como político– fue prácticamente nula. El segundo período se inicia con el gobierno de Turbay Ayala (1978) y termina con el fin del mandato del presidente Virgilio Barco (1990). En estos años, la excepción perdió fuerza como instrumento de control social –en parte por la disminución de las manifestaciones políticas de estudiantes y obreros– y ganó importancia como instrumento de represión de las actividades ilegales del narcotráfico y la subversión. Durante la década de los años 70 y principios de los 80, las Fuerzas Armadas y los organismos de seguridad del Estado obtuvieron prerrogativas propias de un régimen militar, lo cual les eximió de los costos políticos del ejercicio directo del poder.

En la historia reciente el expresidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010) declaraba que la seguridad era la condición indispensable para promover el desarrollo del país: sin atentados terroristas, Colombia podría encaminarse por las rutas del progreso. En su documento marco «Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática» (PDSD) el expresidente enfatizaba que los esfuerzos de su gobierno estarían concentrados en la pacificación de



la geografía nacional (Presidencia de la República Ministerio de Defensa Nacional 2003). Al calor de la PDSO nació la directiva ministerial<sup>8</sup> permanente del 17 de noviembre del 2005 en la que se definía una política para el pago de recompensas «por la captura o el abatimiento en combate de las cabecillas de organizaciones armadas al margen de la ley» (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional 2005). Como consecuencia de la Política de Seguridad Democrática, y de las órdenes contempladas en la directiva ministerial, hubo 6400 ejecuciones extrajudiciales, también conocidas como los falsos positivos. Las víctimas fueron civiles: sus cadáveres fueron vestidos con uniformes de la guerrilla y sus muertes fueron declaradas ‘golpes al enemigo’<sup>9</sup>. Esto se debe, a que la directiva ministerial presionaba a miembros del Ejército para mostrar resultados que debían ser medidos en muertes enemigas. Como resultado de la presión, se acudió al asesinato de civiles que disfrazaban como miembros de la guerrilla para acrecentar los resultados que les demandaban.

Las víctimas fueron civiles: sus cadáveres fueron vestidos con uniformes de la guerrilla y sus muertes fueron declaradas ‘golpes al enemigo’<sup>10</sup>. La directiva ministerial presionaba a miembros del Ejército para mostrar resultados que debían ser medidos en muertes enemigas.

La Comisión de la Verdad (2024), en su informe «Ejecuciones extrajudiciales: un antídoto frente al veneno de la negación», aclara que ‘los falsos positivos’ no fueron crímenes cometidos únicamente por el estamento castrense. En el informe se lee:

[hubo] casos en los que funcionarios de instituciones estatales encargados de registrar, investigar y castigar estas muertes, efectivamente, ignoraron su trabajo y fueron cómplices de su ocultamiento e impunidad. Entre el 2002 y 2008 se evidenció el trabajo conjunto entre el Ejército y grupos paramilitares en diferentes departamentos del país para entregar a las víctimas, vivas o muertas, y comprar armas para presentarlas de manera fraudulenta como muertas en combate. La Comisión logró determinar que por lo menos 162 batallones y unidades especiales adscritas al Ejército estuvieron involucradas en casos de ejecuciones extrajudiciales bajo la modalidad de combates simulados. La práctica se fue extendiendo en todo el país a través de los traslados a oficiales y suboficiales que ya habían cometido estos hechos, alimentada por la estructura de incentivos y evaluación, fundamental para que se reprodujera en toda la institución (Comisión de la verdad 2024).

Con esto en mente, recordemos la afirmación del Coronel N.: «El Ejército es una institución herida». ¿Qué sentido tenía tal afirmación cuándo era evidente que a lo largo de la historia colombiana el Ejército había demostrado ser el estamento privilegiado para encargarse del orden público? La aseveración del coronel definitivamente me inquietaba, producía una experiencia de choque. Me encontraba con algo inesperado que provocaba una interrupción en mi forma habitual de significar al Ejército. Heredera de la antropología ciudadana, lo identificaba con el rol de victimario. El dolor y los reclamos del coronel, que resonaban en los miembros de alto rango que encontraba, hacían que cayera en cuenta de la insuficiencia de mis categorías de análisis, de lo incompleto del sentido que el Ejército tenía en mi horizonte. Para avanzar en el entendimiento del malestar de los altos mandos, me sumergí en la forma de vida de quienes demandaban ser interpretados como heridos. Establecía una metodología inmersiva que me permitía introducirme en el dolor militar. Tras dos años de conversaciones en oficinas y viviendas de altos rangos militares; de asistir a algunas clases de la Escuela Militar de Cadetes José María Córdova<sup>11</sup>; de leer la totalidad de los números de la revistas ‘Ejército’ y ACORE (Asociación Colombiana de Oficiales Retirados de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia) publicados desde

8 En Colombia una directiva ministerial es un documento oficial emitido por un ministerio o una autoridad gubernamental superior. Este documento tiene como objetivo proporcionar instrucciones, establecer políticas y definir procedimientos que deben seguirse dentro del ámbito de competencia del ministerio que la promulga.

9 Ver Comisión de la verdad (2024).

10 Ver Comisión de la verdad (2024).

11 La oficialidad colombiana inicia su profesionalización en *La Escuela José María Córdova* donde reciben la formación que los gradúa como subtenientes (el rango más bajo de la oficialidad).

su fundación hasta el 2005; de analizar la obra completa de los historiadores militares: los generales Novoa, Álvaro Valencia Tovar, Puyana, Ibañez y Landazábal<sup>12</sup>; y de sistematizar más de una decena de entrevistas; comprendí que en la imagen del mundo militar la institución estaba herida porque ni el Estado, ni los civiles, hemos sabido reconocer su grandiosidad.

Los oficiales historiadores afirman que el Ejército ha sido indispensable en la evolución y sobrevivencia de la humanidad. En su concepción histórica, el origen universal de los ejércitos se remonta al estado de naturaleza en el que el hombre era lobo para el hombre, y no existía ningún estamento o institución que dirimiera los conflictos que surgían por dicho estado natural. Según sus narrativas, los seres humanos se agredían unos a otros, arriesgando con ello la sobrevivencia de la especie. Sin embargo, el estado de naturaleza pudo ser superado gracias a la presencia de los primeros cuerpos del orden, quienes se dedicaron a dirimir los conflictos para evitar las agresiones entre los seres humanos, y custodiar las formas de paz establecidas. Los hombres que conformaron estos primeros grupos armados se caracterizaron por tener un excelente temple moral, por ser justos y por estar en capacidad de intervenir con mesura y equilibrio en los conflictos. En palabras de los miembros de la *Academia de Historia Militar*, una vez establecidos los cuerpos del orden, otros hombres y mujeres pudieron dedicarse a las artes, a la agricultura y a la religión, elementos que consideran fundamentales en el camino civilizatorio (Ibañez Sánchez 1993).

En el caso de Latinoamérica, la historia militar se vio marcada por la llegada de los españoles. En Colombia, pues se encontraron con 'tribus' que recién arrancaban el camino civilizatorio. Los historiadores militares se esmeraron en describir a los *chibchas*<sup>13</sup> como una tribu superior que ya estaba madurando una organización estatal y que, gracias al código de *Nemequene*, había logrado imponer, a lo largo del altiplano cundiboyacense, una serie de disposiciones legales que castigaran a los adúlteros, a los incestuosos, a los sodomitas y a los ladrones (Ibañez Sánchez 1993). Asimismo, los historiadores explicaron que los *chibchas* gozaban de una forma de organización política que les permitía aceptar la superioridad de la religión católica, pero no la atribuida al rey que 'era un loco medio ebrio que se creía el dueño de un territorio que ni siquiera había visto' («Conversación Informal Sostenida Con El General Ibañez» 2005a).

De acuerdo con estos oficiales, los conflictos de la población comenzaron por disputas territoriales. Los autores militares recuerdan que, con los españoles, desembarcaron también los valores de la Corona: la religión, el arte renacentista y una gran estructura militar que supo adaptarse a las condiciones del Nuevo Mundo. En sus narrativas, se recuerda que las tropas españolas estaban compuestas por una gran cantidad de hombres de orígenes diversos: había personas de origen noble, al igual que representantes de los peores sectores de la sociedad identificados con la felonía, el afán de conseguir riquezas, la codicia y la lealtad a la revuelta. Ellos, presa de sus instintos, abusaron de las mujeres indígenas y dieron origen a la peor de las razas: la mestiza. Al respecto, el general Ibañez afirmó que

Los conquistadores venían sin mujeres y se aprovechaban de las indígenas. Nosotros somos un producto de la lascivia de los conquistadores y de las mujeres aborígenes. Los hombres indígenas eran perezosos sexualmente a diferencia de los conquistadores que eran muy activos en ese sentido. Cada conquistador andaba con seis, ocho

12 Estos historiadores son quienes dentro de la institución se consideran portavoces autorizados con función autor. En su obra *¿Qué significa hablar? Economía de los intercambios lingüísticos*, Bourdieu afirma que el portavoz autorizado sólo puede actuar por las palabras sobre otros agentes y, a través de su trabajo, sobre las cosas mismas, en la medida en que su palabra concentra el capital simbólico acumulado por el grupo que le ha otorgado ese mandato y de cuyo poder está investido. Para entender la función autor, Foucault nos invita a diferenciar entre los nombres comunes como Pierre Dumont, y nombres de autor como Kierkegaard (1999: 14) El nombre del segundo no es un simple elemento del discurso, «este ejerce un papel respecto a los discursos: asegura una función clasificadora, reagrupa un cierto número de textos, establece una relación de filiación» (1999: 16). La función autor manifiesta el acontecimiento de un cierto número de discursos y se refiere al estatuto de estos en el interior de una sociedad, y en el interior de una cultura. Esta insta un cierto grupo de discursos que son objeto de apropiación a lo largo de años, que se transmiten a lo largo de la historia, y que se hacen referente para las discusiones canónicas alrededor de un tema.

13 Los *chibchas* son un pueblo indígena que ha habitado algunas regiones de Colombia desde el siglo VI a.p. Actualmente viven en distintas localidades del Bogotá, la capital colombiana, en algunos municipios vecinos como Cota, Chía y Sesquilé, y en Tunja donde se encuentra el «Cabildo Mayor Chibcha - Muisca de Tunja» -el cual representa la autoridad indígena territorial de ese grupo (Langebaek 2019).

indígenas. La desaparición de los indios no se debe tanto a la guerra sino al mestizaje y a las enfermedades. La lascivia de las indias y de los españoles dañó dos razas: la blanca y la india. Dio origen a la raza mestiza: defectuosa y perezosa, carente de disciplina (General Ibáñez, comunicación personal, marzo 2005).

Por consiguiente, el Ejército sufrió las consecuencias de este encuentro y quedó conformado de la siguiente manera: los españoles, representantes de la moral y razón civilizada, ocuparon los altos mandos y se encargaron de la organización política de las colonias; mientras que los indígenas, avanzados en el camino civilizatorio, enrolaron los cargos de la tropa y conformaron la servidumbre; por su parte, los mestizos quedaron apartados de las fuerzas militares, y de la administración de los territorios, siendo relegados a las campañas educativas: ellos debían dejar de ser un obstáculo en la evolución de los pueblos americanos (Herrera 1990: 13).

Con esto en mente, los historiadores militares insisten en que hubo que esperar a que en la *Campaña Libertadora* Simón Bolívar demostrara que el gen mestizo podía ser dominado y reprimido para dar lugar a la disciplina y al genio militar (Rodríguez 1979: 25). Esto se debe, a que *El Libertador* supo recibir con agradecimiento la formación impartida por sus maestros, viajó a Europa para aprender las doctrinas políticas y militares de avanzada, y tuvo siempre consigo «El contrato social» de Rousseau. Para los historiadores militares, la disciplina de Bolívar domesticó los defectos de su raza, pero no eliminó la pasión que usaba en el don de mando, y que era indispensable para triunfar sobre cualquier ejército.

En pocas palabras, al decir de los altos mandos, el Ejército contemporáneo es producto de un progreso paulatino: las organizaciones castrenses primitivas garantizaron la supervivencia de la especie; el encuentro con los españoles dio orden a la jerarquía militar; y la disciplina de Bolívar demostró que los instintos podían domesticarse; esto, dio lugar a un Ejército civilizado en el que los altos mandos sabían dirigir a la tropa en el cumplimiento de, lo que consideran, la más noble de las tareas: la defensa de la autonomía de los pueblos y la conservación del orden.

Los historiadores militares aclaran que el temple moral de los soldados evolucionó de manera simultánea al de la institución. Estos hombres, sin importar su rango, desde la noche de los tiempos<sup>14</sup> maduraron su espíritu de servicio y de sacrificio. La quintaesencia de la identidad militar ha sido «desde siempre la misma: sacrificarse por el bienestar y el progreso de la sociedad). Empero, los historiadores Valencia Tovar, Landazábal, Puyana e Ibáñez, quienes han escrito la historia militar, se unen a la afirmación del coronel N., e insisten que ni el Estado, ni los civiles, reconocen el valor del Ejército colombiano: ellos ignoran que, ambas la evolución y la historia nacional, se han encargado de forjar una institución que tiene como única misión preservar el orden y proteger a los ciudadanos. De hecho, los miembros de la *Academia de Historia Militar* señalan que este desamor ha madurado con el desarrollo y fortalecimiento de las guerrillas nacionales:

La guerrilla se roba el corazón de los colombianos. Les promete mejorar su situación, sacarlos de la miseria, promete llevar educación a las zonas marginales, promete salud. La guerrilla llena el vacío estatal y aleja a los ciudadanos de sus reales defensores: nosotros, el Ejército Nacional de Colombia. Los gobiernos nos usan como una fuerza apagafuegos: nos mandan a recuperar los territorios y después no envían a las instituciones civiles. El Estado se vale de sus fuerzas militares y no llega con educación, con salud, con empleo y los ciudadanos, obviamente, nos ven como la bota que castiga. Los colombianos asisten a la violencia de nuestras misiones y aprenden a vernos con desconfianza, no entienden que es necesario acabar militarmente con el enemigo para poder garantizar condiciones dignas de vida (conversación personal sostenida con el general Álvaro Valencia Tovar 1996).

En la historia oficial militar se establecen dos incuestionables: los gobiernos no han entendido la función de la institución, y la población civil teme a los garantes legítimos del orden. Haberme sumergido en la forma

14 Esta expresión, utilizada por los mismos oficiales historiadores, hace referencia a que, desde el inicio de la institución, los soldados han madurado un espíritu de servicio y sacrificio.

de vida militar, haber asumido la experiencia de choque y haber seguido el imperativo extranjerizante (en la tercera sección me ocuparé de este punto), me permitió comprender que las heridas denunciadas por los altos mandos militares son una recurrencia narrativa que se transmite de generación en generación. También, que el dolor es un telón de fondo sobre el que fundamentan sus relaciones con los gobiernos, el Estado y la población civil. El imperativo extranjerizante demostraba que, las duplas de análisis propuestas en la introducción de este escrito, se quedan cortas en el momento de comprender y registrar la complejidad del mundo militar. Al re-significar el sentido que el Ejército tenía en mi horizonte, esto me llevó a incorporar algunas de las creencias y valores de sus historiadores. En este punto, podemos parafrasear las preguntas anunciadas anteriormente: Si la empatía implica algo valioso en sí mismo, tal como el reconocimiento del otro en el centro de la experiencia etnográfica, ¿establecerla con el 'otro incómodo' del militar, no materializaría uno de los mayores miedos de la antropología? A saber, ¿caer en el relativismo moral? ¿La empatía podría significar perder las nociones de bien y de mal que impiden repudiar los hechos de barbarie? Cuando ella se pone delante de la versión de la historia de la institución y de sus heridas, ¿me convierte en cómplice de sus excesos de guerra, sus abusos descritos y su concepción histórica?

### **Empatía, traducción y miedo al relativismo moral**

Las preguntas que cierran la sección anterior sintetizan las reacciones frecuentes a mi trabajo. Algunos colegas y asociaciones de víctimas de la violencia ejercida por el Estado establecen una rápida conexión entre comprender la imagen del mundo militar, y justificar los delitos cometidos por el Ejército. Es decir, que construyen una estrecha relación entre aproximarse a otros valores, creencias y formas de estar en el mundo con la conversión a los incuestionables de esas formas de estar en el mundo; de ahí que, por supuesto, si esa forma de vida es la militar, se asuma que, debido al carácter íntimo de la etnografía, se esté celebrando una cierta complicidad con los valores militares, o con la desorientación moral. No obstante, esta asociación es errónea, pues como ya he mencionado, el trabajo de campo en la antropología es empático: su objetivo es comprender las formas de vida de nuestros interlocutores; por esto mismo, somos receptivos a la extrañeza y, en el ejercicio de traducción, incorporamos sus maneras de estar en el mundo. Afirmo como Gadamer que:

Esta receptividad no presupone neutralidad frente a todas las cosas, sino que incluye una matizada incorporación de las propias opiniones previas y prejuicios. Lo que importa es hacerse cargo de las propias anticipaciones con el fin de que el texto mismo pueda presentarse en su alteridad (Gadamer 1977: 372).

En otras palabras, la comprensión no es sinónimo de conversión. Establecer la intimidad etnográfica significa reconocer la dificultad del diálogo entre diferentes tradiciones, ya sean estas políticas, religiosas, filosóficas o artísticas. En las traducciones no comprendemos la totalidad de lo que nos interpela, como tampoco lo ignoramos todo; éstas son un género abierto que obliga al investigador a reconocer la extrañeza del otro, y reconocer de manera simultánea la dificultad de expresarla en nuestros horizontes. Por lo tanto, asociar la labor etnográfica de la comprensión del Ejército con la complicidad, y con la justificación de sus actos de barbarie, reduce la institución al rol de victimario. Empero, lo anterior olvida que ésta es una forma de vida compleja con la que es indispensable dialogar si se quieren atender las diferentes aristas del conflicto interno colombiano y, para ello, es necesario, siguiendo a McIntyre en De La Torre, Loria y Nontol (2022), aprender también su idioma. El filósofo aclara que:

Así las personas se convierten en un habitante en situación de frontera. No hay muchos, pero siempre ha habido personas (misioneros, antropólogos, traductores) que han sabido traducir gran parte del lenguaje del otro y con creatividad e imaginación extender y enriquecer el propio lenguaje para traducir las partes más intraducibles y diferentes del otro (McIntyre en De la Torre, Loria & Nontol 2022).

Tarea que, indudablemente, no es sencilla, pero sí es posible con el tiempo. La comprensión no es sinónimo de reducir al otro en una categoría con la que debemos sentirnos cómodos. Reducir al Ejército a la categoría de victimario impide entender su imagen del mundo. Acalla las demandas de escucha de quienes se sienten afectados por la fragilidad de la institución y, con ello, sienten la necesidad de verse reconocidos por los gobiernos y la población civil para «así finalmente poder cumplir con la misión constitucional y ser la institución que realmente cumpla con sus características fundacionales» (Forero Angel 1996; Forero Angel 2005a). Del mismo modo, desconocer la imagen del mundo militar nos impide aproximarnos a sus heridas, así como a la manera en que estas son determinantes para las concepciones de su misión, del enemigo y de la población civil (me ocuparé de esto en la última sección).

En otras palabras, desatender los «incuestionables» militares nos aleja de la posibilidad de conocer con minucias etnográfica a la institución que, como hemos visto, ha sido determinante en la geopolítica nacional. Si la empatía y la traducción se asocian al miedo del relativismo moral, y si se exige a los antropólogos asumir las dicotomías propuestas por la antropología ciudadana, entonces abandonamos la razón de ser de nuestro quehacer disciplinario: «abrir diálogos con lo que nos incomoda». Cuando aprisionamos los actores políticos en categorías dicotómicas de análisis como las de víctima y victimario, esto nos impide dar cuenta de las diferentes instituciones que rigen el destino de las naciones (Lutz 2006).

La comprensión antropológica es traducción y, como tal, en este ejercicio incorporamos la forma de vida que nos interpela. Durante dicho proceso, asistimos a la inadecuación de nuestro lenguaje, y experimentamos el imperativo extranjerizante que nos obliga a encontrar las mejores maneras posibles de dar cuenta de lo que nos (con) mueve. Algo que, por lo demás, siempre implica atender a ciertas demandas de escucha. La coincidencia entre esa búsqueda por encontrar las formas adecuadas de narrar las demandas del otro, y la satisfacción del otro al sentirse respetado, tiene resonancia en lo que Gadamer llama ‘fusión de horizontes’.

Para el filósofo alemán, los horizontes del intérprete y del ‘otro interlocutor’ se transforman mutuamente durante la experiencia de la comprensión en la que se «aprende a ver más allá de lo cercano, no desatenderlo, sino precisamente verlo mejor integrándolo en un todo más grande y en patrones más correctos» (Gadamer 1977: 375). Quien interpreta—el antropólogo—trae consigo su propio horizonte de comprensión. Su propia imagen del mundo aporta a la comprensión de aquello que busca entender. Por esto, para comprender propiamente al otro, el antropólogo debe dar cabida a otra forma de vida en su propio horizonte. La experiencia etnográfica nos lleva a reconocer diferentes maneras de vivir el mundo, y esto nos obliga a deshacernos de las categorías de análisis que nos distraigan de nuestra labor: debemos intentar entender la extrañeza de lo que nos incomoda, aun cuando esto carezca de sentido para nuestras propias formas de vida.

La acusación de relativismo moral es, por todo esto, improcedente; debemos preguntarnos si la empatía hace inmune a la antropología de las preocupaciones y responsabilidades éticas. De ninguna manera. Sostengo que los posicionamientos éticos no deben apuntar a imaginarios propensos de conversión, y propongo que agucemos nuestra mirada en las formas en las que damos a conocer nuestras interlocuciones con los sujetos de indagación antropológica, al vínculo entre ética y producción etnográfica.

## Traducciones

El coronel no tiene quien le escuche

En la primera sección quedó claro que en la imagen del mundo militar, el Ejército—institución que desde la noche de los tiempos ha estado dispuesta a sacrificarse por el bienestar y el progreso de la humanidad—es resultado de la evolución civilizatoria. Bajo esta imagen, sin su consolidación la humanidad hubiera perecido en

el estado violento de su naturaleza. En los incuestionables castrenses, la institución ha sido y es indispensable para la sobrevivencia de la humanidad. Recordemos que, al decir de los historiadores militares, ni el Estado, ni la población civil, han reconocido esta grandiosidad, pues ambos estamentos han desconocido la «verdadera historia militar». A su vez, dicho desconocimiento lo consideran el telón de fondo sobre el que viven las heridas institucionales; a saber, la ignorancia de los gobiernos que se valen del Ejército como una mera fuerza apagafuegos, y la desconfianza de los colombianos que le temen a sus soldados.

La concepción histórica del Ejército, con las consecuentes formas de entender la mencionada llegada de los españoles, la corrupción de las razas, el genio bolivariano y las guerrillas contemporáneas, no tenía cabida alguna en mi horizonte, y produjo una experiencia de choque que, como vimos, trajo consigo la necesidad de recomponer el sentido de lo que me inquietaba. Para recomponer el sentido, aprendí el idioma militar, y reconocí la fuerza de sus incuestionables. No me preocupé por si estos eran verdaderos o falsos, en cambio, me concentré en asir cuáles era los binarios sobre los que construían sus relaciones con el estamento civil, con los gobiernos y con las tropas.

Una vez aprendí el idioma militar intenté traducirlo, siguiendo el principio de McIntyre por el que la traducción debe ser un acto de creatividad. No me convenció la manera militar de concebir la historia, pero sí comprendí la fuerza que esta imagen de mundo tenía para ellos; por esto, para dar a conocer la forma de vida militar elegí valirme del concepto «invención de la tradición» de Hobsbawm y Terence (1992). En esta línea, señalé que para los autores:

La tradición inventada implica un grupo de prácticas, normalmente gobernadas por reglas aceptadas abierta o tácitamente y de naturaleza simbólica o ritual que, buscan inculcar determinados valores o normas de comportamiento por medio de su repetición, lo cual implica automáticamente continuidad con el pasado. De hecho cuando es posible, normalmente intentan conectarse con un pasado histórico que les sea adecuado (Hobsbawm & Terence 1992: 8).

La concepción militar de la historia del Ejército, con su anclar en la quintaesencia castrense del estado violento de naturaleza, y la grandiosidad que, consideran, este representó para la evolución civilizatoria, sin duda alguna ofrece a la institución un pasado glorioso al cual apelar en momentos de crisis; un pasado que debe recordarse generación tras generación para hacer frente a las heridas. A partir de esto, me surgieron las preguntas por: ¿Cómo dar cuenta de la invención de la tradición militar? ¿Cómo dar cuenta de la traducción? ¿Cómo ser respetuosa de las demandas de escucha de los militares? ¿Cómo seguir el mencionado imperativo extranjerizante?

A modo de respuesta, continué con el ejercicio de traducción que cobró oficialmente vida en *El Coronel no tiene quien le escuche: una aproximación antropológica a las narrativas militares*. En este seguí la ya clásica propuesta de Goffman (1956) que, en su texto *La presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana*, afirmó que todos los sujetos, cuando nos mostramos ante otras personas, intentamos proyectar una determinada impresión de nosotros mismos. Para ello, interpretamos el papel que queremos transmitir: toda interacción social es un *performance* creado a la medida de cada audiencia.

Por añadidura, en el texto mencionado, Goffman se vale de los elementos del teatro para explicar cómo se da la interacción entre personas. Él, postula que ésta se desarrolla en escenarios (*stages*) que condicionan cómo es la obra que se presenta, al mismo tiempo que la puesta en escena es preparada tras bastidores (*backstage*); lugares inaccesibles al público en los que los actores preparan su papel. Una vez lista la escena, la obra es presentada delante de una audiencia que sabe qué esperar y cómo reaccionar durante la presentación.

En resumidas cuentas, para Goffman, las personas somos actores que pretendemos provocar una buena impresión entre los públicos delante de los cuáles *performamos*. Para que la actuación tenga éxito, debe haber un acuerdo: un consenso operativo entre, por un lado, los performadores: aquellos que deben presentar de la mejor manera sus papeles; y, por el otro, la audiencia, aquella dispuesta a aceptar esa actuación. Goffman aclara que cuando ese consenso se rompe, es decir, cuando los actores pierden el control sobre las impresiones que

quieren dar, el público puede mostrarse benevolente y fingir no haber notado la pérdida de control, o mostrarse cínico y rechazar la actuación. Los actores que se equivocan deben ser hábiles y recuperar rápidamente la confianza del auditorio mediante técnicas de defensa. Si estas son eficaces, no se notará el peligro de la ruptura de la promesa y la puesta en escena podrá continuar.

En *El Coronel no tiene quien le escuche* la puesta en escena de los incuestionables nacidos en la invención de la tradición militar se da en la *Biblioteca Tomás Rueda Vargas* que se encuentra dentro de la *Escuela Militar de Cadetes José María Córdova*—centro en el que inician su formación los jóvenes oficiales. Para los historiadores militares, este lugar es especial: el mismo nombre de la Biblioteca rinde culto a la quintaesencia militar. Rueda Vargas fue un intelectual, según los académicos militares, que merecía el apelativo de soldado sin rango y sin presillas, consagraba las características de la institución militar: «ser superior a las contingencias políticas y respetar la misión militar que no debe estar al servicio de gobiernos sino al servicio y defensa de la patria» (Forero Angel 2005b). En la Biblioteca que lleva su nombre, residen colecciones escritas por quienes los miembros de la *Academia de Historia Militar* definen como hombres cultos; oficiales que son los portavoces autorizados de la historia de su institución (Bourdieu 1999).

Dicho esto, en el escenario *Tomás Rueda Vargas* monté los cuatro actos, el intermedio, y el epílogo, que componen esta obra de teatro. En el primer acto «Los mitos fundacionales» narro cómo los actores *performan* el origen universal de las leyes, el advenimiento del mestizaje, la aparición de Bolívar con la redención de la «raza mestiza» y la consolidación de la profesionalización militar; es decir, doy cuenta de la constitución de la quintaesencia militar. En el segundo acto «Una historia de heridas» me concentro en la performatividad que trata de convencer al público de cómo, desde los tiempos post-independentistas, los gobiernos civiles se han mostrado incapaces de consolidar un orden político que pueda ser salvaguardado por un único ejército. Al decir de los militares, las élites civiles son estamentos incapaces de unirse alrededor de un proyecto político común que siga los derroteros bolivarianos; en cambio, éstas nacen como sectores ambiciosos que, armados cada uno con su pequeña milicia, prefieren luchar por «dominios territoriales antes que concentrarse en la consolidación de las naciones recién liberadas» (Forero Angel 2005c) Como consecuencia de esto, el verdadero Ejército Nacional queda, ya desde el siglo XIX, sumido en la precariedad técnica y económica, así como en el abandono estatal. A pesar de ello, los actores militares insisten en que estas condiciones de ninguna manera han alterado su quintaesencia.

En la *Tomás Rueda Vargas* los hombres cultos admiten que, durante breves episodios en los años 40 y 50 del siglo XX, los gobiernos reconocieron que el Ejército Nacional de Colombia era la única institución capaz de poner fin a la violencia fratricida que se venía consolidando desde los albores post-independentistas. Las élites políticas reconocen la necesidad de contar con el Ejército en la consolidación de un verdadero proyecto de unión nacional y, por ello, «suplican al general Rojas Pinilla que asuma el poder» (Forero Angel 1996). Durante el segundo acto, en la *Biblioteca Tomás Rueda Vargas*, los actores ponen en escena la ceguera de las élites civiles; la capacidad militar de mantenerse neutral a pesar de asistir a la debacle nacional; su carácter civilista; y su capacidad de, una vez los gobiernos lo aclaman, asumir la conducción del destino nacional, fundando las bases para el desarrollo económico de la República.

Terminados los dos primeros actos, en el Intermedio, rompo la complicidad de la audiencia: en este las voces de los soldados profesionales (los de más bajo rango), algunas víctimas y la exposición de algunos hechos que cuestionan el que el Ejército haya alcanzado una quintaesencia neutral y civilista, interrumpen la performance militar. En este Intermedio la promesa instaurada se quiebra: los actores que intervienen contradicen abiertamente la puesta en escena de los historiadores, y el público debe elegir entre permitir que la obra de teatro siga (pese a la ruptura instaurada), o negarse a seguir asistiendo a la invención de la tradición militar. El lector del ‘Coronel no tiene quien le escuche’, en este punto, puede abandonar su lectura o continuar.

Si decide seguir, leerá el tercer acto «Momentos de gloria» donde los historiadores de la institución subrayan que durante breves períodos las élites gubernamentales, y los ciudadanos, han sabido reconocer la importancia y la verdadera razón de ser de la institución. Los historiadores ponen en escena la excelente actuación del Ejército en la Guerra de Corea, y en el conflicto colombo-peruano de 1932; ambos eventos en los que el ejército demostró que, pese a su pobreza económica, contaba con la moral necesaria para cumplir su verdadera misión: defender las fronteras. En el conflicto colombo-peruano los soldados armados sólo con su moral, y con el dinero que los sectores más altolocados (o adinerados) de la sociedad colombiana donaron, supieron defender a los ciudadanos de la periferia que, además, vieron en los soldados compatriotas civilizados ejemplos dignos a seguir. Durante la Guerra de Corea la institución demostró que estaba a la altura de los grandes ejércitos del mundo para unirse en contra de la amenaza mundial del comunismo. Así las cosas, en el escenario *Tomás Rueda Vargas*, el Ejército en dos ocasiones cumple su misión; dicho éxito trae el amor y agradecimiento de gobiernos y ciudadanos que por fin reconocen y honran los sacrificios hechos.

Luego, estando en el mismo escenario, se aclara también la futilidad de estos eventos. En el acto IV 'El enemigo nacional' los historiadores militares recuerdan que la mayor parte de la sociedad colombiana vive en condiciones de miseria y de abandono estatal. En consecuencia, esta termina acogiendo a los grupos guerrilleros que se valen de la manipulación comunista para entrar en el «corazón de los colombianos». No obstante, esto los aleja de sus verdaderos defensores, debido a que ellos terminan siendo percibidos como opresores y violadores de derechos humanos. Así pues, el fortalecimiento de la guerrilla es visto como resultado de la indiferencia estatal y de la ingenuidad del pueblo colombiano que se refugia en ella. En la *Tomás Rueda Vargas* la fuerza del enemigo se nutre de los gobiernos que no han sabido reprimirla, dejando a la población civil a merced de los grupos al margen de la ley. Finalmente, en el epílogo el telón cae, y la obra de teatro termina, no sin antes recordar que se ha asistido a una puesta en escena: la de la tradición inventada por la institución militar. Aquí, se hace evidente que los actores ponen en escena una concepción de tiempo en la que ubican su origen, el de las élites, la pobreza del pueblo y el fortalecimiento del enemigo.

Así las cosas, la escritura de una obra de teatro me permitió dar cuenta del imperativo extranjerizante, así como reconocer lo inadecuadas que eran mis categorías de análisis. Sin haber aprendido el idioma militar, para lo que fue indispensable establecer empatía con sus narrativas, hubiera sido imposible comprender la complejidad de su forma de vida, sus emociones y su rencor hacia los estamentos civiles. En la traducción propuesta es evidente que lo que represento no es un espejo fiel de lo traducido. La imagen de mundo militar y sus incuestionables se alteran al entrar en contacto con mi horizonte de sentido. Sin embargo, en este ejercicio intento dar cuenta del significado que para la institución militar tiene esta concepción de la historia en su forma de vida.

Tras la publicación del libro, nuevas preguntas no tardaron en aparecer: algunos militares señalaban la traición cometida «¿Cómo es posible que nosotros le hayamos contado nuestra historia y usted la vuelva una obra de teatro? ¿Cómo es posible que traicione la confianza que le dimos?» Otros altos mandos aplaudían el ejercicio: «Ahí vamos haciendo puentes entre los dos mundos civiles y militares». La audiencia de mi obra de teatro aprobaba o rechazaba mis técnicas, y con ello recordaba que la traducción cultural siempre está en el deber de incomodarse para encontrar categorías de análisis que amplíen los ejercicios etnográficos.

## Conclusiones

En este texto me ocupé de la pregunta por: ¿Qué consecuencias tiene para la antropología social asumir las demandas de escucha de grupos incómodos? Para poder responder a esta cuestión me serví del material etnográfico recopilado entre 2005 y 2008 con oficiales historiadores del Ejército Nacional de Colombia. Luego, estructuré el texto en tres secciones. En la primera parte sostuve que el trabajo etnográfico, en tanto empático, debía comprender incluso con los incuestionables de los interlocutores que nos interpelaban de manera



chocante. También, expliqué que este ejercicio de empatía permitía a los antropólogos una comprensión de formas de vida ajenas que, luego, tenían como labor traducir en el mundo propio. Basada en Venuti (2019) argumenté que la traducción era un «ejercicio extranjerizante» (Venuti 2019) que obligaba al antropólogo a ajustarse a las extrañezas del mundo social que lo interpelaban, incorporando nuevas categorías de análisis para responder a estas. Luego, en la segunda sección, defendí la idea de que preocuparse por la comprensión de los incuestionables del 'otro incómodo' no implicaba cancelar los propios límites morales. Por el contrario, demostré que la fusión de horizontes, resultante de la traducción extranjerizante, no era sinónimo de la disolución de las concepciones de bien y de mal del investigador. Finalmente, en la tercera sección, expuse una obra de teatro escrita en la que intenté dar cuenta de la imagen del mundo militar que pude comprender durante mis años de investigación. Esta obra, traducida a un público más común y allegado a mis círculos sociales la forma de vida militar concebida desde la perspectiva institucional, pero también ponía a dialogar dicha concepción con la herida que los lectores sentían hacia el Ejército de Colombia. Lo anterior, se hizo evidente en el intermedio donde ellos tienen la posibilidad de elegir entre si continuar o no con el desarrollo de la obra.

En definitiva, con la obra quise dejar en claro la urgencia de que los antropólogos exploremos distintos registros en la expresión de nuestro quehacer; sobre todo, cuando aquellos que traducimos con nuestros ejercicios etnográficos tienen contactos difíciles, incómodos y espinosos con la sociedad. En este caso, mi obra de teatro era un intento por traducir la forma de vida militar desde su propia perspectiva a un público que la subsumía en una radical categoría de victimarios que cerraba toda posibilidad de diálogo y comprensión.

Por último, considero imperativo que la antropología continúe expandiendo sus horizontes investigativos para ocuparse de quienes ha tachado como indignos de recibir atención antropológica. Esto último, lejos de ser un borramiento de las directrices morales del investigador, es una oportunidad para que éste amplíe sus horizontes disciplinares y multiplique su conocimiento sobre las diferentes formas de estar en el mundo.

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# Un poco de cariño. Horror y sensualidad en relatos etnográficos

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## Resumen

En este texto pretendo recuperar el lugar del horror y de la sensualidad en literatura de ficción y en diversas situaciones de mis investigaciones. La cuestión principal que busco indagar es: ¿cómo ser fiel a la voz de nuestros interlocutores cuando estos nos generan rechazo? Muchas veces, al vivenciar sus mundos debemos mirar hacia otro lado porque aquello nos produce malestar o resulta insoportable, pero al mismo tiempo captan nuestra atención. Paradojas como éstas podrían pensarse como quién «baila con el enemigo». Lejos de eso, diré que no se trata de cuestiones meramente «metodológicas», sino que implica una apuesta política y epistemológica para comprender mejor el mundo de las violencias y violaciones cometidas, porque como etnógrafos por más distancia analítica que establezcamos, de algún modo u otro nos alcanzan y repercuten. Luego, de la cuestión principal se desprende otra: ¿de qué manera lidiar con el malestar de esas voces en la etnografía? Me interesa reflexionar sobre la textualización—etnográfica y literaria—de estos mundos, porque quienes pesquizamos muertes crueles (linchamientos) o territorios turbulentos (prisiones) como los aquí retratados, solemos producir cierta fascinación en la construcción estética de nuestras etnografías. Para finalizar, observaré dos riesgos muy costosos a costa de fascinar: fetichizar la violencia e higienizar la política.

**Palabras clave:** Malestar; Fetichismo de la violencia; Higienización de la política; Texto etnográfico

# A little bit of caress. Horror and sensuality in ethnographic reports.

## Abstract

In this text I intend to recover the place of horror and sensuality in fiction literature and in different situations of my research. The main question I seek to investigate is: how to be faithful to the voice of our interlocutors when they generate rejection? Many times, when we experience their worlds, we must look away because they make us feel uncomfortable or unbearable, but at the same time they capture our attention. Paradoxes like these could be thought of as ‘dancing with the enemy’. Far from that, I will say that these are not merely ‘methodological’ questions, but imply a political and epistemological bet to better understand the world of violence and violations committed, because as ethnographers, no matter how much analytical distance we establish, in one way or another they reach us and have repercussions. Then, from the main question follows another one: how to deal with the discomfort of these voices in ethnography? I am interested in reflecting on the textualization - ethnographic and literary - of these worlds, because those of us who investigate cruel deaths (lynchings) or turbulent territories (prisons) such as those portrayed here, tend to produce a certain fascination in the aesthetic construction of our ethnographies. To conclude, I will note two very costly risks at the cost of fascination: fetishizing violence and sanitizing politics.

**Keywords:** Discomfort; Fetishism of violence; Hygienization of politics; Ethnographic text.

# Um pouco de carinho. Horror e sensualidade em relatos etnográficos

## Resumo

Neste texto, pretendo recuperar o lugar do horror e da sensualidade na literatura de ficção e em várias situações de minha pesquisa. A principal questão que busco investigar é: como podemos ser fiéis à voz de nossos interlocutores quando sentimos repulsa por eles? Muitas vezes, quando vivenciamos seus mundos, temos de desviar o olhar porque eles nos fazem sentir desconfortáveis ou insuportáveis, mas, ao mesmo tempo, captam nossa atenção. Paradoxos como esses poderiam ser considerados como “dançar com o inimigo”. Longe disso, direi que essas não são questões meramente “metodológicas”, mas implicam um compromisso político e epistemológico para entender melhor o mundo da violência e as violações cometidas, porque, como etnógrafos, por mais distância analítica que estabelecamos, de uma forma ou de outra elas nos alcançam e têm repercussões. Então, a partir da pergunta principal, segue-se outra: como lidar com o incômodo dessas vozes na etnografia? Interessa-me refletir sobre a textualização - etnográfica e literária - desses mundos, pois aqueles de nós que investigam mortes cruéis (linchamentos) ou territórios turbulentos (prisões) como os aqui retratados tendem a produzir certo fascínio na construção estética de nossas etnografias. Para concluir, observarei dois riscos muito caros à custa do fascínio: fetichizar a violência e higienizar a política.

**Palavras chaves:** Desconforto; fetichismo da violência; higienização da política; texto etnográfico

# Un poco de cariño. Horror y sensualidad en relatos etnográficos

Nahuel Adrián Blázquez

## **A modo introductorio. *Un falo enorme, demasiado filoso para el amor***

No imagino otro modo de comenzar que no sea con «El niño proletario», el cuento de Osvaldo Lamborghini (1988 [1973]). Cuando empecé a estudiar casos de linchamientos en la ciudad de Córdoba (Argentina) para indagar diferentes sentidos atribuidos a la categoría violencia, este texto fue uno de los primeros materiales con los cuales me topé al construir mi objeto de investigación. El argumento de la obra literaria es bastante sencillo, dejemos que sea el mismo narrador quien lo presente: «¡Estropeado!, con su pantaloncito sostenido por un solo tirador de trapo y los periódicos bajo el brazo, venía sin vernos caminando hacia nosotros, tres niños burgueses: Esteban, Gustavo y yo» (p. 64).

El cuento es narrado en primera persona. Como se observa cuatro son los personajes, todos varones, tres niños burgueses y otro que, a juzgar por la descripción de su vestimenta y su condición trabajadora, no puede ser sino el niño proletario. Pienso que este texto de ficción, impregnado de un clasismo setentista, rápidamente habría caído en el olvido si no fuera porque al horror practicado por Esteban, Gustavo y el personaje principal sobre Estropeado no le hubiera correspondido semejante cuota de sensualidad en su retrato. Observemos el momento en que los niños burgueses deciden desvestir al niño proletario.

Esteban se lo arrancó y quedaron al aire las nalgas sin calzoncillos, amargamente desnutridas del niño proletario. El goce estaba ahí, ya decretado, y Esteban, Esteban de un solo manotazo, arrancó el sucio tirador. Pero fue Gustavo quien se le echó encima primero, el primero que arremetió contra el cuerpito de ¡Estropeado!, Gustavo, quien nos lideraría luego en la edad madura, todos estos años de fracasada, estropeada pasión: él primero, clavó primero el vidrio triangular donde empezaba la raya del trasero de ¡Estropeado! y prolongó el tajo natural. Salió la sangre esparcida hacia arriba y hacia abajo, iluminada por el sol, y el agujero del ano quedó húmedo sin esfuerzo como para facilitar el acto que preparábamos. Y fue Gustavo, Gustavo el que lo traspasó primero con su falo, enorme para su edad, demasiado filoso para el amor.

Esteban y yo nos conteníamos ásperamente, con las gargantas bloqueadas por un silencio de ansiedad, desesperación. Esteban y yo. Con los falos enardecidos en las manos esperábamos y esperábamos, mientras Gustavo daba brincos que taladraban a ¡Estropeado! y ¡Estropeado! no podía gritar, ni siquiera gritar, porque su boca era firmemente hundida en el barro por la mano fuerte militari de Gustavo.

A Esteban se le contrajo el estómago a raíz de la ansiedad y luego de la arcada desalojó algo del estómago, algo que cayó a mis pies. Era un espléndido conjunto de objetos brillantes, ricamente ornamentados, espejeantes al sol. Me agaché, lo incorporé a mi estómago, y Esteban entendió mi hermanación. Se arrojó a mis brazos y yo me bajé los pantalones. Por el ano desocupé. Desalojé una masa luminosa que enceguecía con el sol. Esteban la comió y a sus brazos hermanados me arrojé.

Mientras tanto ¡Estropeado! se ahogaba en el barro, con su ano opaco rasgado por el falo de Gustavo, quien por fin tuvo su goce con un alarido. La inocencia del justiciero placer (Lamborghini [1973] 1988: 64-65).

El texto literario tiene un contenido sexual explícito. La forma de abusar y matar a un niño me perturbó cuando tenía 25 años, y hoy, 10 años después, lo sigue haciendo. Sucede algo similar con otros cuentos de la literatura argentina como «El Matadero» de Esteban Echeverría (2006) o «La Fiesta del Monstruo» de Jorge

Luis Borges y Adolfo Bioy Casares (Bustos Domecq 1977), donde la violencia exhibida y atribuida a las clases populares (la facción de federales en el siglo XIX y los muchachos peronistas en el XX, respectivamente) se muestra ferozmente.<sup>1</sup> Sin embargo, creo que el cuento de Lamborghini se caracteriza en algo que resalté antes, la forma en la que el autor exhibe sensualidad delante de tanto horror. Aunque no es objeto de este artículo, quiero señalar que mucho se ha dicho sobre un concepto que brida la relación en la que predomina el disfrute, el goce o el placer en la perpetración de ciertas acciones: la crueldad<sup>2</sup>. Y algo más, hay un elemento que subyace tanto en la parte literaria traída en este comienzo como en los fragmentos de mi trabajo de campo desplegadas en el próximo apartado que no quisiera que pase desapercibido, una dinámica ampliamente analizada por Rita Segato (2018), me refiero a la relación entre crueldad y masculinidad. Una relación que atraviesa la socialización y entrenamiento de jóvenes varones y modula la adultez.

Seguramente, parte de la discusión, sería posible trazarla alrededor de «Los encantos del delito» (2023) que Jack Katz puntualizó con «los atractivos positivos, a menudo maravillosos, de la experiencia vivida de la delincuencia» (2023:111). Es decir, la vivencia del delito (como también de los «encantos» y «atractivos» de vivir del delito) constituye la búsqueda de nuevos afectos y pasiones, pero también la necesidad de un abordaje analítico y una atención que privilegie las interacciones. Y este asunto es complejo ya que toca el centro de la cuestión cuando pensamos el vínculo etnográfico construido con nuestros interlocutores y luego, claro, la tarea de narrar los mundos vividos sin higienizar las dimensiones horribles y sensuales de las que forman parte. Es por ello que la pregunta principal que busco indagar aquí es: ¿cómo ser fiel a la voz de nuestros interlocutores cuando estos nos generan rechazo? Muchas veces, al vivenciar sus mundos, debemos mirar hacia otro lado porque aquello nos produce malestar o resulta insostenible, pero al mismo tiempo captan nuestra atención.

Y esto causa malestar, no podemos evitarlo, por lo que resta analizar de qué está hecho eso que tanto incomoda. En un libro en el que se busca problematizar el «mal-estar» que emerge de algunas etnografías, Rosana Guber (2019) propone una metáfora interesante, habla de lo que cuesta digerir o lo que genera regurgitación a la hora de pensar el trabajo de campo, específicamente con aquellos sujetos que son difíciles de tragar para el mundo académico. Entonces, si estas sensaciones existen, nos acompañan y pueden ser comunes a otros campos e investigadores pregunto: ¿qué ganamos con involucrarnos con interlocutores que frecuentemente desautorizan y menosprecian el conocimiento científico? ¿Por qué elegimos contar ciertas historias y de qué modo lo hacemos? ¿Hay límites éticos en los estéticos? ¿De qué modo contar lo que estos sujetos expresan abiertamente, sin vergüenza y hasta con regocijo? ¿Cuánto de esto estamos dispuestos a decir y los demás a escuchar? Estas cuestiones denotan que la investigación y la escritura etnográfica está envuelta en un sin número de complicaciones, y sin embargo, no hay certezas universales que calmen, manuales o respuestas acabadas en comités de ética. Y lo que es más importante, este orden no está reglado, pero sí sujeto a negociación por aquellas personas del campo (interlocutores, colegas y mediadores) que modulan las posibilidades de lo que se puede o no decir.

A modo introductorio resta solo un comentario más. ¿Por qué el diálogo con la literatura de ficción? Son varias las razones. En primer lugar, generar una incomodidad en el lector y disponer un terreno fértil para debatir las herramientas estéticas y precauciones éticas al momento de enfrentarnos con relatos violentos, pero

1 «El Matadero» es considerado uno de los primeros cuentos de la historia argentina y de la literatura hispanoamericana. Fue producida por Esteban Echeverría entre 1835 y 1840, época donde Juan Manuel de Rosas tomaba posesión de su segundo mandato como gobernador de Buenos Aires. Dicha pieza literaria fue recién publicada en 1871, por Juan María Gutiérrez, quien, tras la muerte del escritor, se encargó de publicar las obras completas de este intelectual unitario. «La fiesta del Monstruo» fue escrito por Jorge Luis Borges y Adolfo Bioy Casares en el año 1947, durante la primera presidencia de Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955), bajo el seudónimo de Bustos Domecq. El cuento circulaba en manuscritos, y tras la caída del gobierno peronista, fue editado y publicado por primera vez del otro lado del Río de la Plata, con fecha de octubre de 1955 en el semanario *Marcha*.

2 En un reciente dossier titulado «la política de la crueldad» (2024) publicado en *LE MONDE Diplomatique*, edición argentina, Verónica Gago y José Garriga Zucal, ambos investigadores del CONICET, resaltan estos puntos: «¿De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de crueldad? Nos referimos al regocijo en el dolor ajeno. Gozar del sufrimiento del otro» (p.8) y «¿qué agrega, concretamente, la noción de crueldad a una fenomenología de la violencia? En principio, la crueldad señalaría un disfrute, un modo de placer asociado a la ejecución de la violencia» (p.4).



también con el objetivo de saber valorar este tipo de conocimiento y comprender un punto de vista intolerable cuando suspendemos ciertos prejuicios. A su vez, el fragmento literario citado—por su estrecha conexión con las sustancias que se comparten durante el trabajo de campo, por lo que se digiere y por lo que se expulsa de nuestros cuerpos—funciona como un hilo conductor en la trama del texto del que también forma parte el material empírico y su análisis.

En segundo lugar, soy consciente de que existen diferencias entre el fragmento literario y los fragmentos etnográficos aquí recuperados y que, sin las mediaciones necesarias, corremos el riesgo de dar «puntadas sin hilo». Sin embargo, sostengo esta vinculación literaria-etnográfica no porque permitamos sentirnos menos horrorizados o más condescendientes cuando lo que nos toca y provoca se aborda dentro del género de la ficción. Tampoco porque el arte tenga licencias que la ciencia no se permita. El asunto, a mi entender, gravita en otro lugar, recae en el despliegue narrativo, en eso que Walter Benjamin nos enseñó de manera preciosa: «el arte de narrar radica en referir una historia libre de explicaciones» (2012: 110). Esto es central en nuestro oficio, pues debemos resolver hábilmente la inscripción de lo empírico en lo textual, ya que nuestra potencia disciplinar a la hora de construir conocimiento antropológico está supeditada a saber *mostrar* la experiencia vivida en campo, a un *mostrar*—tal como nos invita a pensar Mariana Sirimarco (2019)—que sea deudor del ir y venir entre campo y teoría.

Es así que en la parte siguiente de este artículo voy a narrar dos fragmentos de mis investigaciones relacionadas con sujetos difíciles de lidiar. Pero más que *explicar*, pretendo que éstos puedan *mostrar* la incomodidad generada para luego ponderar cuestiones analíticas, epistemológicas y políticas devenidas de tales experiencias etnográficas. El primero trata sobre *El Oreja*, un taxista de Córdoba, que tuvo la oportunidad de perseguir a dos ladrones cuando éstos robaban a una mujer, y una vez derribados, los vecinos del lugar se encargaron de continuar lo que este hombre había comenzado. El segundo fragmento cambia de territorio y de personajes, sucede en una cárcel de esta misma ciudad junto a personas privadas de la libertad que decidieron contar historias en un taller de literatura. Valiéndome de este encuentro recupero el relato de *El Enmascarado*, donde el autor narra la situación en la que él y sus amigos atan, golpean y hacen sufrir a una madre y a su hija para robarle dinero y luego gastarlo en una desenfrenada noche de excesos.

## ¡Salvaje me puse!

Lo que aquí quisiera recuperar se relaciona con «linchamientos». Mientras cursaba mi maestría y realizaba el trabajo de campo en Córdoba, ciudad en la que vivo, advertí que mis interlocutores no concebían estos actos de la misma manera, más aún, no todos los entendían como «actos violentos». Me explico: en junio de 2015, el nombre de José Luis Díaz tomó trascendencia local, él era un joven de 23 años que viendo la posibilidad de robar un celular encontró la muerte; al menos siete vecinos lo amarraron, le pegaron y lo dejaron 13 días en terapia intensiva hasta que su vida, sostenida por un respirador artificial, se apagó. Frente a esta situación, algunos movimientos sociales y organismos de derechos humanos denunciaron lo sucedido, politizaron su muerte encuadrando el caso como un hecho racista con profundas marcas de clase, al mismo tiempo que exigieron juicio y castigo para los perpetradores por ser un hecho totalmente *injusto*. Sin embargo, para la madre del joven asesinado, lo sucedido era *indigno*, ya que no merecía morir de esa forma, ella repetía una y otra vez que a su hijo *lo mataron como a un perro* (Blázquez 2022a). En cambio, algunas personas involucradas con este tipo de prácticas con las cuales pude interactuar, no consideraban que éstas sean necesariamente *injustas* o *indignas*. Veamos el testimonio de *El Oreja*, un taxista que narra el momento vivido tras haber interceptado a dos ladrones mientras estos asaltaban a una mujer.

Todo empezó cuando veo a la chica en el piso, una criatura. A mí me dio asco, odio, ver cómo le estaban pegando (...) Los tipos estaban en moto pero parados, entonces yo me bajo para hacerlos cagar. La cosa es que se las pican,

yo hago reversa y los entro a perseguir. Venía a fondo, endiablado. La cuestión es que ellos doblan y yo ponele... habré venido a 70, 80, me abrí y doblé. Como me habían sacado un poco más de una cuadra de distancia, ellos quieren girar en «U» para que yo me coma el amague y pase de largo. ¿Qué? ¡Salvaje me puse! Cuando veo eso pegué el volantazo. ¡Al medio los agarré! [su mano se cierra en forma de puño, al igual que sus ojos, frunce el rostro, mientras una mueca de campeón transforma su cara]. Vos imagínate, habrán volado dos metros. ¡Los reventé! El auto quedó cruzado. Yo me bajé y, cuando me bajé, les di un poco de cariño. (Blázquez 2022b: 40-41).

En esta investigación, en la que buscaba indagar diferentes sentidos atribuidos a la categoría violencia, mi análisis sobre el trabajo de campo construido previamente fue que el «linchamiento» practicado por *El Oreja* y los vecinos del lugar, lejos de percibirse como un delito, algo *injusto* o *indigno*, se colocaba en un lugar diametralmente opuesto, es decir, reventar a golpes a un ladrón era la oportunidad perfecta para desplegar un espectáculo de *justicia* ampliamente aprobado (Blázquez 2018).

Al entrevistar a *El Oreja* me pareció interesante la forma en la que se ponía en juego «lo sucedido» con lo que «se cuenta que sucedió». El encuentro me generaba contradicciones: viajar acompañado del tipo que persiguió a dos ladrones para luego tirarles el auto encima, bajarse, arremangarse y ponerse en acción junto a los vecinos me generaba ansiedad y bajo su mirada me sentía diminuto; pero también me llamaba la atención su simpatía y generosidad para contarme cada detalle. A la hora de narrar su historia y convertirse nuevamente en autor de lo sucedido él era profundamente seductor, manifestaba un regocijo ante la desgracia ajena que me dejaba sin respuesta, absorto. Quizás pueda arriesgar una generalidad: los taxistas son estupendos contando historias. Son viajeros, conocedores excelsos de distancias, y si bien usan los pies y las manos para manejar, nadie podría negar que trabajan con la lengua. Utilizan los viajes para hilar historias, existiendo en su oficio una enorme sofisticación con el lenguaje oral. Y esto es importante: el lenguaje oral y el oficio están íntimamente ligados en el arte de narrar, ya que forma y contenido son partes inextricables. *El Oreja*, pertenece a este gremio, es un narrador extraordinario, esa fue mi percepción aquella noche cuando contó la hazaña sin dejar retazos, y al hacerlo, esparció una estela profundamente sensual en el habitáculo de su auto<sup>3</sup>. *Yo me bajé y, cuando me bajé, les di un poco de cariño...*

Frente a mi escucha interesada, *El Oreja* quería transformar su accionar en un relato épico: *¿Querés que te muestre el recorrido, amiguito?* Acto seguido apretaba el acelerador, cambiaba la perilla de G.N.C a nafta, haciéndome cómplice de las destrezas del motor. Esta era la ocasión perfecta para narrar y actualizar su experiencia. Esa noche reconstruyó todo el recorrido, la persecución, la caída, los golpes y el momento en el cual los vecinos se acercaron a continuar lo que él ya había comenzado.

—¿Qué pasó? Yo me bajé del taxi. Había uno que se me escapaba. Creeme que rompí un par de zapatillas, unas Adidas nuevas, ¡las abrí por todos lados! Yo soy rengo con la derecha, le pegaba con la renga, con la zurda, trompadas, le saltaba arriba de la cabeza, hasta que llegaron los vecinos. Cuando veo el auto... ¡uhhh me quería matar! Entre las ópticas y la parte del paragolpe no había nada, pero ¡nada! ¡nada! [*El Oreja lleva las manos sobre su cara mostrando un recuerdo ajado*]. Rompí el electro, eso me dejó de andar. Gracias a dios algún vecino abrió la puerta de atrás y guardó los repuestos, la patente del auto y la chapa de taxi.

—¿Vos les pegabas un poco a cada uno?

—¡A los dos les pegaba! ¿Viste cuando vos le das con bronca? [*sus manos hacen ¡plaf! ¡plaf! ¡plaf! ¡plaf!*]. Bueno, así. El de blanco estaba inconsciente [*El Oreja se echa para atrás, y se tira sobre el apoyacabeza, fingiendo un desmayo*].

3 «El arte de narrar está llegando a su fin» nos advirtió Walter Benjamin hace casi un centenario en *El Narrador* (2012 [1940]). Allí podemos encontrar herramientas preciosas para observar de manera calificada los paisajes narrativos de nuestros interlocutores, principalmente si pensamos al lenguaje mismo como forma de acción. Benjamin se apoya en el dictado popular que afirma que «cuando alguien se va de viaje tiene algo que contar» e inmediatamente piensa en la figura del marino mercante como alguien que viene de lejos. Creo que el oficio del taxista contiene algunas de esas características, principalmente cuando Benjamin nos enseña que todo maestro de la narrativa precisa de «la mano, el alma y el corazón» para contar historias. Esto nos obliga, tanto en el trabajo de campo como en la elección de la poética narrativa, a observar las dimensiones temporales de nuestros interlocutores a la hora de hablar de sí y de los demás, como en los gestos que yacen en la palabra pero que también la trascienden.

—¿Por el choque del auto?

—¡Nooooo, querido! ¡Por la caída a palos que les había pegado yo! Vinieron los vecinos y les siguieron pegando.

—¿Mujeres también?

—Síííí, todo el mundo les pegaba. Pero una mina me quiso frenar... me agarran por la espalda y yo me doy vuelta -levanta el brazo, lo deja firme en posición de combate y mira para atrás-, tiro una trompada y una minita de ojos claros me dice: «¡Pará! ¡Pará! ¡Los vas a matar!»

—¿Y qué le dijiste vos?

—Que sí, si yo quería eso. Yo les zapateé la cabeza, pedí la policía y me fui a la mierda. Con dos taxistas amigos nos juntamos a comer una picada y nos tomamos una o dos cervezas. Yo dije: «Me voy. Hay heridos, por más que uno no tenga la culpa, hay heridos, me van a trasladar, me van a secuestrar el auto y tengo alcohol en sangre». Agarré la radio y llamé a la central: QcQ le digo, QrB me dicen, enseguida pedí que manden la PL. (Blázquez 2022b).

En una investigación donde lo central gira en torno a relatos de violencia, tortura y terror, el antropólogo Antonius Robben (2011), advierte sobre algunos peligros y herramientas para lidiar con la «seducción etnográfica»<sup>4</sup>. Ahí da cuenta de conversaciones con víctimas y victimarios de violencia de la última dictadura militar argentina, son encuentros que él define como cargados emocionalmente, donde es leído por sus interlocutores como alguien que porta marcas privilegiadas (hombre, blanco y europeo), situación singular para construir datos que, de otro modo, afirma él, jamás conseguiría. Para Robben, allí operaba una seducción desplegada por sus entrevistados que «no sólo querían relatar su historia a un foráneo interesado, limpiar su nombre, o hacer catarsis, sino que realizaban una apuesta política al intentar hacerme adoptar sus verdades» (p. 12) sobre la violencia política de 1960 y 1970. Con esto, enfatizo la pregunta sobre cómo contar el campo que incomoda, pero hay algo más, Robben pone el acento en un punto de vital importancia para la práctica psicoanalítica: el fenómeno de la transferencia y de la contratransferencia. ¿Por qué es importante entender esto? Porque allí, las y los antropólogos podemos valernos de una valiosa herramienta a los fines de indagar en los soportes de credibilidad y confianza con los que construimos vínculos con nuestros interlocutores. En mi investigación, al subirme al taxi y preguntar a *El Oreja* por qué no viajaba armado, encontré algo interesante.

—Te arruinás, al salir armado te cagás la vida, hijo. Uno es un tipo trabajador, con familia, todo, y si vos le metés un tiro a estos giles (*jerga local para referirse a una persona menospreciada*)... [*muestra cara de resignado*] Porque, por ejemplo, vos, ¿tenés hijos o papá y mamá?

Asiento con la cabeza.

—Bueno, yo no tengo ni papá ni mamá. Sólo dos hijas, y una mujer que me espera todas las noches. Uno tiene muchas cosas que perder, estos negros no. Por eso, si vos los matás nos hacés un favor, ¿me entendés? Lo que podés hacer es capturarlos y llevarlos, qué sé yo... para algún campo y cagarlos bien a puñetes. En lo posible, meterles un martillazo en cada dedo o un tiro en las rodillas cosa que no puedan hacer más nada. ¿Me entendés? (Blázquez 2022b).

La seducción etnográfica—según Robben—es una dinámica que podría ubicarse «en los actos conscientes y defensas inconscientes» (p. 2) que puede surgir en las entrevistas con nuestros interlocutores con el objetivo de condicionar el resultado de una investigación, «la seducción otorga poder al entrevistado por sobre el

4 Para este autor, el término seducción con el que trabaja se aparta de la teoría de Freud, por lo que no es usado para connotar histeria o un deseo sexual, encantamiento o trampa. En lo que a este artículo pretendo, tampoco quiero vincular la seducción con un tinte sexual, y sí con el acto de fascinar, impresionar y cautivar en quién escucha que, como Benjamin nos enseñó, todo maestro de la narrativa precisa valerse de «la mano, el alma y el corazón» a la hora de contar historias. Dicho esto, Robben señala algo que no quiero dejar pasar: la seducción etnográfica debe ser ponderada como fuente de discernimiento y no de obstrucción.

etnógrafo» (p.12). Esta seducción de nuestros interlocutores opera «para desviar de ciertas áreas de conocimiento a los etnógrafos desprevenidos» (p. 4), o dicho de otro modo, «la seducción hace que el etnógrafo falle en mantener cierto grado de independencia frente al informante» (p.11). En la escena etnográfica recuperada, hay situaciones interaccionales y transferenciales que merecen atención. Resalto las marcas de privilegio que mi interlocutor adscribe: *El Oreja* me ubicó no solo como hombre y trabajador, si no como alguien que tiene familia. Estas distinciones tienen una magnitud importante en la configuración territorial donde se practican linchamientos—al menos los que tuve la oportunidad de estudiar en Córdoba—en la que los valores morales que se movilizan en el robo y en la condición trabajadora iluminan procesos de racialización y subalternización que conectan localmente en la configuración del barrio. En mi opinión, allí operaba la seducción etnográfica que Robben nos invita a pensar, ya que *El Oreja* buscaba una identificación conmigo a partir de estas distinciones, y por medio de estas, a la de los vecinos del lugar que defendían el territorio para que yo adoptara una posición: *si vos los matás nos hacés un favor, ¿me entendés?* Ahora bien, esta seducción era efectiva en la medida que yo me encontraba absorbido y un tanto inhibido delante de su relato brillante y enardecido.

¿Cómo enfrentar la seducción? La posibilidad de prestar atención a cómo había operado fue escuchando la entrevista y reinscribiendo el campo en lo textual. Allí pude observar otra arista del problema: fetichizar la violencia. A la hora de etnografiar estos encuentros cargados emocionalmente y buscar una poética narrativa que sea capaz de representar algo de estos mundos, solemos caer en la tentación de presentar atención exclusiva al horror y a la seducción evocados en el relato. Esto nos lleva a otra pregunta: ¿con que herramientas estéticas y con que precauciones éticas contamos las historias?

Reificar la violencia -clavar los ojos en las zapatillas rotas y detenernos en el festejo de *El Oreja* con sus amigos tomando cervezas luego de lo sucedido-, imposibilitaría observar, por ejemplo, los usos políticos del «vecino» con fines securitarios, o cómo la «vecinocracia» amalgama el nexos afectivo entre el valor del trabajo, la propiedad privada y la capacidad contributiva de quien defiende el territorio. El «detalle» de los vecinos guardando los repuestos, la patente del auto y la chapa de taxi (que no es otra cosa que la extensión de sí mismo como instrumento de trabajo) nos hablan de esto. Y más aún, la apuesta del detalle por el detalle mismo, exhaustivo o «pornográfico de la violencia» (Bourgois 2005), nos tornaría torpes e incapaces de reconocer que el contrato social es al mismo tiempo un contrato de género: se protege el barrio a condición de defender una mujer. El fetichismo de la violencia busca impresionar a costa de reducir analíticamente, es disección pura y dura, es, siguiendo una explicación rasa de fetichismo, atribuir a los objetos o fenómenos la cualidad de poseer poderes mágicos o sobrenaturales.

Avancemos ahora hacia el próximo fragmento.

## Como nunca antes lo habíamos hecho en nuestras vidas

En la actualidad, en mi investigación doctoral, busco reflexionar sobre diferentes tipos de intervenciones gubernamentales en dos instituciones estatales: la cárcel y la universidad. Por un lado, me interesa indagar cómo la universidad pública transforma el espacio de la prisión en un territorio para ser intervenido y, a su vez, cuáles son los sentidos políticos de sus intervenciones. Por el otro, intento ver las marcas que deja la cárcel en la universidad y las formas en que las personas privadas de la libertad hacen uso de los espacios universitarios. En 2019, durante mi trabajo de campo, desempeñé tareas de gestión y docencia en el Programa Universidad Sociedad y Cárcel (PUSyC) de la Secretaría de Extensión Universitaria. En ese marco tuve la oportunidad de formar un equipo y llevar adelante un taller de escritura y lectura creativa en una cárcel mixta y abierta, la colonia penitenciaria N° 4 de Monte Cristo. Fue a partir de allí que, dentro de mis objetivos de pesquisa, encontré interesante reflexionar sobre los impactos del arte y la literatura producida en contextos de encierro carcelario.

Fruto de esa intervención publicamos *Martes a la Siesta* (Blázquez 2019), un libro de cuentos, relatos y poesías. Las personas detenidas no solo escribieron, sino que participaron de la edición y presentación del material en el Museo de Antropologías de Córdoba. En lo siguiente me gustaría recuperar un fragmento de un relato que lleva por nombre «Los pibes rochos», firmado por *El Enmascarado*. Veamos.

Empezó un sábado de otoño, estaba en la esquina del barrio con dos amigas y mi compañero, fumábamos un porro (*marihuana*) y hablábamos de lo que íbamos a hacer más tarde. Esa noche tocaba Jiménez en Sociedad Belgrano y teníamos ganas de ir. Sonó mi celular, me fijé, era Moria, atendí. Hola, amigo, qué onda para ir a laburar, me preguntó. La mejor, vamos, contesté. Les dije a las chicas que ya volvíamos y fuimos con mi compañero hasta mi casa, me subí al techo, levanté una teja y saqué mi arma, un 38 lechucero.

Esperamos a Moria en la vereda. Dimos unas vueltas por Cerro las Rosas, íbamos al bardo (*jerga local para referir a una situación caótica*), no teníamos nada planeado (...). Dimos la vuelta a la manzana y vimos una casa en construcción, nos metimos por un costado y pasamos derecho al fondo, trepamos una tapia y de ahí saltamos al patio de la otra casa, era inmensa, alto rancho. Tenía una ventana abierta y por ahí nos metimos. Era una pareja, estaban en el living, saqué el fierro (*arma*) y le apunté al hombre en la espalda, lo tiré al piso. Mi compañero subió a la parte alta y trajo a la hija. Entre los dos le atamos las manos al gil (*jerga local para referirse a una persona menospreciada*) y lo dejamos en el suelo. A la señora y a la hija las sentamos en el sillón y le pusimos una toalla en la cabeza para que no nos vieran. La señora estaba muy nerviosa, le pregunté qué le hacía falta y ella me pidió unas pastillas para los nervios. Tranquila, señora. Acá ninguno es violador, ni abusador, ni asesino, le dije y la acompañé hasta la cocina para que buscara las pastillas, ella sacó una y yo le serví un vaso de agua para que tomara.

Volvimos al living y mi compañero le gritó al gil: DAME TODA LA BURRA. ¿Qué cosa? preguntó el hombre. La guita (*dinero*) y las joyas, grité. No tenemos nada, todo lo tenemos en el banco guardado, dijo la señora. Dejé de mentir, si la burra está en tu casa, a vos te entregó (*delató*) la empleada, dije de una y le pegué dos fierrazos al tipo que lo hundió en el piso. ¡Cómo nos puede hacer esto! Se lamentó la señora.

(...) Le sacamos la llave del auto y se lo embagayamos, lo llenamos de electrodomésticos. En ese momento la llamé a Moria que seguía de campana. ¿Todo piola para salir, no hay nadie?, pregunté. Todo piola, ladrón, salgan tranqui, dijo Moria. (...) Todavía me duraba la adrenalina por haber metido un caño (*arma*) más junto a los pibes rochos.

Fuimos hasta el traficante, compramos un par de bolsas [cocaína], un par de porros, algunas roinol (*rohypnol, psicofármaco*) y nos fuimos al baile del mandamás, Carlos la Mona Jiménez. Esa noche bailamos con las traidoras (*adjetivo que refiere a sus parejas mujeres*) como nunca antes lo habíamos hecho en nuestras vidas. (Blázquez 2019).

Durante la presentación del libro, la lectura de este fragmento generó perplejidad entre el público presente. El escritor del relato, ante las autoridades del servicio penitenciario en sala, optó, obviamente, por mantener el anonimato, por lo que rápidamente se pasó a lectura de otras partes. En ese momento me grafiqué la idea de que textos como éste, historias así narradas y personajes del tipo generan reacciones difíciles de mostrar en público. No se sabe con claridad si se tiene que aplaudir por haber logrado concebir una buena historia en un lugar sórdido como es la prisión, reír de incomodidad o manifestar algún tipo de consternación por el daño que se afirma haber causado. ¿Con qué imágenes pensamos las prisiones? Y Más aún, ¿qué se busca y qué se espera de una persona presa que participa de actividades «resocializadoras»?

En lo personal, fue una sorpresa el relato de *El Enmascarado*, ya que no esperaba conocer en detalle cómo un ladrón golpea a un hombre, ata a una madre con una hija para desvalijar una casa y luego se regodea de lo sucedido en una noche de excesos. Sin embargo, con el equipo de docentes que llevamos adelante el taller de literatura, de ningún modo se nos pasó por la cabeza «desinflar» la historia y mucho menos sacarla de la edición final. Para el equipo que conducía la propuesta se abría una situación contradictoria: no queríamos caer en

una posición autoritaria o de censura como a menudo realiza el servicio penitenciario; pero nos graficábamos abiertamente la posibilidad de que una presentación desafortunada, sumado a su potencia seductora en la que se desdibuja los límites del horror y placer, podría contribuir a reforzar las percepciones negativas de las personas que habitan el encierro. Lo cierto es que las actividades educativas propuestas son resignificadas todo el tiempo en el territorio, y los destinatarios de éstas no siempre quieren ser «productivos» en sus estudios, avanzar en la progresividad de la pena o abrir su mundo a las «buenas intenciones» universitarias.

Habría que decir también que ninguno de los participantes del taller pidió retirar la historia del libro, tampoco lo hizo autoridad alguna al observar la muestra final previa a su impresión. En ese momento pensé que sacarla, hubiera respondido más a un «cuidado» como los que suelen tomarse con este tipo de programas educativos para conservar las vías institucionales que permiten el desembarco universitario en cárceles, que a un acto que corrompe el «espíritu de una política progresista». No obstante, la situación era lo suficientemente incómoda y singular como para no prestar atención al desacople de expectativas producidas en territorio, a aquello que emerge entre lo que se planifica y lo que efectivamente sucede.

¿Cómo lidiar con esto? En mi trabajo de campo percibí que las dimensiones morales no sólo están presentes en la prisión regulando la vida de aquellos que se relacionan con ésta, sino que son las substancias que nutren el desembarco universitario. Hay dos imágenes que pueden ayudarnos a visualizar esta idea. Por un lado, sucede que de manera recurrente se romantizan este tipo de intervenciones, ya que en repetidas ocasiones, «La Universidad»<sup>5</sup>, se presenta (y es representada) con una fuerza salvadora y paternalista que actualiza la matriz jesuítica que atraviesa su origen. De ahí que en esta territorialidad conjugada sea posible escrutar el «poder tutelar» (Souza Lima 1995) ejercido entre agentes universitarixs y trabajadorxs del servicio penitenciario sobre un segmento social muchas veces entendido como «incapaz» o «digno de tutela». Ahora bien, a esta imagen edulcorada de «presos apreciados» producida por un romance académico que toma como objeto de reflexión las motivaciones y actos de resistencias de personas encarceladas, podemos encontrar otra, la de «presos despreciados». Esta imagen gira nuestra atención hacia otro lugar: concluida la etapa más oscura de la Argentina (1976 – 1983) y posterior recuperación democrática, la universidad pública se posicionó manifestando que las causas penales marcan una frontera moral entre quien merece y no merece recibir educación superior en contextos de encierro carcelario. Primero en 2010 y luego en 2017, personas detenidas y condenadas por delitos de lesa humanidad solicitaron ser admitidas como estudiantes de la Universidad de Buenos Aires y en la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC), siendo negada la condición de «ciudadanía universitaria» en ambos momentos. En otra publicación (Blázquez 2024), pude observar que los sentidos políticos de la universidad en la cárcel atravesados por sentimientos de *compromiso* y *aversión* se reactualizan con delitos con marcas de género abriendo la puerta a nuevos reclamos punitivos.

Creo que estas imágenes desplegadas, la de «presos apreciados» y la de «presos despreciados», sostenidas ambas en los valores morales del «compromiso» y la «aversión», y en el paternalismo y la exclusión que explican los sentidos políticos de la universidad en la cárcel, nos ayudan a comprender la situación de perplejidad con la que abrí esta parte del artículo. El relato de *El Enmascarado* recupera algo de esta discusión posicionándose «entre» estas imágenes, indudablemente no es el «buen preso» que el público invitado fue a escuchar, pero tampoco es un genocida ni ocupa posiciones morales «equivalentes» (*Tranquila, señora. Aquí ninguno es violador, ni abusador, ni asesino*, afirma él). *El Enmascarado* es la incomodidad que emerge entre lo que se infunde en el territorio y lo que se espera, es lo que resultó de la propuesta desplegada y lo que las personas hicieron de ella.

5 Utilizo mayúscula y el encomillado para connotar una propuesta analítica que rechace la reificación del «Estado». Si bien en mi trabajo doctoral trabajo con la universidad pública cordobesa, no hay tal «Universidad», por el contrario, si nos acercamos, si la caminamos y buscamos comprender, encontraremos distintos tipos de entramados institucionales en la que cada unidad académica tiene sus propias lógicas para pensar el extensionismo universitario y maneras propias de intervenir el territorio carcelario. En lo siguiente, cuando hable de «universidad», a secas, busco señalar, cualquier propuesta educativa concebida por y desde este entramado de gobierno.

Creo que lo rico de esta situación yace en las tensas fronteras que producen bienes culturales, intervenciones universitarias y formas estatalizadas de administrar las diferencias y alteridades.

No es aquí el lugar para explayarme más en estas cuestiones, sin embargo, entiendo que el fragmento de *El Enmascarado* nos permite reflexionar sobre la relación siempre turbulenta entre universidad y cárcel. Así todo, anudada a la cuestión principal que en este artículo pretendo indagar, me gustaría observar otra arista del problema. Llegado el momento de textualizar las situaciones vividas en el trabajo de campo solemos «limpiar» un poco el asunto o «higienizar» algunas de las texturas de vida que pretendemos conocer, me refiero específicamente a aquello que Sherry Ortner (2016) denominó «higienización de la política» como una de las formas posibles de cometer rechazos etnográficos. ¿Adónde voy concretamente? A la hora de entender, analizar y enfrentar las atrocidades cometidas por nuestros interlocutores junto a las formas estatalizadas de abordarlos, es muy común que disimulemos los conflictos, como por ejemplo la fragmentación interna entre personas detenidas, las posiciones ambivalentes de sectores universitarios y las posturas contradictorias que también encarnan los movimientos de derechos humanos.

En las intervenciones universitarias que tuve la oportunidad de participar, percibí que a menudo se engrandece el «compromiso» y se disimula la «aversión», o dicho de otro modo, lidiamos mejor con la alteridad cuando nos relacionamos con «presos apreciados» que con los «despreciados». Esto claramente acarrea un problema, algo que Sherry Ortner advierte: «es la ausencia de conflicto interno lo que les confiere a muchos estudios de la resistencia un aire de romanticismo» (p. 61). Estas cuestiones nos colocan en un aprieto: los escenarios carcelarios en Córdoba son altamente conflictivos, con autoridades volátiles que modifican constantemente el territorio a intervenir y los consensos, lejos de ser sólidos y sostenibles en el tiempo, se nos muestran cada vez más fragmentarios y abiertos a nuevos reclamos punitivos a la hora de vincularse con ciertos actores.

## Los riesgos de fascinar

En momentos anteriores a esta publicación, buscando divulgar las historias del taxista y del asaltante, algunos colegas supieron advertirme que no era necesario reponer algunas escenas en la escritura, que tal o cual detalle «era condimento», que debía tener cuidados porque podía humillar a quienes me confiaron su relato, o que era necesario pensar cómo retornar a ciertas escenas de sometimiento sin reproducir la gramática de su violencia.<sup>6</sup> George Marcus (2016) supo indicar que el propósito del seminario de Santa Fé donde nacieron los textos de *Writing culture* fue introducir una conciencia literaria en la etnográfica como práctica de representación. Ahora bien, el ejercicio de inscribir hábilmente lo empírico en lo textual y poder representar la alteridad de un modo literario precisa un entrenamiento de las herramientas estéticas, de precauciones éticas y negociaciones en el campo para saber qué se puede decir y cómo esto puede ser leído.

Autoras como Adriana Vianna indaga sobre situaciones incómodas como éstas, específicamente sobre el universo prisional-manicomial: «es preciso dejar que algo del horror siga fluctuando incómodo hasta que se engrude en nosotros, lectores y lectoras, y no se disipe más» (2021: 375), esto implicaría, paradójicamente, mostrar el horror, hacerlo explícito, pero no explicarlo o domesticarlo del todo, remarcando, eso sí, que las elecciones narrativas no son banales. Otros autores advierten en esto la complicada situación de caer en una «pornografía de la violencia» en el acto de sumergir a los lectores a «espeluznantes detalles de derramamiento de sangre, agresiones y heridas» (Bourgois 2005: 17). Los fragmentos y escenas etnográficas aquí recuperadas nos enfrentan a interlocutores incómodos, figuras con las cuales resulta difícil congeniar un «compromiso político» o una

<sup>6</sup> Esta última inquietud fue formulada por Saidiya Hartman (2008) a los fines de indagar las implicancias políticas del acto de narrar. Esta historiadora negra norteamericana, utiliza la «fabulación crítica» como metodología de investigación, pero fundamentalmente como práctica política para de recrear voces de mujeres esclavizadas.

«antropología por demanda», en los términos planteados de Segato (2013), debido a que perpetraron sufrimientos a otras personas y a la hora de narrar sus actos lo expresaron abiertamente, sin vergüenza y hasta con regocijo.

Reflexionando sobre estas tensiones, advierto que quienes investigamos sobre el horror, violencias y abusos solemos producir cierta fascinación en la construcción estética de nuestras etnografías. En el apartado que tiene al taxista como protagonista expliqué las consecuencias de reificar y/o fetichizar la violencia. Esto que señalo, nos trae el primer riesgo, ya que ponderar solo el horror evocado por nuestros interlocutores, generaría un efecto de luces y sombras sobre la realidad social que intentamos comprender. Es decir, el afán de multiplicar audiencias y fascinar a los lectores, trae aparejado la invisibilidad de otras violencias y tramas de significados de mayor importancia.

Con la figura de *El Oreja* intenté tener especial cuidado para no plasmar la imagen de un engendro, un monstruo definido por características psicológicas y vaciado de cualquier hilo social que lo enrede a su contexto. Convertido en esto, su figura se hincha y se deforma perdiendo todo rasgo de verosimilitud. De hecho, esto fue lo que sucedió cuando me acerqué a entrevistar a los operadores jurídicos que investigaban lo sucedido con el caso de linchamiento. Según la explicación de la fiscal, las distintas versiones de los hechos, incluyendo la de los propios asaltantes, junto a la testimonial del taxista y la de los policías que intervinieron en aquel momento, *todo resultaba confuso*. En el momento repuse que había visto por internet a un hombre que afirmaba haber golpeado a los ladrones, a lo que la fiscal respondió: *Sí, sí, pero ese estaba exagerando todo. Capaz que era un hombre que buscaba algo de cámara, vaya uno a saber...* Bajo mi sorpresa, agarré el expediente judicial que tenía en manos y leí en voz alta un testimonio: *me quemaron la cara con cigarrillos, me asentaban los cigarrillos en la sien y se empezó a juntar la gente...* La fiscal insistió en que esto tampoco era *tan* cierto. A los días de esta entrevista supe que lo que se decretó en la causa jurídica: «archivar las presentes actuaciones, sin perjuicio de continuar con la investigación si nuevos elementos probatorios así lo justificaran».

La sobredimensión, el exceso y la exageración en el tratamiento de la violencia, repercuten no sólo en las formas en la que opera su ejecución, sino en la manera misma de nombrarla y narrarla. Elsa Blair (2007) llama la atención de esta cuestión a partir del arte popular colombiano y del realismo mágico (específico de la escritura de Gabriel García Márquez y de las pinturas de Fernando Botero), sobre cómo la desmesura, la teatralización y la divulgación de la violencia tienden a «hinchar» lo real:

El hiperbolismo, si bien en una primera instancia intensifica el cuerpo real, tiene también la capacidad de negarlo, y en esa refutación, crea los mundos improbables. Ciertamente al proyectar las propiedades del cuerpo en un nivel de excepcionalidad, rompe las nociones de lo verosímil para entrar en el orden de lo imaginario [...] La realidad de la violencia del país - en su desmesura - se niega todos los días como si ocurriera en otra parte, o peor aún como si no estuviera ocurriendo sino en los dominios de lo imaginario. *Su exceso la vuelve improbable* (Blair, 2007: 212-213. Resaltado en el original).

En cambio, con la figura de *El Enmascarado* y su texto escrito en el taller de escritura y lectura creativa en contextos de encierro, advertí otro tipo de riesgo, allí señalé un rechazo etnográfico de la mano de lo que Sherry Ortner denomina «higienización de la política». Muchas veces, quienes trabajamos con personas en situaciones vulnerables, producimos silenciamientos y, un poco romantizando una posición combativa y otro poco por miedo a contribuir y reforzar las percepciones negativas de ellas o de sus territorios, lavamos nuestra escritura y la mostramos totalmente desinfectada. Ejemplo de esto es lo que revelan muchas etnografías contemporáneas: nuestros interlocutores no tienen nombres («personas privadas de la libertad»; «personas presas»; «sujetos encarcelados»), no mostramos sus posiciones ambivalentes, como tampoco las fragmentaciones que existen en el territorio, ni mucho menos las dimensiones morales que sustentan las formas de gestionar las alteridades. Allí, el riesgo de fascinar se asume aplanando todas las diferencias, y de este modo, hablamos de «sistemas



carcelarios» como si los efectos del encierro o las posibilidades de moldear mundos posibles fuese igual en cualquier parte y en cualquier momento.

## Salir manchados

Para concluir, además de las preocupaciones desarrolladas hasta aquí, en las cuales lo «incómodo» y lo narrativo conforman dos ejes estructurantes del artículo, escribo con una incomodidad de otro tipo. Con una escala que trasciende los estados nacionales, nadie podría negar el ascenso de gobiernos autoritarios con características negacionistas y tendencias a desfinanciar la inversión pública de producción científica, especialmente en Ciencias Sociales. Hace unos años, en Brasil, Jair Bolsonaro afirmó que las actividades universitarias promovían *balburdia*, y se refirió a las Ciencias Sociales con profundo desdén, dijo que lo que hacemos es «marxismo cultural». En Argentina, con la victoria presidencial de Javier Milei y un segmento social que desde la pandemia no ha parado de crecer apela a las «fuerzas del cielo» para dirigir también a los ataques hacia este sector. Tengo amigos y colegas antropólogos que fueron ridiculizados en canales televisivos por los objetos de sus investigaciones, por los nombres de sus ponencias y artículos.

Es por todo esto que también encuentro necesario dirigir nuestra mirada hacia interlocutores que no simpatizamos y tenemos poco grado de identificación, al menos de forma consciente. Podríamos llamarlos de diversas formas: interlocutores difíciles de «tragar», «incómodos», «despreciables» o «repugnantes», y hasta podríamos pensar que sería como «bailar con el enemigo». Pero con adjetivar no alcanza y, como he mostrado, más que una cuestión de método, lo planteado alcanza una comprensión de la vida social desde lo ético, lo epistemológico y lo analítico. Hay una frase que se le atribuye a Jorge Luis Borges: «hay que tener cuidado al elegir los enemigos, porque uno acaba pareciéndose a ellos». Lo que afirma raspa e incomoda, pero de alguna manera refleja un costado político subrayado por diversos autores (Segato 2013; Shoshan 2016; Escolar 2017): la antropología tiene una marcada tendencia a privilegiar el punto de vista de grupos victimizados, lo que trae aparejado un «ethos de la compasión» (Fassin & Rechtman 2009) y, en consecuencia, la invitación a embanderarnos junto a estos en diferentes luchas en torno a reivindicación de derechos y justicia.

Por diferentes vías he percibido que los actos violentos cometidos por nuestros interlocutores y registradas por nosotros, por más distancia que establezcamos, de un modo u otro nos alcanzan y repercuten. En consecuencia, más que establecer vínculos de empatía con estos sujetos y buscar «colocarnos en sus zapatos» o «sentir sus dolores» con el objetivo de ampliar los horizontes de comprensión de nuestra disciplina, prefiero trazar otro camino. Me agrada la imagen donde el encuentro etnográfico es como tirarse por una chimenea llena de hollín, y luego al salir, mirándonos la cara, comprendemos que ambos, etnógrafos e interlocutores, estamos manchados.<sup>7</sup> Que se entienda bien, no pretendo insinuar ni plantear ninguna simetría, no obstante, si en la etnografía buscamos comprender al otro a partir de la propia experiencia, debemos considerar, cuando menos, la posibilidad de salir tiznados de ese encuentro.

En un artículo donde se problematiza qué implica/significa escribir sobre personajes moralmente reprochables, Martínez-Moreno (2022) teoriza sobre esta cuestión a partir de tres colegas antropólogas que trabajaron con excombatientes del conflicto armado colombiano, paramilitares y guerrilleros. En todas aparece una experiencia vivida a partir del *miedo* o *asco* presenciado, y como consecuencia un costo a pagar, un *mal* que queda dentro del cuerpo de ellas producto de haber escuchado, narrado o registrado historias que emergen como una especie de veneno en la que luego se torna imposible depurar totalmente en la escritura. Este autor nos dice algo que debe ponderarse: si para producir conocimiento etnográfico necesitamos tener confianza

7 La anécdota del Talmud sobre la chimenea es utilizada por Lacan en 1960 y reformulada en 1966 para referirse a la experiencia analítica donde reconoce que tanto el analista como el analizante están marcados por sus consecuencias. Conozco de esta historia a partir de Gloria Leff (2008) *Juntos en la chimenea - La contratransferencia, las «mujeres analistas» y Lacan*.

en los vínculos construidos con nuestros interlocutores, como contrapartida, no podemos olvidarnos que la violencia imanta y contamina al investigador.

En la investigación doctoral en curso tuve la oportunidad de observar a algunos colegas salir de prisión con el brazo cruzando el estómago y acusando ganas de vomitar. La pestilencia que emanan algunos sectores con restos de trapos húmedos mezclado con tabaco, sobras de comida, creolina y excremento de palomas que se acumula de a pilas por rincones, y el olor ácido que desprenden ciertos cuerpos luego de pasar días en salas de castigo es nauseabundo. Es muy difícil hacer registros de campo el día que se ingresa a la prisión, a veces, en el mejor de los casos, solo es posible registrar las conversaciones con otros colegas o algún familiar en el colectivo de regreso a casa. Y digo a veces porque si no es olor, es ruido, es barullo, es la capa sonora de un paisaje estridente que un poco agobia y otro poco irrita.

Lo que he intentado mostrar en este trabajo es que hay interlocutores que también nos agobian e irritan. Y más también, quizás nos dan arcadas por lo que hacen o dicen que hacen. A veces un cuerpo fétido o un rincón hediondo se parece, por lo que genera, al malestar que despiertan algunas personas con las que nos relacionamos. Suele pasar que, en estas situaciones, se activa un movimiento fisiológico, una reacción corporal inmediata, hay necesidad de girar la cabeza y mirar a otro lado, cerrar los ojos, secar la humedad que brota de las manos o detener como sea el retorcijón del estómago. Sin embargo, y tal como nos recuerda la filósofa Sara Ahmed (2015), la repugnancia es un sentido ambivalente «implica el deseo o la atracción por los mismos objetos que se siente que son repulsivos» (p. 136). El punto pasa por saber sintonizar políticamente el para qué de ese encuentro y el cómo nos alcanzan y afectan estas situaciones, para conseguir luego dar valor etnográfico a ese malestar.

En el cuento de Lamborghini, el personaje principal, Esteban y Gustavo, violan de una manera brutal a un niño, el Niño Proletario, y al hacerlo producen flujos, heces y vómitos que, en un acto de hermanación gozante, entre ellos beben, tragan y digieren. En el fragmento del taxista, *El Oreja* golpea a los ladrones, con las dos piernas, con la renga y con la zurda, hasta romperse las zapatillas, hasta «darles un poco de cariño» y luego festejar con sus amigos tomando cervezas. En el fragmento del asaltante, *El Enmascarado* roba y golpea a una familia entera para inmediatamente dirigirse a una desenfadada noche de excesos, entre cocaína y psicofármacos. Sin querer homologar, en todos éstos aparece la necesidad de buscar una sustancia para digerir lo que allí sucede. Este sentimiento de ambivalencia los persigue, y a nosotros etnógrafos también, lo que ellos hacen nos repele, pero de una manera pegajosa también captan nuestra atención hasta dejarnos regurgitando. Paul Stoller (2022) nos invita a recuperar la fuerza afectiva de lo que ofende el gusto, y con ello una latente provocación a incorporar el «disgusto» como valor etnográfico. Recuperar lo sensual, sensible y sensorial que se encarna, que se trae en la ropa y hasta en los papeles que se acumulan entre la documentación estatal requerida forma parte de la necesidad de rescatar las texturas de vida que conforman los mundos que etnografamos.

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Hacia la ampliación de horizontes de la comprensión antropológica:  
etnografías con «alteridades incómodas»

# Entre «alteridades reprochables» y «otredades irredimibles»: Violencia, moralidad, y los límites de la comprensión etnográfica

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## Resumen:

Violencia, terror y resiliencia son tres temas que han captado la atención de académicos y líderes políticos desde al menos los años 80. Inspirados por el estudio del Holocausto, un número considerable de especialistas surgió con el objetivo de gestionar intervenciones para atender las necesidades de las víctimas de regímenes totalitarios. Mientras tanto, aquellos involucrados activamente en los actos de violencia que produjeron esas víctimas parecen haber sido relegados a un segundo plano. Este artículo examina, por lo tanto, los límites de la comprensión etnográfica a través de dos categorías cruciales para comprender la violencia. Por un lado, las «alteridades reprochables» engloban a individuos o grupos que, a pesar de su involucramiento en actos violentos, aún pueden ser objeto de empatía para el investigador. Por otro lado, las «otredades irredimibles» son aquellos definidas únicamente por medio de una aparente contaminación moral producida por el propio acto que perpetraron. De esta manera, mientras en el primer caso el perpetrador es considerado como una víctima de las circunstancias, en el segundo el acto perpetrado se presenta como abyecto lo que le excluye de la posibilidad de comprensión. Tal dicotomía introducida por estas dos aproximaciones a quienes cometen actos de violencia plantea preguntas importantes para los etnógrafos como, por ejemplo: ¿De qué manera los esquemas morales de los investigadores influyen en su comprensión y descripción de determinados actos de violencia?, y ¿cuáles son las implicaciones políticas y metodológicas para una etnografía de la violencia atrapada entre estas «otredades irredimibles» y «alteridades reprochables»?

**Palabras clave:** Violencia; Victimización; Perpetradores; Etnografía; Moralidad

# Entre “alteridades reprováveis” e “outras irredimíveis”: Violência, moralidade e os limites da compreensão etnográfica

## **Resumo:**

Violência, terror e resiliência são três temas que têm capturado a atenção de acadêmicos e líderes políticos desde pelo menos os anos 1980. Inspirados pelo estudo do Holocausto, um número considerável de especialistas surgiu com o objetivo de gerenciar intervenções para atender às necessidades das vítimas de regimes totalitários. Enquanto isso, aqueles envolvidos ativamente nos atos de violência que produziram essas vítimas parecem ter sido relegados a um segundo plano. Este artigo examina, portanto, os limites da compreensão etnográfica através de duas categorias cruciais para compreender a violência. Por um lado, as “alteridades reprováveis” englobam indivíduos ou grupos que, apesar de seu envolvimento em atos violentos, ainda podem ser objeto de empatia para o pesquisador. Por outro lado, as “outridades irredimíveis” são aqueles definidos unicamente por meio de uma aparente contaminação moral produzida pelo próprio ato que perpetraram. Desta forma, enquanto no primeiro caso o perpetrador é considerado como uma vítima das circunstâncias, no segundo o ato perpetrado é apresentado como abjeto, o que o exclui da possibilidade de compreensão. Tal dicotomia introduzida por essas duas abordagens a quem cometem atos de violência levanta questões importantes para os etnógrafos, como por exemplo: De que maneira os esquemas morais dos pesquisadores influenciam sua compreensão e descrição de determinados atos de violência? E quais são as implicações políticas e metodológicas para uma etnografia da violência presa entre essas “outridades irredimíveis” e “alteridades reprováveis”?

**Palavras-chave:** Violência; Vitimação; Perpetradores; Etnografia; Moralidade

# Between ‘reproachable alterities’ and ‘irredeemable others’: Violence, morality, and the limits of ethnographic understanding

## **Abstract:**

Violence, terror, and resilience are three themes that have captured the attention of academics and political leaders since at least the 1980s. Inspired by the study of the Holocaust, a significant number of specialists emerged with the goal of managing interventions to address the needs of victims of totalitarian regimes. Meanwhile, those actively involved in the acts of violence that produced these victims seem to have been relegated to the background. This article therefore examines the limits of ethnographic understanding through two crucial categories for understanding violence. On the one hand, ‘reproachable alterities’ encompass individuals or groups who, despite their involvement in violent acts, can still be the object of empathy for the researcher. On the other hand, ‘irredeemable others’ are defined solely by a seeming moral contamination produced by the very act they perpetrated. In this way, while in the first case the perpetrator is considered a victim of circumstances, in the second the perpetrated act is presented as abject, thus excluding it from the possibility of understanding. Such a dichotomy introduced by these two approaches to those who commit acts of violence raises important questions for ethnographers, such as: How do the moral schemes of researchers influence their understanding and description of certain acts of violence? And what are the political and methodological implications for an ethnography of violence caught between these ‘irredeemable others’ and ‘reproachable alterities’?

**Keywords:** Violence; Victimization; Perpetrators; Ethnography; Morality

# Entre «alteridades reprochables» y «otredades irredimibles»: Violencia, moralidad, y los límites de la comprensión etnográfica

Andrés M.F. González-Saiz

Violencia, terror y resiliencia. Tres conceptos que desde la década de los ochentas han despertado el interés de un considerable número de expertos y figuras políticas. Si bien el fin de la Guerra Fría—en palabras de Mikhail Gorbachev y George H. W. Bush—prometía un «nuevo orden mundial» de paz y prosperidad este sueño rápidamente se convirtió en una pesadilla (Obermann 2023). El incremento de violentos conflictos tras el colapso del bloque socialista en Europa del Este y el de las dictaduras militares en el Cono Sur y África, que en muchos casos culminaron en genocidios de carácter político o étnico, trajo consigo una avalancha de expertos cuyo objetivo era dar cuenta de las atrocidades que fueron cometidas por diferentes grupos en el marco de un periodo determinado de tiempo. Expertos que, imitando los pasos de quienes estudiaron el Holocausto, centraron principalmente su atención en los individuos y grupos considerados como víctimas de regímenes totalitarios y solo tangencialmente en aquellas «alteridades reprochables» y «otredades irredimibles» que participaron activamente de la violencia<sup>1</sup>.

Estas dos formas de conceptualizar a interlocutores involucrados en prácticas que sacuden las fibras morales de la comunidad académica, como explicaré en este artículo, resultan de gran importancia para el estudio de la violencia al poner en evidencia los límites de la comprensión etnográfica. Por un lado, las «alteridades reprochables» se refieren a aquellos grupos o individuos que a pesar de haber participado directamente en actos de violencia—los cuales pueden llegar a ser cuestionables a los ojos del investigador—estos no clausuran la posibilidad de empatía hacia ellos<sup>2</sup>. En este grupo se incluyen pandilleros, traficantes de droga, inmigrantes ilegales, e incluso algunos combatientes de organizaciones guerrilleras. Por otro lado, se encuentran las «otredades irredimibles», las cuales incluyen personajes como el abusador sexual o el torturador. Personajes cuya identidad queda subsumida al acto que perpetraron. Un acto que pareciera no necesitar ser comprendido, sino simplemente reprimido.

Con más de medio siglo de conflicto armado interno a cuestas, el cual ha dejado un saldo de casi diez millones de víctimas<sup>3</sup>, no es de sorprender que en los últimos treinta años Colombia se convirtiera en un laboratorio privilegiado para una hueste de expertos interesados en estudiar las secuelas de este contexto tan particular. Un contexto caracterizado por un entramado institucional aparentemente democrático que coexiste con masacres, desplazamientos forzados y la criminalización de amplios sectores de su propia población. Así pues, de acuerdo a quién se le pregunte, los militares colombianos pueden ser descritos bien sea como víctimas heroicas o como asesinos

1 Con notables excepciones como es el caso de Arendt (2006) y Lifton (1986), cuyos respectivos trabajos tienen como protagonistas a individuos que participaron activamente en el genocidio alemán, la mayor parte de publicaciones tras los Juicios de Núremberg estuvieron centradas principalmente en los sobrevivientes de este terrible suceso (Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Feierstein 2007; Gatti 2017).

2 En este texto entiendo empatía desde aquello que Mazarrella llama resonancia constitutiva. En este sentido, la posibilidad de sentir empatía por nuestros interlocutores sugiere «una relación de devenir mutuo más que de determinación causal. No todas las personas o cosas son capaces de resonar entre sí (...). Pero la resonancia, una vez establecida, es una fuente tanto de actualización como de ansiedad» (Mazzarella 2017: 5).

3 De acuerdo a la más reciente Comisión de la Verdad implementada en el país Colombia cuenta con un número aproximado de 800.000 víctimas. De acuerdo con el Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV), actualmente existen 8.219.403 víctimas de desplazamiento forzado por eventos ocurridos desde el 1 de enero de 1985 hasta el 31 de diciembre de 2021. No obstante, el número de colombianos que sufrieron directa o indirectamente las secuelas del conflicto armado podría llegar a ser mucho mayor si se parte de una periodicidad distinta. Ver: Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición (CEV). 2022. «El Informe final en cifras.» Informe Final - Comisión de la Verdad. 2022. <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/el-informe-final-en-cifras>.  
Unidad para las Víctimas. 2022. «Las cifras que presenta el Informe Global sobre Desplazamiento 2022.» *Unidad para las Víctimas* (blog). May 20, 2022. <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/las-cifras-que-presenta-el-informe-global-sobre-desplazamiento/>.



irredimibles. Algunos académicos, políticos y periodistas cercanos a las élites empresariales y latifundistas del país, por ejemplo, se refieren al Ejército Nacional como una institución de patriotas abnegados, dispuestos a sacrificarse en la lucha contra el terrorismo. Esta narrativa patriótica, sin embargo, se ve opacada por el historial de abusos contra la población civil cometidos por miembros de esta institución y que actualmente están bajo el escrutinio público.

Al igual que en otros países del sur global profundamente afectados por conflictos armados, en 2016 se implementó un acuerdo de paz entre el gobierno colombiano y las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), una de las guerrillas marxistas más antiguas del mundo. Un acuerdo que configura lo que algunos autores llaman «escenarios transicionales». En este tipo de escenarios se entrecruzan «ensambles de prácticas institucionales, conocimientos expertos y discursos globales que se entrecruzan en un contexto histórico concreto» con el objetivo de administrar un pasado reprochable marcado por graves violaciones a los derechos humanos (Castillejo-Cuéllar 2017: 20). Esta teodicea secular<sup>4</sup>, como ha sido llamado en la literatura académica, plantea así un imperativo moral por medio del cual se busca «enmendar las fracturas realizadas a las texturas de lo social, a través de la palabra hablada y de la instauración de una teoría que explica el dolor colectivo» (Castillejo-Cuéllar 2020: 105). En Colombia, donde existe un legado de persecución política hacia comunidades campesinas, indígenas y militantes de izquierda que ha influido significativamente en el alarmante número de personas afectadas por el conflicto, la idea de que los militares colombianos puedan ser considerados víctimas, especialmente de una guerra jurídica en su contra, permite analizar un aspecto poco estudiado de los esquemas humanitarios.

Considerados al mismo tiempo como víctimas y perpetradores de crímenes atroces por parte de la actual infraestructura de justicia transicional colombiana, mi trabajo etnográfico al interior del Ejército Nacional de este país me permitió explorar las limitaciones metodológicas y conceptuales que introdujo el giro deontológico hacia la figura de la víctima, lo que algunos autores denominan como «razón humanitaria»<sup>5</sup>, al momento de desarrollar una comprensión cultural más profunda de la violencia. Un giro que le dio visibilidad a aquellas estructuras políticas y económicas responsables del sufrimiento de segmentos cada vez más amplios de la población. En este artículo entiendo a la «víctima» como un dispositivo técnico-jurídico que delimita que tipos de violencias son consideradas problemas públicos. Mi intención aquí no es juzgar la veracidad de las distintas experiencias de vulnerabilidad que configuran este concepto, sino la de analizar críticamente como la creciente centralidad de las «víctima» en las narrativas humanitarias actuales y de algunos sectores de la academia influyen en la manera en como los etnógrafos damos sentido a los actos de los «violentos». Un sentido que indudablemente establece límites a nuestra comprensión etnográfica de problemas sociales como son el abuso sexual o la limpieza social.

En este artículo rescato algunas notables excepciones a este giro deontológico entre las que se incluye mi propio trabajo etnográfico. Lo que algunos autores han llamado «antropología oscura»<sup>6</sup>. Tomando como punto de partida el creciente interés de algunos antropólogos por estudiar repudiables actos de violencia desde la

4 De acuerdo a algunos antropólogos las teodiceas seculares son esquemas interpretativos mediante los cuales los individuos buscan entender la existencia de sufrimiento en el mundo sin emplear para ello explicaciones de aparente índole religioso o sobrenatural. Para Das (1997), por ejemplo, el sufrimiento no es resultado de un castigo divino o una prueba de fe que busca hacer más fuerte a quién lo experimenta, si no que este es producto de fuerzas sociales y políticas. No obstante, a pesar de que el objetivo de esta teodicea secular es la de aliviar el sufrimiento de un número cada vez más amplio de víctimas esto es algo que pareciera verse truncado en la práctica. Pues, como sugieren Herzfeld (1992) y Auyero (2012), muchas veces las burocracias creadas para dar solución a estos problemas terminan contribuyendo a la reproducción de violencias simbólicas, exclusión política, y marginalidad económica de sus supuestos beneficiarios.

5 Fassín (2012) sostiene que la «razón humanitaria» se ha convertido en una forma de gobierno que busca no solo aliviar el sufrimiento de los individuos, sino también regular y controlar poblaciones en crisis. Al explorar las tensiones entre la solidaridad y el control, este autor plantea interrogantes sobre las implicaciones éticas y políticas que son producidas por este imperativo moral dirigido a aliviar el sufrimiento de las víctimas.

6 Este término hace referencia a una serie de etnografías que enfatizan los violentos efectos del proyecto neoliberal en los grupos estudiados por los antropólogos. Para Ortner (2016: 65), por ejemplo:

(...) since the 1980s or so, the emergence of neoliberal capitalism has had profound effects on the field, at the levels of both theory and ethnography. Marx (including various post and neo-Marxisms) and Foucault, with their theories emphasizing exploitation, inequality, and the workings of power, have come to dominate the field theoretically. In addition, a large number of ethnographic studies, looking at the impact of neoliberalism as both an economic system and a system of governmentality, have come out. Like the theory, the ethnography is often very dark, emphasizing the harsh, violent, and punitive nature of neoliberalism and the depression and hopelessness in which people under neoliberal regimes are often enveloped.

mirada de los mismos perpetradores, mi objetivo es invitar al lector a reflexionar críticamente acerca de los retos asociados con este proyecto. Retos que también incluyen la profunda resistencia que aún persiste en el mundo académico frente a este tipo de investigaciones, las cuales incluso llegan a ser consideradas como un acto de complicidad con los «violentos» (Martínez-Moreno 2022).

En nuestro rol de etnógrafos cabe preguntarse entonces: ¿de qué manera los pánicos morales asociados a ciertas formas de violencia dificultan el desarrollo de una comprensión más profunda de las lógicas culturales que nutren estos hechos sociales? y ¿qué efectos sociales y políticos tiene la producción de «otredades irredimibles» y «alteridades reprochables» en nuestros círculos académicos?

En la primera sección de este artículo, por lo tanto, relataré una conversación informal en la que un militar colombiano me confesó haber participado en el asesinato de civiles desarmados. Civiles que posteriormente fueron presentados como combatientes de la guerrilla en un caso conocido como *Falsos Positivos* y que actualmente está siendo investigado por la Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (JEP). Por medio de esta viñeta busco reflexionar acerca de cómo los investigadores contribuimos a la producción de «alteridades reprochables» y «otredades irredimibles».

Continuando con lo anterior, la segunda sección de este artículo examina los obstáculos que enfrentan quienes estudian la perspectiva de estos grupos. Obstáculos que se traducen principalmente en dificultades al momento de buscar financiación para sus proyectos y en acusaciones de complicidad con los «violentos». Una acusación que merece ser analizada con detenimiento.

Finalmente, en la última sección retomaré algunas anécdotas de mi trabajo de campo para analizar críticamente la función metodológica de cierto grado de complicidad con este tipo de sujeto etnográfico. Una complicidad que, de ninguna manera, justifica los actos de nuestros interlocutores pero que es inevitable, e incluso necesaria, en cualquier tipo de proyecto etnográfico.

## Encuentros etnográficos con «alteridades reprochables» y «otredades irredimibles»

Aunque el interés etnográfico por los efectos de la violencia en comunidades consideradas como «subalternas»<sup>7</sup> permitió que algunos investigadores fueran testigos de prácticas cuestionables llevadas a cabo por sus participantes, solo en unos pocos casos es posible encontrar una reflexión explícita acerca de estos sucesos. Una notable excepción es el trabajo etnográfico realizado por Bourgois en un barrio latino de Nueva York. Interesado por la economía moral de los traficantes de crack—en su mayor parte hijos de inmigrantes puertorriqueños—este investigador realizó la mayor parte de su trabajo de campo entre sujetos para quienes el ejercicio de la violencia era un atributo necesario en línea de trabajo.

Los interlocutores de Bourgois son responsables de ejercer violencia al interior de sus propias comunidades y, al mismo tiempo, víctimas del racismo endémico que estructura el proyecto nacional estadounidense<sup>8</sup>. Un proyecto que se expresa, por ejemplo, en la gentrificación que tuvo lugar en Nueva York durante los años noventa. Siendo consciente de esta doble faceta en la vida de sus interlocutores, Bourgois no estuvo exento de serios cuestionamientos éticos y morales durante su trabajo de campo. Uno de estos se presentó durante una conversación informal que sostuvo con sus participantes, y donde estos relataron haber participado en violaciones colectivas mientras eran aún estudiantes de secundaria.

Antes de que esta conversación terminara, él impactó mis oídos ya adormecidos y emociones revueltas con alardes de violaciones en el patio de la escuela. Recuerdo vívidamente tratar de persuadirme a mí mismo de que estaba

7 Spivak (2010) utiliza el término «subalterno» para referirse a personas marginadas y oprimidas por grupos dominantes. Según ella, el subalterno es silenciado por el discurso dominante, ya sea mediante explotación económica, privación política o marginalización cultural. Como resultado, sus experiencias y perspectivas suelen ser borradas o distorsionadas.

8 Sobre la relación entre racismo y el proyecto nacional de Estados Unidos ver Hinton (2021); Omi y Winant (1994).

hablando metafóricamente o exagerando. No fue hasta varios años después que tuve el coraje o la *confianza*<sup>9</sup> y el respeto de los traficantes del Game Room para recopilar relatos sistemáticos de violaciones colectivas llevadas a cabo por grupos de adolescentes (Bourgois 1996: 189)<sup>10</sup>.

Aunque es evidente que los actos descritos le producen incomodidad, e incluso repudio, la idea de que sus interlocutores son sujetos «subalternos» permite a Bourgois empatizar con aquello que he llamado «alteridades reprochables». En otras palabras, personas cuyos actos de violencia son considerados por el investigador como el resultado casi inevitable de condiciones económicas y sociales adversas. En el relato anterior sus interlocutores aparecen como víctimas trágicas de una sociedad excluyente. Víctimas cuyos actos, sin embargo, producen bastante sufrimiento al interior de sus comunidades.

En su trabajo acerca de la evolución de las estructuras sociales y las normas de comportamiento, Elias (2000) argumenta que aquello que asociamos con civilización es en realidad una restricción gradual de los impulsos humanos y la formación de nuevas sensibilidades morales. Prácticas que antes eran consideradas «reprochables» pueden convertirse en «irredimibles» con el paso de los años. O, dejando de lado la aparente progresión moral que se encuentra implícita en el argumento de Elias, incluso en sentido contrario. ¿Por qué toleramos ciertos actos de violencia y no otros? ¿Dónde se encuentra la delgada línea que separa una práctica o idea «reprochable» de una «irredimible»? ¿De qué manera influyen los esquemas morales de los investigadores en el desarrollo de una comprensión antropológica de la violencia?

Estas preguntas invitan a centrar nuestra mirada en las inflexiones de un régimen de verdad que se constituye alrededor del sufrimiento que experimentan ciertas personas. Un régimen de verdad que, en palabras de Foucault (2007: 37), da forma a «un dispositivo de saber-poder que marca efectivamente en lo real lo inexistente, y lo somete en forma legítima a la división de lo verdadero y lo falso.» La difusa línea que separa lo «reprochable» y lo «irredimible» no se encuentra, por tanto, en el acto mismo que produce sufrimiento si no en sus protagonistas. Esto es evidente en como se entiende, por ejemplo, la figura del militar. Una figura que inevitablemente se encuentra asociada con actos de violencia que conducen a la muerte de otros seres humanos. La comprensión de estos actos, sin embargo, esta supeditada a si el investigador considera a este combatiente como un héroe patriótico, una víctima de las circunstancias, o un asesino desalmado.

Martínez-Moreno (2022) plantea que las reacciones de los investigadores frente a los actos de violencia cometidos por sus interlocutores son materiales etnográficos inigualables. Bien como una aversión explícita o una tolerancia tácita que se manifiesta durante este encuentro, este material permite observar cómo los esquemas morales del investigador influyen no solo en las interpretaciones que este hace de los hechos, sino también en los límites de su comprensión etnográfica. Teniendo en cuenta que «solo podemos entender la tortura y el abuso a través de las deficiencias del lenguaje»<sup>11</sup> resulta de gran importancia que también sometamos a un examen crítico nuestras propias reacciones psicológicas cuando nuestros interlocutores describen prácticas o comparten ideas que hieren nuestra susceptibilidad (Robben 1996: 75). De lo contrario, corremos el riesgo de obviar tanto aquellos elementos estructurales que nutren tales prácticas, así como las posibilidades de resistencia moral que se presentan en contextos en donde este tipo de prácticas son comunes.

Es importante entonces tener presente que, como señala Bloch, «cuando los antropólogos realizan trabajo de campo o escriben etnografía, lo que intentan capturar es el flujo de conceptos mentales y esquemas, así como la capacidad de leer mentes que ocurre en situaciones sociales»<sup>12</sup> (2012: 180). En otras palabras, lo que se busca por medio de la etnografía es la posibilidad de comprender los mecanismos por medio de los cuales quienes pertenecen a determinado grupo organizan «elementos cognitivos en un objeto mental abstracto capaz de ser retenido en la

9 En español en el original.

10 Mi traducción.

11 Mi traducción.

12 Mi traducción.

memoria con valores predeterminados o espacios abiertos que pueden ser llenados de diversas maneras con detalles apropiados»<sup>13</sup> (D'Andrade 1995: 179). De esta manera, los esquemas morales del investigador son también el resultado de una «estructura interpretativa que organiza la experiencia» (Hinton 2021: 120). Quizás la mejor manera de entender la función de estos esquemas morales durante el encuentro etnográfico sea pensar en ellos como si se tratara del marco físico de una fotografía mediante el cual se «Encierra y resalta una imagen (la fotografía) mientras sitúa en segundo plano todo lo que está fuera del marco. En otras palabras, un marco es una lente que otorga significado a nuestra experiencia al proporcionar una forma de ver la realidad» (Ibid). ¿Por qué entonces no pensar de manera más crítica acerca de los marcos interpretativos que estructuran la reflexión moral del propio investigador?

Aunque desde los años ochenta venía cobrando importancia en la academia norteamericana los debates acerca de la posicionalidad del investigador y la reflexividad etnográfica, estas discusiones se limitaron en su mayor parte a evidenciar las dinámicas de poder constitutivas al ejercicio antropológico (Rabinow 1986). En Centroamérica, por ejemplo, algunos antropólogos norteamericanos usaron su posición como académicos para denunciar graves violaciones a derechos humanos cometidas por regímenes totalitarios (Bourgois 2007). Otros, usaron de manera estratégica los privilegios asociados a su ciudadanía para acceder a lugares e individuos que no son de fácil acceso para investigadores locales.

En su etnografía acerca de la estrecha relación entre marketing y contrainsurgencia Fattal (2018) tuvo la oportunidad de interactuar con militares en servicio activo que servían como enlace entre el aparato militar y la agencia publicitaria que tuvo a su cargo el diseño de la estrategia de comunicaciones del programa de desmovilización por medio del cual el gobierno colombiano buscaba debilitar a los grupos guerrilleros. A pesar de esto, las interacciones entre antropólogo e interlocutores estuvieron plagada de tensiones. Consciente en todo momento acerca de cómo su posición como ciudadano norteamericano facilitó su contacto con interlocutores de las Fuerzas Militares, este autor relata que, a diferencia de otros etnógrafos institucionales su situacionalidad en estos espacios burocráticos «era más parecida a la de los periodistas de investigación críticos que resisten el control del mensaje, aspecto intrínseco del sistema situacional, el cual fue diseñado para asegurarlos» (Fattal 2018, 128). Aunque los militares colombianos ocupan un rol protagónico en su etnografía, el hecho de que miembros de esta institución se encuentren vinculados a abusos en contra de la población civil llevó a que Fattal se rehusara a satisfacer algunos pedidos que le hicieron sus interlocutores. Cierto día, por ejemplo, un oficial del ejército con quién había desarrollado un grado significativo de *rapport* le pidió que revisara unas presentaciones de Power Point. Fattal se negó argumentando que «de ninguna manera podía contribuir a la contrainsurgencia» lo que terminó por convertir la relación con sus interlocutores en un camino de una sola vía (Ibid 127). ¿Hasta qué punto revisar y comentar tales presentaciones puede ser considerado como una contribución real a un proyecto contrainsurgente?

Al igual que este colega, muchos antropólogos encuentran más tolerable involucrarse a profundidad en la vida institucional de personas que trabajan en agencias de marketing (Shankar 2015) o con agrupaciones defensoras de derechos humanos (Tate 2007) que en la de militares que, de un modo u otro, son responsables de crímenes atroces en contra de sus propios ciudadanos. Esto no ha sido impedimento alguno, como argumentan Price (2009; 2011) y González (2008), para que algunos antropólogos norteamericanos hayan puesto su conocimiento al servicio de burocracias de seguridad nacional como el Pentágono. En un artículo bastante controversial, McFate, una de las principales promotoras del sistema de terreno humano<sup>14</sup>, argumenta que la principal función de la antropología es la de producir información cultural acerca de grupos no occidentales. Grupos que, en muchos casos, estas burocracias identifican como amenazas. La autora menciona

13 Mi traducción.

14 El Sistema de Terreno Humano (HTS, por sus siglas en inglés) fue un programa del Departamento de Defensa de los Estados Unidos, iniciado en 2007, que buscaba integrar conocimientos antropológicos y sociales en operaciones militares. Su objetivo principal era mejorar la comprensión cultural de las comunidades locales en zonas de conflicto, con la esperanza de que esta comprensión mejorara la efectividad de las operaciones militares y redujera los conflictos. Sin embargo, el programa fue objeto de controversia y críticas, tanto dentro de la comunidad académica como entre los profesionales de la antropología, debido a preocupaciones éticas y la posible instrumentalización de la investigación cultural con fines militares. El HTS fue descontinuado en 2014.

que «independientemente de si los antropólogos deciden entrar en el ámbito de la seguridad nacional, la información cultural inevitablemente será utilizada como base para las operaciones militares y la política pública. Y, si los antropólogos se niegan a contribuir, ¿qué tan confiable será esa información?» (McFate 2005: 37). Hacer comentarios a unas presentaciones de Power Point, como le solicitó su interlocutor, no es lo mismo que poner el conocimiento antropológico al servicio de un proyecto insurgente como pareciera estar insinuando Fattal. Su negativa a satisfacer el pedido del oficial termina funcionando como un mecanismo por medio del cual el investigador toma distancia de su interlocutor. Una distancia que, lamentablemente, impide a este antropólogo explorar aquellas ideas que lo llevan a sobredimensionar su posición como investigador norteamericano, así como de su rol al interior del aparato militar colombiano.

A diferencia de lo que sucede en el mundo anglosajón, los antropólogos latinoamericanos han tenido menos reparos en estudiar críticamente la perspectiva de quienes forman parte de Fuerzas Militares involucradas en graves violaciones a los derechos humanos (Castro 1990; Forero Angel 2017; Frederic 2013). Esto no quiere decir que los estudios etnográficos acerca de este tipo de burocracias de seguridad nacional producidos en Latinoamérica no le den importancia a la reflexividad etnográfica. Para el caso latinoamericano, como pertinentemente señala Guber (2016), esta aproximación metodológica para desmitificar la «otredad radical», y reprochable, que representan la mayor parte de Fuerzas Militares de la región. Fuerzas Militares que, como mencioné anteriormente, se han visto involucradas en graves violaciones a los derechos humanos de sus propios ciudadanos.

Llevar a cabo una investigación etnográfica con interlocutores que tienen ideas diametralmente opuestas a las nuestras es un reto que enfrentan en mayor o menor medida quienes se dedican al estudio antropológico de las sociedades contemporáneas. Especialmente cuando estas ideas implican justificar actos de violencia en contra de personas debido a su orientación sexual, ideología política o por su color de piel<sup>15</sup>. Quizás sea por este motivo que algunos autores como McLeish hayan tomado la decisión deliberada de evitar «el tema de matar: lo que los soldados dicen al respecto, cómo se sienten al respecto, lo que podría significar para ellos, y así sucesivamente» (2013: 90–91). Wool adopta una posición similar cuando anota que «en la guerra y en casa, los soldados hablan de lo que hacen como «un trabajo» más a menudo que cualquier otra cosa» (2015: 105). Considerar el uso de la violencia como un trabajo que realizan sus interlocutores, pero que no los determina en su totalidad, les permite a estos investigadores convertir al militar en una víctima de las circunstancias o, en otras palabras, una «alteridad reprochable» por la que se puede sentir cierto grado de empatía.

Varias veces durante mi trabajo de campo con militares colombianos experimenté situaciones en las que los límites de mi empatía fueron puestos a prueba. Situaciones en las que mis interlocutores solicitaron directamente mi opinión acerca de temas que no me resultaban del todo gratos. Una de estas situaciones se presentó durante la pasantía de investigación no-remunerada que realicé en uno de los tanques de pensamiento de la Escuela Superior de Guerra (ESDEGE) y la cual me permitió tener acceso informal a personal militar que facilitó mis visitas a otras unidades militares. En aquella ocasión fui invitado a participar de la elaboración de un informe dirigido a evaluar el potencial de amenaza de partidos políticos de izquierda, organizaciones estudiantiles, y de ONG dedicadas a la defensa de los derechos humanos. A pesar de lo incómodo que todo esto me resultaba, traté de convencerme de que mi participación en estos escenarios era una oportunidad inigualable para plantear una posición crítica, aunque irrelevante en tales contextos, y al mismo tiempo documentar las discusiones que allí tenían lugar. Discusiones que, sin embargo, fueron fundamentales para mi estudio acerca de cómo este tipo de burocracias desarrollan eufemismos mediante los que se busca hacer más tolerables ciertas muertes violentas.

15 No es de sorprender que investigadores que conversaron directamente con personal militar colombiano expresen un profundo recelo al momento de interpretar las respuestas de sus interlocutores. Gill, por ejemplo, menciona haberse sentido como una escribana «anotando obedientemente los detalles de una historia revisionista que oscurecía y silenciaba el pasado, y había ocasiones, especialmente después de largos días de entrevistas, en las que apenas podía contener mi ira e impaciencia ante sus justificaciones de la guerra sucia» (Gill 2004: 18).

Mi caso, a diferencia del de muchos colegas interesados en este tipo de instituciones es el de un antropólogo cuya familia es sobreviviente de la violencia del estado colombiano. Durante mi trabajo de campo tuve que escuchar cómo algunos de mis interlocutores negaban de manera tajante su participación y la de sus compañeros en el exterminio de organizaciones políticas como la Unión Patriótica, una organización muy cercana a mi propia familia. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo que me vi enfrentado a dichas narrativas este proyecto etnográfico también me permitió documentar las similitudes que existen entre la forma de ver el mundo de estos militares y la de algunas organizaciones de izquierda de las que yo mismo fui integrante. Ambos grupos, por ejemplo, comparten una visión de mundo a partir de la existencia de otredades irredimibles que son consideradas como una amenaza existencial para sus respectivos proyectos de sociedad. A pesar de profesar ideas que incluso llegué a considerar como antagónicas a las mías, el conjunto de conversaciones informales que sostuve con personal civil y militar fue determinante para entender el esquema moral que estructura sus análisis del conflicto colombiano. Algo que solo fue posible tras analizar mis propias reacciones durante las entrevistas, las cuales, afortunadamente, consigne en varios diarios de campo.

Una de estas situaciones ocurrió durante mi visita a una unidad antinarcóticos ubicada en una de las regiones de Colombia con mayor presencia de grupos armados, legales e ilegales. El coronel a cargo de esta unidad—compuesta, en su mayoría, por integrantes de las Fuerzas Especiales—era un viejo amigo de un oficial retirado que conocí en Bogotá y con quien alcancé niveles considerables de *rapport*. Aprovechando mi visita este coronel consideró oportuno invitarme a una salida recreacional que había preparado para algunos de sus hombres, quienes saldrían de permiso en unos pocos días tras varios meses de estar desplegados en el área de operaciones. La idea, según él, era brindarme la oportunidad de interactuar con militares en un escenario distinto al del cuartel. Con bastante interés acepté su invitación y al día siguiente me dirigí a un popular parque acuático en donde me esperaba el suboficial responsable de *acción integral*<sup>16</sup> junto a casi una centena de soldados en ropa deportiva quienes al poco tiempo de haber llegado se encontraban ya vistiendo pantalonetas de baño.

Sin ningún distintivo evidente más allá del corte de pelo reglamentario que usualmente se asocia a los militares, era casi imposible diferenciar a los soldados de esta unidad de otros bañistas que habían venido con sus familias. Entre toboganes y partidos de fútbol, esta oportunidad me permitió conversar en un entorno informal con miembros de la tropa. Tal informalidad contribuyó a que algunos soldados se sintieran cómodos al momento de realizar críticas a los altos mandos o incluso a personalidades políticas. Comentarios que en otro contexto podrían acarrearles serios problemas. Nunca esperé que uno de mis interlocutores decidiera compartir conmigo un suceso en el que años atrás él había asesinado a sangre fría a dos campesinos desarmados.

A lo largo de su carrera, mi interlocutor se desempeñó como *puntero*. En el argot militar colombiano, el *puntero* es el soldado que encabeza una patrulla y cuya principal tarea es alertar a su escuadra sobre cualquier eventualidad en su camino. [...] Durante un patrullaje, mi interlocutor se encontró con dos campesinos que, según él, eran milicianos. Un eufemismo con el cual se refiere a partidarios de la guerrilla. Los campesinos llevaban un pesado bloque de panela, una actividad común en una región en la que la mayoría de los pueblos apenas están conectados por caminos de tierra. Pero él estaba convencido de que eran combatientes guerrilleros tratando de eludir a las autoridades vistiendo ropa de civil.

El disgusto en mi rostro cuando mi interlocutor me contó que disparó a los dos campesinos allí mismo fue evidente. En ningún momento esperaba que esta conversación tomara un giro tan macabro. Pero, para mi sorpresa, en lugar de mostrar remordimiento, cuando el Sargento notó mi incomodidad, procedió a justificar sus acciones. Un acto que aparentemente él no consideraba como asesinato. Argumentando que había visto a los dos campesinos relacionándose con guerrilleros, este suboficial intentaba convencerme de que, si los dejaba vivos, esos milicianos

16 Dentro de un Estado Mayor el responsable de *acción integral* se encarga de las relaciones civiles-militares de su unidad. Esto puede tratarse desde la articulación de proyectos con otras instituciones estatales hasta la participación en espacios gestionados por organizaciones comunitarias que hacen presencia en su jurisdicción.

habrían atacado a sus unidades. Incluso a la población civil. Me dijo que los civiles son rápidos para juzgar sin saber que el sistema judicial colombiano dificulta mucho que soldados como él castiguen a los criminales que, como los milicianos de su anécdota, se esconden a plena vista. Cualquiera juez los habría liberado, dice él, para que continuaran con sus actividades delictivas. Según este sargento él estaba dispuesto a llevar a cabo lo que los tribunales civiles tenían demasiado miedo de hacer por sí mismos.<sup>17</sup>

Mientras este sargento relataba su macabra historia podía ver por el raballo del ojo un grupo de niños jugando junto a una de las piscinas. Mi interlocutor y yo éramos los únicos en la mesa de plástico roja en la que poco antes habíamos estado charlando alegremente con los demás miembros de su pelotón. ¿Por qué consideró pertinente mencionar tan funesto suceso? Especialmente frente a un extraño como yo. A pesar de haber sido invitado por el comandante de su unidad, yo no dejaba de ser agente externo al mundo militar. ¿Sería posible que de manera inconsciente yo hubiera invitado lo que a mi forma de ver era una confesión? Lo que relataba el sargento era algo que indudablemente lo comprometía legalmente ya que estaba aceptando haber participado en lo que los medios colombianos llamaron como *Falsos Positivos*<sup>18</sup>. Este término se refiere a una serie de ejecuciones extrajudiciales que ocurrieron en Colombia durante el período comprendido entre 2002 y 2008. Estos casos involucraron a miembros del ejército colombiano que asesinaron a civiles inocentes y luego los presentaron como guerrilleros muertos en combate, con el fin de inflar las estadísticas de éxito en la lucha contra los grupos armados ilegales.

La anterior anécdota permite analizar dos aspectos muy relevantes del encuentro etnográfico. El primero se relaciona con la reacción de mi interlocutor a mi evidente disgusto. El segundo, con el conjunto de cuestionamientos éticos y políticos que surgieron al terminar este encuentro. Estos aspectos cobran mucho más sentido cuando se piensan en términos de transferencia y contratransferencia, dos conceptos de gran importancia para la teoría psicoanalítica. Dentro de un contexto terapéutico la relación de transferencia se presenta en el momento en que las palabras o reacciones del analista llevan a que, basándose en experiencias previas, el consultante proyecte en este emociones, deseos y conflictos inconscientes (Lacan 1981: 129). El analista, a su vez, tampoco es ajeno a esta relación por lo que este «debe tener en cuenta (...) los sentimientos, no los que él inspira, sino los que él mismo experimenta en el transcurso de un análisis, es decir, lo que se conoce como su contratransferencia»<sup>19</sup>. (Lacan 2017: 187). Tales conceptos, como propongo en este artículo, no se limitan al espacio terapéutico y pueden resultar de utilidad durante el encuentro etnográfico.

Tomando como punto de partida las reflexiones de algunos autores quienes sugieren que de no examinar críticamente las reacciones psicológicas que se producen durante un encuentro etnográfico—especialmente si este involucra temáticas emocionalmente complicadas—podríamos ver truncado nuestro intento por conseguir una «comprensión cultural más profunda» (Robben 1996: 74), considero que es necesario prestar una mayor atención a la manera en que nuestros esquemas morales influyen en la interpretación que hacemos de las historias que escuchamos durante nuestros respectivos trabajos de campo. Resulta válido preguntarse por qué mi interlocutor decidió mencionar un tema que yo mismo había tratado de evitar en otras ocasiones. También es importante cuestionar mis propios motivos cuando en varias ocasiones busqué activamente evitar increpar a mis interlocutores acerca de un caso tan conocido como el de los *Falsos Positivos*.

Fue solo hasta este encuentro en que fui consciente de esta evitación. Al regresar a Bogotá, aún perturbado por la historia del sargento, volví a revisar el material que había recolectado hasta ese momento. Pude notar un patrón mientras escuchaba nuevamente algunas de las entrevistas que meses atrás había llevado a cabo en la

17 Nota de campo – 5 de diciembre de 2019.

18 Según la Justicia Especial para la Paz (JEP) en este periodo diversas unidades militares ubicadas a lo largo y ancho del país fueron responsables de asesinar a aproximadamente 6402 civiles, quienes luego fueron presentados como *bajas de combate*. Para más información consultar: JEP. 2023. «Caso 03: Asesinatos y Desapariciones Forzadas Presentados Como Bajas En Combate Por Agentes Del Estado - Jurisdicción Especial Para La Paz.» Jurisdicción Especial Para La Paz (JEP). 2023. <https://www.jep.gov.co/macrocasos/casoo3.html>.

19 Mi traducción.

Escuela de Inteligencia Militar (ESICI). Aunque en ninguna de estas entrevistas los participantes mencionaron haber participado directamente en sucesos como los que me fueron relatados por el sargento, algunos de ellos mencionaron estar enfrentando investigaciones relacionadas con *Falsos Positivos*. Investigaciones que ellos desestimaban argumentando que se trataba de una guerra jurídica que los aliados de la guerrilla libraban en su contra. Tal negacionismo ante un caso ampliamente documentado me producía un profundo disgusto que trataba de ocultar por medio de risas incómodas y humor negro. Fueron quizás estas reacciones las que invitaron al sargento de la unidad anti-narcóticos a compartir su historia, asumiendo que encontraría en mí un público afín.

El relato de este doble asesinato era mucho más de lo que yo podía tolerar. Por lo que mi reacción de disgusto fue evidente<sup>20</sup>. Ante mi reacción el sargento se vio en la necesidad de ofrecer una justificación frente a un acto que parecía ser legítimo a los ojos de otros tantos militares y personal civil adscrito al Ejército Nacional que conocí entre el 2016 y 2020. La confusión que sentí tras este encuentro fue también muy valiosa. Pues si bien en un primer momento sentí la necesidad de realizar una denuncia formal, recordé que no existía ningún registro de esta conversación. Solo contaba con mi diario de campo. Además, ni siquiera recordaba el nombre del sargento.

También sentí miedo. Los *Falsos Positivos* eran claramente una práctica que incluso cobró las propias vidas de aquellos militares que intentaron denunciarla<sup>21</sup>. Pensar en mi interlocutor como un monstruo, una otredad irredimible, ciertamente se presentaba como una idea cada vez más seductora. Una idea que me permitiría reforzar la aparente superioridad moral con la que algunos investigadores tratan de diferenciarse del perpetrador a quien estudian. Sin embargo, así como las respuestas que elaboran nuestros participantes se encuentran basadas en ideas preconcebidas, las cuales le dan un sentido a su relación con el investigador, también los marcos interpretativos de cada etnógrafo se ven influenciados por una serie de elementos inconscientes, como el disgusto o la aversión, que deben ser analizados críticamente con el objetivo de alcanzar una mejor comprensión etnográfica de problemáticas sociales que consideramos abyectas.

Mi principal argumento es que la mayor parte de personas, incluidos los etnógrafos, pensamos en términos de «alteridades reprochables» y «otredades irredimibles» cuando hablamos de violencia. Esto resulta particularmente útil en situaciones en las que, sin buscarlo, el investigador se enfrenta a situaciones que de un modo u otro hieren su sensibilidad moral. Abusadores sexuales infantiles, torturadores, o integrantes de organizaciones extremistas que promueven discursos de odio pueden ser representados como víctimas de las circunstancias que merecen el cuidado de la sociedad que los produce, o como monstruos aterradores cuyos actos no ameritan comprensión alguna. Tan solo expresiones de repudio o lástima que nos permiten construir chivos expiatorios mediante los cuales obviar los aspectos más incómodos y problemáticos de nuestras sociedades contemporáneas.

## ¿Víctimas o monstruos?: Los «violentos» en los espacios académicos

No sólo durante el encuentro etnográfico resulta útil pensar en como las relaciones de transferencia y contratransferencia influyen en la comprensión teórica que tienen académicos y activistas acerca de la violencia. El rechazo implícito o explícito a las investigaciones que buscan desmitificar estas aparentes «otredades irredimibles» por parte de los asistentes a eventos académicos o por pares evaluadores adscritos a procesos de financiación dirigidos a fomentar la investigación social también pueden ser leídos en estos términos. Una

20 Reflexionar activamente acerca de las experiencias etnográficas que nos generan disgusto es de gran importancia al momento de desarrollar una comprensión mucho más profunda acerca de determinadas prácticas culturales. Incluso aquellas que hieren nuestras fibras morales más profundas. Frente a esto resulta útil la reflexión que hace Durham al respecto. La autora argumenta que «al igual que términos antropológicos como parentesco o matrimonio, el «asco» o el «disgusto» debería servir como una herramienta heurística, algo que nos impulse a hacer preguntas, no como un objeto en sí mismo.» (Durham 2011: 135).

21 Ver, por ejemplo, Mora y Guylaine Roujol-Perez (2020); Narváez, Julieth. 2021. «Raúl Carvajal: Catorce Años de Lucha Por La Verdad.» *La Palabra*, 2021, sec. Crónica. <https://lapalabra.univalle.edu.co/cronica-raul-carvajal-catorce-anos-de-lucha-por-la-verdad/>.  
Semana. 2018. «La historia de 19 soldados que se negaron a cometer falsos positivos.» *Semana*, January 27, 2018. <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/soldados-que-se-negaron-a-cometer-un-falso-positivo/554942/>.



evidencia de esto puede observarse en las críticas recibidas por algunos investigadores dedicados a estudiar la relación entre masculinidad y violencia.

Durante un simposio de antropología, por ejemplo, Martínez-Moreno (2022) relata cómo tras presentar los resultados de su investigación etnográfica, la cual incluía los puntos de vista de hombres acusados de violencia doméstica, una colega lo acusó de ser cómplice de los agresores. Una acusación sustentada, principalmente, en el hecho de que el investigador es un hombre. El contenido de la investigación o incluso su propósito mismo pierden así cualquier relevancia heurística pues pareciera no ser posible separar la identidad del etnógrafo de los sujetos con quienes trabaja. Esta acusación pone en evidencia un ensamblaje conceptual que «caracteriza la idea de la violencia como «naturaleza» del género masculino que puede ser evocada como un «fantasma», que tiene la potencialidad de dañar el contexto en donde aparece. Y por eso no es posible nombrarla» (Martínez-Moreno 2022: 287). La posibilidad de pensar en el hombre agresor como algo diferente a un monstruo, una «otredad irredimible», se entiende entonces como una amenaza encarnada por el investigador. Una amenaza construida a partir de fantasías esencialistas que la audiencia proyecta en las palabras y en el cuerpo mismo del investigador.

Esto se debe a que la figura del monstruo es de gran utilidad para las instituciones de poder de la mayor parte de sociedades contemporáneas. Incluida, por supuesto, la academia. Foucault (2000), por ejemplo, argumenta que instituciones sociales como la medicina, la psiquiatría y la prisión contribuyen a la creación y mantenimiento de aquello que es considerado «normal». Algo que, por supuesto, también introduce la idea de la «anormalidad». La figura del monstruo, en este contexto, representa a aquellos individuos que desafían o no se ajustan a las normas establecidas por la sociedad. La existencia del monstruo destaca y define lo que se considera aceptable y deseable en términos de comportamiento, apariencia o identidad. Así mismo, el monstruo desempeña un papel en la legitimación de estas instituciones de poder. Su existencia se utiliza para justificar la intervención de las autoridades ya sea en términos de control social a través de la medicalización o encarcelamiento de aquellos sujetos considerados como «anormales».

Un caso icónico que recoge la idea de una disposición natural de los hombres a la violencia, y que a su vez permite ejemplificar la manera en que la academia contribuye a producir «otredades irredimibles», es el del abuso sexual. Especialmente cuando la víctima es un menor de edad. Tales «otredades irredimibles» son resultados de problemas sociales reales, pero interpretados desde una lógica de «pánico moral». Considerados como una perversión que cuestiona los límites de la comprensión humana y la empatía, los actos de violencia cometidos por estos individuos parecieran no requerir de explicaciones diferentes a las que ofrecen las psicopatologías o la idea de una maldad primigenia. Son estos actos los que producen a la víctima; el sujeto sobre el que se sustentan gran parte de las intervenciones estatales contemporáneas (Gatti 2017).

Así pues, los principales obstáculos que enfrentan quienes estudian la violencia desde la perspectiva de los abusadores son el conjunto de emociones, deseos, y experiencias que sus investigaciones evocan en las diferentes audiencias con las que comparten sus resultados.

Niños, sexo, abuso y rehabilitación: los cuatro elementos centrales de este estudio, provocan una amplia gama de respuestas emocionales e intelectuales, y generan una fantasía independiente de lo que realmente digo o escribo. A menudo, estas respuestas implican proyectar *en mí*<sup>22</sup> una intimidad con el tema, asumiendo, por ejemplo, que he sido víctima de abuso, que tengo interés sexual en niños o que estoy obsesionado con el sexo, todas ellas afirmaciones que realmente dudo que sean ciertas. También implica proyectar *en mí*<sup>23</sup> ciertos sentimientos negativos

22 *Onto*, en el original. En este sentido, la audiencia asume que el investigador se encuentra motivado por determinadas emociones, deseos, y experiencias relacionadas directamente con el abuso sexual infantil.

23 *Into*, en el original. Contrario al desplazamiento de motivaciones dirigidas a explicar el interés del investigador en el abuso sexual infantil, esta proyección involucra las propias emociones, deseos, y experiencias de quienes escuchan los resultados de la investigación. Lo que sucede entonces es que el investigador se convierte en el vehículo por medio del cual se hacen evidentes los diferentes esquemas morales que convergen en la audiencia.

que otros tienen sobre los temas en cuestión, elementos inquietantes de experiencias o fantasías que los oyentes o lectores desean eliminar (Borneman 2015: 32–33).<sup>24</sup>

Para muchas personas, como sugiere Borneman, la figura del pedófilo es la encarnación de un mal absoluto que no necesita ser comprendido. Basta simplemente con identificarlo y reprimirlo. Lo que en este caso permite el tránsito de una «alteridad reprochable» a una «otredad irredimible» es la idealización de la niñez contemporánea. Una idea que presupone un estado primigenio de inocencia moral y sexual representado en esta etapa del desarrollo humano, la cual se contrapone a los actos deliberados e injustificables de un adulto. Actos que terminan incluso contaminando este ideal de niñez.

Muchos países han adoptado una «cruzada contra la pedofilia» a través de marcos jurídicos y dispositivos policiales dirigidos a la contención de este problema público. Uno de los principales efectos de estas «cruzadas», como señala Lowenkron (2013: 44), ha sido el difuminar la frontera entre deseo y acción, «produciendo un cambio en la atención política desde las desigualdades de poder hacia los peligros relacionados con la perversión sexual y desde la violencia perpetrada contra niños reales hacia la corrupción del ideal moderno de la infancia.»<sup>25</sup> De esta manera, incluso las víctimas de estos actos terminan convertidas en personajes sospechosos. Personajes cuya existencia resquebraja no solo las narrativas idealizadas de la niñez como una víctima inocente, sino también la del perpetrador como una «otredad irredimible».

Aquí es importante resaltar que la «proposición de que el fenómeno de la violencia sexual contra los niños es un problema socialmente construido no debe confundirse con una actitud de desconfianza ni con un intento de relativizar su existencia» (Lowenkron 2013: 45). Nuestro principal aporte como etnógrafos al estudio de la violencia no es, por tanto, determinar la legitimidad de un hecho social sino comprender aquellos elementos culturales que hacen posible que estos ocurran.

Una comprensión que, lamentablemente, se ve opacada como consecuencia de lo que algunos autores han denominado como «pánicos morales». Para Cohen (2011), por ejemplo, tales «pánicos morales» se convierten en atractivas explicaciones que reducen la violencia a dimensiones esencialistas en las que se diluye cualquier tipo de reflexión crítica acerca de sus causas. De igual manera, como sugiere Lancaster (2011: 23), estos «pánicos morales» necesariamente involucran movimientos masivos que surgen «en respuesta a una amenaza moral falsa, exagerada o mal definida para la sociedad», los cuales proponen «abordar esta amenaza a través de medidas punitivas: una aplicación más estricta de la ley, «tolerancia cero», nuevas leyes, vigilancia comunitaria, purgas violentas».<sup>26</sup> Movimientos dirigidos a construir un monstruo (in)humano que termina imponiendo los límites paradigmáticos a la comprensión antropológica de ciertos tipos de violencia.

Encontrar alguna agencia o entidad dispuesta a financiar este tipo de investigaciones, por lo tanto, resulta incluso más tortuoso para el investigador que el mismo trabajo de campo. Las razones expuestas por los pares académicos encargados de revisar la propuesta de Borneman, por ejemplo, permiten observar como los «pánicos morales» asociados a la «razón humanitaria»<sup>27</sup> producen relaciones de transferencia que tienen un profundo impacto para el desarrollo de una teoría antropológica de la violencia mucho más robusta.

El autor relata como uno de los evaluadores de su proyecto mencionó que «después de todo, el abuso infantil se trata de niñas pequeñas siendo abusadas por hombres»<sup>28</sup>, mientras que otros dos pusieron en duda que el investigador contara con los permisos necesarios para llevar a cabo su proyecto aún cuando estos fueron anexados a la propuesta (Borneman 2015: 200). Otros comentarios ni siquiera tenían sentido desde un punto de vista metodológico. Uno de los evaluadores, por ejemplo, reclamó que las sesiones terapéuticas fueran

24 Mi traducción.

25 Mi traducción.

26 Mi traducción.

27 Ver nota pie de página número 5.

28 Mi traducción.

grabadas para asegurarse de que las interpretaciones del investigador no estuvieran siendo manipuladas por sus interlocutores. Un requerimiento que en otras circunstancias no se le exigiría a alguien que trabaja con las víctimas de estos abusadores.

Aunque el trabajo etnográfico que realicé acerca de los usos políticos de la idea de «victimización» por parte de los militares colombianos no evoca el pánico moral asociado a la figura del pedófilo, mi investigación también suscitó críticas muy interesantes acerca de su relevancia académica en los escenarios que fue presentada. Críticas que cobran sentido cuando evitamos pensar en estos combatientes ya sea como víctimas de las circunstancias o como asesinos adoctrinados.

Al igual que Borneman, durante la búsqueda de financiación para mi proyecto doctoral tuve que enfrentar múltiples rechazos por razones que no tenían mucho sentido a nivel metodológico. Pocos revisores, por ejemplo, tuvieron en cuenta que mi interés no se encontraba en las secuelas físicas y psicológicas que ha dejado la guerra en los militares, sobre lo cual ya existe una considerable literatura académica (Finley 2011; Grossman 2009; Hatch et al. 2013; MacLeish 2013; Wool 2015), sino en los usos políticos que las élites hacen del supuesto sacrificio heroico de estos combatientes (Açıksöz 2020). Algunos incluso calificaron mi proyecto de elitista, argumentando que mis propias interpretaciones eclipsaban las realidades émicas<sup>29</sup> de mis interlocutores. Estos revisores mencionaron tener serias dudas acerca de que realmente los militares con quienes conversé se identificaran como víctimas y no como héroes, un argumento que resonaba con la narrativa patriótica propia de algunos estudios etnográficos contemporáneos acerca de los militares estadounidenses. Curiosamente, como señala Abu El-Haj (2022), la figura del soldado traumatizado por la guerra como la de quien es obligado a participar de esta debido a circunstancias económicas adversas devienen en una idea de victimización. Una idea que le ha permitido a la academia norteamericana desviar su atención de los debates relacionados con el carácter imperialista de la política exterior de ese país.

Abu El-Haj menciona que «tanta deferencia hacia el punto de vista del soldado elude las preguntas cruciales de para qué son las guerras y si son legítimas o justas» (2022: 5). Esto es particularmente cierto en el caso de los militares norteamericanos como observa Van Buren cuando analiza la producción de cine bélico en ese país. Este autor señala que la tendencia entre muchos cineastas, incluso aquellos que adoptan una posición aparentemente crítica frente a los conflictos bélicos, es presentar a estos combatientes como sujetos que «no tienen responsabilidad por lo que hacen una vez que han sido arrojados a nuestras guerras» (Van Buren 2015).

Otras críticas a mi proyecto fueron mucho más interesantes. En el 2022 recibí varios cuestionamientos por parte de algunos colegas y defensores de derechos humanos durante un evento académico organizado por el grupo de América Latina de la Asociación de Estudios de Memoria. Al terminar una presentación en la que explicaba por qué la idea de «víctima militar» puede ser leída como una «memoria disidente», y aunque mi argumento se centró en cómo estas memorias estaban siendo usadas por élites civiles y militares para desacreditar los esfuerzos de la justicia transicional colombiana, fue inevitable que el solo nombrar a los militares como víctimas fuera entendido como un acto deliberado de mi parte por absolver a las Fuerzas Militares de su responsabilidad institucional en el conflicto. Pareciera entonces que la figura de la víctima no pudiera desligarse de un halo de sacralidad que la recubre de inocencia. Una figura que se contrapone a la del violento que no merece ser comprendido.

El hecho de que muchos de los colegas que participaron en este evento trabajaran directamente con los grupos que sufrieron la violencia de los militares colombianos ciertamente contribuye a las proyecciones que hacen de mi trabajo etnográfico. Es comprensible que prácticas atroces como los *Falsos Positivos* sean interpretadas en términos de monstruosidad, lo que para ciertas audiencias es evidencia suficiente de que los

29 El término «émico» se refiere a la perspectiva interna de una cultura, es decir, cómo los miembros de esa cultura entienden, interpretan y categorizan su propio comportamiento y experiencias. Este enfoque contrasta con la perspectiva «ética», que es la visión externa del observador. El análisis émico busca comprender los significados y conceptos propios de la cultura estudiada, proporcionando una visión más profunda y auténtica de la misma.

militares colombianos son «otredades irredimibles». Sin embargo, para entender realmente el alcance real de este tipo de prácticas primero es necesario comprender que elementos estructurales las permiten, así como las lógicas culturales que las nutren.

Para ello se hace necesario hurgar en las motivaciones de los violentos, así como en sus «sus estrategias de autojustificación y, por último, en su propia comprensión de los actos perpetrados» (Segato 2010: 23). Esto, de ninguna manera, implica su justificación. Pues, cabe resaltar, que nuestra función como antropólogos no es la de emitir juicios acerca de la conducta de quienes estudiamos, sino la de explicar las lógicas intrínsecas y explícitas que usan nuestros interlocutores en su interacción con el mundo. Lógicas que de no ser comprendidas terminarían reproduciéndose en otros espacios de la vida social. Acceder a estas lógicas culturales requiere cierto grado de complicidad entre el investigador y los agresores por lo que la preocupación de algunos colegas no es del todo infundada.

Esta relación de complicidad es inevitable para cualquier proyecto etnográfico. De esta manera, la tercera y última sección de este artículo retoma mi propio trabajo etnográfico con militares colombianos para así explorar los dilemas éticos asociados a la comprensión etnográfica de la violencia. Una comprensión que permita trascender los límites que imponen las «alteridades reprochables» y las «otredades irredimibles».

### **Complicidad etnográfica y ética en el estudio de los «violentos»:**

Es innegable que la participación de militares latinoamericanos en crímenes atroces ha contribuido a que estos sean conceptualizados en términos de «alteridades reprochables» u «otredades irredimibles» por activistas y miembros de la comunidad académica. Fue común que mi investigación acerca del desarrollo y circulación de la figura de la «víctima militar» generara agitados debates entre estas dos posturas en los escenarios académicos en donde ha sido presentada. Bien sea como sujetos carentes de agencia cuya participación en actos reprochables es resultado de falta de oportunidades económicas y educativas o como irreflexivas máquinas de guerra al servicio de élites políticas y empresariales, tales aproximaciones parecieran no prestarle mayor atención a las lógicas culturales que hacen posible determinadas formas de violencia. Lógicas que para ser documentadas requieren que los etnógrafos desarrollen cierto grado de complicidad con sus interlocutores.

Aunque preservar mi autonomía intelectual fue siempre un imperativo ético y político, las acusaciones de complicidad que recibí por parte de algunos colegas invitan a reflexionar acerca de un aspecto fundamental del trabajo etnográfico. La complicidad, como menciona Shoshan (2021: 125), «habita nuestras interacciones en el campo, al igual que lo hace en otros entornos que no se relacionan con la investigación»<sup>30</sup>. En su famoso ensayo sobre peleas de gallos en Bali, por ejemplo, Geertz describe como el rapport con sus interlocutores se incrementó exponencialmente cuando, tras una fortuita redada policial, tuvo que huir junto a quienes se encontraban en una de estas peleas. El autor relata que tras este incidente él y su esposa no solo dejaron de ser invisibles sino que se convirtieron en el centro de atención pues todos «en el pueblo sabían que habíamos huido como todos los demás»<sup>31</sup> (Geertz 1973: 416). Desarrollar cierto grado de complicidad con nuestros interlocutores es no solo importante sino necesario. Algo que puede resultar bastante complejo tanto a nivel ético como metodológico con interlocutores interesados en justificar sus actos de violencia.

Desde esconder latas de cerveza vacías para evitar que algunos soldados fueran amonestados por el comandante de su unidad hasta colaborar en la edición de publicaciones académicas de las Fuerzas Militares (Rey Pinto, Rivera Páez & González-Saiz 2021), la complicidad que desarrollé con mis interlocutores tomó muchas formas. Una de estas fue ofrecerme como voluntario en una organización de «víctimas militares». Apoyada con recursos políticos

<sup>30</sup> Mi traducción.

<sup>31</sup> Mi traducción.

y económicos del Ministerio de Defensa, así como de la cooperación internacional, esta organización presentó en el 2019 un informe ante la Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (JEP) acerca de esta población<sup>32</sup>.

Aunque ya en otro lugar analicé con detenimiento los problemas metodológicos y políticos asociados con el anterior informe (González-Saiz 2021), el voluntariado fue la puerta que me permitió conocer de cerca las críticas que las «víctimas militares» y sus familias tienen frente a sus antiguos empleadores. Críticas que, por supuesto, resultaron excluidas del informe pues estas reñían con la imagen de mártires patrióticos que buscaba proyectar esta organización. Otra expresión de complicidad fue documentar las críticas de mis interlocutores frente al Ejército Nacional. Una institución que, como mencionó uno de ellos, «no les ha garantizado las condiciones materiales de existencia necesaria tras haberle dedicado toda una vida de servicios»<sup>33</sup>. En otro caso, uno de los soldados que sobrevivieron a un ataque guerrillero relató con rabia como al pedir apoyo al comandante de su unidad este «se iba para una fiesta y solo decía tranquilo que usted es un verraco. Aguante.»<sup>34</sup>

Preocupada por cómo estas críticas afectarían la imagen institucional de las Fuerzas Militares, la directora de la organización de víctimas, una psicóloga casada con un oficial en servicio activo, buscó tomar medidas legales para evitar que yo usara estas entrevistas a pesar de contar con el consentimiento informado de mis interlocutores. Medidas que se materializaron en un acuerdo de confidencialidad y no divulgación que debí firmar al terminar mi voluntariado. Afortunadamente, uno de los integrantes de esta organización con quién desarrollé una valiosa amistad fue el encargado de redactar tal documento. Tras avisarme con antelación de la solicitud de su jefe, este procedió a redactar un documento que permitía el uso de aquellas entrevistas que contaran con un consentimiento informado avalado por un comité de ética de una institución académica extranjera. Una precisión técnico-jurídica hecha a mi medida gracias a la complicidad de alguien que conocí durante mi trabajo de campo.

Aunque el desarrollo de relaciones de complicidad con nuestros interlocutores es inevitable en cualquier tipo de trabajo etnográfico, el hecho de que algunos de mis interlocutores mencionaran haber participado en el asesinato de civiles desarmados, como sucedió durante la conversación que presenté en la primera sección de este artículo, requiere examinar críticamente sus límites. Al igual que este sargento, algunos militares con quienes conversé de manera informal buscaron restarle importancia a los *Falsos Positivos* argumentando que se trataba de «muertes ilegales, pero legítimas»<sup>35</sup> pues, según ellos, se trataba de gente que se «dedicaba a actividades ilegales»<sup>36</sup>. De esta manera, en diferentes ocasiones fui testigo de cómo durante una entrevista aparentemente formal un mismo interlocutor pasaba de describir a los militares acusados de participar en estos asesinatos en términos de «manzanas podridas»<sup>37</sup> a referirse a ellos como «víctimas de una guerra jurídica»<sup>38</sup> al apagar mi grabadora.

Este tipo de justificaciones plantean un escenario en el que los «principios éticos fundamentales de nuestra disciplina, como la plena transparencia, el consentimiento informado y la producción de conocimiento colaborativa, no pueden abordarse como imperativos estrictos»<sup>39</sup> (Shoshan 2021: 109). Establecer límites a la complicidad etnográfica que desarrollé con mis interlocutores implicó por tanto traicionar la confianza de quienes, como la directora de la organización de «víctimas militares», esperaban que yo omitiera de mi investigación aquellos datos que podrían afectar negativamente la imagen institucional de las Fuerzas Militares.

32 La Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (JEP) es un componente clave del acuerdo de paz firmado en 2016 entre el gobierno colombiano y las FARC. Su objetivo es investigar, juzgar y sancionar los crímenes cometidos durante el conflicto armado en Colombia. La JEP busca garantizar justicia para las víctimas, promover la verdad y la reconciliación, y ofrecer beneficios jurídicos a quienes colaboren con el proceso. Es un tribunal transicional que forma parte integral del Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición.

33 Entrevista a abogado de víctimas militares – 10 de enero de 2020.

34 Entrevista a militar sobreviviente de ataque guerrillero – 27 de julio de 2019.

35 Nota de campo – 28 de junio de 2017.

36 Nota de campo – 13 de julio de 2017.

37 Entrevista a oficial – 5 de julio de 2017.

38 Nota de campo – 5 de julio de 2017.

39 Mi traducción.

Así mismo, debido al agitado clima político generado por el más reciente proceso de paz, también tuve que tomar distancia de las interpretaciones esencialistas con las que algunas veces se suele representar a estos combatientes en diferentes escenarios académicos.

Puede parecer irónico, pero traicionar las expectativas de audiencias e interlocutores que esperan explicaciones esencialistas de la violencia es en sí mismo un acto de empatía por parte de los investigadores. Un acto de empatía por medio del cual se reconoce tanto la agencia moral de aquellos a quienes llamamos «los violentos», así como la influencia de lógicas culturales en el desarrollo de esquemas interpretativos que alimentan este tipo de prácticas. Reconocer al «violento» como un interlocutor etnográfico válido no implica estar de acuerdo con su forma del mundo. Sin embargo, ver más allá de los actos de violencia que cometieron estos sujetos permite adentrarnos en las inflexiones de un régimen de verdad constituido alrededor de las figuras de la «víctima» y el «perpetrador». Dos figuras que implícitamente presumen la inocencia de los primeros, así como la amenaza que representan los segundos.

Realizar un trabajo etnográfico al interior de una burocracia de seguridad nacional también supuso reflexionar acerca de las implicaciones éticas de integrarme a una de estas a través de una pasantía de investigación. Como menciona Max, «no es por nuestro conocimiento específico u orientación teórica que los antropólogos son valorados para la contrainsurgencia, sino por nuestras metodologías, nuestra capacidad de extraer de los informantes información que puede ser útil para su propia subyugación»<sup>40</sup> (2010: 162). Price señala que «las guerras actuales, con su fuerte dependencia del conocimiento cultural necesario para la contrainsurgencia y la ocupación, son concebidas por muchos estrategas del Pentágono como las Guerras de los Antropólogos»<sup>41</sup> (2011: 2). Así, algunas críticas a los procesos de militarización parecieran sugerir que cualquier tipo de colaboración entre antropólogos y burocracias de seguridad nacional se encuentra asociada a proyectos contrainsurgente. Proyectos que, en otras palabras, implican «un esfuerzo concertado a nivel estatal para defender y mantener el status quo frente a la acción subversiva»<sup>42</sup> (Max 2010: 153). Afortunadamente existe una serie de trabajos etnográficos que demuestran que es posible adentrarse al mundo institucional de las fuerzas militares sin que necesariamente por ello se contribuya a tales proyectos contrainsurgentes<sup>43</sup>.

Aunque encuentro reprochable que algunos colegas trabajen directamente como analistas de inteligencia o agentes encubiertos, también creo que es necesario que muchos más antropólogos empecemos a tener una mayor injerencia al interior de estas instituciones. Esta injerencia, sin embargo, debe ser ajena al fantasma de la contrainsurgencia. Tomforde, por ejemplo, señala que la participación de antropólogos en instituciones como las Fuerzas Militares no debería tratarse de «hacer que los soldados sean más eficientes en lanzar ataques contra las poblaciones locales, sino de enseñarles, por ejemplo, más sobre teorías culturales, su propio trasfondo cultural y su autoimagen para hacerlos más sensibilizados hacia el «otro»».<sup>44</sup> (2009: 95). La participación de antropólogos en escenarios militares, añadiría yo, debe servir también para dismantelar los enfoques contrainsurgentes que aún subsisten en este tipo de instituciones. Un objetivo que solo es posible alcanzar a través de una comprensión profunda de su cultura institucional aun cuando, como argumentan algunos colegas, «este estilo de adquirir un conocimiento institucional profundo nace de una afinidad política con la organización en la que uno se inserta» (Fattal 2018: 128). Evidentemente resulta más cómodo trabajar con grupos y organizaciones con las cuales compartimos esquemas morales similares a los nuestros; sin embargo,

40 Mi traducción.

41 Mi traducción.

42 Mi traducción.

43 Este es el caso de Castro (1990), Forero Ángel (2017), y Frederic (2013) cuyas etnografías ofrecen importantes reflexiones acerca de la producción y reproducción de la cultura institucional de los ejércitos brasilero, colombiano y argentino.

44 Mi traducción.

esto no puede convertirse en una justificación que nos permita ignorar cómo se producen y circulan aquellas prácticas o ideas que consideramos incómodas.

Como he venido mencionando a lo largo de este artículo, el estudio antropológico de la violencia desde la perspectiva de los perpetradores requiere examinar críticamente nuestros propios esquemas morales para así evitar representar a nuestros interlocutores como «alteridades reprochables» u «otredades irredimibles». Esto es, como víctimas de las circunstancias o monstruos inhumanos. Aunque comprensible, es importante reconocer que la aversión al momento de incluir la perspectiva de los perpetradores en las políticas públicas dirigidas a intervenir algunas prácticas de violencia ha contribuido a crear lo que algunos autores denominan como una «lógica inmutaría». Para Quintana esta lógica nos protege «(...) de quedar expuestos a la contingencia del no-saber y a la radical alteridad de lo que puede pasar, desde un cierto orden de sentido que hace todo inteligible, que revoca el azar, conjura lo acontecimental, suspende lo incalculable» (2021: 64). Dicho de otra manera, tanto el monstruo como su víctima sirven como chivos expiatorios. Chivos expiatorios sobre los que los ciudadanos proyectan sus miedos y frustraciones evitando así una reflexión mucho más profunda de las condiciones estructurales que producen a los «violentos».

No resulta extraño entonces que muchos grupos de extrema derecha en Europa, Estados Unidos y América Latina estén utilizando ambas figuras para ganar adeptos. Con agresivos discursos que mezclan un profundo conservadurismo social, al igual que un liberalismo económico que raya en el fundamentalismo, la elección de Jair Bolsonaro y Javier Milei como presidentes de Brasil y Argentina son una evidencia de que estamos siendo testigos de un nuevo cambio ontológico. Convencidos de la existencia de una conspiración comunista, feminista, o incluso ecologista los seguidores de estos personajes han diversificado su galería de «enemigos» así como su tolerancia frente a medidas cada vez más violentas con las que enfrentarlos. Dicho de otra manera, estamos ante una reconfiguración moral en la que los límites de lo «reprochable» e «irredimible» se convierten en un terreno en disputa. Actos tales, por ejemplo, como el bombardeo indiscriminado de hospitales, campos de refugiados y convoyes humanitarios por parte de Israel—algo que los países integrantes de la «comunidad internacional» considerarían justificación suficiente para imponer fuertes sanciones económicas si hubiesen sido cometidos por Rusia o China—hoy son considerados por diferentes sectores de la sociedad como una justa, aunque desproporcionada, retaliación (Bose & Holland 2024) o la evidencia palpable de un genocidio (Foulkes 2024). Por lo que aun cuando es un imperativo moral adoptar una posición clara frente a las atrocidades que aún hoy llevan a cabo muchos estados contemporáneos, debe existir también en los investigadores una disposición a examinar críticamente las justificaciones de quienes simpatizan con tales actos. Una disposición que permita al etnógrafo aproximarse a la violencia desde su cotidianidad, y no desde su excepcionalidad.

Comprender las motivaciones de nuestros interlocutores, finalmente, de ninguna manera justifica los actos que estos cometieron. Examinar críticamente tales motivaciones, sin embargo, es una decisión que, aunque incómoda, resulta necesaria al momento de intervenir las causas de determinadas formas de violencia. Solo así es posible contribuir a la construcción de un régimen de verdad que no trate el sufrimiento humano como un fetiche, sino como un hecho social. Un hecho social en el que es posible observar la convergencia de una amplia gama de estructuras políticas, económicas e interpretativas que influyen, pero no condicionan, no solo la agencia moral de nuestros interlocutores sino también de quienes hacemos etnografía.

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Hacia la ampliación de horizontes de la comprensión antropológica:  
etnografías con «alteridades incómodas»

# Incomodidades e intervenciones antropológicas en escenarios de reformas *democratizadoras* de Fuerzas de Seguridad y Armadas, en Argentina.

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## Resumen

Este artículo da cuenta de cómo la investigación de objetos socio históricamente incómodos, como en Argentina aquellas que atendieran al punto de vista de policías, gendarmes y militares, se tornó un modo de intervención antropológica en procesos políticos específicos. Para ello, destaca los hitos que convirtieron el escenario de nuestra investigación en uno marcado por sucesivas e intermitentes reformas *democratizadoras* con el objeto de subordinar al poder político a militares y policías. Asimismo, analiza nuestra inserción en ese terreno, donde se sucedieron y solaparon, la investigación y el ejercicio de la función pública, para poner de relieve las condiciones de producción, las estrategias de publicidad y confidencialidad, la rendición de cuentas sobre nuestros resultados y fundamentalmente los escenarios producidos junto a militares, gendarmes y policías, para construir con ellos políticas sustentables en educación y bienestar.

**Palabras clave:** Democratización; Militares; Policías; Intervenciones antropológicas; Argentina.

# Incomodities and anthropological interventions in scenarios of *democratising* reforms of the Security Forces and the Armed Forces in Argentina.

## **Abstract**

This article explains how the investigation of socio-historically uncomfortable objects, such as in Argentina those that attended to the point of view of police, gendarmes and the military, became a mode of anthropological intervention in specific political processes. To this end, it highlights the milestones that turned the scenario of our research into one marked by successive and intermittent *democratizing* reforms with the aim of subordinating the military and police to political power. Likewise, it analyzes our insertion in that field, where research and the exercise of public function follow on and overlapped, to highlight the conditions of production, publicity and confidentiality strategies, accountability for our results and fundamentally the scenarios produced together with the military, gendarmes and police, to build with them sustainable policies in education and well-being.

**Keywords:** Democratization; Military; Police; Anthropological interventions; Argentina.

# Incomodidades e intervenciones antropológicas en escenarios de reformas *democratizadoras* de Fuerzas de Seguridad y Armadas, en Argentina.

Sabina A. Frederic

## Introducción a las incomodidades

Llevo cerca de dos décadas dedicada a la investigación antropológica con trabajo de campo etnográfico sobre las fuerzas de seguridad y las fuerzas armadas en Argentina, y una década y media a contribuir, intermitentemente, con el diseño e implementación de políticas en Seguridad y Defensa. La pregunta de mis investigaciones ha sido cómo los quehaceres, experiencias de vida y valoraciones morales de estas poblaciones se inscriben en el derrotero de la *democratización y la profesionalización*, pos dictatorial. Por consiguiente, el escenario en el cual llevé adelante trabajo de campo durante estos últimos veinte años, no puede quedar fuera de análisis. Este estuvo marcado por debates reiterados acerca de cómo evitar un nuevo Golpe de Estado y qué políticas llevar adelante para «integrar» esas poblaciones al Estado democrático. Como ya he señalado, siguiendo a Antonio de Souza Lima (2002), las poblaciones estatales fueron objeto de tensiones en su administración (Frederic 2013, 2020) por parte de distintos gobiernos desde 1983, cuando Raúl Alfonsín asume como presidente electo luego de siete años de dictadura militar. Así dominaron este campo posiciones antagónicas que, a riesgo de simplificar, posicionaban de un lado a quienes impulsaban un movimiento *democratizador* traccionado por el arco de activismos por los derechos humanos, mientras del otro con pérdida creciente de voz crecía la desconfianza y resentimiento de policías, militares, gendarmes. Tan así fue que pasadas dos décadas del fin de la dictadura las explicaciones sobre la violencia ejercida por las policías y fuerzas de seguridad, denunciadas como casos de «gatillo fácil», eran explicadas, con frecuencia, como herencia de la dictadura producto del carácter autoritario de estas poblaciones. Dicho de otro modo, invocaban más reformas democratizadoras.

La violencia política de la década de 1970 y el terrorismo de Estado finalizado en 1983, como argumento en *Las Trampas del Pasado* (Frederic 2013), no habían quedado en el pasado, siguieron intercediendo en la interpretación del presente. Precisamente, la investigación etnográfica llevaba a comprender la producción de la violencia como fruto de un contexto histórico del cual el autoritarismo era solo una parte, al mismo tiempo que resultado de concepciones y prácticas sacrificiales; y dinámicas de pertenencias y rechazos activadas en determinadas situaciones sociales.

Por consiguiente, las incomodidades de los estudios que realicé se alimentaron, en principio, del hecho que ni policías, ni militares fueron objeto habitual de investigación con trabajo de campo en las ciencias sociales, ni en la antropología. Habían sido dejados de lado, por ser agentes esquivos, sombríos, victimarios al fin. Como señalaron Benoit L'Estoile, Federico Neiburg y Lygia Sygaud (2002), en ciertos contextos históricos nacionales la antropología se posicionó respecto a determinados problemas asociados a la administración de poblaciones. Pero en esas situaciones lo hizo fundamentalmente con la administración de poblaciones subalternas: pueblos originarios, desempleados, villeros o campesinos, mujeres, diversidades, entre otros. En cambio, las poblaciones elegidas para mis estudios no solo no eran identificadas por los sectores más cercanos

política y socialmente, como subalternos, lo eran como perpetradores de la violencia ejercida contra ellos/nuestras comunidades de pertenencia.

Compartir rutinas, patrullajes, operativos, ejercicios de adiestramiento, cursos de capacitación, alojamientos militares, reflexiones en tiempos de pausa de los quehaceres del servicio, para muchos de mi entorno inmediato y mediato, era inaceptable; un ejemplo claro de adhesión, connivencia, complicidad, o cooptación, en el mejor de los casos, tal como algunas colegas enfatizaban en clases de posgrado a las que alguna vez asistían estudiantes de doctorado que supervisaba. Pero ese posicionamiento en el campo me permitió producir una perspectiva que entendía que las violencias extra institucionales o no legítimas no podían explicarse prioritaria y exclusivamente por el pasado, sino que había que introducir dimensiones tales como la pertenencia social, las prácticas de conducción, formación y disciplina; junto al hecho que se trata de personas que deben hacer uso de la fuerza pública. Este enfoque se contrapuso al que explicaba el comportamiento de policías y militares, tan solo como consecuencia de la herencia autoritaria de la dictadura, y de su «cultura corporativa». Desde este abordaje, la denuncia había sido la acción principal de toda una corriente de la antropología jurídica y política en Argentina, que enfatizaba el control y la búsqueda de los elementos militares en todas las facetas de la actividad militar o policial.

Finalmente, haber aportado a través de lo que denominé intervenciones antropológicas y etnográficas (Frederic 2016)<sup>1</sup> a otros modos de pensar e implementar políticas hacia policías, gendarmes y militares, completó el esquema de incomodidades. Aún más disruptiva fue la incomodidad resultante del registro de las intervenciones reservadas o públicas, a las que el conocimiento etnográfico me llevó, como investigadora y como funcionaria pública—primero como subsecretaria de formación del ministerio de Defensa de la Nación (2009-2011), luego como Ministra de Seguridad de la Nación (2019-2021). Al revisar las consecuencias de estas intervenciones vemos cómo el trascender la audiencia puramente académica, nos obliga a hacernos responsables —rendir cuentas—(Dullo 2016:141) por las implicancias del conocimiento que producimos.

Ahora bien, al mismo tiempo que las incomodidades fueron fuente de creatividad y descubrimiento, no estuvieron a contramano de la historia. Acompañaron procesos, matizaron posiciones irreconciliables, tendieron puentes—y lo siguen haciendo. Para lo cual debí recrear, flexibilizar y adecuar, las herramientas teóricas y metodológicas de la etnografía, de modo tal que los instrumentos de comunicación, difusión y divulgación, hicieran que la confidencialidad fuera la condición de la intervención más que la publicación. Por consiguiente, el artículo se organiza en tres secciones, la primera sobre la puesta en juego de posiciones en escenarios donde la incomodidad ya era parte; la segunda sobre la renovación de la incomodidad a instancias de las intervenciones del conocimiento etnográfico; y la tercera sobre los desafíos a la producción y difusión del conocimiento que impone el convertir la intervención en un objetivo.

## Posiciones en escenarios de *reformas democráticas* a policías y militares

Daba clases los sábados por la mañana en la Universidad Nacional de Quilmes ubicada en el partido homónimo, un municipio de los 24 que circunvalan la Ciudad Capital de Buenos Aires, y pertenecen política y administrativamente a la provincia de Buenos Aires. Uno de esos sábados, al cruzar el portón de ingreso a la Universidad observé a un número significativo de policías entrando por su único acceso llevando su uniforme ceremonial y sin armamento. Por entonces, había comenzado el trabajo de campo sobre policías de la Provincia de Buenos Aires a partir de una red acotada facilitada por un colega y circunscripta a entrevistas, en el municipio de Avellaneda lindero al de Quilmes. Se trataba de quienes habían reemplazado a los policías entonces sindicados y luego condenados como autores del asesinato de Maximiliano Kosteki y Darío Santillán

<sup>1</sup> Julieta Quiros (2023) ha hecho un interesante aporte a la cuestión de la intervención antropológica en su campo.

en 2002, durante una manifestación masiva por reclamos ante la grave situación social que se vivía, a las puertas de la estación ferroviaria de Avellaneda. Un hecho emblemático de la crítica a la criminalización de la protesta social en Argentina.

De manera que, ver esa mañana toda esa cantidad de policías se presentó como una oportunidad para ampliar el campo. El acontecimiento era extraño, porque si algo se prohibió luego de la dictadura militar fue el ingreso de personal policial a las universidades, salvo orden de un juez. Pregunté a los encargados del control de acceso cuál era el motivo de la concurrencia de policías, pues al no estar armados no parecían estar en medio de un operativo. La respuesta que recibí de uno de los encargados fue que se realizaba una reunión organizada por el ministerio de Seguridad de la Provincia con los oficiales de la policía provincial de la Departamental de Quilmes, incluidos sus jefes y subjefes, y referentes de la sociedad civil del municipio. Se trataba de uno más de los encuentros de los denominados Foros de Seguridad, un recurso que introdujo la gestión del Ministro de Seguridad de esa Provincia León Arslanian<sup>2</sup> en 2004, para llevar adelante una política de seguridad participativa, donde las prioridades se definieran con los vecinos, y estos ejercieran también un cierto control de la acción policial.

Decidí que, en lugar de partir rumbo a mi casa, debía ingresar al auditorio donde se realizaba la reunión del Foro. En la antesala, había unos 30 policías uniformados de azul, entre ellos el jefe de la Departamental de Quilmes, según me indicó quien estaba realizando la tarea de recepción. Me presenté como docente e investigadora, y le comenté la propuesta de investigación en general, mi interés en entender la actividad policial desde sus perspectivas. Sumó a ese encuentro que me pidieran representar a la universidad en esa actividad ya que no había quien lo hiciera. Como por entonces desempeñaba el cargo de directora del Departamento de Ciencias Sociales, el área que comprendía siete carreras de grado de la universidad; me sentaron cerca del Comisario Mayor Adrián Ferro y me nombraron. Nos intercambiamos los teléfonos y al cabo de unos días comencé con entrevistas a los oficiales de la dependencia. Posteriormente el campo se amplió a otras comisarías de la jurisdicción.

Durante las conversaciones, los temas recurrentes giraban en torno a la crítica a las reformas, a la imposición de Arslanián, un civil, como conductor, al que llamaban interventor; a la descentralización de la Escuela de Oficiales de Policía Juan Vucetich en muchas escuelas esparcidas por la Provincia; a la creación de una policía «buena» o «limpia», la Policía Buenos Aires<sup>2</sup> formada en parte en la universidad pública; y a la exoneración arbitraria denominada por la intervención «depuración» de alrededor de 3000 mil policías de los 54.000. Al mismo tiempo que denunciaban que estas reformas no contemplaban sus pésimas condiciones de trabajo, ni la mala retribución de horas dentro y fuera del servicio ordinario.

Paralelamente, la reforma policial de Arslanián era emblemática para quienes defendían la causa de los Derechos Humanos, un ejemplo contundente de *democratización policial*, sinónimo también de *desmilitarización* del cuerpo policial más numeroso de la Argentina. El ministro de Seguridad contaba con una reconocida trayectoria al haber sido uno de los dos fiscales del juicio que en 1985 condenó a las cúpulas militares de las tres Juntas Militares de gobierno de la dictadura que se inició en 1976. Pero en 2007 debió dejar el cargo de ministro de Seguridad con la reforma inconclusa. En varias entrevistas posteriores se refirió a como se desmanteló su política, incluso identificó en lo que llamó «la cultura policial», ese núcleo duro, inmutable que resistió el cambio.

De modo que, el curso de esta investigación como de las siguientes sobre otras poblaciones de uniformados armados, fue indisociable de las disputas sobre la transformación de instituciones vistas por algunos como presas de aquel pasado reciente, signado por la violencia política y estatal. Desde el inicio del régimen democrático en 1983 hubo decisiones en Argentina tendientes a desmantelar el aparato represivo de Estado, subordinar a las fuerzas armadas y las fuerzas de seguridad a las autoridades electas, y debates en torno a cómo inscribirlas en un Estado de derecho, de los cuales participaron activamente académicos alineados en

<sup>2</sup> León Arslanián había llegado por segunda vez al mismo cargo, la primera luego del homicidio de un reportero gráfico José Luis Cabezas en 1997 y la segunda por el secuestro y asesinato de un joven, Axel Blumberg en 2004 ambos con amplia repercusión pública y con connivencia y/o negligencia policial.



la corriente de las relaciones cívico-militares de la Argentina, Brasil, Chile y Estados Unidos. Entre ellos cabe mencionar a los argentinos Ernesto López y Marcelo Saín, uno de sus discípulos, devenido luego en arquitectos de las reformas militares y en el caso del segundo también de las policiales (Frederic 2008). Estos debates no fueron, sin embargo, sostenidos a lo largo de período. Pero entre 2004 y 2015 comenzó una corriente de cambios marcados por el inicio de los juicios contra todos los perpetradores de crímenes clasificados judicialmente como de lesa humanidad, es decir delitos imprescriptibles. Militares, policías e integrantes de las fuerzas federales de seguridad<sup>3</sup>, se convirtieron en principales victimarios para el Estado, por segunda vez luego del Juicio a las Juntas de 1985, con la diferencia que, abolida la obediencia debida, toda la cadena de mando desde el más bajo al más alto de rango serían juzgados. De manera que su lugar en los términos de Mariza Peirano (1998), dicha población viene siendo sostenidamente para diversos grupos en Argentina, la otredad más radical.

Con los primeros resultados de esa investigación sobre policías, a mediados de 2007 acepté la invitación a una actividad organizada por la secretaria de Seguridad de la Nación dependiente del Ministerio del Interior<sup>4</sup> junto con la Agencia de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica y la Embajada de Francia. En ese evento di cuenta de sus demandas laborales y de los desacuerdos de los y las policías con la reforma policial conducida por el todavía ministro Arslanián. Fue en ese evento que una colega, antropóloga, quince años mayor, ligada a uno de los organismos de Derechos Humanos defensor de víctimas de la violencia policial y referente en las causas por delitos de lesa humanidad, señaló que, por su historia, tenía límites morales y políticos, para aportar a un análisis que recuperase la perspectiva de los y las policías, como estaba haciendo yo en ese momento.

Ya por entonces, había comenzado un proceso de reforma de las Fuerzas Armadas en el cual la perspectiva de Derechos Humanos bajo los principios de la causa de *Memoria, Verdad y Justicia*, se convirtió en un mandato explícito con el cual el presidente Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) nombró como ministra de Defensa a Nilda Garré (2005-2010). El presidente ya había tomado dos decisiones emblemáticas. La primera fue ordenar al jefe del Ejército Argentino en su primer aniversario, como presidente, del golpe de Estado del 24 de marzo de 1976, descolgar frente suyo y subido a una pequeña escalera, los cuadros de quienes habían sido jefes de las juntas militares y a la vez directores del Colegio Militar de la Nación (CMN) donde se forman los oficiales de esa Fuerza. La segunda, horas más tarde del mismo día, fue anunciar la expropiación a la Armada Argentina de la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) ubicado en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires donde funcionó uno de los centros clandestinos de detención más grandes de la Argentina, con el objeto de que pasara a constituirse en un centro de *Memoria, Verdad y Justicia* administrado por los organismos de Derechos Humanos, Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, entre otros.

Mientras se desarrollaban algunas acciones y se definía qué hacer y cómo, me convocaron desde el Ministerio de Defensa como investigadora sobre la policía para crear un observatorio de la integración de las mujeres en las Fuerzas Armadas. Había por entonces, año 2006, una profunda desconfianza y un profundo desconocimiento, entre los y las funcionarios y funcionarias que habían asumido; civiles casi todos ellos, o militares ya retirados desde hacía varias décadas. Ese Observatorio tenía objetivo ser un medio para el relevamiento de información cualitativa y estadística, a partir del cambio que se estaba dando de ingreso de las primeras mujeres a los cuerpos comandos<sup>5</sup> de las Fuerzas Armadas.

Propuse entonces retomar el debate contemporáneo sobre las tendencias atravesadas por otros países donde la cuestión de género había sido planteada, y conocer la perspectiva de las mujeres militares argentinas,

3 En Argentina hay cuatro fuerzas federales de Seguridad la Policía Federal Argentina, la Prefectura Naval Argentina, la Gendarmería Nacional Argentina y la Policía de Seguridad Aeroportuaria que en su conjunto sumaban en 2023 unos 93.000 efectivos.

4 El ministerio de Seguridad de la Nación se creó en diciembre de 2010, hasta entonces existió una Secretaría de Seguridad Interior dependiente desde su creación en 1996 hasta 2002 del Ministerio del Interior, luego de lo cual dependió del Ministerio de Justicia, Seguridad y Derechos Humanos.

5 Los cuerpos comando de las fuerzas armadas son aquellos que se distinguen de los profesionales. Mientras quienes integran aquellos hacen los cuatro años en las escuelas de oficiales, estos están integrados por egresados universitarios que hacen un curso de alrededor de tres meses sobre disciplina y normativa militar.

sus concepciones, modos de vida, divergencias, convergencias y matices. Esta fue la primera de otras dos iniciativas que se sucedieron entre 2006 y 2008 para ampliar el conocimiento sobre la experiencia de vida y profesional de los militares en la Argentina. Las investigaciones tuvieron objetivos diferentes y a medida que avanzábamos en el vínculo con la ministra de Defensa pudimos mostrar el aporte de la descripción etnográfica al conocimiento de estas poblaciones. Los informes que producíamos reflejaban las miradas de las mujeres y varones de los grados subalternos, por fuera de la cadena de mando, es decir de los comentarios que la ministra recibía procedentes de los altos mandos.

Mujeres y varones en las Fuerzas Armadas expresaban sus aspiraciones, su manera de pensar la vida militar, las transformaciones impuestas por el Estado democrático, la discordancia con sus aspiraciones, el rechazo a ser sometidos a los principios de los derechos humanos como si fueran los únicos potenciales violadores de los mismos siendo en su mayoría ingresantes posteriores a 1983, los motivos por los que habían ingresado a la carrera, aquellos por los que preferían irse, entre otros muchos asuntos. La visión de los altos mandos erigidos en portavoces de sus subordinados, ante las autoridades política, dejaría de ser la única.

Quienes habían asumido la conducción civil de las Fuerzas Armadas no tenían todos los elementos para decidir sobre algunas medidas a tomar. Nuestros informes resultantes de entrevistas, observaciones participantes de ejercicios de adiestramiento, capacitaciones, rutinas de trabajo/servicio, pasaron a ser entonces un insumo que contribuía con la toma de decisiones. Además, esos informes no coincidían con la visión de los funcionarios civiles que nos demandaban producir conocimiento.

De modo que, varias veces quedamos en una zona gris, propensa a las acusaciones de estar contaminados por los militares, y tironeados entre posiciones por momentos antagónicas en las que se disputaba también algo del rumbo de las Fuerzas Armadas. En ese tironeo que contó con momentos de cierta perplejidad, en los que se me acusó de haber sido cooptada por los militares, u otros en los que se me criticó por tutearlos, descubrí esquemas de interpretación cambiantes sobre el pasado, el presente y el futuro, incluso entre los mismos funcionarios, fueran civiles o militares. Estos oscilaban entre ver el presente invadido por el pasado –anulando el tiempo-, y el que veía las profundas diferencias entre los militares del presente y del pasado (Frederic 2013). Esa controversia generada por esquemas de interpretación contrastantes, desafiaba el qué hacer con diversos aspectos de su profesión e introducía cierta frustración e impotencia entre los funcionarios reformistas. La creencia por ejemplo que la religión católica era el núcleo de su conservadurismo, o su formación de claustro la base de la producción de una corporación violenta, llevó a intentar eliminar el obispado castrense o a aprobar una batería de contenidos valiosos en derecho constitucional, derechos humanos, historia argentina, entre otros, en un régimen de estudios que prácticamente impedía, como luego explicaré, la lectura completa de la bibliografía obligatoria.

## **¿Tender puentes? Transitar incomodidades e intervenir etnográficamente en terreno militar**

A la cuestión de la integración de las mujeres a las fuerzas armadas, siguió la cuestión de por qué se sucedían tantas bajas de jóvenes militares de sus filas, así como por qué mantener el sistema de traslados a oficiales cada dos o tres años, si generaba tanto sufrimiento y tendía a dividir la familia cuya unidad era un valor central en el ámbito militar; y luego cómo hacer para cambiar la formación de los oficiales y suboficiales de modo que *democratizarlos* no implique *desprofesionalizarlos* como militares. Para responder a esas cuestiones, realizamos durante el año 2008 la investigación más prolongada y profunda acordada con la ministra de Defensa preocupada por el éxodo de militares y los problemas de traslados o cambios de destino de oficiales y suboficiales. Esta se realizó mediante un convenio con la Universidad Nacional de Quilmes y se denominó Observatorio Sociocultural de la Defensa. El grupo que coordiné estaba integrado por dos colegas, doctores en antropología Laura Masson y Germán Soprano. Cada uno de nosotros tomó una de las tres Fuerzas

Armadas para realizar trabajo de campo recorriendo las unidades militares destacadas por las autoridades de sus direcciones de personal, con las que definíamos las más relevantes. Las escuelas de formación de oficiales y suboficiales fueron indicadas como fundamentales por ser, para ellos, el sitio de la producción identitaria por excelencia. También la diversidad de áreas geográficas (Patagonia, Puna, Monte), así como las unidades donde se desarrollaban las distintas especialidades. Esa investigación de ocho meses que se conoció entre los militares como del «Observatorio», derivó en hallazgos sobre: la educación militar sacrificial; la deshonra del ejercicio de la profesión militar por «la propaganda en contra» que ocasionaban los juicios por delitos de lesa humanidad contra los perpetradores de la violencia; los bajos salarios y los suplementos en negro; el equipamiento obsoleto; las profundas diferencias generacionales en la mirada sobre la vida militar entre retirados, la generación que egresó apenas iniciada la democracia y las generaciones que crecieron en democracia y luego ingresaron a la carrera militar; las distintas concepciones sobre la mujer, los hijos y la familia militar; entre otras. Todos aspectos cuya articulación permitían comprender el porqué del éxodo de jóvenes militares y sobre todo ofrecer una base de conocimiento para orientar las políticas hacia los y las militares.

Fue así que el conocimiento etnográfico nos posicionó para los militares y los funcionarios del ministerio de Defensa en un lugar relativamente legítimo para argumentar respecto de las cuestiones antes señaladas. Recibí en ese tiempo un comentario de un coronel a cargo del área de Personal frente a otros oficiales y funcionarios, que conocía más el Ejército que la mayoría de los oficiales. La fuente de esa legitimidad era el trabajo de campo con ellos y ellas, en sus lugares de trabajo, durante la preparación y los ejercicios de adiestramiento, prácticas de tiro, desplazamientos en tanques y vehículos anfibios, en formaciones, ceremonias, en los casinos donde vivían, vuelos en avión y helicóptero, traslados prolongados, en los campamentos, en los almuerzos, mates y cenas compartidas, momentos de recreación, entre muchos otros. Los informes etnográficos que realizamos cuyo acceso fue habilitado por la ministra a los militares en septiembre de 2008, fueron debatidos con ellos quienes pasaron, según nos dijeron, de sentirse como hormigas en un laboratorio a apreciar el verse reflejados en ese documento al que denominamos «Informe de Avance».

Ahora bien, decía que esa legitimidad era relativa porque las propuestas que surgían de nuestras investigaciones no necesariamente ratificaban el rumbo deseado ni por funcionarios políticos ni por militares. A veces, colisionaban con esos esquemas de interpretación en los que el presente era presa del pasado, ya sea que como autoridades políticas vieran solo en él las rémoras del terrorismo de Estado para que no se repita, o como militares lo defendieran como una guerra que hubo que dar para salvar a la Patria. Pero esos no eran los únicos en danza, también había quienes distinguían el presente del pasado y veían una oportunidad para profesionalizar las Fuerzas Armadas y librarlas de aquella controversia y de la «mochila del pasado».

Por consiguiente, la incomodidad era producto no solo del interés en conocer y entender la experiencia militar, a contramano de quienes pensaban la comprensión en el límite de la justificación de los victimarios, sino por ser también la nuestra otra de las posiciones que contribuían a darle un rumbo alternativo a los posibles cambios. Así fue que el primer texto que escribí para una revista producida por el propio ministerio de Defensa, sufrió un extraño recorte en su versión impresa. El artículo con el que me ofrecieron contribuir que versaba sobre distintos problemas de los militares, salariales, de falta de equipamiento, etc., terminaba señalando que estos podrían ser subsanados si impulsábamos la política de tender puentes con la que entendía contribuía nuestra investigación. Fue justamente esa parte, la conclusión, que no salió. Las explicaciones que me dieron fueron poco verosímiles. Quedaba claro que la idea de tender puentes no era de interés de las autoridades políticas. Ese recorte, constituyó sin duda una señal de cómo seguir, cómo introducir nuestra mirada sobre qué hacer, cómo y para qué, cómo tender puentes, sin enunciarlo.

A esta experiencia de investigación asociada a necesidades de conocimiento de funcionarios y funcionarias interesadas en producir procesos de cambio, siguió mi ingreso a la función pública. Asumí en enero de 2009 la responsabilidad de llevar adelante cambios en la formación militar y de civiles en Defensa. Durante los tres

años que fui subsecretaria de Formación del Ministerio de Defensa recibí indicaciones sobre qué cambios había que hacer en la formación básica de los oficiales y suboficiales, especialmente de los primeros, responsables de la conducción de los segundos.

Sin embargo, el fondo de conocimiento y el diálogo abierto con los y las militares luego de dos años de investigaciones etnográficas hicieron que negociara con la ministra acciones que nos permitieran obtener la aceptación de las autoridades militares, para lo cual había que construir las modificaciones con ellos. Al asumir el cargo ya se habían introducido siete materias obligatorias a la formación de oficiales, cuyos grados militares se obtienen junto con una licenciatura universitaria<sup>6</sup>. Una comisión integrada por especialistas había diseñado los programas y su bibliografía de las siguientes materias o asignaturas: Estado, sociedad y mercado; Historia Argentina 1890-1990; Nuevos escenarios de las relaciones internacionales, globalización y regionalización; Sociología de las Organizaciones; Derecho Constitucional y Derecho Administrativo; Derecho Militar y Código de Justicia Militar; Derecho Internacional Público; Derechos Humanos, Derecho Internacional Humanitario y Derecho Internacional de los Conflictos Armados. Aunque ya se habían implementado en 2008, los trámites para la compra de los libros contenidos en la bibliografía obligatoria no habían llegado a las bibliotecas de ninguna de las tres escuelas: Colegio Militar de la Nación, Escuela Naval Militar y Escuela de Aviación Militar. Urgía para la ministra conseguir que esos libros llegasen para el ciclo lectivo siguiente, así como implementar un curso para instructores militares que el funcionario saliente del cargo que ocupaba no había sabido o podido implementar. El desafío fue determinar cómo habían sido recibida esas materias por docentes y cadetes. Respecto del curso para instructores militares, me resultaba totalmente desatinado ponernos en el lugar del saber y «bajar línea», es decir dar cátedra de cómo hay que instruir en la formación disciplinaria. Así fue que con los colegas que habíamos realizado la investigación antes mencionada y que se sumaron al equipo de gestión, introdujimos la conversación con los militares de distinta jerarquía y los profesores, en el diseño de qué hacer. La ministra dio su aprobación a la propuesta.

### **Cuando el cómo define el qué hacer. Contextos de conocimiento como intervención sobre la formación militar**

Quisiera destacar en esta sección un hallazgo que en rigor la reflexión antropológica especialmente metodológica ha conseguido sistematizar, de la mano de su diferenciación respecto de otras metodologías en ciencias sociales. Como antropóloga junto a mis colegas Soprano y Masson, y los militares que ya habíamos conocido en nuestras investigaciones o sabían de nosotros por ellas, construimos escenarios donde poder definir qué y cómo había que modificar tal o cual aspecto de la educación militar. El ejercicio antropológico reflexivo del trabajo de campo nos ha hecho saber que la singularidad de los contextos y de la inscripción del antropólogo/a en él, es inescindible del dato. Al participar junto con las personas de cuyas vidas aprendemos, de aquellas situaciones que nos proponen – tácita o deliberadamente- somos parte de ellas. Es allí, donde se producen determinadas conversaciones y la producción de los datos relativos a la perspectiva del actor.

Aquellos contextos que generamos con ellos fueron: un conjunto de reuniones con profesores para entender y evaluar cómo había sido la implementación de aquellas siete materias obligatorias; un curso-taller itinerante para instructores militares construido junto a las autoridades militares de cada una de las escuelas tanto de oficiales como de suboficiales; el Seminario Internacional *La integración de la formación militar en la educación superior universitaria del siglo XXI*; y una comisión de definición de criterios para modificación de la formación militar. Todos esos contextos de encuentros estuvieron encadenados, derivaron unos en otros, se convirtieron en

<sup>6</sup> La conversión de la educación militar en universitaria es un proceso que inició el Ejército Argentino en 1994 y que luego impulsó también en las otras dos Fuerzas, la Ley de Reestructuración de las Fuerzas Armadas (Nº 24948/1998) que obliga al personal en condiciones de ascender a oficial superior contar con un título universitario.

el vehículo para construir una modificación no tanto al contenido, sino al régimen de estudio y la organización del tiempo de clases teóricas, de instrucción militar, de estudio y descanso.

Durante las reuniones con los profesores que habían estado a cargo de las materias obligatorias supimos que los y las cadetes no disponían ni de tiempo material, ni capacidad física para leer y comprender la bibliografía obligatoria. Muchos de ellos se dormían en clase exhaustos por la demanda física del régimen disciplinario y la instrucción. Por esta situación los profesores optaban por darle el material en versiones que denominaban «apuntes», síntesis con interpretaciones propias y fragmentos de la bibliografía, para que pudieran leer lo que entendían era más importante. Este fue un descubrimiento que nos llevó a profundizar en otros datos tales como cantidad de materias, régimen de estudio, tiempo disponible para la lectura, entre otros, y a comenzar a conversar con las autoridades educativas militares sobre su perspectiva en torno a este problema. Por consiguiente, la alarma que hasta entonces preocupaba a la ministra derivaba en otro problema más grave y estructural, el diseño de los planes de estudios universitarios había adosado el plan que llamaban académico al plan existente de formación militar, llevando el número de materias a un número que rondaba las 50 a cursar en cuatro años.

Pasó un año y medio hasta poder introducir este cambio de perspectiva y lograr su aceptación por la ministra de Defensa, tiempo en el cual avanzamos con otros encuentros con los militares dónde hacíamos mientras comprendíamos, e intentábamos generar una comunidad de debate y entendimiento. El siguiente encuentro al mencionado fue el curso de instructores convertido en un taller diseñado con los jefes de cuerpo, oficiales jóvenes en torno a los 35 años. Fui parte de las reuniones donde conversamos la propuesta en general y surgió la idea de trabajar con casos problemáticos. El diseño específico del curso estuvo a cargo de Germán Soprano. Luego participé de la realización del curso que fue itinerante entre las provincias de Córdoba y Buenos Aires, de manera que oficiales y suboficiales de todas las escuelas tuvieran su curso. En cada escuela se trataron los casos que habían seleccionado, situaciones que ya habían atravesado, pero convertidas en paradigmáticas. Entre ellas, adicciones, embarazos no deseados, homosexualidad, abuso de autoridad, abusos sexuales. Todos los casos propuestos que se presentarían ante instructores de las siete escuelas para discutir cómo proceder, ponían en evidencia un conflicto en el que valores aceptados socialmente, parecían conspirar con la disciplina y los valores militares. También daban cuenta de comportamientos que podían ser considerados de la vida privada, como fue el caso del consumo de drogas en un bar de cadetes sin uniforme. Estos interrogaban a los instructores militares sobre si debían o no ser juzgados con arreglo a la vida militar. Los valores de la vida civil se metían en las escuelas, cosa que antes no ocurría, y eso desataba debates que necesitaban encauzar. Fue un lugar de conversación con instructores militares muy jóvenes, la dinámica era de presentación del caso, reunión en grupos más pequeños y luego compartir cuál sería el tratamiento en el que la enseñanza de la disciplina militar y el cuidado del o de la cadete fueran considerados. En muchos de esos encuentros se expresaba en forma lateral, en conversaciones cara a cara, el rechazo a la cantidad de actividades, seminarios y charlas dedicadas a hablarles de los derechos humanos.

En una de las ediciones del Curso, recibí el más directo de los comentarios de un oficial de unos 30 años en el Colegio Militar de la Nación mientras acompañaba la conversación sobre uno de los casos, posterior a su presentación, en un grupo más pequeño de instructores. Sin que el resto escuchara, sentada junto a él me dijo que consideraba que debía ponerse en discusión el *Nunca Más*, que no estaba de acuerdo en cómo se había tratado ese capítulo de la historia, que los militares de entonces habían frenado el daño producido por la violencia política. Agregó en un tono decidido que el *Nunca Más*—libro emblemático del reconocimiento de desaparecidos, centros clandestinos y sus situaciones de cautiverio redactado por la Comisión Nacional de Desaparición de Persona (CONADEP 1984)—era solo un relato de las víctimas y que faltaba dar cuenta de quienes habían provocado la violencia política previa. Su comentario me sorprendió por lo valiente y aparentemente fuera de contexto. Solo le respondí que ese consenso político no impedía otras perspectivas. Claro que aquella que ese instructor criticaba no dejaba de comunicar diariamente sobre los militares detenidos, procesados y condenados, y las circunstancias pasadas que los hacían imputables.

Ahora bien, quiero detenerme en dos cuestiones. Por un lado, que se animara ante mí, siendo funcionaria, daba cuenta que habíamos habilitado un espacio un poco más horizontal y que el miedo a la represalia cedió a la necesidad de discutir ciertos posicionamientos sobre el tema que dominaban la época. Asimismo, señalaba que éramos quienes representábamos aquella posición, pero también con quienes podían discutirla o al menos quienes podían escucharlos. Había recibido antes distintos comentarios críticos sobre el tema como investigadora, este era el primero como funcionaria. Por otro lado, retuve el impacto de su valentía y al unirlo a la insistencia con que de una u otra manera todos ubicaban en las escuelas de formación básica de oficiales el sitio de producción de su núcleo identitario, comencé a entender que había que despejar de ese núcleo la idea de que ellos eran solo victimarios de compatriotas. Idea a la que los empujaba, el tratamiento judicial de los militares por delitos de Lesa Humanidad, las decenas de actividades sobre Derechos Humanos, y la introducción del curso obligatorio en Derechos Humanos más cómo consecuencia del *Nunca Más* que como necesidad de cualquier Fuerza Armada del mundo.

El camino posterior incluyó una serie de esquelas enviadas a la ministra con este argumento que nunca fue rebatido, ni aceptado. Sí autorizó la propuesta que ofrecí y que fue la realización del Seminario Internacional antes mencionado. Este Seminario surgió de la visita que hicimos junto a Laura Masson y Germán Soprano, en agosto de 2009 al sistema de formación norteamericano poco conocido en Argentina denominado *Reserves Officers Training Corps* (ROTC) que está anclado en las universidades. El 70% de los oficiales en actividad del Ejército norteamericano no salen de West Point (el CMN de Estados Unidos) sino de ese sistema que financia la formación e introduce cursos y actividades de adiestramiento a través del sistema de créditos, en el marco de la formación universitaria. La versatilidad que encontramos allí nos dio los insumos para construir ese nuevo escenario de encuentro, que resultó la referencia posterior de todos quienes participamos para pensar cómo mejorar la formación de oficiales en Argentina.

El Seminario se realizó en el auditorio Roca, habitualmente usado por Ejército, un salón con capacidad para poco más de 100 personas tipo anfiteatro, ubicado en el piso octavo del edificio Libertador sede del Estado Mayor de Ejercito, del Estado Mayor Conjunto y del Ministerio de Defensa. Tenía por objeto comparar los sistemas de formación de oficiales con estudios universitarios de Argentina, Brasil, España, Estados Unidos, Chile, Francia y Alemania. Se desarrolló durante tres meses entre abril y junio de 2010, con dos encuentros mensuales de una jornada cada uno, donde por la mañana integrantes de las Fuerzas Armadas de dos de esos países explicaban su sistema, y por la tarde se trabajaba en comisiones donde discutir sobre la exposición de la mañana, y luego se compartían los resultados del debate en comisiones. Participaron activamente unas cien personas por jornada la mayoría de los cuales, en torno al 80%, eran militares de las áreas de educación, el otro 20% éramos funcionarios del ministerio de Defensa y especialistas en educación superior y en educación militar. Invitamos también a dos antropólogos más que trabajaban sobre estos temas Máximo Badaró (2009) y Rosana Guber (2007, 2004).

Al término del primer encuentro en el momento en que se compartía la síntesis de la discusión, percibimos un cierto enojo en la exposición de uno de los oficiales de la Marina, que arguyó: «porque había que cambiar lo que estaba bien ¿Qué es lo que está mal?», «por qué no manifiestan las autoridades cuales son los cambios que quieren hacer». Entonces, esperé que terminaran las exposiciones, salí de mi butaca en el público, subí a la mesa de exposiciones y dije que el Seminario era para identificar mejor los problemas y construir juntos los cambios que había que hacer, con creatividad, imaginación y respeto por la formación militar, y que no guardábamos ninguna carta en la manga. Las siguientes sesiones fueron más relajadas, intensas y debatidas. De ellas surgieron interesantes debates sobre cómo era posible integrar la educación militar y la universitaria, y resolver las tensiones de esa coexistencia (Soprano 2013), a la vista estaba que esa dificultad era la raíz principal del problema. Entre ellas destacué el modelo alemán, luego de escuchar con todos los presentes cómo funcionaba. Retomé la referencia a que tenía un ciclo inicial de 6 a 9 meses de adiestramiento puramente militar, al cual le seguía el desplazamiento hacia la universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas (*Bundeswehr*) donde el

sistema de instructores hacía las veces de uno de tutores que garantizaban que la disciplina militar contribuyera a hacer el ciclo de licenciatura y maestría en 4 años, dos menos que cualquier formación civil. Se abstendían así del entrenamiento militar un freno al hábito de estudiante universitario, para convertirlo en un recurso de la disciplina que requiere hacer una carrera de grado y posgrado aceleradamente. Esto sin dejar de señalar que era una variante y que lo importante era, como había señalado otro colega ex funcionario de Defensa presente, «no estamos aquí para copiar un modelo extranjero adecuado a una historia y una realidad distinta a la Argentina», sino para hacer nuestro «traje a medida». De estos encuentros, surgieron nuevas ideas y sobre todo se terminó esa ejemplificación fragmentada de quienes habían estado fuera de la Argentina, para construir un conocimiento compartido sobre otros modelos de educación universitaria y los desafíos que enfrentaban.

Pocos meses después junto a las autoridades educativas de las Fuerzas convenimos en la importancia de retomar el debate del Seminario y generar otro espacio de encuentro esta vez de las autoridades educativas de las Fuerzas Armadas y quienes conformábamos la subsecretaría de Formación. Así fue que se constituyó el Comité de Modernización de la Formación Profesional Militar de Oficiales de las Fuerzas Armadas creado por la Resolución Ministerial número 1587 en octubre de 2010, integrado por los antes mencionados, con el objetivo de proponer los cambios necesarios para mejorar y adecuar la formación militar universitaria básica de oficiales a las exigencias de la profesión militar actual en las tres academias. Durante las reuniones acordamos los criterios y redactamos la resolución que aprobó, en diciembre del mismo año, las Pautas para la Formación Profesional Básica de los Oficiales de las Fuerzas Armadas (Resolución ministerial 1648). El ítem que más debate llevó fue aquel que establecía que el ejercicio de la responsabilidad individual del cadete incluía la posibilidad de retirarse del establecimiento o de ausentarse del aula en aquellas materias que le resultaban más fáciles para adelantar conocimiento de las que les resultaran más difíciles, algo que solo podía definir el mismo cadete. Este aspecto entendíamos resultaba en un aprendizaje necesario para el futuro oficial en relación a sus estudios y desempeño, y redundaría en mejoramiento de la calidad educativa ya que el sistema de control de cadetes de grados superiores e instructores, diluía su responsabilidad en la observación permanente del superior. Claro que, para algunos militares integrantes del Comité, ponía en riesgo la disciplina militar. Finalmente alcanzamos un punto de acuerdo que fue el que se aprobó:

El ejercicio de la responsabilidad individual incluirá también la elección por parte del cadete de la posibilidad de permanecer o retirarse del establecimiento, de acuerdo a la normativa de cada instituto, a fin de que pueda participar de otros ámbitos de sociabilidad o bien hacer uso del tiempo para estudio o recreación en el mismo. Dicha posibilidad estará supeditada al estricto cumplimiento de las actividades comprendidas por la práctica profesional supervisada que incluyan la práctica del ejercicio del mando, tales como: servicio de semana y de armas; encargado de curso y sistemas de guardias de seguridad de cada Instituto (inciso G, resolución 1648/2010).

Durante los meses siguientes, ya en 2011 y con cambio de ministro<sup>7</sup>, se conformaron equipos de revisión y rediseño de planes de estudio para formar a los oficiales de las Fuerzas Armadas por perfiles de egreso y competencias. Esto redundó en un análisis del contenido y ajuste de la pertinencia de las materias para reducir ese descomunal número al que había llevado la superposición de la formación militar y la formación universitaria, su acople sin integración. También se modificaron los regímenes de estudio de cada escuela a efectos de introducir entre otros aspectos: cambios en el régimen de asistencias y regularidad; un margen para el aprendizaje del uso del tiempo en pos de un mejor rendimiento académico tomando esto como un aspecto central de la disciplina del oficial, y no como obstáculo; y para que fuera factible cursar un tramo de la carrera en una universidad nacional. Todos los cambios se aprobaron en noviembre de 2011, solo quedó pendiente la regularización de los docentes universitarios, esto era llevarlos a un régimen de la carrera docente

7 El 15 de diciembre de 2010 fue designado Arturo Puricelli como ministro de Defensa en tanto Nilda Garré pasó a ser ministra de Seguridad de la Nación.

de nivel terciario a una donde se contemplen perfiles docentes y dedicaciones que incentivarán la formación de posgrado y la actividad de investigación y transferencia. Sin embargo, esto no dependía solo del ministerio sino de las normas de empleo público del Estado Nacional, debido a que los institutos universitarios de cada una de las tres Fuerzas no eran beneficiarios del régimen de autonomía de las universidades nacionales, sino que dependían de la administración pública nacional<sup>8</sup>.

Antes de dejar el cargo en diciembre de 2011 contacté al rector de una de las universidades nacionales del área metropolitana de Buenos Aires con el objetivo que cadetes de los institutos militares puedan cursar algunas materias junto con estudiantes de la universidad y realizar intercambios. Me convocó luego a una reunión junto con parte del consejo universitario para conversar informalmente sobre esta posibilidad. Allí destacaron que, dada la proximidad con Campo de Mayo, la guarnición de Ejército más grande de la Argentina, había suboficiales cursando estudios universitarios y familiares de militares en actividad y retirados, y que por temor a la discriminación no daban cuenta de esas facetas de sus vidas en clase<sup>9</sup>. Mencioné en esa reunión que ya había habido una experiencia con la Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero pero que aquí les abrieron a los y las cadetes un curso de metodología de la investigación que no compartían con estudiantes de la universidad, razón por la cual no se cumplía el objetivo de intercambiar perspectivas con un público más amplio que el militar. Los y las presentes en la reunión del consejo veían dificultades para alcanzar el objetivo de compartir aulas y quedaron en analizar el tema, aunque consideraban que iban a tener resistencias internas. Nada ocurrió en este sentido.

## ¿Golpistas? Transitar incomodidades e intervenir etnográficamente en terreno policial

La periodista me contactó telefónicamente. Quería conversar sobre la protesta de gendarmes que se estaba llevando adelante desde hacía dos días, era octubre de 2012. Quería saber cómo la veía, cuál era mi punto de vista. Alguien le había comentado que estaba haciendo una investigación sobre la gendarmería (GNA) en el Operativo Cinturón Sur, donde estaban o habían estado destinados los manifestantes. Ella me conocía de mi paso como subsecretaria de formación del Ministerio de Defensa, y de las investigaciones anteriores sobre militares. En esta oportunidad, preocupaba ese conflicto que se desarrollaba con manifestaciones y acuartelamientos en las escalinatas del edificio Centinela (sede del comando de esta fuerza federal de seguridad), las escuelas de suboficiales, y la mayoría de sus escuadrones y unidades del país. Un conflicto al que se sumaron efectivos de la Prefectura Naval (PNA) y casi se expande a algunas unidades de las fuerzas armadas, donde finalmente no hubo acuartelamiento, porque los superiores pudieron contener al personal.

El medio periodístico era *Página12*, devenido partidario del gobierno de entonces y la periodista, Nora Veiras, especializada hasta entonces en temas de Defensa y Derechos Humanos. Ella buscaba interrogar o ratificar una serie de interpretaciones y reacciones sobre las causas del conflicto. Una parte significativa de ellas procedentes fundamentalmente de referentes del gobierno, sindicaban a los manifestantes como golpistas promovidos por las corporaciones mediáticas. Algunos indicaban que se trataba de un fenómeno en expansión en América Latina como había sucedido en Ecuador. Le di mi opinión a partir del trabajo de campo que estaba realizando sobre la Fuerza, en el que las conversaciones con gendarmes de distinta jerarquía, generación y función, remitían a una serie de demandas, conflictos, tensiones y posicionamientos. Estos, permitían aportar a la comprensión de la protesta en un sentido bien distinto al que se imponía.

8 Hasta entonces cada Fuerza contaba con un Instituto Universitario que a diferencia de las universidades nacionales no tenían la autonomía para darse su régimen docente, por tanto, sus salarios y carrera estaban asociadas a regímenes de educación secundaria. Esto tenía impacto negativo en sus salarios y dedicación. Esta situación cambió cuando se creó la Universidad de la Defensa Nacional en 2014.

9 Desde 1983 con dispar intensidad los militares atravesaron situaciones de discriminación, insultos, al punto que se les ordenó no usar uniforme en la vía pública, cosa que no siempre les fue posible. Esto afectó a las generaciones formadas en democracia dejando en ellos una amarga experiencia que siguen señalando como esa mochila que no merecen cargar.



Fundamentalmente, le destacué a la periodista que la protesta nada tenía que ver con un Golpe de Estado, que por el contrario creía que debían ser escuchadas y atendidas, las demandas por la situación salarial y las condiciones de trabajo resultado de los operativos ordenados por el gobierno nacional de entonces en el Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires tanto el Cinturón Sur como el Operativo Centinela. Le ofrecí algunas evidencias que hoy están publicadas en *La Gendarmería desde Adentro: de centinelas de la patria al trabajo en barrios cuáles son sus verdaderas funciones en el siglo xxi* (Frederic 2020) para que entendiera el trasfondo de un conflicto inédito, entre ellas: las brechas generacionales, una fuerza mayoritariamente compuesta por personas muy jóvenes sin cuadros intermedios suficientes, condiciones del servicio indignas para el personal, un ambiente operacional adverso, entre otras.

Al cortar la llamada, temí que mi interpretación del conflicto fuese a resultar un problema con las autoridades políticas del ministerio de Seguridad. Me quedé pensando cuáles serían las críticas cuando al día siguiente saliera la nota, ya que la posición de sus autoridades iba en la dirección de sumarse también a las acusaciones contra los gendarmes de estar alentados por las corporaciones opositoras de gobierno. La investigación estaba asociada a un acuerdo formal entre ese ministerio y la universidad Nacional de Quilmes de transferencia de conocimiento. Más allá de ese convenio, había por supuesto un vínculo de confianza fundado en el trabajo previo con militares cuando la ministra Nilda Garré, ahora ministra de Seguridad (2010-2013), era de Defensa (2005-2010).

En rigor, no había violado la confidencialidad suscripta ni acordada de palabra con las autoridades políticas, pues no había revelado los resultados de la investigación durante la entrevista solo había señalado lo que el trabajo de campo me permitía interpretar. El último informe de avance que había entregado respecto del modo en que los y las gendarmes destinados al Operativo Cinturón Sur respondían o se *adaptaban*, en sus propios términos, a tareas distintas de sus funciones habituales en la frontera, ya hacía un mes que estaba a disposición de las autoridades, quienes me habían solicitado no difundirlo entre los jefes de la gendarmería. De la producción de ese informe habíamos participado tres investigadoras, dos de ellas en formación: Sabrina Calandrón y Agustina Ugolini. Cada una de nosotras había tomado una de las tres unidades operativas en dicho Operativo ubicado en la zona de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires dónde se encuentra la mayor concentración de población segregada y los barrios, tal como el Barrio Padre Ricchiardelli más conocida como «la 1-11-14», identificados como el sitio de alta concentración de delito. El Operativo inaugurado en junio de 2011, un año antes de nuestra investigación, consistió en apartar a la Policía Federal con jurisdicción en ese sitio, del patrullaje de calle y recluirla a la administración de las causas, para cederle esta facultad a la PNA y a la GNA.

El informe etnográfico daba cuenta de los quehaceres de los y las gendarmes, de cómo evaluaban su desempeño en ese *ambiente operativo*, de sus demandas y percepciones sobre la adecuación con su formación básica, y sus especializaciones profesionales. Pero las circunstancias y la experiencia del personal allí desplegado unos 1300 gendarmes aproximadamente, desbordaba los objetivos que definiéramos junto a las autoridades políticas, preocupadas por un Operativo inédito de gran envergadura con resistencias internas notables también entre los altos mandos de la Fuerza. Entre las personas movilizadas descubrimos perspectivas divergentes. Proliferaban las evaluaciones muy negativas sobre el modo en que habían sido desplegados, aunque muchos trataban de encontrar continuidades con sus trayectorias y especialidades previas; otros aceptaban la tarea, pero se descargaban contra sus jefes por el descuido hacia el personal, la falta de lugar para descansar, sentarse, comer, etc, la improvisación de unidades, una de las cuales había tomado la vieja morgue de la comisaría. Si bien había quienes se habían *adaptado*, no dejaban de dar cuenta de injusticias reiteradas, sentimientos de indignación y un profundo malestar por el servicio. Uno de los relatos que más me preocupó fue el de el Cabo Cristian Bermúdez quien angustiado sin poder mirarme a los ojos me pedía si podía hacer algo para que lo llevaran devuelta a la provincia de Salta su destino original, junto a su pequeña hija de 6 años que hacía ya 8 meses que no veía. Cristian era conductor, estaba trasladado, cobraba un viático y lo inundaba la incertidumbre de no saber cuándo volvería a ver a su hija, una práctica completamente fuera de lo normal en la GNA. Nadie

le decía cuándo terminaría el servicio en Buenos Aires, distante más de 1500 kilómetros de su casa. En las recorridas se había quejado estando presente uno de sus superiores mientras recorriamos en una camioneta de la GNA el barrio: «aquí nadie respeta nada, tiran basura en la calle, y no ve que cuando pasamos nadie se corre, ni siquiera cuando llevan criaturas». Las veces que volví siguió insistiéndome si podía hacer algo para que pudiera regresar a Salta. Mi respuesta fue siempre que lo intentaría, cosa que hice, sin éxito, había muchos en su situación me dijeron, son obligaciones del servicio era la respuesta.

De regresó del trabajo de campo mi percepción era que el clima de angustias, destrato e indignación hacía del Operativo una bomba de tiempo. El informe lo entregamos a las autoridades del ministerio de Seguridad en julio de 2012, dos meses antes de la protesta. Ahí fueron muchas recomendaciones entre ellas incluimos: ordenar la disparidad de condiciones de revista; el retorno de personal a sus lugares de despliegue original u ofrecerle certidumbre sobre los plazos de su destino; corregir la discrepancia en las remuneraciones percibidas por destinados y movilizados; mejorar las condiciones de trabajo en las unidades (espacios de descanso y alimentación); y por sobre todo, abrir un espacio de reentrenamiento para el personal. Esto último sí lo anunció la ministra, aunque no se implementó sino años después.

La protesta se extendió una semana al cabo de la cual varios de los puntos de un petitorio que demandaba contar con una Aseguradora de Riesgos del Trabajo, modificar el decreto salarial por el cual estalló la protesta, sanear la obra social, entre otras medidas, fueron atendidos. Hubo más de 150 gendarmes sancionados, la mayoría de los cuales fue expulsado de la Fuerza, no obstante, al cabo de cinco años la justicia federal ordenó GNA que los reincorporara. La Fuerza solo recurrió los casos de quienes habían tenido algún gesto violento hacia su superior o con emblemas patrios, esto solo refería a un puñado de cinco personas. La protesta se había desarrollado pacíficamente, sin uso de armamento. En tanto, el ministerio retiró a los jefes de entonces— Director y Subdirector—y los reemplazó por otros dos. Como subdirector asumió quien había sido el director de personal de la Fuerza.

En cuanto a mis preocupaciones respecto del posible reproche de las autoridades del ministerio, no ocurrió. Si, sucedió, que el flamante subdirector, de la GNA, me convocó a conversar sobre la entrevista que leyera en *Página12* pues coincidía con mi visión. Ahí compartí con él los resultados preliminares de la investigación, particularmente de aquellos que arrojaban luz sobre los cimientos de aquella protesta. La conducción era pensada por entonces como una capacidad fundada en la habilidad para conocer las necesidades del personal o inducirlos, al tiempo que satisfacerlas material y/o simbólicamente, para procurar su bienestar. Por consiguiente, la protesta era un signo del fracaso de la conducción de los mandos medios y superiores, quienes quedaron con un profundo sentimiento de vergüenza de ese evento que era catalogado como «el octubre negro».

Un año después me pidieron dictar una conferencia a los mandos superiores cuando todos ellos reunidos en Buenos Aires en los tiempos de la evaluación de las juntas de ascenso, pudieran participar. Para mi sorpresa al cierre de la charla donde expuse los resultados de la investigación, luego de recibir un ramo de flores ciertamente difícil de transportar, me reprocharon por haber sido muy blanda con ellos—todos varones. Respondí a la crítica diciendo que entendía que para ser «duros» estaban ellos a quienes les correspondía ejercer el liderazgo y la conducción. Evidentemente, no confiaban en su capacidad de mando, y el conocimiento adquirido por el trabajo de campo era un capital que ninguno de los superiores podía esgrimir, porque no conversaban con el personal subalterno en confianza. La situación dio cuenta de las perspectivas disímiles entre subalternos y superiores en el contexto operativo, y también fuera de él, en el de la administración central de la Fuerza.

Por otra parte, la protesta dejó abierta una rendija para discutir la sindicalización de las fuerzas de seguridad en Argentina. Sin embargo, se obturó rápidamente. Supe que la presidenta de la nación, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner no acordaba con la idea, ni con un mecanismo alternativo. Su posición coincidía con la de un arco significativo de integrantes de ese espacio, aquellos y aquellas que consideraban que los policías son represores

y potenciales golpistas, que encarnan la violencia contra el pueblo trabajador; por consiguiente, no merecen el derecho a la sindicalización<sup>10</sup>.

En verdad, el argumento central de la investigación posterior a esta etapa (2013-2018) resultó de concentrarme en comprender las condiciones de esa protesta a partir de los nuevos usos de la gendarmería desde 2003 con el gobierno del presidente Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007). Ahí pude identificar el proceso político económico que lo atravesó, del cual los y las gendarmes en tanto ciudadanos argentinos también eran parte. Si tuviera que sintetizarlo diría que la gendarmería fue uno de los recursos para hacer frente o contener evitando la represión descarnada, a la administración de la población en las márgenes de los beneficios económicos del período. Pues, el período 2003-2015 no restituyó el Estado del Bienestar, sino que apuntaló las ruinas de aquella transformación estatal que dejara el período neoliberal de la década de 1990 (Frederic 2020).

Publicar ese análisis etnográfico renovó la incomodidad porque dejaba a ese gobierno lejos de alcanzar a las mayorías con un Estado Benefactor. Es decir, ya no era solo el problema del abuso que hiciera de las personas que integraban la gendarmería, también daba cuenta de las continuidades con el período neoliberal y ponía a la crisis de 2001 como un hito en un proceso más largo. Como el libro salió siendo ministra de Seguridad de la Nación de un gobierno integrado por muchos de los referentes y funcionarios del período de gobierno de Néstor y Cristina Kirchner, entregué algunos ejemplares al presidente y la vicepresidenta. Durante mi gestión los conflictos políticos se suscitaron por la profundización de este régimen de administración de poblaciones en las márgenes, que demandaba solo más personal de gendarmería para sofocar los incendios políticos que producían los hechos de inseguridad.

### **Accountability y condiciones de la producción etnográfica colectiva**

Pocas veces nos referimos a las condiciones en las que desarrollamos nuestra investigación. Por lo general las damos por sentadas, posiblemente porque demos por hecho que se parecen unas con otras, o tal vez porque esas condiciones comunes sean presupuestas como la base de sustentación de resultados científicamente consistentes. Habitualmente los análisis que propician la reflexividad del investigador o investigadora en el campo dan cuenta de las interacciones que allí ocurren y lo que evocan del escenario mayor. Básicamente porque otros aspectos se asumen como igualadores o porque no se los considera con incidencia en la producción de datos.

Aquí quisiera destacar la conformación colectiva del equipo de investigación y los acuerdos sobre difusión de información y datos, así como las consecuencias de estos sobre las personas e instituciones, o *accountability* (Dullo 2016:141). Las investigaciones sobre policías, militares y gendarmes que llevé adelante tuvieron ciertas características que quisiera subrayar porque sin ellas los resultados no hubieran sido los mismos. La primera es que tuvo muchas etapas de trabajo colectivo comenzando por la formulación del acuerdo general de investigación con las autoridades políticas, el abordaje de campo, las negociaciones en el acceso y la interpretación. La segunda es que durante ese esfuerzo colectivo había interpretaciones disimiles, miradas divergentes de quienes llevábamos adelante la investigación. La tercera es que cada quien aportó a los informes a entregar y también desarrollo a posteriori, vencido el plazo de confidencialidad, sus propias líneas de investigación. La cuarta es que en la presentación de los informes ante las autoridades políticas y/o militares o policiales, el grupo de investigación también era parte del debate, marcando sus señalamientos. De cada investigación realizada para el Ministerio de Defensa y luego para el Ministerio de Seguridad, los grupos fueron modificándose, para el primero éramos tres colegas con parecida trayectoria Laura Masson y Germán Soprano que habíamos trabajado juntos durante nuestros doctorados sobre Antropología de la Política. En cambio, la composición del que desarrolló las investigaciones para el Ministerio de Seguridad fue distinta

<sup>10</sup> El derecho a la sindicalización de las policías está permitido en Uruguay, Estados Unidos y Canadá, y los países de la Unión Europea, y prohibido en el resto de América Latina. Donde está permitido el derecho a huelga está prohibido.

había investigadores formados y en formación. La quinta es que cada acuerdo suscrito entre ministerio y universidad, formaba parte del programa de vinculación y transferencia de esta última, y suponía una erogación presupuestaria para remunerar a los y las investigadoras, siempre que estos no estuvieran en incompatibilidad.

Así cuando presentamos el primer informe de avance sobre la formación de los oficiales de la Policía Federal Argentina a las autoridades políticas del ministerio de Seguridad del área de educación y de derechos humanos, se produjo un fuerte debate en relación a nuestros primeros resultados. Fundamentalmente, porque ahí mostramos que la *desmilitarización* pretendida por la autoridad máxima del ministerio, era en un reclamo extemporáneo. El informe era el resultado de ocho semanas intensivas de observaciones participantes y conversaciones con cadetes, profesores e instructores, en la escuela de oficiales, con seguimiento de los cadetes en las comisarías donde hacían pasantías, que habíamos realizado cuatro jóvenes investigadores e investigadoras en formación que realizaban sus doctorados en antropología, Sabrina Calandrón, Agustina Ugolini, Tomás Bover y Mariano Melotto; y dos que ya habíamos terminado los nuestros, una de ellas Mariana Galvani sobre la Policía Federal Argentina.

La presentación se hizo en uno de los salones más grandes del ministerio de Seguridad allí habría unos quince funcionarios políticos, entre ellos especialistas en educación y derechos humanos, y nosotros seis. No había policías, con ellos la presentación fue posterior. El debate se produjo al comenzar a dar evidencias de que la formación se había renovado, que habían fortalecido las áreas de simulación de escenarios para ambientar las prácticas policiales a los entornos más comunes de actuación tales como: andenes de tren, centros comerciales, espacios ajustados de pasillos y viviendas, interiores de viviendas como escenas probables de homicidios. También al identificar problemas en la administración del personal docente, muchos de los cuales trabajaban ad honorem, como jueces y fiscales, o por una paga insignificante. Nuestro informe daba cuenta de la perspectiva de las autoridades policiales y de los instructores, del modo en que ellos explicaban la formación, pero también de los y las cadetes que señalaban la convergencia y las divergencias entre sus aspiraciones y el tránsito por la Escuela. La proximidad etaria de los y las investigadores en formación y los y las cadetes, produjo acceso a perspectivas que se complementaban con aquellas a las que accedíamos quienes ocupábamos no solo otro lugar generacional sino también una posición jerárquica en la coordinación del grupo.

El contrapunto con las autoridades políticas obedecía a que estos manifestaban con certeza que la formación no tenía un perfil definido, mientras nosotros señalábamos que había un perfil que el esfuerzo de renovación de la escuela buscaba producir, y que en todo caso podía no ser compartido por las autoridades políticas de ese momento. El saldo del debate fue que aceptaran nuestra sugerencia de realizar una segunda etapa para dar cuenta de ese perfil, o perfiles profesionales. Cosa que sucedió y que arrojó luz sobre un problema reconocido por la plana mayor de la Escuela, y era la tensión entre la teoría y la práctica, la escuela y la trinchera (la comisaría), o la pérdida de legitimidad de la formación escolar en el ejercicio de la profesión policial en las comisarías.

## Reflexiones finales

Las distintas formas y circunstancias de la investigación tuvieron en la descripción que compartí a la incomodidad como condición y resultado. Incluso me aventuro a decir que nos ubicamos en la incomodidad de distintos modos, y solo salimos parcialmente de ella, para volver a entrar ya sea con un nuevo tema de investigación o con alguna intervención que nos dejó siempre en una posición incómoda ante algún grupo o sector. La incomodidad se tornó la condición de producción del conocimiento sobre estas poblaciones objeto de renovadas administraciones por parte de actores políticos.

Sin embargo, son las circunstancias y los escenarios históricos en los que nos movemos los que definen el tipo de incomodidad, y nuestros movimientos siempre acompañan al menos circunstancialmente, el de aquellos sobre los cuales hacemos nuestra investigación. Por eso la simpatía y la empatía (Shoshan 2015),

fueron momentos comprimidos e intermitentes de la relación con las poblaciones que estudié durante el trabajo de campo. Con ellos y fundamentalmente, tomando nota de qué escenarios analizar y cuáles contribuir a producir es que pudimos llevar adelante un proceso donde quienes fueron objeto de políticas, como futuros beneficiarios, se convirtieran en agentes de su producción, y no fueran convertidos únicamente en opositores a los cambios. Ahí los avances en las reflexiones metodológicas de la etnografía desde una perspectiva reflexiva resultaron cruciales para entender que contexto y dato, son instancias inescindibles y que, sin conversación efectiva y no simulada, con escucha atenta y flexible, con los militares y los policías, dentro o fuera del trabajo de campo propiamente dicho, no hay posibilidad de transformación sostenible en el tiempo.

Los resultados alcanzados por las intervenciones antropológicas permanecen siendo hoy una muestra de comprensión del punto de vista tanto de policías, gendarmes y militares, como de quienes desde la función pública buscan administrarlos. No se trata de conciliar. Tender puentes no es unificar u homogeneizar perspectivas, sino darle a cada una su lugar, sin cancelarla, para producir una articulación que no anule contrastes, oposiciones o convergencias. Porque aun cuando las decisiones políticas no coincidan con los resultados de la investigación etnográfica y las sugerencias basadas en ellas, son insumos significativos en el mediano o largo plazo, para rectificar rumbos o redefinir medidas incluso con recambio de funcionarios.

La intervención antropológica o etnográfica, llevada adelante por investigadores/as responsables de las consecuencias de sus resultados y que consigan ceder a la tentación de la publicación como único espacio de validación, es un recurso único del campo de las ciencias sociales para evitar, en contextos donde priman la controversia y la radicalización de las oposiciones, la reducción y justificación de posiciones unilaterales. Puede contribuir, por consiguiente, a conocer y mostrar con toda la sutileza que se requiera, las relaciones que existen entre ellas y los puntos posibles de acuerdo, a comprender sus fundamentos y contribuir a evitar choques donde puede haber encuentros. Se trata desde mi punto de vista de una intervención que, fundada en un abordaje teórico metodológico, sostenido en una tradición centenaria, que validó la flexibilidad de sus herramientas de producción de datos, a instancias de los escenarios, poblaciones y problemas a investigar, posee un enorme potencial para informar, cuestionar o aportar a políticas públicas sostenibles en ámbitos como el militar o policial. Pues sin lugar a duda, para ello se requiere que sus beneficiarios o beneficiarias no sean convertidos en enemigos, y consigan ser también protagonistas.

Como mostré la etnografía puede continuar sus aportes haciendo de los contextos donde se conoce, también contextos donde se producen alteraciones en los modos de relación entre personas que pertenecen a mundos sociales totalmente ajenos, como son en Argentina los de militares, policías y gendarmes, y los de investigadores o profesores universitarios en ciencias sociales, y viceversa. Finalmente, su flexibilidad y capacidad de adaptación para el conocimiento de la diversidad debe también aplicarse a la identificación y construcción de las circunstancias y los medios a través de los cuales se puede comunicar a públicos no académicos, cuidando de la confidencialidad y el anonimato de quienes nos confiaron su palabra, siempre.

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Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding:  
ethnographies with ‘uncomfortable otherness’

# ‘Confusion of horizons’ with unwanted Others: Frustrations, results and effects of ethnographic practices in the realm of justice and public safety.

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## **Abstract:**

By reviewing various ethnographic experiences, we examine how inhospitality, unwanted and incongruous relationships, tensions and conflicts, inform a type of fieldwork and nevertheless allow—despite the ‘anti-manualistic’ form of this work—creating opportunities for understanding and interpreting the schemes, practices and worldviews of the subjects studied. Despite confronting tortuous paths, mediated by a ‘confusion of horizons’, anthropological research, when informed by questions and analyses with a good theoretical organization and conducted according to qualified ethnographic education, allows deducing broader aspects, related to the practices and representations of the world not only of the universe studied, but of its surroundings. By presenting the results of ethnographies and interactions with various actors in the fields of justice and public safety, we present some analytical devices developed in these two fields through different ethnographic experiences, such as the ‘inquisitorial tradition’ and ‘schismatic rationality’.

**Keywords:** Inquisitorialness; Schism; Justice; Public safety; Ethnography of Brazilian criminal justice system



# “Confusão de horizontes” com Outros indesejados: frustrações, resultados e efeitos de práticas etnográficas no universo da justiça e segurança pública.

## **Resumo:**

A partir do percurso de experiências etnográficas distintas, buscamos problematizar como a inospitalidade, as relações indesejadas e incongruentes, tensionadas e conflitivas, informam um tipo de trabalho de campo e permitem, ainda assim, a despeito de sua forma anti-manualística, imprimir possibilidades de compreensão e interpretação dos esquemas, das práticas e das visões de mundo dos sujeitos estudados. Mesmo diante de caminhos tortuosos, mediados por uma “confusão de horizontes”, a pesquisa antropológica, quando informada por questões e problemáticas com um bom acabamento teórico e etnográfico, permite depreender aspectos mais abrangentes, relativos às práticas e representações de mundo não apenas do universo estudado, mas de seu entorno. Apresentando os resultados de etnografias e interações com diferentes atores da justiça e da segurança pública, mostramos alguns dispositivos analíticos desenvolvidos nesses dois campos através de diferentes experiências etnográficas, tais como o da “tradição inquisitorial” e da “racionalidade cismática”.

**Palavras-chave:** Inquisitorialidade; Cisma; Justiça; Segurança pública; Etnografia do sistema de justiça e da polícia no Brasil.

# ‘Confusion of horizons’ with unwanted Others: Frustrations, results and effects of ethnographic practices in the realm of justice and public safety.

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## **Introduction**

Imagine you are on the campus of the Universidade Federal Fluminense (Fluminense Federal University), located on the shores of the beautiful and sumptuous Guanabara Bay, which is exalted in the poetry of Caetano Veloso, in his song ‘Estrangeiro’ (And the less I knew it, the more I loved it/ I’m blind from seeing it so much, from having it as a star / which is a beautiful thing). You also have a special view of Rio de Janeiro, and from afar you can see Corcovado and Christ the Redeemer with his arms open to the city. It is a bright, sunny day, perfect for enjoying a morning in Rio. All this idyllic beauty contrasted with the mood in the classroom...

Now imagine yourself, in this four-walled environment, in a class full of men and women, most of them from the Military Police and the Civil Police<sup>1</sup> of the state of Rio de Janeiro. The class also has a few other students from other professional backgrounds: journalists, lawyers, social scientists. However, the vast majority of the class are police officers.

The professor enters the room. There is the usual buzz about various topics. He organizes his things, observes the mood, and begins to make notes on the blackboard. After a few moments, the lesson begins. Some of their bodies and eyes are at attention. Most are copying what’s on the board. Others are already looking away or at their cell phones, they don’t even have a piece of paper... Some have a cynical or sarcastic look, while others seem to be thinking ‘what am I doing here?’.

The content of the lesson concerns data from a study on police stops and racial profiling<sup>2</sup>. Given the characteristics of Brazil’s police forces, the study focused on police lethality and racial profiling. As the lesson progressed and the data and analysis emerged, objections began to pop up. ‘No professor, the police are not racist. Shootings aren’t chosen by color’. ‘It’s easy to talk about police violence, I want to see you go into the favela on an operation.’ ‘More Black people die because there are more Black criminals’. The debate continues to boil with other gems uttered without any embarrassment, with divergent opinions of all kinds.

The discussion is taking shape and the debate is becoming even more intense and heated, mobilized by the ‘logic of the contradictory’ It should be noted that the adversarial principle should not be confused with what is known as the logic of the contradictory process in Brazil. This ‘princípio do contraditório’, or principle of contradiction, which in other Western legal traditions is known as the ‘adversarial principle’, consists of an

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<sup>1</sup> Brazilian states have two police organizations. The Military police is in charge of patrol; and the civil, or judiciary police, are in charge of the ‘inquérito policial’, the first written legal administrative step in a judicial procedure.

<sup>2</sup> This study (Sinhoretto, Batitucci, Mota et al. 2014) analyzes the mechanisms of racial profiling in the police selection of suspects, and was carried out in a network and by teams in different contexts in Brazil, in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and the Federal District.

accused person's right to defend themselves against accusations. In Brazil this 'logic of contradiction' requires the parties to disagree endlessly, only to be interrupted by an authoritative third party. In other countries, the adversarial principle allows for agreement and even convincing the other party.

In Brazil, as operators in the criminal justice and public safety systems, most police students share the certainty that they have a monopoly on the restricted truth and restricted knowledge about issues related to these fields. And whenever they find themselves contradicted, they react using the logic of contradiction, which does not allow for agreement or convincing by the opposing party. Only an authority recognized in their field can resolve the debate. Thus, they isolate themselves in their incontestable authority. They find themselves in the absolutist reign of certainty. And the more data and arguments they are presented, the more they challenge them and more annoyed they become. After almost an hour of intense discussion, a Black student, an officer in the Military Police, intervenes in the midst of countless statements and affirms:

Let's stop being hypocritical and trying to deceive the professor. What he's demonstrating with his data and arguments is reality. And I'll tell you something else: in one operation I was in we arrested the kids who were traffickers. Then, in the conversation about who was going to take the heat that time, a policeman said, without any mercy, 'let's get the Blackest one over there and work him over'.

This excerpt from the field notebook contributes to introducing the examination we would like to conduct in this article: how do we produce anthropological knowledge about universes for which there is no empathy, common values or convergence of points of view? How can we understand an unwanted Other? What can we learn from ethnographies conducted at the interior of the inhospitality of the Other? How can we produce recognition without recognition being granted by the Other?

The production of knowledge in the social sciences and humanities consists of a complex process of understanding, comprehending and interpreting social phenomena that often take place in worlds parallel to those of the social scientist. In anthropology in particular, we seek to understand the dimensions of other realities through the set of practices, representations and symbolic apparatuses of Others. During the discipline's history of more than 100 years, much has been produced about the epistemological, theoretical and methodological resources needed for this endeavor. We have a set of techniques, ethnographic monographs and a large accumulation of questions of an epistemological nature that have guaranteed countless inflections in the anthropological field.

It is worth mentioning that the posthumous publication in 1967 of the personal notes of Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, in *A diary in the strict sense of the term* (1989 [1967]), sparked a major debate within the international anthropological community about the vicissitudes of ethnographic work. After all, how could the author of the idyllic *Argonaut of the Pacific* distil countless prejudices and existential discomforts? As the author himself confesses 'I tore my eyes from the book and I could hardly believe that here I was among neolithic savages' (Malinowski 1989 [1967]: 54), or 'I was fed up with the niggers' (Malinowski 1989 [1967]: 154), and other expressions of prejudice and racism that have done great damage to the anthropological dream of living and being a native, reducing to dust a mythic figure of modern anthropology.

The clashes, which were much more dominated by moral dimensions (see, for example, Raymond Firth's first introduction to the book), failed to highlight the deeper aspects of the problem, which were later tackled by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his famous essay *From the native's point of view: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding*. In it Geertz points out that the problem lies in the interpretative nature of anthropology, and therefore in the epistemological sediment of the discipline and not in the 'myth of the chameleon fieldworker, perfectly self-tuned to his exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience, and cosmopolitanism' (Geertz 1983: 56).

To describe and interpret the point of view of the Other does not mean that the authenticity of the native soul will be surely captured. Anthropology consists of a less ambitious intellectual activity (at least from

a certain perspective), since its undertaking allies itself with other disciplines by conceding a more or less finished and organized format to spheres of human life that are disorganized for those who 'live life as it is'. As human beings, we live under constellations of ideas, representations and symbolic artifacts that we cannot ordinarily explain, understand and interpret from the perspective of the social sciences.

Anthropological research into justice and public safety, especially judicial and police institutions, and the respective ethnography of the practices and representations of their agents, necessarily presents us a set of ethical and theoretical questions and methodological choices that challenge the exercise of anthropological work. If we consider the different layers of 'uncomfortable otherness' in the production of knowledge in this field, in which it is possible to see a profusion of discomfort and antipathy on all sides (both from the research subjects and from fellow researchers from other fields), we could even speak of a universe of 'confusion of horizons'. It is important to mention here that 'confusion of horizons' is inspired by Gadamer's notion of 'fusion of horizons', which was taken up in an original way by anthropologist Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (1995). He affirmed:

If in Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy, dialog and, with it, understanding (*Verstehen*), is constitutive of Man (hence it is an ontological hermeneutics), for anthropology the dialogic relationship leads the parties involved to a dual understanding - which means that the Other is equally stimulated to understand us... This happens thanks to the broadening of the research horizon itself, incorporating, to some extent, the horizon of the Other. This is the well-known *fusion of horizons* spoken of by hermeneutics (Cardoso de Oliveira 1995: 223).

In our case, the idea of a confusion of horizons raises the dimension of partial understanding, of a dialogical short-circuit, of disagreement and of the utilization of a schismatic and inquisitorial rationality, which are concepts that we will elaborate on at the conclusion of the article, which is an impediment to complete *verstehen*.

Based on similar questions raised at the round table on the police at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 2015, Karpiak and Garriott (2018) problematize ways of dealing with police violence and its 'humanization' during anthropological writing. In particular, the arduous task of producing writing that, by humanizing the police, on one hand risks an incompatibility between an approach that is humanizing yet simultaneously critical and accusatory about their violent practices. On the other hand, and in opposition, it risks overlapping a humanization and an uncritical justification of police practices, which is also not the anthropologist's objective. These authors' idea for resolving the issue focuses on the act of humanizing the police in the sense of recognizing in them the traits that most define what it is to be 'human'. This includes showing their vulnerabilities and failures, in other words, making their actions (whether as an institution or as a group of individuals who compose the police forces) human. Therefore, an effort must be made to use research questions that aim to more deeply understand the relationship between the police and the meanings of being 'human' in a given time and place, and thus avoiding the opposition 'denouncing the police versus justifying the police'.

It is well known that false problems often arise in the field of anthropology when we study groups with whom we do not have a relationship of empathy, solidarity or shared ideologies and conceptions of the world.

This question becomes even more pressing when, as is the case with most of the studies carried out by Brazilian anthropologists in Brazil, the aim is to describe differences in values and moral orientations that are foreign, but no less internal to the social universe of the researchers. However, without such a perspective, for instance, how could a psychoanalyst or psychiatrist understand the motivations of a *murderer*, *serial killer* or *pedophile*? The moral impasses that arise in these circumstances are obvious, but they do not serve as measures for the analytical and interpretive work of these academic disciplines.

The issue also becomes more complex when the research subjects, the anthropologist-researcher's interlocutors, do not belong to groups or segments of the subordinate layers of social stratification, and

therefore do not see ethnographies and their publicization as a gesture of solidarity or even as a form of publicizing their identities and conditions of social, political and economic existence (Shoshan 2015). When the subjects being studied are located in the upper classes of society (Nader 1972), anthropologists' interpretations can be easily criticized and even rejected, with unpredictable consequences from a judicial point of view. In certain cases, the only guarantee of acceptance of their ethnography by the groups studied is the establishment of a consensus between researchers and their interlocutors that their ethnographic narrative corresponds, in whole or in the most part, to the practices and representations shared by the group.

On the other hand, in relation to research in the field of the anthropology of law, despite the similarities that Geertz (1983) points out as being present in the practices of these disciplines, difficulties also exist. For example, Freeman and Napier (2009) affirm that in recent generations, the concerns of legal anthropologists have been similar to those of scientists in the field of social theory and sociology (including sociologists of law). To demonstrate this affirmation, they mention Simon Roberts (1976) and, in particular, emphasize what he considered to be the peculiar contribution of the anthropology of law: which in addition to its research method, was the emphasis given to ways of managing conflicts (institutional and non-institutional), since these issues are ignored by the dominant legal approaches, and have only recently begun to arouse the interest of sociologists of law (Freeman & Napier 2009).

These questions and obstacles have also marked the development of an anthropology of law and social control institutions in Brazil, especially since the 1980s.

We would like to present a theoretical and methodological proposal, in which ethnography becomes an instrument for confronting the multiple perspectives that are presented in the world. From our point of view, it also becomes an antidote to anti-moralism insofar as anthropology is an academic and scientific discipline in which methodological and theoretical resources must be used to understand social phenomena, including those of a moral order, regardless of the nature of what is being studied. From this point of view, we share the assumption that: 'ethnography, whatever it is, has never been mere description. It is also theoretical in its mode of description. Indeed, ethnography is a theory of description' (Nader 2011: 211). And as a theory of description, ethnography cannot do without a systematic analysis and methods that give body to the ethnographic exercise. Carrying out ethnography is therefore the execution of a social relationship mediated by a theoretical or epistemological question and formulated from a good anthropological question, anchored in a solid education in the field and in ethnography.

In this way, the realization of ethnography is supported by the different formats that the social can present, the problems and questions raised by the worlds in which it takes shape, producing necessary adjustments to the methodological and analytical apparatus. We start from the assumption that although there is only one anthropology, it is elaborated from different versions that grant the anthropological field the status of an anthropology in the plural (Peirano 1992). For anthropologies such as the English, North American and French, to mention three versions of an anthropology that has been historically constituted from the relationship with the 'exotic', issues such as being affected can play a prominent role in ethnographic practice in terms of its methodological and analytical content. After all, this is a research condition in which the dilemma of participation and observation is effectively unsettling (Favret-Saada 2005: 157). Or, as the author points out:

When an ethnographer accepts being affected, this does not imply identifying with the native point of view or taking advantage of the field experience to exercise their narcissism. Accepting to be affected supposes, however, taking the risk of seeing one's project of knowledge undone. Because if the project of knowledge is omnipresent, nothing happens. But if something happens and if the project of knowledge is not lost in the midst of an adventure, then ethnography is possible. (Favret-Saada 2005: 160).

In a research project in which the conditions for producing knowledge underlie a relationship in which the 'Indians are us' (Kant de Lima 2011), it is also necessary to work on becoming disaffected from our moral terrain to produce an exercise in transforming what is familiar, close and commonplace into something that can be relativized from a methodological and analytical point of view. As an integral part of the common universe in which we are immersing ourselves ethnographically, the dilemma of affectation requires another intellectual and cognitive operation, which is: to become disaffected from judgments and previous evaluations to be able to undertake the ethnographic exercise itself. For in this case, the anthropologist-citizen (Peirano 1992) finds themselves entangled in a set of representations, even though he or she starts from antagonistic positions, which are often irreconcilable, and yet are not exotic to our culture<sup>3</sup>.

Hence our intention to start this article with an excerpt from a field note that takes us, on the one hand, to a distant, idyllic place like 'imagine you are looking out over Guanabara Bay', and then, a moment later, we try to take the reader to another universe, a known, familiar one, of a classroom in which other situations and formats of social relations are imposed. After all, much of the ethnography that we will examine is the result of research in environments that are familiar and known to people (anthropologists-citizens and police officers). We are dealing with dimensions that are part of our repertoires, categories, things we see and read about in newspapers, things we observe as passers-by. These conditions bring us to other challenges in the comprehensive work of analyzing and interpreting the social phenomena we are dealing with.

As Viveiros de Castro points out:

the problem that defines anthropology consists less in determining which social relations constitute its object, and much more in asking what its object constitutes as a social relation. [...] To put it concisely, doing anthropology means comparing anthropologies, nothing more - but nothing less. Comparison is not only our primary analytical tool. It is also our raw material and our supreme foundation (Viveiros de Castro 2018: 249).

In this sense, we will try to discuss, based on different ethnographic experiences, how inhospitality, unwanted and incongruous relationships, tense and conflictive relationships, inform a type of fieldwork and still allow us, recognizing this fieldwork's resistance to any 'manualistic' formula, to establish opportunities for understanding and interpreting the schemes, practices and worldviews of the subjects with whom we interact. Even facing tortuous paths, like that we mentioned in the excerpt from the field notes at the beginning of this article, anthropological research, when informed by questions and problems with a good theoretical organization and carried out through qualified ethnographic preparation, allows deducing more comprehensive aspects relating to the practices and representations of the world, not just of the universe studied, but of its surroundings. As we will examine at the end of this text, these experiences have enabled us to design original analyses of what we define as the inquisitorial tradition (Kant de Lima 2009, 2010, 2019, 2023; Kant de Lima & Mouzinhos 2016) and schismatic rationality (Mota 2018, 2021, 2023a, 2023b; Mota & Velásquez Peláez 2021; Mota & Kant de Lima 2022; Mota & Toscano 2023). These analytical dimensions will be dealt with at the conclusion of the article. Let's first follow the ethnographic routes.

### **'There was a stone in the path' (or many stones?)**

The authors' first ethnographic experience with the police and criminal justice systems dates back to the 1980s. At the time, one of us was studying for a doctorate in the United States and was deeply affected by the conception and functioning of the mechanisms of social control and the production of academic and judicial

<sup>3</sup> This was notorious under the previous federal government, elected through free and democratic elections, during the campaign and while in office, the nation's highest leader, the President of Brazil, repeatedly appropriated the well-known slogan 'a good bandit is a dead bandit' to affirm his vision of public safety, demonstrating the capillarity in society of the values and representations we described at the beginning of the text.

truths that were dominant in that region. These differed greatly from his previous experience with the academia and criminal justice, the latter as a result of his experience as a law student and legal intern in Brazil (Kant de Lima 2011). For this reason, he decided to dedicate his thesis to comparing the formats of the US 'jury trial' and the Brazilian 'Tribunal do Júri' (Kant de Lima 1986). However, since dating back to 1871, jury trials in Brazil, like the vast majority of other criminal cases, begin with a single administrative procedure called a 'police inquiry', it would be necessary to follow them in the field from the outset, in the police stations. Through Brazilian colleagues, who were also doing their doctorates in the US, helped provide access to important figures in the criminal law profession in Rio de Janeiro, who were willing to collaborate with the research which, at the time, even received funding from the *Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil* [Brazilian Bar Association] of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Relationships in the field, therefore, were based on introductions that constituted a veritable 'web' of successive presentations, involving judges, prosecutors, police officials, and criminal lawyers. These relationships made the research possible. The study lasted three years (1982-1984), covering the entire criminal justice and public security system in the city of Rio de Janeiro (police stations, criminal courts, penitentiaries). This web that made the research possible reproduced, in a way, the structure of the social relations of this group of professionals who establish inter-professional personal ties throughout the system, forming groups that are often in opposition to each other, or even in outright dispute.

These were the only limitations imposed by the context. The researcher would go through all the stages of the patchwork system, within this group of highly valued professionals. What enabled the research was always an introduction, by one acquaintance, to another acquaintance who was a member of this web. This was very clear because, when there was any friction—caused by the inevitable gaffes that the ethnographer would make during research—it was necessary, in this often very fragile environment between researcher and interlocutors due to the prevalence of 'schisms'<sup>4</sup> that informed the relationships, for the researcher to re-establish trust by reinforcing the introductions, with the appropriate apologies.

This was the case, for example, when the research focused on the *Tribunal do Júri* [criminal courts, with juries, for intentional crimes against human life], where it was possible to observe that, despite all the legislation that made it impossible for there to be prior agreements among the parties, and which determined the randomness of jury selection, that jurors exercise the logic of the contradictory process, and the sovereignty of a jury's decisions, there were entries on the Court's agenda that contradicted these rules. At times two trials were scheduled for the same day, while at others a single trial was scheduled for a whole week, as if their length was determined beforehand.

Intrigued by this scheduling—which occurred frequently—the researcher asked the presiding judge of the court if this circumstance involved some kind of agreement between lawyers, prosecutors and the judge himself, who was responsible for setting the schedule (although this was not allowed by law). The judge's reaction was vehement and violently indignant: 'There are no agreements in my court!!! And if you think so, please leave and don't come back!!!'. Only with the subsequent intervention of his 'godfather', a famous criminal attorney from Rio de Janeiro, who again assured the judge that the researcher was 'trustworthy', was it possible to appease the judge's indignation, who then began to tolerate the researcher's presence once again, certain that he would not denounce or harm the judge in any way (Cf. Nuñez 2021).

These webs should not be confused with the notion of 'networks', because unlike networks, which do not transfer the dyadic relationships of their individual components to other individuals outside the primary relationship, here they can be extended almost infinitely, increasing their scope, by successive referrals from third parties, 'acquaintances of acquaintances' (Kant de Lima 2011, 2019). Another characteristic is that the webs often incorporate agents who are at different points in their careers and also agents from different institutions (civil and military police, the judiciary, the public prosecutor's office, criminal lawyers, penitentiary

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that most contemporary Latin languages have the category 'the' schism [as a male noun], defining it as a rupture, but only in Brazil is the category 'the schism' [a female noun] used in this sense that we are using and that will be discussed in greater detail and depth in this article.

agents—now prison police—etc.). The webs also extend *intra corporis*, characterizing each police station, or each court, for example, as composed by its own 'team', which would shift if its 'leader' was transferred or promoted, especially in the police (Kant de Lima 2019).

This form of organization also results in forms of political struggle in these corporations that are characteristic of factionalism, an object of sociological study, which led to the occupation of police leadership positions by a successive of often antagonistic groups. As the work was carried out at the state level, the weight of the governor, who chooses court judges, police chiefs, military police commanders, state secretaries for public safety and prison administration, was very important, as these factions succeeded each other in power according to electoral results, thus producing interruptions and even opposition to the public policies of previous governments, in order to implement their own initiatives.

The research environment could be perceived as clearly segmented. On one hand there was the law (ordinary and constitutional) and the legal-doctrinal, abstract, and normative discourses which—due to the aforementioned logic of the contradictory process—vehemently clashed, claiming constitutional rights and procedural filigree, before the magistrates and/or jurors who had the final decision in the trials. On the other hand, police practices, especially the extraction of confessions and the inhumane treatment of prisoners in custody and penitentiaries, created situations in which these rights did not seem to exist. Although the ethnography covered the entire criminal justice and public security system, the thesis, due to the time constraints of the CAPES doctoral scholarship, only dealt with the practices of the judiciary police and some aspects of the special criminal court [known as the Jury Court] in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Kant de Lima 1986, 2019).

What seemed strange to the researcher, however, was that this paradox—the contradiction between the stated liberal rights and the repressive inquisitorial practices that shaped the determination of guilt in the judiciary police investigation and interacted in the same process—was completely naturalized and caused no surprise, unless, of course, it went beyond the unwritten limits of assumed convenience. Torture to obtain a confession, for example, should not lead to the death of the tortured person. If it did, the agent responsible would certainly suffer informal punishments—such as transfers to undesirable places—in order to 'learn how to do the job'. On the other hand, obtaining a confession was such a naturalized procedure that the agents would call the researcher to watch it, so that he could see how 'the job was done'. For them, it was therefore a necessary stage in discovering the judicial truth, without which police work would not be complete. Of course, this was possible because the researcher was 'recommended', as a 'trusted' person.

It should be noted that we are not talking here about the trust that exists in market relations, which requires agents to comply with impersonal rules in order to continue trading. The trust that sustains these webs is a personal trust, attributed by the endorser to an individual whose attitudes, if identified as a violation of this trust, will have consequences for the entire segment and will affect those who recommended them (Sampaio 2023).

Over time, it was concluded that both legal discourse and police practice were articulated, implicitly and/or explicitly, around 'inquisitorialness', the prior 'establishment of guilt' of the accused by the police and the need for confession to confirm the judge's certainty, assuage any doubts and ensure 'fair' convictions; although contaminating the constitutional principle of the 'presumption of innocence' in the process.<sup>5</sup> Among other characteristics, this inquisitorial orientation of the process presumes the guilt of the accused person who is being prosecuted and seeks the so-called 'real truth', a single truth that must be 'discovered' by the judge, or by the jurors, at the end of the process, after the contradictory versions of the parties have been exposed. As a

<sup>5</sup> Michel Lobo, using quantitative and qualitative data, provides an excellent discussion of the different criteria - used by the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office—for pursuing cases and bringing them to trial (2021). For a more recent approach to police investigation practices in Rio de Janeiro and other states, see Michel Misse (2023) and Vidal (2013).



result, unlike the system of judicial evidence in the accusatory models introduced in Western law, there is no distinction between what is known and what can be proved in court, with the confession being the confirming element of this presumed guilt, the bearer of the so-called 'real procedural truth'<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, penal confession, inspired by ecclesiastical confession, juridically attenuates criminal responsibility because it signifies an external sign of repentance and confirms the justice of the punitive sentence. This means that, regardless of what was proposed at the time, or what federal and constitutional law currently proposes, by classifying torture as a 'heinous crime', the use of torture will continue to be an effective, although clandestine and illegal means to obtain confession<sup>7</sup>.

This creates a veil, invisible to the majority of society, that covers up the violent practices of the police which, although formally illegal, are considered by the majority of magistrates and prosecutors to be necessary for a case to run smoothly (Alves 2022). It is no wonder that 40 years later, in ethnographies carried out by InEAC researchers<sup>8</sup> in custody hearings, complaints by detainees about torture are at most registered, but have no practical effect, either on the investigation or on the penal consequences, which results in the silent reaffirmation of the legitimacy of their practice (Brandão 2020, 2021).

There is no need to emphasize the importance of this legal form of legitimizing illegal procedures as part of the procedural routine. In the course of our research, this apparent schizophrenia—strict laws that are not enforced versus everyday practices that are naturalized as institutionally legitimate—was revealed on many other occasions, even giving rise to a saying that is learned in law school: 'theory is different in practice!'. In this case, it's not a *theory* stricto sensu, but a 'doctrine', which expresses a 'becoming', but is not interested in what 'is'; except, of course, to define the exception that confirms the rule, punishing any exaggerations by agents as if they were isolated cases and not the generally exaggerated expression of routines consensually accepted by these institutions.<sup>9</sup>

Following this dive into this universe—that is hidden but always glimpsed—of the practices of the criminal justice and public security system, the researcher also had the opportunity to do fieldwork in the United States in 1990. On this occasion, he was at a university in the southern US, where he did fieldwork with the local police, and later, in the state of California, in the court system, with the public defender's office<sup>10</sup>.

These two stages of the work were quite enlightening because of contrasts with the ethnography in Brazil, although they were difficult to carry out. Working with the police was especially difficult. In Birmingham, Alabama the force was composed entirely of Baptists, including pastors, who brought the full force of their beliefs to the exercise of their work and a certain religious proselytizing towards the researcher.

What was different was that Birmingham had formal protocols that did not exist in Rio. If they did exist, they were not mandatory guides to practices in the criminal justice and public security system. While in Birmingham these protocols were seen as protections for those served by the police, and for the police themselves, in Rio they were repudiated as obstacles to the efficiency of police practice.

6 See Kant de Lima (2010) and Kant de Lima and Mouzinho (2016). Through its dogmatic principles, Brazilian criminal procedure aims to discover the 'real truth'. This implies not limiting a procedure to what the parties bring to the process, but allowing a judge to conduct investigations in an evidentiary initiative, as well as not distinguishing between what is known and what can be proved judicially.

7 In this sense, see the differences between 'judicial torture' and 'police brutality', explored during fieldwork in the USA (Kant de Lima 1995a). See also Kant de Lima (2010) and Kant de Lima and Mouzinho (2016)

8 InEAC is one of the Institutes of the National Institutes of Science and Technology/CNPq Program (<http://inct.cnpq.br/sobre>), which since 2009 has aimed to continue the research excellence of these Institutes, strengthen the qualified education of human resources, internationalize research results and transfer these results to society. InEAC is a consolidated national and international multidisciplinary network (with researchers from the fields of sociology, anthropology, law, history, social communication, and psychology) and aims to promote dialogue between the social sciences and the applied social sciences, especially between law and anthropology ([www.ineac.uff.br](http://www.ineac.uff.br)).

9 Legislation is often adjusted to contemporary, Enlightenment values, such as protecting human rights. However, the theory that informs the practices remains unaffected, as it is traditionally identified with medieval, secular and ecclesiastical forms of punishment, all implicit.

10 The research was funded by the Fulbright Foundation and took place in Birmingham, Alabama and San Francisco, California in 1990.

At the San Francisco Public Defender's Office, what was most striking was the social division between prosecutors and police, and the public defenders. While in Rio, coexistence was vertically interspersed by the previously mentioned 'webs', in San Francisco there was a clear separation and relations were strictly formal between the prosecution and defense. This difference had already been noted in the field research with the police in the USA when, after a chance meeting with a criminal lawyer who invited the researcher to his office, he was warned by his local police 'sponsor' that he would have to choose: either do research with the police or with the criminal lawyers, because he could inadvertently leak information about cases. In Rio, this warning would have been incomprehensible given the formation of the webs described above<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to this experience with the institutional side of public safety enforcement, however, there is another aspect to this issue, which we will describe below. This is when the object of research involves alterities that, in addition to being uncomfortable, also produce various types of violence in the public space, as is the case with the militias<sup>12</sup> in Rio de Janeiro. In this case, there are a series of ethical and methodological precautions that need to be taken by the researcher, whether the interlocutors are militia members or simply residents of a given region that is under the control of these groups. This second case represents the experience that one of our authors/researchers<sup>13</sup> had to deal with, in which building close relationships based on reciprocal trust also proved to be fundamental.

### **Institutional tensions with the 'unwanted Others'**

Another stage of conviviality with this 'other' in Brazil was built in an entirely inverse way, as it was produced from the curiosity of police officers and their institutions about academia, which eventually resulted in the building of trust between members of the police forces and university professors, which as will be seen, led to a unique experience in Brazil of academic interaction between anthropologists and other social scientists.

When the Postgraduate Program in Anthropology and Political Science was created at UFF in the mid-1990s, two colonels from the Rio de Janeiro Military Police (PMERJ) reserve applied, were accepted and enrolled in the Program, taking a course taught by the researcher who wrote the thesis mentioned above, which dealt with police practices in Rio (Kant de Lima 1995b). At the end of the course, they invited the professor to give a lecture at the Escola Superior da Polícia Militar do Rio de Janeiro [the Rio de Janeiro Military Police College], which administered the Superior Police Department and the PMERJ Officers' Training Course. The professor refused to go to the police compound, but invited the police to come to the university, which they did. After some time, these negotiations resulted in the creation of a non-degree specialization course in 'Public Policies in Criminal Justice and Public Security' (JCSP), initially funded by the Ford Foundation and a commitment for continued funding by the newly created Public Security Institute of the Rio de Janeiro State Security Secretariat (ISP/SSEG/RJ). One of the colonels who had completed our master's degree became president of this Institute and from then on, from 2000 to 2006, in a period of continuity of elected governments, more than 750 Military Police officers, as well as Civil Police officials, attended the course. Their promotion was conditioned on them *passing the subjects offered*, and many of them completed their monographs, receiving the title of specialists. The best papers were selected and published by Editora da UFF (Miranda & Lima 2008; Pires & Eilbaum 2009; Miranda & Mota 2010; Guedes & Silva 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Other consequences of these ethnographies have been published. See especially Kant de Lima (1995a) and 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Since the mid-2000s in the state of Rio de Janeiro the category 'militia' has included diverse and heterogeneous practices and forms of organized criminal groups. What are currently known as militias, may operate in a variety of ways. For example, the term can cover everything from groups of public safety officers and/or civilians who strive to 'impose order' in a region; as well as groups that practice various forms of extortion and armed control in a given territory, or even groups organized into articulated political-economic networks that reach deep into the administration of the state machine. For more information on what militias are and how they got their name, see Brama (2019, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> This is the master's thesis research carried out by Brama (2022) in the period 2017-19.

The course curriculum, drawn up by professors from the Fluminense Federal University in consultation with representatives of the Military Police and the Civil Police, represented a consensus between what the police wanted and what the university could offer in terms of empirical research, and was taught in collaboration with colleagues from other universities in Rio de Janeiro and other states, with guest lecturers from France, Argentina and Canada. Methodological issues were introduced concerning quantitative and qualitative empirical research, and work by social scientists associated with the issue of public safety and criminal justice in Brazil and abroad was also discussed, such as those whose contents were described at the beginning of this article, taken from excerpts from the field notes.

However, during this period the course suffered a number of complications, as its implementation depended on the commander of the Military Police at the time. Some of them were in favor of the course, others indifferent and others outright against it. One of the most common incidents during the change of command at the ESPM was the university's demand that police officers attend the course in plain clothes. This was because they claimed that, in uniform, they had to carry their weapons ostentatiously, which was extremely uncomfortable for teachers and civilian students who also attended the course, especially during the heated discussions that took place during and after classes, such as the one we described in the introduction to the article<sup>14</sup>.

One commander, after refusing to send the students without uniforms, finally gave in, convinced by his colleague, the aforementioned President of the Public Security Institute, as long as he could give the course's inaugural lecture. That agreed, during his talk he told the future students that nothing they would learn during the course would be useful for their work in the police. Nevertheless, the agreement was maintained and the students returned to the course without their uniforms.

In addition to police officers, 20% of the course students were non-police, including students of social sciences, law, social communication, social service, and others. The most important thing to note in this relatively long period of university life was the lack of academic socialization for most of the students, whether they were civilian or military police officers. Socialized in instrumental military education and/or legal dogmatism, in which the argument of authority prevails, there was no space in their academic experiences for them to discuss issues resulting from empirical research, without making use of the logic of contradiction that only admits apology or denunciation.

Here again is the distinction between scientific argumentation, driven by the authority of the argument, and an argument based on authority, which relies on the authority and status of the person who enunciates it. In this regard, it is important to note the difference between *arguing* to convince a universal audience and *persuading*, which is aimed at a particular recipient. In the first case, we are dealing with a scientific argument that aims to convince the opposing parties; in the second, persuasion, for example, of the authority who will decide the dispute, without necessarily considering the arguments of the opposing party. (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 2014).

For this reason, constructively critical academic discussion was foreign to law students and those from the military, who considered the texts that they read and discussed as nothing more than the opinions of their authors, who they did not regard as authorities in the field, since they were neither lawyers, nor military personnel, nor police officers. Furthermore, they did not see empirics as a basis for formulating generalizing theories, because for them 'theory in practice is different', as mentioned. In other words, for these students a radical separation truly existed between doctrine and practice, where the repressive theories that guided their knowledge and daily practices were camouflaged by the informality of their traditional, unwritten production and reproduction.

Another noteworthy issue in relation to this separation concerned the monographs completed and approved in the course, which had to be registered at UFF, but also filed in the ESPM/RJ library. It was common for the

<sup>14</sup> Note that the description of the class that begins this article refers to one of these courses.

coordinator to be summoned every time a new commander took over, both to justify the course and to present the monographs that had been submitted. They were systematically sent to ESPM/RJ every year, after the classes had finished, but for some reason they couldn't be found in the library. This 'mystery' was later solved. When the best monographs were selected for publication in EDUFF's *Anthropology and Political Science* collection, several of their authors refused to do so. We then learned that their monographs were also not available in the ESPM/RJ library. In other words, they were writing something for the UFF course, but they didn't want the police to know about their academic work. Once again, a veil was drawn between the formality of academic work and the informal routines of police practice.

This experience has had a number of consequences, one was to partially break down the traditional hostility between police institutions and public universities, especially in the humanities and social sciences in Brazil. These hostilities are the result of a history of fierce police repression of university institutions, not only during the military dictatorship (Baptista *et al.* 2021), but also during previous authoritarian governments in Brazil. In addition to this consequence, we would like to discuss two others: the creation of undergraduate courses in public safety (classroom bachelor's degree) and a distance learning course to train technologists in public and social security.

With regard to the creation of a bachelor's degree course in public security at a federal university, the UFF<sup>15</sup>, the initiative was initially the result of evidence that the 18-month specialization course was not capable of deconstructing the effects of military teaching and legal dogma, during its 10 months of classes and eight months to prepare and defend a monograph. Thus, the expected socialization of students in the discussion of production methods did not take place, but also in the forms of consumption of scientific knowledge resulting from social science research, which was always challenged by their sources of dogmatic knowledge and dismissed as mere opinions unauthorized by the military, law and public security fields in general, as mentioned.

To help build a field of knowledge that discussed the sociological characteristics of public security, it therefore seemed necessary to create a longer bachelor's degree course that would introduce and develop the discussion of public security not just as a repressive facet of the state, but as a complex field of social relations and conflict management processes, from society's point of view. The aim was to educate professionals who could compete effectively in the job market with the soldiers and jurists who had exclusive access to this market.

The process of creating a bachelor's degree in public security at UFF took place during the expansion program for federal universities in 2007<sup>16</sup> and showed another side to these unwanted relations, prejudice and schism, since its proposal at the Institute of Human Sciences and Philosophy (ICHP/UFF) generated a strong reaction from its members, professors and students, who affirmed that 'the public university is not a place for the police!'. After intense discussions lasting four months in 2008, the proposal was not approved by the ICHP collegiate council, reflecting the historical antagonism between police forces and their instrumentalization against progressive or leftist thinking, present in most Brazilian social sciences, and the university community's reactions to them. Further negotiations finally resulted in the creation of the course at UFF's Faculty of Law, which initially received the project, creating the course and the Department of Public Safety in 2012.

A year after the classroom course was created, the Rio de Janeiro Security Department approached the coordinator of the aforementioned bachelor's degree course in public safety, requesting that a project be drawn up for the creation of a distance learning course for technologists, to be taught exclusively to security professionals, the latter restriction due to determinations made by the Ministry of Education<sup>17</sup>. This request

15 There were courses for police officers at state universities and even at federal universities, both concurrently and after the one we are discussing here. But whenever they were compulsory, they were controlled by the state police and not by the university administration.

16 This was the REUNI Program for the expansion of federal educational institutions. For more details see <https://reuni.mec.gov.br>

17 The course was set up through an agreement between UFF and CEDERJ, the latter a state institution that brings together RJ's public universities and institutes of higher education for distance learning.

stemmed from the initiative of the Military Police of Rio de Janeiro, which at that time was led by some of the students from the first class of the UFF specialization course in 2000 (JCSP).

At the same time as these institutional achievements at UFF, there was a consolidation of comparative research by contrast on conflict management processes in other regions of Brazil and abroad. An example of their results are numerous publications<sup>18</sup>, including a dossier recently published simultaneously in Brazil and France (Cardoso de Oliveira & Kant de Lima 2023a, 2023b).

In the case of the police forces, while the various INCT-InEAC courses attracted the attention of professionals from the field of public security, who first enrolled in undergraduate courses (the distance learning course for Technologists in Public Security) and from 2019 in the academic master's degree in Justice and Security at UFF, the contacts and dialogues between these two distant worlds (academia and the institutional and professional contexts of public security) multiplied.

Thus, in the same way that anthropologists, when entering ethnographic fields with police officers, need to go through a process of adapting to the sensitivities, habits and norms of these contexts in order to succeed in their research, public security professionals who wish to succeed in one of the INCT-InEAC courses must go through the academic socialization (or anthropological socialization in the case of those who already had an academic degree in law) necessary to complete the various requirements for an academic degree.

In this socialization process, because the course involves public safety issues that the police officer-student believes to know deeply from his practice, it is not uncommon for conflicts and disputes to occur between civilians and military personnel, especially when the latter want to assert their authority in pedagogical matters over which they have no decision-making power (Kant de Lima & Geraldo 2022). Veríssimo (2024) and Grandin (2024) have discussed this so-called 'culture shock', a native category adopted by the public security agents enrolled in the Technologist in Public Security Course to designate this process.

On this issue, Ramos (forthcoming), who is not only a sergeant in the Military Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro, but also has a bachelor's degree in public and social security from UFF and a master's degree from the Graduate Program in Justice and Security from the same university, states that each of these two universes (the academy and the police forces) produces its own reality and conception of public security, through its own values, signs and representations, which legitimize these distinct and antagonistic conceptions in dispute. The author, based on his own professional experience, believes that the knowledge of the police universe, both from training courses and practical knowledge acquired 'on the beat', is:

an experience that, because it is immersed in dogmas, tends to resist alternative views that aim to deconstruct the truths of this field. This 'truth' about what it is to be a police officer, about what 'public order' is, about what 'Public Security' is and how to do it, is part of a cultural pattern made up of 'signifiers and meanings' which, in addition to giving meaning to the identity of this group, constructs events that harmonize with their own way of life' (Ramos, forthcoming).

In addition to the relevance and originality that the point of view of a native of public safety talking about his own work can represent (and this considering that the state of the art on this issue is, for the most part, produced by researchers who have never worked professionally as police officers), both the Public Security Technologist course and the master's degree in Justice and Security have also provided research opportunities for these native researchers.

As for the master's program, which held its first class in 2019, with openings for 20 students per year, 43 dissertations have been produced by the student body. Some of these<sup>19</sup> are ethnographies carried out by

<sup>18</sup> Take, for example, the collection from Editora Autografia *Conflitos, Direitos e Sociedade* (Available at <https://www.autografia.com.br/categoria-produto/direito/colecao-conflitos-direitos-e-sociedade/>)

<sup>19</sup> Until the time this part of the text was written, of the 43 dissertations defended in the Postgraduate Program in Justice and Security at UFF, 9 were produced by security professionals, or more than 20% of the total.

professionals in public safety. An example of this is Ítalo do Couto Ferreira's dissertation, published in 2022 as a book with the title *Entre mercadorias políticas e atos de resistência. Memórias etnográficas de um Oficial do extinto 1º BPM da PMERJ* [Between political goods and acts of resistance. Ethnographic memories of an Officer of the extinct 1st Military Police Battalion] (Ferreira 2022). In this study, the author presents detailed ethnographic descriptions that highlight the power relations in the professional context during his time as a police officer, emphasizing how in most cases private interests define the actions on the public security agenda defined by the corporation, which often end with a lethal outcome.

In this sense, the experience of one of our authors, who has never worked as a public security professional and has never even had close contact with these professionals, exemplifies how he was able to build his field of research for his doctoral thesis with the help of the rapprochement that these courses brought about between police officers and academia.

However, even though he explained to his potential interlocutors all the precautions he would take to preserve their identities, not all of his contacts were clearly open with the researcher. Or as one police officer put it: 'A policeman can't tell the truth... He can tell some truths, but he can't tell the truth'.

These circumstances, while helping to make the police-students more comfortable with sharing their knowledge in the doctoral thesis, also help to solve, as mentioned previously by Karpiak and Garriot (2018), the problem of the anthropologist who studies the police in the dilemma of 'writing and denouncing their practices *versus* writing and justifying them', facilitating that consensus (even if partial or incomplete) between the researcher and her interlocutors about her ethnographic narrative and its eventual correspondence with her own practices and representations.

## Conclusion

Throughout the article, we have tried to explore various ethnographic journeys, experienced at different times and in different circumstances, which would allow us to explain the pitfalls of the ethnographic exercise. Unlike the idyllic and romantic representation that marks the origin myth of modern ethnography, beginning with the aforementioned Malinowski (considered simultaneously as a hero and anti-hero), we propose that there are research conditions in the field of anthropology that give rise to occasional misadventures; disagreements and tensions; conflicts and disagreements and the possibility of a 'confusion of horizons'.

Clifford Geertz's importance and influence on the understanding of modern ethnography is well known, as is his hermeneutic presupposition based on the idea that:

Culture is public because meaning is. You can't wink (or burlesque one) without knowing what counts as winking or how, physically, to contract your eyelids, and you can't conduct a sheep raid (or mimic one) without knowing what it is to steal a sheep and how practically to go about it (Geertz 1973: 12).

Despite the common ground of meaning, the sharing of a common culture and language, between police officers, magistrates, lawyers, and other operators in the public safety and criminal justice system and anthropologist-researchers, there are, as we have tried to show, tortuous paths that are based on communicative short circuits that present other methodological and ethical challenges to the analytical and comprehensive exercise of the discipline<sup>20</sup>.

If, according to Geertz, the meaning of a practice can be interpreted by the anthropologist through its public characteristic, how can we approach a universe in which meanings are always particularized and even encapsulated in the absolutes of the actors' certainties, as we described above in some of the ethnographic

<sup>20</sup> See for example Shoshan (2015).

situations we experienced? After all, if, as Gadamer advocates, in the exercise of *verstehen* 'it is true in every case that a person who comprehends, comprehends himself (*sich versteht*), projecting himself upon his possibilities' (Gadamer 2004: 251), how do we deal with comprehension in a universe of 'confusion of horizons'?

It is not new that anthropologists have had to deal with what we call a 'confusion of horizons'. Evans-Pritchard among the Nuer (1940) and the Azande (1937), Berreman in the Himalayas (1963), Foote Whyte on the street corners of Boston (1943), and so on. Well-known anthropologists, such as the American anthropologist Margaret Mead, have been accused of dressing up the *truth* about some aspects of the practices and representations of young women in Samoa with previously constructed questions.

The fundamental point is that anthropological work often finds itself in the interpretative labyrinth in which actors-researchers-anthropologists find themselves, producing dissonances and tensions that enrich the analytical and interpretative exercise. Instead of understanding the 'confusion of horizons' as something that is pernicious, we interpret it as a fruitful path of compositions that are elaborated in these tortuous journeys in the production of knowledge by both parties. And the confusion of horizons is understood to be significantly different than a misunderstanding in translation. As we have shown throughout the text, the relationship between anthropologists and civil and military police was shaped by a series of controversies, disagreements and confusions. However, these dimensions have not prevented the construction of a theoretical-analytical corpus, even if through tortuous paths, through incongruous ones, it has opened up ground for the institutionalization of research, publications and courses in the field of anthropological studies on public safety and justice. In this sense, we distance ourselves from the issues raised by Viveiro de Castro about the commensurability of perspectives (of natives/anthropologists). He affirms:

perspectivism projects an image of translation as a process of controlled equivocation—'controlled' in the sense that walking can be described as a controlled way of falling. Indigenous perspectivism is a theory of equivocation, that is, of referential alterity between homonymous concepts. Equivocation appears here as the mode of communication par excellence between different perspectival positions - and therefore as both the condition of possibility and the limit of the anthropological endeavor (Viveiros de Castro 2018: 251).

This implies, according to the author, that

To translate is to emphasize or enhance equivocation, that is, to open up and widen the space imagined as not existing between the conceptual languages in contact, a space that equivocation precisely concealed. Equivocation is not what prevents a relationship, but what founds and drives it: a difference in perspective. To translate is to assume that an equivocation already exists; it is to communicate through differences, instead of silencing the Other by assuming a univocal—essential similarity—between what the Other and We are saying (Viveiros de Castro 2018: 254-255).

In the case of legal anthropology carried out with and about police and judicial institutions, the issue is steered precisely to the processes of confusions caused by fieldwork relationships and the interpretations produced through this labyrinthine experience, which is strained by different ethical and moral armors. In this case, we are dealing with groups that seek, often explicitly and publicly, as described above, to delegitimize anthropological knowledge, giving it meanings such as 'theory without practice', 'every society has the police and justice it deserves', 'you've never held a gun and exchanged fire with a bandit', among other discursive formulas that tend to reinforce the incommensurability of comprehension and understanding of what we are trying to understand together.

It's not a question of the classic and important issue of translation, but of the legitimacy or delegitimacy translation can achieve in the field of study we are discussing. As we have seen, it is a veritable field of confusion, conflicts, disagreements and threats in a process of mutual ignorance of the other. This is because we as social scientists/anthropologists do not share the principles of the police and court officials (or a part of their components

if we consider their differences and internal heterogeneity), nor do officials of the courts or police recognize the legitimacy of the social and human sciences, which is expressed by disqualifying their professionals.

This rejection, however, turned out to show itself, during the research that preceded and succeeded it in this initially troubled environment, to be focused on understanding and identifying the categories that supported the naturalization of contemporary practices. These made explicit categories belonging to dogmatic frameworks that in the past had established practices informed by punitive legal and police perspectives, typical of ecclesiastical systems of legal-ecclesiastical control of society, present in societies of the *Ancien Régime*. They were thus opposed to the principles that underpin liberal legal-political systems, as described philosophically and historically by contemporary authors such as Foucault (1977) and Berman (1983, 2003). In other words, defending 'practices' as the best because they are based on police experience, only means that they are reproducing old ways of repressing and maintaining monarchical order, which should be anachronistic, but are not (Kant de Lima 2010).

Although these conflicts exist in this environment of opposition and even rejection of horizons, in our case they have reverted into a contemporary 'confusion of horizons', in which labyrinthine paths have culminated, as we mentioned, in the institutionalization of various academic and scientific research ventures, for research production and teaching of social technologies. These have opened up interpretative doors of high impact anthropological relevance for understanding not only the contrasting universes we are referring to, but also, to a certain extent, the gateway to cosmologies and practices that flow into and inform other universes. Above all, this confusion of horizons has allowed us to shape ethnographic interpretative content of great anthropological relevance. In other words, the confusion of horizons is not an analytical/interpretative impropriety. On the contrary, as long as it is mediated by anthropological and ethnographic education and guided by theoretical questions, it offers us countless ways of analyzing sociological and anthropological problems.

The tortuous paths of ethnography allowed Author II to develop some questions about what he called 'inquisitorialness'. This is a multivocal category, which has legal significance, but is also present, although often without this name, in the daily practices of some social groups. The understanding we have here is that it basically presupposes a prior systematic suspicion of the 'other' with whom we are interacting. The origin of this suspicion is not explicitly shared. And its practice consists of being certain of certain facts and practices that the possible interlocutor has committed and, by approaching them in some way, getting them to acknowledge their guilt, thus confirming our suspicions that we want to turn into facts and certainties. The practice of inquisitorialism establishes an asymmetry between the interlocutor who knows and accuses and the interlocutor who denies and defends himself. Confidential knowledge, obtained without the participation of the other party, establishes a power that the accuser manipulates in the relationship. Therefore, the only way to overcome it is to create transparency about the often diverse, albeit homonymous, meanings of native categories. And this transparency can only be created in a universe that favors respectful communication between the interlocutors, as was the case here, which is conducive to successful ethnographies.

Some examples were presented in the ethnographic part of the article, but other examples of these practices are common in love relationships, where jealousy fantasizes, often unfoundedly, about non-existent betrayals, but which nevertheless have an effect on the dynamics of violence and conflict that they provoke. But inquisitorialness also manifests itself with those who occupy subaltern positions in society, often accused, rightly or wrongly, of practices incompatible with the personalized trust placed in them. This is the case with accusations against housemaids, or against children and spouses in reference to their behavior, which is more or less suitable to the environment of family trust. For example, in the expression: 'Who moved my wallet?', in which it is assumed that someone has moved an object improperly, without there being any evidence to prove anyone did, while it is often the accuser who forgot to put it back in its usual place.



On the other hand, we have another analytical dimension stemming from ethnographic experiences that led to the construction of the category 'schismatic reason' (Mota 2018, 2021, 2023a, 2023b; Mota & Velásquez Peláez 2021; Mota & Kant de Lima 2022; Mota & Toscano 2023). This is a polysemic category, as it can have several meanings in different contexts as it does in a dictionary. *Cisma* [schism, as a masculine noun in Portuguese], can refer to a rupture or split, while *schism* [as a feminine noun in Portuguese] refers to an act that consists of producing an evaluation and judgment about things, people and facts supported by a fixed and unswerving preconception, as commonly occurs on social networks these days and in the case of relations with agents of public security and criminal justice systems, as we have described throughout the article.

This latter form of schism differs from an act of substantive distrust, in that in distrust the communicative bridges enable interlocution and the production of provisional consensus about the elements that are part of the interaction, the social relationship and the controversy that arises, and can undo the initial certainties. The notion of *cisma* [schism] we are using produces a communicative schism, breaking the circuits of recognizing the other as an interlocutor. Mistrust (and trust) has a liberal matrix, in which it is assumed that there are individuals capable of using 'logic', 'rationality' and valid assertions for a specific audience, to make it possible to share arguments and rules. The 'schism' in this case, on the other hand, like inquisitorialness, has a medieval, pre-scientific matrix, since it only recognizes what is already known, diluting the critical nature of human interactions in the name of the absolutism of certainty, as we have discussed<sup>21</sup>.

This *cisma* is expressed in the meanders of entering the field, as we discussed in the case of our ethnographies, but also in other ethnographic situations. Situations in which arguments mobilize the logic of contradiction, which are also wrapped in schismatic conceptions, gain strength in the conformation of a truth about a given theme or issue without recognizing the reasons of the interlocutor. It doesn't matter what other arguments are mobilized, what other data is provided in the course of the debate, because the opposing parties will be deeply rooted in their convictions, as in the case described in the field note at the beginning of the article.

These were some of the results we chose to illustrate our arguments, but we could point to dozens of other analyses, interpretations and theoretical and methodological contributions made by other colleagues who are part of the INCT-InEAC network based at the Fluminense Federal University.

Finally, it was possible to problematize that in Brazilian law and public safety there are huge barriers to dialogue with the knowledge produced by the empirical perspective because it is based on the scientific method, which produces knowledge through the construction of 'provisional consensus about facts' by peers, based on the authority of arguments (and continuous distrust of the facts and theories), which is not possible to develop under the logic of contradiction and schismatic rationality, supported by the argument of authority.

This lack of reflexive critical mass about the effects of judicial and police practices on society is the main reason why there is still denial about the inquisitorial and schismatic characteristics of the Brazilian process - which are implicit in federal legislation and explicit in judicial and police practices. The lack of reflection produces impediments, which to this day have not been overcome, to constrain or limit these practices by regulatory policies for the police and judiciary, as happens in other countries with the same traditions. Thus, Brazilian law does not create a reflective space for knowing and interpreting how it acts and, therefore, for a possible knowledge and theoretical interpretation of the effects that institutional legal - and police - practices effectively have on society (Kant de Lima 2019, 2023).

This epistemological obstacle, packaged in a communicative deficit, allows 'post-colonial' institutional, bureaucratic structures and organizations to remain responsible for the structure and functioning of the police and courts in our society, reproducing old prejudices from a slave society made up of segments with

<sup>21</sup> On the category of trust in different contexts, see Sampaio (2023).

unequal rights, which leads to the permanent criminal subjection (Misse 2022) of some of them, especially the Afro-descendant population and many of its religious practices, the main targets of this schismatic rationality.

A justice system like this operates unpredictably and without legal certainty, based on a pre-Weberian bureaucracy that does not arouse the confidence of either the market and its agents or of ordinary citizens. Furthermore, as the system also gives the courts a monopoly on jurisdiction, the number of cases that depend on the logic of contradiction, which encourages an endless number of appeals, is unmanageable, resulting in an equally significant number of unfinished cases and latent impunity.

As long as this legal-political context and the institutional practices that stem from it are not ethnographically and critically described and become recognized and made explicit as such by the legal field, no reform of the police, or of the judiciary itself, will be effective, because it will not act on what these institutions do driven by their traditional values and origins, real or imagined, but on what they doctrinally 'should be' doing. As DaMatta has already explained, traditions are mostly unconscious and can only change when they are made explicit, which can prompt reflection and, eventually, the conscious choice to change them (DaMatta 1987). Concluding with Clifford Geertz:

Looking into dragons, not domesticating or abominating them, nor drowning them in vats of theory, is what anthropology has been all about. [...] We have, with no little success, sought to keep the world off balance; pulling out rugs, upsetting tea tables, setting off firecrackers. It has been the office of others to reassure; ours to unsettle. Australopithecenes, Tricksters, Clicks, Megaliths—we hawk the anomalous, peddle the strange. Merchants of astonishment (Geertz 2000: 63-64).

'If we wanted home truths, we should have stayed at home' (Geertz 2000: 65).

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Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding:  
ethnographies with 'uncomfortable otherness'

# Grappling with complexity in research with the Military Police: The far-right and anthropology's civilizing mission

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## **Abstract:**

This text examines the challenges of carrying out fieldwork with the Military Police, an institution responsible for systematically targeting Rio de Janeiro's favela populations with extreme levels of racialized state violence. It discusses how anthropologists can describe police officers in ways that avoid the pitfalls of binary thinking: of reproducing a cosmology of war that assumes a strict division between good and evil and instead produce accounts that hold space for complexity and change, without assuming a moral relativist position.

**Keywords:** Brazil; Research ethics; Moralization; Perpetrators; Police violence.

# Abordando la complejidad en investigaciones con la Policía Militar: La extrema derecha y la misión civilizatoria de la antropología.

## **Resumen:**

Este texto examina los desafíos de conducir trabajo de campo con la Policía Militar, una institución que ha sometido a la población de las favelas de Rio de Janeiro a niveles extremos de violencia estatal racializada. Discute cómo antropólogos pueden escribir sobre la policía de una manera que evite caer en lógicas binarias: de reproducir una cosmología de guerra que asuma una división estricta entre el bien y el mal y en su lugar produce relatos que contemplan complejidad y transformaciones sin asumir una posición moral relativista.

**Palabras clave:** Brasil; Ética de investigación; Moralización; Perpetradores; Violencia policial.



# Grappling With Complexity in Research with the Military Police The Far-Right and Anthropology's Civilizing Mission

Tomas Salem

## Introduction

June 2015. ‘What can be harder than talking about Human Rights to the Soldiers from Alemão?’ The police officer at the front of the room smiles nervously. A few of the men laugh at his feeble attempt to lighten the mood with a joke. Do they find it funny or are they being polite? Their teacher measures every word: something about how important it is for the police to ‘demystify’ human rights. I’m in the meeting room at the Pacifying Police Unit (*Unidade da Policia Pacificadora*, UPP) of Adeus, one of four police stations established in the favelas of Complexo do Alemão—the frontline of Brazil’s war on drugs—to guarantee security concerns in Rio de Janeiro ahead of the 2016 Olympics. Building on earlier attempts to modernize and demilitarize Rio’s Military Police, the implementation of the first UPPs in January 2009 (during Lula’s presidency) were part of the attempt to position Brazil as a progressive global power. To the public, the UPPs were presented as a softer and more gentle police, responding to what was broadly perceived as an outdated, inefficient, and violent model of policing (Salem & Larkins 2021: 66).

The UPPs were the backbone of the *pacification project*. Established within many of Rio’s favelas, they aimed to reduce the level of armed violence in Rio de Janeiro. Scholars and police leaders also saw the project as a pacification of the police, seeking to bring police action in line with human rights and challenging representations of policing as a war against crime and drugs. This reform sought to create a modern and efficient police force fitting of a liberal democracy built around egalitarian principles. However, the project failed to achieve these goals and was discontinued in 2018. In 2015, at the time of research, the UPPs were in crisis. Everyday patrol activities reproduced highly militarized and war-oriented practices of policing while the institutional implementation of the human rights framework was resisted by the rank and file.

Throughout Brazil’s democratic period, the country has seen consistently high levels of violent deaths, with some of the world’s highest rates of police killings and victimization. Rio de Janeiro’s Military Police is paradigmatic in this regard and is often referred to as ‘the police that kills the most and dies the most’ by police and the city’s residents alike. On an institutional level, the human rights violations of Rio’s Military Police forces are thoroughly documented, and scholars drawing on postcolonial perspectives increasingly understanding police actions as central to a genocidal project towards Brazil’s black communities (see, e.g. Nascimento [1978] 2016; Cardoso 2018; Vargas 2023).

However, understanding the police officers that I accompanied during my time in Rio as ‘perpetrators’ and ‘active participants in state institutions and repressive organizations or informal associations and networks who carry out genocide, mass killings, or violent acts for the presumed greater good of the state, a people, or an ideology’ (Robben & Hinton 2023), glosses over complexities and divergences among men and women of a highly contested and heterogeneous police force. While some police officers had ‘killed in the hundreds’ (in the words of officers I spoke with) others were either invested in reforming the police, in a mission to serve and protect, or sought to remain removed from violent policing activities. I will discuss these differences in the following, but let me first return to Adeus to show some of the assumptions that underpinned far-right

worldviews. There, a group of patrol officers from the UPP at Alemão (where I did most of my fieldwork) were schooled in human rights by a colleague as part of the attempt to bring the UPP project 'back on track'.

Their teacher explains that he wants the police officers to understand the historical context in which the human rights emerged: 'In the Middle-Ages, society was regulated by strict moral rules,' he begins. People were afraid of offending God. But today, 'the fear of God has decreased, and we must protect society since the moral laws are no longer effective, and since there are also international laws that control the power of the states' [sic]. Human rights, he says, appeared in 1948, in a context where communism was on the rise. Religious people carried this codex with them already: they are foundational, natural rights that every person has.

'But who is relying on the human rights today,' he asks. 'The political left,' he says, noting the contradiction that 'human rights were not born as left-wing discourse.' on the contrary, they emerged as a reaction to communism and the Soviet Union, 'who didn't sign the treaty' he specifies: the countries that the Socialist Party (PSOL) supports! It's important that the officers understand that the problem is that for the left, *everything* has become a matter of human rights: 'The question of abortion, the right to do all kinds of *besteras* (bullshit)!' The police officers should know that human rights are not what the left claims them to be. Their interpretation of human rights is that the police are not allowed to do this or that, he says before concluding: 'We have to create our own discourse of human rights!'

The men in the room have long lost interest in what he is saying. They are chatting, joking, and showing no interest in redefining human rights. Some are probably tired after the week-long course in urban warfare tactics with the Special Forces that they have just attended. A few officers at the back of the room are sleeping, one of them is even snoring. The teacher sees that he is losing their attention and seems nervous. He provides them with an example: the tactical training they've just received is also about human rights! 'The state can't give a weapon to a person who has not been trained in the use of weapons.' He continues to say that implementing human rights means that the police must receive more tactical training so that they don't kill innocent people or harm their colleagues.

His voice is getting shrill: 'Human rights,' he says, 'have been politicized by the left to win votes. They have forced upon us their own interpretations and taken control over human rights!' 'Yes,' he adds, 'even our own—even among the Military Police there are Colonels who have been polluted by this discourse!' It seems like a bold rhetorical move to gain his students attention in an institution where critique is sanctioned and where officers who criticize the police or fail to comply with their superior's orders risk confinement or expulsion. 'Since we have been polluted by the ideological discourse of the left, we believe that the officer who defends human rights is the one who teaches music to kids—and that isn't the case. Instead, it's the *operational* (i.e. war-oriented) officer who guarantees human rights.' One of the men in the room objects, his voice is loud and angry: 'Why don't human rights count when police officers are killed?' The other officers agree: 'The police are not treated as human beings!'

## Studying the Military Police in a context of political polarization

In this text, I reflect on some of the dilemmas anthropologists, historically embedded in modernity's civilizational project and invested in the egalitarian ideal of 'speaking truth to power,' face when studying subjects that represent worldviews that are not just radically different from our own (liberal and progressive) but opposed to them, expressing conflicting normative orders such as liberalism and illiberalism (see Shoshan 2014). Recognizing how scientific production is always political and can sometimes contribute to polarization, I will discuss the potentials, pitfalls, and possibilities of carrying out ethnographic research in contexts where ethnographers are forced to take a political stance, usually by peers, sometimes to the point of openly condemning our research participants.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The positions I defend in this text are the result of a long-term collaboration with and discussions in the context of Luis Fernando Dias Duarte and Marco Martínez-Moreno's (2023) postgraduate course in cognitive anthropology at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro.

The police officers I met when I arrived in Rio in December 2014 were at the tail-end of a modernization process that started with the democratization of Brazil in 1985. This process gradually came to a halt as tensions over the country's future emerged, especially following the mass protests in 2013 and onwards. In the years that followed, political divisions between 'the left' and 'the right' were reified, with social and political tensions increasingly framed as a conflict between two opposing bands. From this polarization, a Brazilian far-right emerged, promising national redemption through a moral purification where 'the left' was increasingly framed as being elitist, corrupt, aligned with criminals, and pushing an agenda of sexual and gendered indecencies that threatened the traditional nuclear family. Meanwhile, on the left, right-wing voters were characterized as authoritarian, anti-democratic, and ignorant religious fanatics who support police and state violence. Gregory Bateson (1958) refers to this process of polarization as *schismogenesis*: A process whereby group identities are defined in opposition to each other. In such processes, right and left are less defined by internal criteria for group identity, and increasingly by that which the other is not (Duarte & Martinez-Moreno 2023).

Analytically, the notion of *cosmologies of war*—that is, different theories of the world that understand social dynamics, including political differences, as a battle between good and evil—is useful in accounting for the historical and emergent forces that have fueled the recent polarization in politics. In Brazil, we can trace such cosmologies to at least two genealogies. On the one hand, practices of 'colonial warfare' (e.g. practices of 'pacification') have consistently divided populations along racial divides, legitimized a national civilizing mission, and sustained predatory forms of human and material resource extraction. On the other hand, Cold-War-imaginaries of a 'cultural war' have contributed to notions of a battle between communists and conservatives, between democratic and authoritarian political projects, or between humanism and religion—recently invoked through the Pentecostal notion of 'spiritual warfare' (Salem 2024).

These cosmologies inform the Brazilian police's war on drugs. Like processes of militarization elsewhere, they have sharpened distinctions between us and them, friend and enemy, good and bad, white and black, civilized and savage. Importantly, they have given shape to a moral universe shared by the police and the Brazilian far-right structured around traditional family values, religion, respect for authority, anti-communism, and a conservative strongman-ideology (Salem & Bertelsen 2020; see Kobes du Mez 2020). The police's interpretation of human rights described in the introductory vignette must be understood in this light. It reflects the social dynamics that emerged at a moment of increasing polarization between those who adhere to a right-wing, conservative morality, and the defenders of a progressive political project that often uses the categories of race, sex, and gender (rather than class) as a tool to challenge specific power formations.

On the left, the progressive and 'woke' pursuit of a specific notion of 'social inclusion' that assumes the universality of the individual as the locus of politics, has increasingly been used to criticize and attribute responsibility to people who are perceived as unaware of how they (as individuals) contribute to the reproduction of structures and processes of exclusion (see Fraser 2019). While this shift in the base categories for political mobilization (and the emphasis on individual responsibility) defies traditional class-based politics and divisions between the right and the left, the political landscape continues to be defined in these terms, so that political projects organized around so-called 'identity politics' are typically understood as more egalitarian and left-leaning than those organized around conservative family values, gender norms, and ideas of national unity, which are increasingly referred to as different instantiations of 'the right' (far-right, alt-right, extreme-right, conservatives, authoritarian, etc.) (Duarte & Martinez-Moreno 2023).

However, the downplaying of class difference and individualization of responsibility, as well as the reliance on multiple categories of identification, has produced shifts in the traditional political landscape. On the one hand, it has led to an understanding of power-relations that is generally less straightforward than we usually conceive and often difficult to grasp through simple distinctions such as victim and offender; on the other, it has reconfigured moral hierarchies and -projects. The police officers that I studied could not be straightforwardly

located within such binaries. Most patrol officers came from low-income communities where violent crimes were commonplace. Many were black and experienced racial discrimination and exclusion. Few of them had any formal education beyond high school-level. Located at the bottom of a militarized institutional hierarchy, they were subject to a draconian disciplinary code of conduct and suffered different forms of abuse from their superiors. Set to patrol in areas with high levels of armed violence, many officers suffered mental health issues like those of soldiers in active warzones. But they also systematically participated in (well documented) unlawful practices, such as summary executions, torture of suspects, excessive use of force, sexual harassment and abuse, theft, and extortion—to name a few (see Salem 2024).

The difficulty of neatly locating officers within a victim-offender binary has important implications for the anthropological endeavor, which has (at least since decolonization) been concerned with representing the voice of 'the little man'; the suffering subject; or of siding with the underdog—largely due to the moral anxiety of anthropologists aware of how our discipline has been embedded in the colonizing projects of the West (see, e.g. J. Robbins 2013). The realization of how geopolitical inequalities have shaped the discipline and often paid lip-service to imperial powers has shaped concerns among anthropologists to be on the 'right' side of history and take a clear stance *against* structures of power—particularly those that are imposed through different forms of violence. Furthermore, it has transformed ethnographers into deeply moral subjects who are expected to assume a clear political stance in their analyses—potentially at the cost of analytic nuance (see e.g. Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco 2021).

Thus, in a complex reality where different categories of exclusion overlap, the imperative to make research explicitly political and side with the 'right' kind of disenfranchised can, despite its intention to challenge structures of power, reinforce them. Paradoxically, as anthropologists have tried to distance themselves from the Western, imperial, civilizational project, they have sometimes ended up creating new enemy images and new 'savage others' that need to be brought into the fold of progressive liberalism (Martinez-Moreno 2024). In a political context where science is 'under attack' and accused of being biased, making ethnographic production overtly political, for example by condemning research participants, might lead to a further polarization and reification of 'the other' as bad or evil on both sides of the political divide.

### The violence of 'respectable society'

Processes of militarization that adopt a war-rhetoric are especially prone to polarizing dynamics that leave little or no space for a middle ground: either you are with us or against us. War re-signifies meanings, changing our understanding of what is right and wrong (see Salem 2024). In *Bala Perdida* where several intellectuals discuss the problem of police violence in Brazil, Colonel Íbis Pereira (one of the reform-oriented leaders at the Military Police at the time of research) cites the French philosopher Frédéric Gros:

Belonging to a band of armed men is constituting. Being under the constant possibility of armed conflict presents itself as a mode of being. The everyday realities of war transform the human soul to stone, produces a kind of suffering capable of altering the framework of reference that banalizes the sense of morality, because it modifies the relation with death and, at the extreme, leads to excess and crime. In those circumstances, when it is possible to make [someone] suffer without condemnation, brutality imposes itself as an axiom. Here we have the manifestation of a terrible power: that of reifying both the victim and the butcher (Frederic Gros in Pereira 2015: 42. Translated from Portuguese)

A controversial news-story from 2010 comes to mind. It was a report on the Norwegian soldiers participating in the war in Afghanistan (2001-2021). The title was printed in bold and read **WAR IS BETTER THAN SEX**. Below, there was a picture of a Norwegian soldier looking through his gunsight. The soldiers in Afghanistan were quoted: 'Being in combat is worth the three months without getting laid. It might sound stupid, but it's

better than fucking [sic]. When you're on the battlefield, it's you or the enemy, and when you get 'red mist' in your sight... (indicating a mortal hit) It's indescribable. *That's why we're here* (my emphasis).

In Norway, the report has repercussions. A different newspaper prints an interview with a military psychologist: 'Norwegian soldiers aren't chosen for their lust for war. They are a group of fine young men who are willing to sacrifice their lives and health to change the world. But of course, they aren't beyond influence. War does something to people. It always has.' The journalist objected: 'But we like to think that Norwegian soldiers are more decent?' 'The common denominator is that they're all human beings. When we are subjected to hatred, grotesque acts, and injustice, we start questioning what's right and wrong in the world. Soldiers start looking for revenge and killing more than they need to. But they haven't been selected for being that way. We have sent out our best ambassadors. Sadly, a development like this is historically the rule rather than the exception.'

Clearly, when war is evoked, the dividing lines between liberal and illiberal state practices become blurry. The presence, actions, and statements of Norwegian soldiers in Afghanistan are a clear example of how liberal democracies legitimize imperialist warfare in the name of (national) security and challenge *a priori* assumptions that liberal democracies are less violent than illiberal states.<sup>2</sup> It is with this long history of Western imperialism in mind that Bruce Kapferer and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen (2009) argue that instead of assuming the moral superiority of liberal state formations, we should, as scholars, focus on how different state formations deploy and legitimize violence.

This position differs somewhat from Gros' position on the banalization of morality—what Hannah Arendt ([1963] 2006) described as a *total moral collapse*. In her reports on the trial of Eichmann following World War II, Arendt notes that the perpetrators of Holocaust did not have to silence their consciousness because they thought that they were doing good. After all, they counted on the support of *respectable society*. We observe something similar in the case of the Norwegian soldiers, who according to the military psychologist interviewed by the press have not been selected for their thirst for blood. Rather, Western states argued that they invaded Afghanistan to free the Afghans from Taliban and bring peace and democracy to the country.

Let's, for a moment, return to the opening vignette and see what conclusions we might draw from this case if we assume an analytical relativist position: if we suspend the passing of judgement during the research process as a tool to prevent ethnocentrism and to understand the social dynamics at play. First, we observe how the human rights lesson attended by the officers to modernize the police and adopt a liberal (albeit militarized) framework of policing was subverted even by those who were supposed to put it into practice. The officer who held the lesson had been given a difficult task: in Brazil the fight for human rights has generally been voiced by minoritarian groups and monopolized by the political left and is closely associated with the critique of military rule and of Military Police's actions in the favelas (see Eilbaum and Medeiros 2015).

Among police officers, this meant that appeals to human rights were usually interpreted as a defense of criminals and as part of the cultural war of the 'communist' left—a sentiment that is broadly shared by large segments of the Brazilian public (see Caldeira 2001). In a worldview where people were either friends or enemies, the defense of human rights was thus grouped together with other attributes of 'the left' and seen as part of a concerted attack on police authority by people classified as criminals, their alleged political supporters, and people ascribing to a communist ideology—seen as the root of all evil.

Thus, the emphasis on how human rights were a reaction to totalitarianism like that of the Soviet Union was an attempt to dissociate human rights from the left. For the liberal reader, it might be easy to disregard the instructor's idea of creating a 'police discourse' on human rights as nonsensical (since the purpose the human rights is to protect the individual against state violence and authoritarianism) but his suggestion brings the cosmological dimensions of the police reform to the fore. If we follow recent calls to take the 'illiberal

<sup>2</sup> Rather, like the sexual relations that are evoked, the relation between liberalism and its opposite is characterized by antagonisms but also by complementary: one needs the other to affirm its own identity.

other' seriously, we might even argue that the officer was leveraging a critique that has also been raised by anthropologists (see Asad 2000; Fassin 2011): that human rights have often used to promote political agendas through the universalization of Western liberal values.

The officers' rejection of human rights as a paradigm that they should relate to highlights a worldview that places them outside of, and in opposition to, liberalism structured around the rights-bearing individual (see Martinez-Moreno 2024). Their adherence to a different normative order was also brought to the fore in the affirmation that the police should protect a morally degraded society that has lost its fear of God, signaling how the cosmological order that the police adhere to is characterized by an emphasis on divine authority and the military as stewards of a national moral order (see Larkins and Durão 2022). Analyzed on these terms, the resistance towards human rights among police officers no longer appears as nonsensical but expresses the opposition between humanism and religion that characterizes authoritarian formations elsewhere (see Pasięka 2017): it expresses the tension and negotiation between different cosmological orders in the institutional attempts to modernize the police.

### The politics of moralization

The failure of the UPPs came at a moment of national political instability, with the *Lava Jato* corruption scandal garnering public attention.<sup>3</sup> The uncovering of widespread corruption across the political spectrum coincided with economic stagnation and increasing sensations of insecurity. Renewed calls for hard-handed security politics were accompanied by a moralization of politics. The political debate was increasingly structured around ideas of purity and pollution, of good and bad, corrupt, and clean—rather than political solutions. Police officers generally believed that democracy was farcical, and that the decadence of the political system mirrored societal decadence. As one officer expressed: '...an educated population, an intelligent population wouldn't accept the indecencies they are accepting, right?' According to this worldview, authoritarianism and military rule were perceived as necessary evils:

In the past, when we had a different police, there was respect. Today there's not, you know? The respect that we enjoyed in the past was through authority, often with truculence, but it was what had to be done. Today you've got the human rights that only defend the bandit, you know? They don't defend the good citizens, they go to jail to defend the rapist, not the family of the person who was raped. The inversion of values in our society is very big, you know? I see it more and more.

In national politics, the Pentecostals particularly thrived on this moralization, which drew on interpretations of Brazilian sociopolitical dynamics as a cultural and spiritual war between good and evil forces (see Kramer 2005; Vital da Cunha 2018). Scholars have noted how Pentecostalism reinstates a 'a dualism between good and evil in its wake,' dividing 'the world in two, allowing for no middle ground' (Mafra & de Paula 2002: 61 cited in Vital da Cunha 2018: 5; see also Pina Cabral 2007). In this context, war 'signifies the ever-present spiritual struggle of the church and its members with the devil and the forces of evil' (Kramer 2005: 106-109). Often, the police expressed such views in characterizations of the favelas as God-forsaken and hellish warzones and of favela youth as 'seeds of evil' (*semente do mal*).

Among Pentecostal police officers, Elizabete Albernaz (2015) has noted that the view of police truculence as a necessary evil could lead to unease and fear of giving into devilish temptations, leading to a corruption of their souls. Similarly, the officers I spoke to were often aware of the brutalizing effects of war on their psyche:

<sup>3</sup> In March 2014, months prior to the Presidential election that secured Dilma Rousseff's reelection, an investigation into a money laundering scheme at a car wash unveiled a larger corruption scheme at the federal level. Elected officials across the political spectrum were involved in the embezzlement of funds from state owned companies.

You know that you're going to a place where you can die, where there will be shooting, but you're not afraid anymore. [...] I've gotten used to it. I don't know if it's good, I don't know if it's bad, you know? But I think it's bad, because who would want to get used to that kind of life, right? Of you seeing a man being killed in front of you without feeling anything at all, but if it's one of your colleagues you despair, you want to save his life. [But] you feel no remorse when killing a *bandido* because the *bandido* wanted to kill you. You take someone's life and it doesn't matter, you know?

The violence of war was simultaneously perceived as futile (as soon as one 'bandit' was killed, another one appeared) and as purifying or redemptive. But there was also an awareness that police truculence was one of the main impediments to the effective assertion of police authority in the favelas since it pushed the population away. This was a concern among reformist leaders in the upper echelons of the institutional hierarchy but was also acknowledged among many patrol officers. Ambivalences towards police truculence, the state, and the war are telling of the complexity of police outlooks, and so are views on favela populations. In line with Pentecostal cosmology, officers believed that some criminals could be 'reformed' through conversions to faith but seeing human existence as a spiritual battle could also strengthen antagonisms, with police officers distancing themselves from the people they were supposed to protect (Albernaz 2015: 531).

### The police and the far-right

The worldview of military police officers both shaped and was shaped by the far-right movement that brought Bolsonaro to power. Within the police as well as within this movement, Brazil was perceived as being mired in a crisis of values: a cultural war where politics were imbued with moral concerns and where leftists and, by association, intellectual elites, critical journalists, feminists, and gays were seen as enemies (Solano 2020: 216). The polarizing logic of war and its easy ordering of the world along the categories of friends and enemies, good and evil, resonated among the militarized subjectivities and churchgoers who supported Bolsonaro.

In the aftermath of his presidency, academics have tried to understand how a far-right politician and outspoken defender of the military dictatorship could gain so much support among Brazilian voters. Political philosopher Marcos Nobre (2020) warns that calling Bolsonaro as stupid or crazy immediately shuts down the possibility of understanding the political crisis that brought him to power. He argues that Bolsonaro's presidency must be understood as a war against the democratic system and his government, as a government of war, permeated by a military logic (see also Durão 2020). This militarization of government cast politics as a battle of the Brazilian people against the 'red communists' on the left—seen as 'enemies' alongside *viados* (faggots), *corruptos* (the corrupted), and the broad and vague category of *bandidos* (bandits).

Thus, Bolsonaro rhetorically constructed his Presidency as a civilizational battle that sought to 'rescue' the nation from moral and spiritual corruption. His understanding of politics and the state rejects any notion of a common good or social contract. In classic liberalism, the underpinning idea is that the negotiation of values through the political system will benefit society at large, that it is possible to conceive of a common good, and that liberal democracy and the rule of law are the basic tools through which the common good is realized. Bolsonaro however, framed politics as a process whereby the will of one group—the true Brazilian people—is imposed on the rest (Feltran 2020). In this conception of politics as warfare, this 'rest' needs either to submit to the will of the people, abandon the country, or face 'elimination' by the police. In this sense, Bolsonaro's understanding of the state is rooted in a dialectic conflict—much like that of Marxist philosophy.

Similarly, anthropologists have problematized the bias that results when we refrain from studying the subjects that are often referred to as fundamentalist, authoritarian, or fascist—the 'repugnant others' according to Susan Harding (1991). Harding shows how, in these cases, social scientists tend to retreat into binary thinking, where the non-modern other is associated with religion, magic thinking,

and backwardness, while the modern us is attributed with rationality and civility. Such understandings inevitably create 'the other' as an object of intervention: as someone who must be educated, reformed, tamed or pacified—sometimes through the recourse to military power. In contrast, anthropologists studying far-right subjectivities have advocated the need to take this 'other' seriously, rather than disregarding them as irrational and easily manipulated (Pasieka 2017).

### Understanding is not acceptance

Approaching the cultural meanings and social practices that informs the exercise of police authority in Rio and the conservative backlash in Brazil through the notion of different but entangled cosmologies of war avoids the discussion of whether Rio's police forces are at war according to conventional criteria of warfare (see Grillo 2019). Instead, it takes war as a cognitive framework or cosmological force that shapes Brazilian social relations, subjectivities, landscapes, economies, and politics. Acknowledging the longstanding configuration of policing as warfare against racialized territories and populations in Brazil, allows us to unpack the moral universe and cosmological order that is produced through the police's war on drugs and to understand how the conflation of policing and warfare shapes the relation between police and the policed, as well as perceptions of good and evil, right and wrong, or friend and enemy.

Challenging the polarizing dynamics of warfare requires anthropologists to bring nuance and complexity to descriptions of people that are sometimes represented as unidimensional perpetrators and savage others. This produces a permanent tension between analytical attempts to understand and explain the rationalities that inform the practices and values of the police officers I studied with, and a political intention to critique and unveil the police's role and responsibility in reproducing dynamics of violence. Inevitably, my own biases and political views informs the ways in which I characterize my research participants and the situations and themes I focus on. Some might think that my moral judgements get in the way of an incisive analysis while others will argue that attempts to understand or humanize police officers who glorify killing or in extreme cases have 'killed in the dozens' (as some of them have) is not a legitimate academic endeavor (see e.g. Alves 2021). But police officers *are* human. When they commit morally deplorable acts, they are expressing a human potential that anthropologists should be careful to reserve to the 'savage other'—even as we acknowledge that human behavior that diverges from our own notions of right and wrong cannot be reduced to cultural difference.

Cognitive empathy, 'the degree to which the researcher came to understand those observed close to how they understand themselves' or the success of research in capturing the native point of view has been suggested as a general criterion for evaluating the quality of qualitative research (Small & Calcaro 2022: 20). Similarly, affective empathy or the capacity to sense a person's emotions and feelings without identifying or merging with the other can further our understanding of political violence (Robben & Hinton 2023). Neither cognitive nor affective empathy requires compassion with our research participants—we do not need to agree or accept in order to understand reasoning and emotions. Furthermore, heterogeneity, or the extent to which people and places are represented as diverse, and self-awareness as 'the extent to which the researcher understands the impact of their presence and assumptions on those interviewed and observed' are also signs of quality in quantitative research (Small & Calcaro 2022: 21). Good ethnographic research then, is not a matter of 'striking the right balance' between analysis and activism but rather to hone quality, even as we acknowledge that our research is always political. This is especially important in situations where we study people whom we hold in disregard. In such instances, social analysis is usually improved when we cultivate cognitive and affective empathy; when we describe our research participants as complex human beings; and when we cultivate self-awareness regarding our own political assumptions as well the impact of our writing.



Studying persons who mainly ascribe to a political ideology that is interchangeably described through concepts such as illiberalism, right-wing populism, the far-right, or fascism made me aware of how both mine and their worldview was shaped by different but entangled *cosmologies of war* that often render us blind to the grey-areas; the darkness within the light; or the light within the darkness. This militarization of the mind polarizes positions and forces us to 'pick a side' or 'write against' in ways that are often anti-ethical to the ethnographic endeavor of understanding. Humanization—the portrayal of the men and women working in the Military Police as human beings concerned with issues of justice, of right and wrong, of good and bad, and of existential meaning—is necessary if we want to develop efficient political strategies that can strengthen our democracies (see Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco 2021), but it is also a truer reflection of the complexities of the human experience, moral or otherwise.

To illustrate these complexities, I want to describe my encounter with Sargent Evandro who worked as shift leader at one of the UPP. Evandro was black and from Northeastern Brazil. Growing up, his father had held a high-ranking position in the Navy, and Evandro's family had therefore lived in a middle-class, mostly white neighborhood, where Evandro had felt as the odd duckling. His classmates lived comfortable lives, vacationing abroad, travelling to Disneyland, and enjoying racial privileges that were not accessible to Evandro and his family. His mother had often reminded him that they were living 'beyond their means' and had a particular responsibility in showing to the world that 'not all black people are thieves'. In conversations, Evandro described a childhood colored by racial prejudice and discrimination—also in encounters with the police.

As Evandro grew older, he developed a strong sense of justice. He joined the police because he wanted to contribute to a better world and fight for a good cause. Once admitted in Rio's Military Forces, he signed up for the demanding tests for the police's special forces, since that was where the action was. He viewed the special forces as doing *real* police work, fighting against Rio's criminals and evil forces. Evandro described the years he served in the special forces as exhilarating and action-packed. Sometimes, his squad would patrol the streets looking for action. Shootouts were terrifying and adrenaline-infused adventures in Evandro's accounts. He described the excitement felt by him and his colleagues when the UPP-project commenced and they were finally able to confront the drug-traffickers directly, as well as the feeling of satisfaction it gave him to see the neighbors from the favela he patrolled get a taste of the 'pleasures of the good life' as they no longer had to live under the thumb of criminals (see Salem 2024).

While Evandro was aware of the shadow of policing—of the business deals between police officers and criminals, and between high-ranking officers and elected politicians—he held on to the belief that the work he did also served a higher good. He took pride in moments when the police had acted with integrity, resisting temptations and attempts at being bribed. He disliked many of the institutionalized practices of 'corruption' but approached these with pragmatism, as something that he had to silently accept and was powerless to challenge. Like many of his colleagues, he experienced the world of policing as a sometimes-treacherous place that left low-ranking officers little space to manoeuvre.

Occasionally, I have been asked to condemn the police. This has raised dilemmas. In a political climate of anti-intellectual sentiments, I fear that such condemnation might further distance ethnographers from the people we study with and politicize science. It might also be experienced as patronizing by a readership who should be able to make their own moral judgements. Furthermore, condemning the officers from my privileged position, enjoying the safety and comforts of life in Europe is easy and allows me to feel morally righteous, but rarely sways political opponents. Taking others seriously, understanding why they think and act the way they do, desisting from positioning them within a simplistic good and evil dichotomy, and acknowledging that many of them navigate complex moral dilemmas of their own does not foreclose political action. It is a prerequisite if we want to undo the cosmologies of war that political violence relies on.

## The pitfalls of ethnographic seduction

On my last visit to the UPP at Alemão before leaving Rio, several of the officers who had helped me during my fieldwork approached me and wished me a good journey home. One of the men, a Sergeant and seasoned officer, asked me to forgive his colleagues: if anybody had treated me badly it was only because they hadn't gotten a chance to know me well. Another officer nodded in agreement: at the base, everybody liked me due to my friendly demeanor. I felt the same, perceiving him as a sensitive man who always greeted me with a smile. During one of our interviews, whilst recalling the racism he had suffered through his life, he had been vulnerable and even shed tears. I had bought a cutting board and barbecue-knife for the officers at the UPP, as a token of gratitude for the many barbecues they had invited me to over the last months. The Sub-Lieutenant at the base had ordered a uniform shirt with 'Professor Tomás' embroidered on the chest. When the officers saw the shirt, they scrambled through their pockets for their uniform tags: one read *UPP Alemão*, another one *Choque* (the insignia of the riot police), and one was a tag that the officers had designed themselves. It showed a skull with the text *God will judge, let's organize the trial*.

At one point during my fieldwork, catching a ride in a patrol vehicle with two officers whom I did not know, one of them asked me: 'What will you write about us? Will you write good things?' I was surprised by his question, and immediately felt nervous. I didn't want to lie. The other officer came to my aid: 'He will write the truth!' To some, 'the truth' is easy to discern: good and evil—right and wrong. Most ethnographers find, once in the field, that reality is usually complex. Through my fieldwork, I gained a strange sense of empathy for a group of people that I disliked when I arrived, even while being aware of the violence that many of them were perpetrating in the favelas. At moments, I also felt sympathy and compassion for some of them. To me, these feelings signal the limits and pitfalls of empathy. Robben and Hinton (2023) would claim that I experienced *ethnographic seduction*. I do not share some police officers' view that they are powerless pawns, victims of a system that robs them of their agency and responsibility. But there were moments when the difference between understanding how they see reality and accepting it as a valid point of view was blurred. The challenge, it seems, is being able to both step in but also step out of their shoes.

This implies staying with the trouble: neither assuming quick fixes to the cosmological divides that I have described here and elsewhere, nor adopting the cynical assumption that these can never be resolved (Haraway 2016). It implies dwelling in contradiction and ambiguity, asking why people choose to support authoritarianism despite the existence of democratic alternatives and why they still see war and violence as a solution to their problems, even as their lives are destroyed by the perpetuation of violence. These are hard questions that need to be addressed through incisive analysis rather than condemnation. Hopefully, by offering others a look into the world of the police officers, I have contributed to furthering the same understanding of the cosmologies of war that feed far-right projects that I have attained. And hopefully, I have also shown that the world of warfare that emerged at the UPPs in Rio's favelas challenges the fantasy that democratic peace can be imposed through violence.

## Conclusion

In this text I have argued that condemnation potentially shuts down dialogue and reifies positions. As the divide between us and the other grows, this process of polarization produces an image of the other as absolute evil, while the 'us' we create in opposition is increasingly imagined as good, righteous, and pure. Anthropological research that assumes a strict division between good and evil can be analytically lazy, produce ethnocentric and reifying accounts, and leave little room for nuance and complexity—the hallmarks of ethnography. The feeling of righteousness that comes from defining ourselves in opposition to an evil other can make us blind to our own darkness or flaws. While it is true that all knowledge is political, activist anthropology that does not account for

divergent points of view might further undermine the status of scientific knowledge production in a polarized political context. Perhaps we should strive to write in a way that makes it possible for different kinds of readers to recognize themselves in our texts. Analytically, this is a so-called no-brainer: social analysis is improved when we hold space for complexity. Politically, this strategy can be controversial, but also a path forward that narrows the gap between us and the other. This has, after all, been the humanizing project of anthropology.

Ethnography has historically been a way of understanding ourselves by looking at others. Avoiding the pitfalls of a moralizing or woke ethnography can ideally make us more attuned to contradictions in our own understandings of right and wrong and to our own potential for violence and de-humanization of others. My own political position is largely shaped by leftist and anarchist perspectives, and this shines through in my writing. I have only partially been able to follow the suggestions put forth in this text. My research is clearly biased and often explicitly political. Sometimes this informs descriptions of the police that are perhaps excessively shaped by my own values. I have tried to adopt a reflexive approach to the ambiguities of my field; I have tried to depict the police officers as complex human beings; and I have tried to make my own thoughts and feelings explicit—both the feelings of contempt I felt at the start of my fieldwork, as well as the desensitization to cruelty that I experienced towards the end, which in the extreme can enable violence. Avoiding the pitfalls of moral relativism as well as ethnocentrism is especially difficult when carrying out research in contexts of war but perhaps it is exactly in these contexts that ethnographic nuance is most important.

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Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding:  
ethnographies with ‘uncomfortable otherness’

# The ambiguous other. Engaging with far right and other uncomfortable subjectivities

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## **Abstract:**

This article explores anthropological hesitation in engaging with “abject” or otherwise “uncomfortable” subjectivities, identifying some of the main concerns and challenges behind it. In doing so, the discussion focuses on far-right subjectivities and on the reasons behind the relative lack of ethnographic studies thereof. Among other things, it is argued that the far-right other does not fit current anthropological orthodoxy in terms of ethnographic approach and therefore represents a kind of ambiguous alterity that poses ethical and methodological challenges for anthropologists. The discussion then brings to light some of the tensions and dilemmas inherent in anthropological approaches to uncomfortable alterities. The article concludes by highlighting what may be at stake for anthropology when excluding certain subjects of research, suggesting instead that their study offers opportunities to expand anthropological horizons of knowledge production, increasing the discipline’s relevance for understanding and analysing complex and troubling contemporary social phenomena.

**Keywords:** Ethnography; Uncomfortable alterities; The far right; Politics; Brazil

# El otro ambiguo. Abordando la extrema derecha y otras alteridades incómodas desde la antropología.

## **Resumen:**

Este artículo explora la vacilación antropológica a la hora de abordar subjetividades “abyectas” o “incómodas”, identificando algunas de las principales preocupaciones y desafíos que se esconden detrás de ella. Al hacerlo, la discusión se centra en las subjetividades de extrema derecha y en las razones que se esconden detrás de la relativa falta de estudios etnográficos al respecto. Entre otras cosas, se sostiene que el otro de extrema derecha no encaja en la ortodoxia antropológica actual en términos de enfoque etnográfico y, por lo tanto, representa una especie de alteridad ambigua que plantea desafíos éticos y metodológicos para los antropólogos. Luego, la discusión saca a la luz algunas de las tensiones y dilemas inherentes a los enfoques antropológicos de las alteridades incómodas. El artículo concluye destacando lo que puede estar en juego para la antropología al excluir ciertos sujetos de investigación, sugiriendo en cambio que su estudio ofrece oportunidades para expandir los horizontes antropológicos de producción de conocimiento, aumentando la relevancia de la disciplina para comprender y analizar fenómenos sociales contemporáneos complejos y problemáticos.

**Palabras claves:** Etnografía; Alteridades incómodas; Extrema derecha; Política; Brasil

# The ambiguous other. Engaging with far right and other uncomfortable subjectivities

*Katerina Hatzikidi*

## **Introduction**

What are we grappling with when we speak of uncomfortable alterities? Are we referring to those anecdotes of awkward situations ethnographies are rife with? Like those serendipitous moments when a gaffe or blunder the ethnographer embarrassingly commits offers an unexpected and oftentimes eye-opening discovery about the people one studies? Are we, in other words, alluding to discomfort, to some degree amusing and productive, that may result from living close to or with the Other? Hardly so. Discussion of uncomfortable alterities in recent anthropological writing points to a very different kind of discomfort, one that is often crippling, proscriptive, and ultimately rules out the very ethnographic undertaking.

Alterities produced by far-right, neo-Nazi, and fascist sympathizers, jihadists, femicide perpetrators, child molesters, and other subjects that personify, for most, abject moralities and violent socialities, sit uncomfortably with ideas of conviviality and acceptance in difference, as well as with ethnographic principles of proximity, contextualisation, and understanding of both individual trajectories and of broader structural, conjunctural, and historical circumstances. Such abject or negative subjectivities rarely become the focus of ethnographic research. From one perspective, it would seem that the least moral ground the anthropologist shares with an Other, the least likely it is for research to ever take place.

While it is understandable that this is so—after all, why would one choose to conduct fieldwork with people they do not like or, worse even, cannot stand?—I want in this article to delve into the inclination to shun specific kinds of subjectivities and to tease out some of the most salient reasons anthropologists hesitate to study (their) uncomfortable others, discussing what may be at stake in failing to engage with abject alterities. The discussion will dwell on far-right subjectivities and the challenges they may bring to anthropologists as subject of research. In doing so, I wish to sketch out what is commonly seen as a problem and suggest that although fieldwork with ‘uncomfortable alterities’ may be harsh and thorny, overcoming reluctance and actively engaging with such alterities in anthropological research is an essential way forward.

The article is comprised of three main sections. In the first, I identify some of the key issues that emerge in anthropological approaches to uncomfortable alterities and discuss the importance of returning to fieldwork and move beyond current impediments. In the second section, I specifically explore the relative lack of ethnographic studies of the far right and point to some of the reasons this may be so. In the third section, I show how the far-right other does not fit current anthropological orthodoxy in terms of ethnographic approach and therefore represents a kind of ambiguous alterity that is particularly hard to grapple with, posing ethical and methodological challenges for ethnographers. By drawing on a seminal ethnographic example of Bolsonarismo, I will reflect on some of the tensions and dilemmas inherent in anthropological approaches to uncomfortable alterities. I will conclude with some reflections on the value of overcoming such impediments for the expansion of the horizons of our disciplinary knowledge production.

In line with the proposition made by this Special Issue’s organizers, I suggest that instead of halting field research, discomfort can be a productive starting point for opening up the field of phenomena and issues anthropologists study, offering new opportunities for understanding the social, political, and ethical other



and hence enrich the potential of anthropology to offer valuable insights into contemporary society and pressing complex issues. In this sense, this article also contributes to ongoing debates on broadening the field of anthropological research to include subjectivities commonly neglected (see, e.g., the Special Issue organised by Lene Faust & Simone Pfeifer, 2021).

### **Anthropology and the study of uncomfortable alterities**

Discussion of alterity and identity, subjectivity, othering, the self and the beyond-self or other-than-self, is so vast and constitutive of anthropological theory that it would be futile to even attempt a brief sketch here as a way of introducing the theme of ‘alterity’ and, consequently, that of ‘uncomfortable alterity’. It probably suffices to note that both field research, the discipline’s emblematic pursuit, and ethnographic writing are profoundly shaped by the relation between the anthropological self and the other it studies. Such relations are often informed by ideas of mutual constitution, fluidity, and transformation, as well as translation and interpretation, that ultimately enlighten our own understanding of ourselves, in the field and beyond. ‘Without the ‘other’ – be it your mother, spouse, child, neighbour, colleague, disciplinary forbear, or indeed Cuban *santero*, Minhoto motorcyclist, Achuar shaman or Brazilian novelist – the world remains opaque, as does your own sense of self’, as Stephan Palmié (2022: 82) eclectically put it. Whatever the situated (conjunctural and ephemeral) nature of a given relation with alterity is, it is commonly understood that anthropology is first and foremost about constructing, comprehending, documenting, and narrating the nitty-gritty of that experience.

Yet not all alterities are created equal, as it were, with some sparking far less interest in being explored and comprehended. Uncomfortable alterities, that is, alterities that do not sit comfortably with anthropological orthodoxy with regards to who and what can be a subject worth researching (I will return to this point shortly), do not only attract little ethnographic attention but even when they do, they are often met with discomfort when presented among peers. Marco Julián Martínez-Moreno, for example, shared in a recent text (Martínez-Moreno 2022) his reflexive scrutiny about his relationships with his interlocutors in the field, the majority accused of intrafamily violence, and the unease many of his colleagues expressed when he was presenting his research.

Agnieszka Pasieka similarly relates an outburst of questions, addressed by her academic colleagues, about what they generally perceived as her daring field research with far-right citizens. In these questions, Pasieka’s colleagues emphasized the presumed tension, or incompatibility, between her (and, by extension, a broader anthropological ‘us’) and ‘them’, the ‘deplorable’ others (2019: 3). Pasieka observes how the insistence of referring to her interlocutors as ‘them’ in those questions (e.g., ‘How did you talk to *them*?’) ‘conveys an absolute, repulsive otherness which no one would purportedly wish to engage with’ (ibid). The suggestion often was, says Pasieka, that getting close and talking to ‘them’ would be ‘so repugnant and condemnable that [it] would simply preclude any fieldwork encounter’ (ibid).

My own experience echoes Pasieka’s and Martínez-Moreno’s reflections. In my ongoing research project, I set out to study the context of the 2022 presidential election in Brazil, and specifically explore the contestations of the electoral result by a segment of the population. To do so, I conducted field research among Bolsonaro supporters who considered Lula’s victory to have been fraudulent and, therefore, illegitimate. I was based in the city of Rio de Janeiro, from January to November 2023, but I also spoke with people from across the state and the country. When I was initiating my fieldwork, I was scrambling for interlocutors. My previous long-term field research was conducted among quilombolas in Amazonian Maranhão (Hatzikidi 2018, 2021), a far cry from urban Rio de Janeiro and the research project I was embarking on. I reached out to friends and colleagues in Rio hoping they could introduce me to someone they knew and who would be willing to talk to me about how they had experienced recent political events. The reaction I most commonly encountered among my peers was one of surprise and slight discomfort, often followed by a friendly nudge in reconsidering my research topic.

'I cut ties with any Bolsonaroista I knew', was a recurrent confession, a painful decision often taken after many conflictive Sunday family gatherings or militant social media activity that just couldn't be tolerated or ignored anymore. Others had more frontal reactions. 'Why the hell would you want to talk to these people? No one can talk to them, they are from another planet', a colleague, upset that this, among a million other, was my research topic told me. Although I understood and empathised with those who were dealing with delicate affective relations, often striving to maintain a fragile communication with loved ones by avoiding any mention of politics, I was also baffled. Yes, this was an informal *botequim* chat, but wouldn't one expect a different, less essentialist, take from an anthropologist? What was so obnoxious about the idea of field research with 'the most extreme' of Bolsonaroistas? Why was the very possibility of meaningful interaction with 'them' precluded? Wasn't my colleague's irritation at least partly indicating that such research shouldn't be taking place at all? And while one should be able to feel, at a personal level, any way they like about others and political subjectivities they object to, when did such intransigence become an acceptable professional/disciplinary stance?

Such reactions from peers should come as a surprise considering anthropology's historical construction as a discipline that sets to study the other; any other. Or is it only a specific kind of other? My argument in this article is that our discipline's commitment, since at least the 1970s, to the model of anthropologist-citizen, who embraces<sup>1</sup> the cause(s) and ideas of the people they study and publicly defends them, not only excludes many from becoming the subject of anthropological research but also compromises, questions, and ultimately rebukes those anthropologists who study such abject others. More than thinking about the ethical and methodological challenges 'highly contested research fields' (Faust & Pfeifer 2021) present (I will return to these later), I am here concerned with processes of othering that ultimately render fieldwork unattainable and limit the possibilities for research with specific alterities. My aim here then is to explore the moral imperatives that underpin a broad anthropological consensus on what can constitute a worthy research subject in the first place and argue in favour of widening the spectrum of anthropological research to include 'the ambiguities and affordances that characterize *all* social life and praxis' (Goodale 2021: 198; italics in the original).

As Susan Harding had suggested in her seminal article on the 'repugnant cultural other', it appears that 'antiorientalizing tools of cultural criticism are better suited for some 'others'' (Harding 1991: 375) and not for those anthropologists often find uncomfortable to be around. Some scholars have suggested that a reason this may be so is that not all others are taken equally seriously. And since they cannot be taken seriously, they 'can only be denounced' (Dullo 2016: 138). While I broadly agree with this argument, in the case of far-right alterities the relative lack of anthropological studies does not primarily spring from anthropologists *not* taking them seriously, but, on the contrary, from taking them *too* seriously and perceive them as a political, social, and even existential threat that does not deserve ethnographic attention.

Hence, the way many anthropologists have found to engage with such uncomfortable alterities is to 'speak from the wound': to leave ethnographic analysis aside and engage in an impassioned, accusatory, and usually one-sided and therefore distanced, interpretation of the danger the other presents. With noteworthy exceptions (see, e.g., Kalil 2018; Cesarino 2020; Dullo 2021 and the works by Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco 2020, 2021; I discuss below), most anthropologists enter the political debate on Bolsonaroismo as stakeholders, missing entirely the chance to elucidate the other's point of view and reducing their interventions to advocacy and denunciation. They often speak of the other without getting anywhere near them, reflecting only on impressions built upon fragments of a collapsed conviviality. Beautiful and poignant diatribes are then more accurately read as opinion essays with little empirical relevance rather than anthropological writing offering grounded insights. While the political can be personal, and it is justified to express shock and sorrow over the

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Teitelbaum (2019) recently turned this professional code of ethics on its head making the case for an 'immoral anthropology', which maintains the 'scholar-informant solidarity' even when there is a major conflict between their ideas. I am here suggesting a break away from either sides of this paradigm.

rise of a complex and prickly social and political phenomenon that to many appeared ‘meteoric’ (see Hatzikidi 2022), anthropological analysis loses in depth and applicability when it is detached from careful ethnographic research conducted with the very subjects we wish to talk about.

While the phenomenon commonly described as *Bolsonarismo* has received remarkable attention from social scientists, including anthropologists, many analyses are so distant from the realities and the people they purport to unpack that they fail to see them in their own terms, primarily inscribing, for example, negative affective relationships –like resentment or fear– where an overwhelmingly positive spirit –‘hope for a better future’, ‘love for the country’, in their own words– motivated people to rally support for an unlikely presidential candidate.<sup>2</sup> And if by now it is commonplace to problematise the alleged uniformity of *Bolsonaristas* and concede that they too are a complex and diverse group like any other, their composition is still not readily qualified as equally dynamic as that of other political groups, with a tendency to see in ‘them’ a bounded alterity, fanatically upholding a political project thriving on hate and destruction. Partly due to this perspective, much academic writing post-2018 on the topic reads like a painfully personal testimony of ‘what happened’ and ‘how it was experienced’; an account to be shared with the world of the sheer perplexity of living in the aftermath of a social earthquake that left many wondering how it happened in the first place and how peace (or, perhaps simply, the ‘liberal settlement’—see Mazzarella 2019: 48) can be restored, without however being able to move in any significant way away from the personal, or the selectively collective, experience and reach out to the uncomfortable other.

My proposition is that a more productive way to approach such phenomena is to leave the shelter of our ruminations from afar and turn to the uncomfortable other via ethnography: get close to ‘them’, get to know ‘them’, and try to see things from ‘their’ own perspective. To return to Harding, this time from a recent essay, ‘[anthropologists] need to keep at bay the liberal desire to restore ‘order’ and a sense of normalcy that specifically engenders an ‘imperial disregard’ for [democracy’s] right-wing-by-products’ (Harding 2021: 4). We would then be better positioned to speak about these people’s lifeworlds, their claims, their grievances, and, as anthropologist citizens, propose different forms of, to put it in Laclauian terms, satisfying their demands, forms that would come from a different position in the left-right spectrum.

### **Why are there not enough anthropological studies of the far-right?**

As studies of different uncomfortable alterities, such as neo-nationalist and right-wing extremist others, have sprouted in the last decade or so (see, e.g., Gingrich & Banks 2006, Shoshan 2016, Bangstad *et al.* 2017; Loperfido 2021, Saglam 2021), anthropologists have enquired into the apparent scarcity of ethnographies on the unpleasant other. Nitzan Shoshan (2015) takes a closer look at the arguments usually put forward as explanations and refutes them one by one. Specifically, he demonstrates that the relevant scarcity cannot be exclusively conceived of as the result of concerns about anthropologists’ safety and physical integrity as anthropologists put themselves into dangerous or otherwise risky situations all too frequently. Neither can it be considered a result of methodological concerns, since suspicion and mistrust are not exclusive to ‘uncomfortable’ interlocutors, nor is gaining access and trust an insurmountable problem in other contexts. Also, even for those who consider such political phenomena to be too marginal, aberrant, or socially insignificant (a decade ago) to worth an in-depth study, Shoshan reminds us that such rationale doesn’t seem to deter anthropologists working on different kinds of aberrant or unusual topics. What then, he asks, can explain the scarcity of said ethnographies?

Is it the fear of ‘contamination’ that comes from close proximity, as Gingrich and Banks suggest when they speak of ‘moral hygiene’ (Gingrich & Banks 2006: 7) in explaining why anthropologists do not wish to conduct

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the populist promise’s entanglements of hope and future aspirations, see Chamorro (2023).

fieldwork with neo-nationalists? Or has it to do with anthropology's preference for emic concepts and the fact that virtually no-one identifies as a right-wing extremist or far-right enthusiast?

Shoshan's answer points at a different direction, namely at restrictions and expectations, both from inside the discipline as well as from outside. 'As anthropologists', he explains, 'if our interest in such topics [politics proper; unpleasant or repugnant faces of human history] is tolerated at all, we are usually expected to apply our ethnographic methods to those who are perceived –and whom we represent as– victims, as inhabitants of the position of the oppressed, the persecuted, or the subaltern' (Shoshan 2015: 155; *my translation*). This insight directly dialogues with the argument put forward by Joel Robbins in his seminal essay on the 'suffering slot', namely that anthropology has, since at least the 1990s, 'chang[ed] its relation to those it studied from one of analytic distance and critical comparison focused on difference to one of empathic connection and moral witnessing based on human unity' (Robbins 2013: 453). This realignment of disciplinary orientation not only did it give anthropologists a new foundation away from their 'savage other' past, but it also profoundly influenced the kinds of topics and subjects they are expected to research, as well as their own horizon of interests.

Drawing on the insights above, I argue that two main constellations of subjects worth researching emerged in the new configuration of anthropological orthodoxy: the 'sympathetic other' and the 'radical other'. The two tentative categories are not mutually exclusive but may overlap, that is, the sympathetic other can also (but not necessarily) be a radical other and vice versa. Largely corresponding to Robbins's suffering subject, the sympathetic other is one anthropologists approach from the perspective of shared humanity, recognising a fundamental affinity despite the many differences that may exist between ethnographer and subject of research. The radical other, on the other hand, is one who inhabits a universe so distinct from 'our' own that is barely accessible. Despite Robbins's suggestion that with the shift from the 'savage slot' to the 'suffering slot', anthropology dispensed with the other altogether, the exotic other found its place in the orthodox anthropological repertoire in the form of radical alterity. Most emblematically expressed in the Ontological turn, studies of the radical other not only maintained the centrality of alterity for anthropology but also, as Chua and Mathur observe, a strong, if implicit, contrast between a 'fundamentally Western' anthropological 'we' and a usually non-Western other, which offers 'the concomitant opportunity for collective self-castigation and redemption' (Chua & Mathur 2018: 8).

Both the radical and the sympathetic other (and their possible fusions) are predicated upon a particular moral approach to alterity, one that allows the anthropologist to either translate an otherwise unintelligible and inaccessible universe or elucidate points of affinity and compassion with a wide diversity of (often grim or austere) human conditions. Seen in this light, what has been described so far as uncomfortable alterity does not sit comfortably with either of the two subject categories. Thinking specifically of the far-right other, their alterity is neither sympathetic nor radical. As I will discuss in the next section, it is precisely the *ambiguity* of this alterity, the fact that 'they' are neither radical (in the sense of an irreducible or 'ontological' alterity) nor sympathetic others, that poses the ethical and methodological challenges for anthropologists mentioned above.

One important way the far-right other (in the case of Bolsonarismo, a loose category that stretches from moral and religious conservatism to anti-Communism and militarism) does not fit the sympathetic slot is that they are not usually interpellated by 'grammars of suffering' (Moutinho, Buarque de Almeida & Simões 2020). This does not only *not* make them a likely sympathetic subject to 'us', ethnographers, but offers little common ground for an anthropology searching for a/the suffering subject. For example, in a study conducted by Laura Moutinho, Heloisa Buarque de Almeida, and Júlio Assis Simões with progressive and feminist groups of women, alongside women who identify as politically conservative, the authors observe that 'those who present themselves as conservative women from the right do not use narratives marked by suffering and a sense of vulnerability. [...] Most of the narratives presented do not share values and representations with those who

vocalize, based on various experiences, a subalternized position in the broader social situation' (Moutinho, Buarque de Almeida & Simões 2020: 18).

During my fieldwork with Bolsonaro supporters and people who denied the legitimacy of the 2022 presidential election result, I similarly observed my interlocutors—who generally identified as conservative—brushing-off any hint at a subjectivity of suffering, describing it pejoratively as 'victimhood' or '*mimimi*'. Some of my interlocutors, for example, openly acknowledged being gay yet they strongly opposed LGBTQI+ movements for promoting, in their view, a victimistic approach to being homosexual as well as for giving disproportionate focus on or primacy to their sexual identity, which was for them a private issue that did not define their sociality. Hence, my interlocutors' relation to their own subjectivity, largely rejecting suffering as a lens through which their experiences, past or present, can be inhabited or interpreted propels me to find a different approach to better comprehend their realities.

Of course, it is also worth considering the ways in which even when 'our' interlocutors may indeed fit the suffering slot, 'we' may still find it hard to comply with the anthropologist-citizen imperative. Consider the case of Peter Loizos, a British anthropologist who conducted research with Cypriot refugees over several decades. In a reflexive paper written in a personal and confessional tone, Loizos admits to being disinclined to continue deepening into the history and culture of Cyprus. He feels he wants to 'cut off from it' (Loizos 1994: 51). Among other things, he recognises that at the core of his disenchantment lies his 'deep political disagreement' with most of his interlocutors ('informants', in his words) and with most Greek Cypriots more broadly: 'I am uneasy with the way they see the world, and they do not at all like the way I see the world, so perhaps it is better we stay out of each other's way?', he asks (1994: 51). He appears troubled and uncertain with regards to the nature of his 'contract with [his] informants' (1994: 52), recognising he does not fit the 'active citizen-intellectual' model of anthropologist who 'tak[es] a stand, mak[es] public statements, writ[es] in newspapers, seek[s] to change things in the right direction. I would ideally wish to live this way, but in fact do little' (1994: 51), Loizos confesses.

Does Loizos's struggle describe a change of stance, from sympathy to empathy, as proposed by Gingrich and Banks (2006: 11), 'indispensable for any seriously methodological focus on actors' experiences and perspectives' (ibid) even when we profoundly disagree and are unable to sympathise with them? Shoshan's counter argument is that there is no 'safe distance' from which one can conduct fieldwork (Shoshan 2015: 153). The latter unavoidably involves intimate situations and affective relations that are not accounted for by the 'empathic approach'. Yet Loizos's account points precisely to the opposite direction: a relation between ethnographer and interlocutors that is both intimate and disagreeable, informal and professional, and where ambivalence and frustration do not preclude proximity and affect.

My relationship with my Bolsonarista interlocutors resembles that of Loizos's with his. I too profoundly disagreed with much of the way they saw the world and spent long hours ruminating on the ethical implications of this unfamiliar mixture of intimacy and aversion. But both feelings were there, and one did not exclude the other. I would be self-conscious, for example, about enjoying myself over lunch and storytelling at the house of an army general who amid a convivial discussion would also disclose his admiration for Putin despite, as he put it, him being a Communist. And I would be touched by an interlocutor's gesture of bringing a small gift for my daughter or another's need to confide in me a very delicate personal dilemma and ask for advice. These two people were sweet and caring with me throughout and I genuinely took pleasure in spending time with them, yet it was also unnerving to hear them both defend a military intervention as the only way to 'save' democracy.

I would like to briefly add that my openness to my interlocutors in the field was crucially aided by my interlocutors' openness towards me. Indeed, as much as someone is willing to reach out to the uncomfortable Other and try to understand them in their own terms, this will likely not succeed if that Other is not willing, to some degree, to do the same. In my case, being a foreigner, among other things, helped me tremendously not

to be immediately classified into one or the other of the two sides of the polarization. Eventually, many would ask me about my views on an issue or, more commonly, whether in my country there was a similarly polarized landscape. But the fact that, to put it plainly and in the way many saw it, I had no stakes in the game, helped my interlocutors see me in a more neutral light, even as I pushed them to consider discrepancies in their accounts (how can democracy be protected via a coup d'état?), questioned and disagreed with them openly, and they eventually had a more or less clear idea about where I stood politically. Their sympathetic (or empathetic?) attitude was not of course unconditional: when I tried approaching people at a demonstration together with a Brazilian male colleague who sported a beard and casual wear, we were instantly turned away with people refusing to talk to us because my colleague was immediately seen as '*petista*', with some straightforwardly accusing him of 'doing the L', that is, of having voted for Lula.

The fact that Loizos continued his research with the same groups of Greek Cypriots until the end of his career perhaps attests to the possibility of overcoming ethnographic stalemates, of the usefulness of acknowledging when we hit a bump in the road but then come to terms with it. Because human relations are always complex and multifaceted, and disagreement, even when it is profound and potentially conflictive, is also an inherent part of relating to the other. Not just to the uncomfortable other, but to any other. To approach the uncomfortable other is to accept our own vulnerability and agree to encounter a possible extreme, or a mirror opposite image. And this is an important step forward; a step towards the possibility of meaningfully communicating with the other. Anthropology needs to make the effort of reaching out to uncomfortable alterities; a gesture of tolerance,<sup>3</sup> instead of rejecting the very possibility of approaching specific others. After all, as Lia Zanotta Machado reminds us, 'tolerance should be the first step towards understanding otherness' (Zanotta Machado 2020: 25). I will return to this reflection in the conclusion.

### **The ambiguous other: Alterity and identity, proximity and distance.**

Earlier, Agnieszka Pasięka's account of her experience with colleagues' reactions to her field research, included an observation that the way her peers insisted on treating her interlocutors as 'them', 'convey[ed] an absolute, repulsive otherness' (Pasięka 2019: 3). In this section, I want to argue that the far-right otherness, as indeed other kinds of uncomfortable alterities, may be experienced, and often explicitly presented, as repulsive, but its construction in much anthropological writing appears ultimately more ambiguous than absolute. Indeed, far-right others, when they find their way into ethnographies, emerge as ambivalent intimate others, occupying a position closer to identity than to alterity.

Rosana Pinheiro-Machado and Lucia Mury Scalco's ethnographic study with Bolsonaro supporters, as published in two texts—the first one in 2020 ('From hope to hate: The rise of conservative subjectivity in Brazil') and the second in 2021 ('Humanising fascists? Nuance as an anthropological responsibility')—offers an example of how this ambiguous place figures in anthropological writing. This is one of the early, and thus far few, ethnographic studies of Bolsonarismo, a clear and laudable effort to get out of the anthropological comfort zone and get closer to the 'repugnant' other in order to understand them in their own terms. Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco's research was conducted at different moments over a period of ten years in the favela of Morro da Cruz, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The 2020 essay is thematically divided in two parts, the first titled 'Hope' and corresponding to research between 2009 and 2014, and the second titled 'Hate', corresponding to return field visits from 2016 to 2019. The authors describe the first part as being 'a moment of precarious hope and ambiguous political mobilization in the Morro' (2020: 22) largely resulting from the 'impacts of Lula's

<sup>3</sup> In the sense of tolerance as respect, rather than tolerance as permission (Forst 2013). While a critical discussion of the liberal notion of tolerance is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that limitations should be considered, including the practice's often condescending and othering expression. See, for example, Ricœur 1988, Brown 2006, Brown and Forst 2014, Lacorne 2019; and for ethnographic insights on tolerance, see Henig 2021, Dubucs 2021.

financial inclusion on new consumers' lives' (ibid). The second period ('Hate') refers to a change of heart in the Morro, with many of Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco's interlocutors now openly supporting Bolsonaro's presidential candidacy.

The authors describe Bolsonaro as 'an entertainment phenomenon' who '[l]ike Donald Trump ... embodied a type of caricature, a grotesque and funny character' (2020: 25) in stark contrast to their interlocutors who 'were fascinated by the politician and found him to be funny, straightforward, and authentic' (ibid). In the 2020 article they discuss 'punitivism', which, the authors argue, informs their interlocutors' narratives (2020: 27) echoing Bolsonaro's own. Yet, when interlocutors are cited, punitive allusions seem more open-ended. For example, when asked why he liked Bolsonaro, a young man called Anriel places himself as the subject that is being punished, in a rather metaphorical sense, for doing things 'correctly' and not receiving any acknowledgment or benefit. In his view, Bolsonaro as president would value hard workers like himself and he would therefore be able to enjoy the things he has been struggling for: 'a family, [...] a salary, a house, a normal life' (ibid). While the ideal of meritocracy, as the authors promptly note, is immanent in Anriel's account of everyday struggle and moral hierarchies, in his first quote there is hardly any hint at him supporting the candidate because of a punitive promise. Anriel is quoted again reacting to an assault he suffered while working as an Uber driver:

Some interlocutors believed that life was unjust for those who wanted to work honestly, in contrast with the impunity afforded *vagabundos*. 'I drove 15 hours and a *vagabundo* came and ripped off everything I have. What happened with him? Nothing. Who cares? Nobody', said Anriel, who had his car stolen and also said that he had his cell phone stolen twice by the same thief (ibid).

Anriel's vexation is interpreted by the authors in a punitive key, which is discussed in more detail in the article and with reference to other examples. Anriel asks 'What happened with the thief', to which he himself responds 'Nothing'. Although his frustration is evident at the lack of consequences for the thief (while he was encumbered with the loss of this car and other valuables more than once), and this can indeed imply that he was expecting some sort of negative consequences for the perpetrator (although not necessarily extra-legal or irregular punishment but simply due process), what Anriel says immediately next is not picked up by the authors. 'Who cares? Nobody', Anriel affirms, answering his own question again. His exasperation speaks of his experience of injustice, of not being seen, of being ignored, of not being cared for. And in affirming that 'nobody cares', his candidate preference immediately comes to the fore, someone who unlike other candidates was seen as sincerely caring for such issues.

In my fieldwork with (self-identified) conservative Brazilians, I heard several accounts that echoed Anriel's. Narrated by interlocutors from entirely distinct age, sex, gender, racial, and socio-economic groups, a point where their accounts converged was in the feeling that Bolsonaro was interested in and was fighting for issues that affected them dearly and that they felt no other candidate could or wanted or was otherwise equally invested in addressing. Mônica (a pseudonym), a woman in her 60s and a municipal employee in her city, was telling me about her frustration at the 2022 elections, which she was convinced were rigged ('it has been proven') and at the arrests of 'patriots' in Brasília after the 8 January storming, whom she thought had been cunningly deceived into surrendering without having done anything wrong. It is evident for everyone to see, she said, that the storming was an inside job. While she was detailing her discontent with how things were under Lula's 'dictatorship' she used a trope recurrent among my interlocutors: 'we are witnessing an inversion of values' (*inversão de valores*), she stated firmly.

From '*bandidos*' killing police men without any fear of repercussion to Lula's 'shady dealings' (*roubalheira*) in his travels abroad, criminality goes unchecked in a straight line from the President to the street thief, and everyone is stealing as much as they possibly can, while they can. Mauro (another pseudonym), a man in his 50s put it in similar terms: 'the *bandidos* are being absolved and freed and the judges [from the Lava Jato

anti-corruption investigation] are imprisoned. It is a complete inversion of values. It's frightening'. But there is hope: 'God is fair, Katerina', affirmed Mônica. 'God is fair. He will do something about it, because what happened with the people was a great injustice, you know?'. There is no doubt in Mônica and Mauro's account that this great injustice, and the immorality that brought it about, can only be rectified by the man who in their eyes represents the values they stand for, the man who in many accounts also appears as the archetypal populist personification of 'the people' (Hatzikidi 2023), the anointed leader who has God's blessings to carry on the sweeping changes that will transform Brazilian society and bring it (back) to the path of virtue and order. In this sense, it was not so much a punitivist promise that rallied Brazilians round Bolsonaro but the promise of rectifying perceived injustice, understood very broadly.

In Mauro's, Mônica's, and other interlocutors' accounts, Bolsonaro was seen as the politician who had the courage and capacity to swim against the stream, as many saw it, and correct past and current 'injustices' (*injustiças*). To do so, he would publicly expose 'uncomfortable truths' while working at resolving the issues at the heart of a given problem. With regards to punishing *bandidos*, some would disagree with Bolsonaro's more vocal and aggressive remarks, which they generally qualified as exaggerated, placed out of context, or only paying lip service to the idea of radical punitivism (*'da boca para fora'*, as one interlocutor put it). My findings, in that sense, relate more to what Nicole Curato had observed in her fieldwork with Rodrigo Duterte's supporters in the Philippines. Duterte received extraordinary voter support despite a radically aggressive rhetoric of (physically) eradicating criminals. Curato remarked however that this was first and foremost due to 'the promise of justice that comes with it' (Curato 2016: 101) and to the attention, oftentimes received and expressed in terms of care, that he placed upon certain issues, which ultimately outweighed his coarse language (Curato 2016: 102).

In their 2021 article, Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco markedly change the language of their analysis and speak less of 'hate' when describing their interlocutors' views. Like Martínez-Moreno (2021) and Pasięka (2019), in this text they share their bewilderment at their colleagues' reactions to their work presenting Bolsonaristas 'in a thoughtful manner' (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2021: 1). What they did, they explain, was to defend 'the professional and political ethics of portraying far-right supporters as complex and ambiguous individuals [who] do not exist in a vacuum, but in entanglements of relationships and adversities in a wider structural context and dynamic changing process' (2021: 2). They did not turn their interlocutors into 'adorable subjects', they clarify, but into 'intelligible ones' (ibid). 'Brazilians have no choice than to cohabit everywhere with Bolsonarists: parents, relatives, neighbours and workmates. Making this universe intelligible is also a form of coping' (2021: 6), the authors affirm in their closing remarks. In reflecting on their positionality in the field, they suggest that their work cannot be situated on any side of Dullo's (2016) empathic divide (people the anthropologist likes or does not like). And they ask: 'What happens when the line between the horrendous fascist and the vulnerable native becomes increasingly blurred' (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2021: 2)?

Their question, in my view, betrays a fundamental problem for an anthropological perspective caught between a perceived obligation to denounce the abject other (the 'horrendous fascist') and an imperative to cater to the suffering subject (the 'vulnerable native'). The two antithetic subject figures ('bad' and 'good', respectively) correspond to the diptych principle of militant or engaged anthropology: to embrace and advocate for the good, to repudiate and denounce the bad. Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco appear surprised that the two are actually not so neatly apart but the lines that separate them are more indistinct than sharp. What does their surprise tell us about the possibility of conducting fieldwork with the uncomfortable other? Would the line between the 'horrendous fascist' and the 'vulnerable native' be less blurred had their interlocutors not been *favelados* or initially sympathetic former Lula voters and were instead, say, Faria Lima executives? Can Bolsonarists only be approached ethnographically to the extent that they can also be seen as vulnerable or oppressed? And considering the country's brutally polarized political landscape, who are the Brazilians



in general, the Brazilians who have no choice but to ‘cohabit’ with Bolsonaroists? Which Brazilians get to be referred to in universalist-national terms and which Brazilians are cast as ‘horrendous fascists’ and ‘vulnerable natives’? Who, in other words, is placed at the centre and who at the margins of our analyses’ social landscapes and why? And, ultimately, who gets to escape being squeezed between abstract and reductionist labels and be understood in their complexity and contradictions?

The problem with the uncomfortable other for anthropological orthodoxy, as it was described above, begins in the conceptualisation of its alterity as ambiguously situated. The uncomfortable other is not a likeable other. But theirs is not a radical (or ‘ontological’) alterity either. That is to say, it is not an alterity anthropologists have learned to respect, embrace, and try to understand in its complexity. On the contrary, the dearth of ethnographies on abject alterities reveals a tacit acknowledgement of the impossibility to meaningfully engage with certain others. And this, I argue, is in great part because the far-right other (among different abject others) is not *an other to begin with*. Their otherness results from a sameness that derailed. A sameness that is not only dangerous because it has the potential to contaminate, but also because it is treacherous: we cannot always know in advance whom we are facing. The uncomfortable other inhabits the same urban environment as ‘we’, lives in ‘our’ apartment building, shares ‘our’ everyday spaces. They could be like ‘me’ but they are actually ‘my’ inverted image: a negative version of the self. And rejection is afforded and even justified precisely because of presumed intimacy. ‘We’ know them well enough to want to stay away from ‘them’. In other words, the uncomfortable other is not ambiguous in their own terms, they are just an ambiguous (if we accord them the possibility of fluidity in their political or other predicament) self, and hence closer to identity than alterity.

Yet this closeness to identity is not one ‘we’ can encompass. As previously discussed, the sympathetic other’s alterity is one anthropologists can readily embrace, if only through the universality of humanity that brings us closer to the subaltern, suffering, or vulnerable other. With the radical other, as Chia and Mathur have suggested, ‘an affinity is also assumed: that of an ideological, practical, or political kind that allows for a sympathetic bond to be created between the otherwise irreconcilable alterity’ (Chia & Mathur 2018: 8). With the uncomfortable other, however, the ambiguity of their relationship to the self, when not making ethnographic field research a pointless feat, often renders ethnographic analysis an impossible act of conciliation: bringing together the ‘horrendous fascist’ with the ‘vulnerable native’.

In his study with people accused of being members or abettors of militant Islamic groups and their families in Pakistan, Salman Hussain (2021) proposes the term ‘ambivalent subjects’ to describe his interlocutors who are ‘morally and politically ambivalent persons whose actions and histories do not neatly fit the description of the ‘ideal’ suffering/oppressed subjects involved in ‘progressive’ struggles, but who, nonetheless, face violence, engage in resistance, and mobilize collectively’ (Hussain 2021: 159). Like Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco’s study, this is another ethnographically grounded attempt to render intelligibility to the complexities of uncomfortable interlocutors and their lives. Yet, as Mark Goodale (2021) astutely asks in the afterword to the Special Issue Hussain’s article was published, ‘Who is not, in the end, an ‘ambivalent subject’? Who does not, in fact, ‘defy easy categorisation’? As it turns out, it is not whether subjects – in the anthropological sense – are ‘ambivalent’ or not; rather, it is much more a question of who has the power of ascription, who gets to define and apply such reductive social categories and for which purposes’ (Goodale 2021: 198).

If I discussed Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco’s study here at length is because I consider it to be important. And, as I explained above, for good reasons.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding, at the same time they defy anthropological orthodoxy and approach the uncomfortable other ethnographically, they also affirm it. In their effort to render their interlocutors intelligible social actors and show that human life is dynamic and not stagnant, that people can and do change their minds over time, are ambiguous, and ‘build their political motivations in a relational

<sup>4</sup> Examining this work more closely does not mean that it is the only anthropological study of Bolsonaroismo where the ambiguous alterity of the ethnographic other can be seen. Since it has been an influential study, however, it makes for an illustrative case.

process' (2021: 7) they also succumb to the idea of oppression as (the only?) appropriate ethnographic lens from which to approach the uncomfortable other. Is it really necessary to affirm the oppression of the uncomfortable other, to assert that they do not exist in a vacuum but entertain relationships with other human beings in society, in order to render them intelligible and say something insightful about their lives? My suggestion is that good and bad are best taken as ideal-types and not as bounded materialisations to be identified in the real world. Power dynamics are multidirectional, they are both structural and situated; all humans are ambiguous (or ambivalent), all change and engage with other humans in affective relations. In fact, acknowledging the complexity and multifaceted reality of our interlocutors' lifeworlds, independently of their political preferences, should be the point of departure for anthropological analyses. The task is to explore the elements that inform and compose these lifeworlds, their entanglements, and what they mean to the people we talk to.

## Conclusion

While writing this article, I was re-reading Susan Harding and Emily Martin's exchange on 'Trump time, prophetic time and the time of the lost cause' (2021), which took place during the pandemic. At some point, when discussing about QAnon and Christian white supremacist militias, Harding appears to be shifting away from her paradigm-making approach to the 'repugnant other': 'Mere empathy and inclusion ... are, for me, out of the question' (2021: 34). She acknowledges that '[t]here is still value in knowing as much as we can about them, and [that] we need to learn continuously how to think about and to take seriously reality as they understand it' but asks whether there may be limits for anthropologists who could or should instead 'bend our skills toward debilitating or dismantling—or building the forces that would debilitate or dismantle—their worlds' (ibid). To Harding's question, Martin posits that anthropology can still be the 'translator of assumptions their reality depends upon' (ibid).

It seems to me that Harding's hesitation speaks to the ways the anthropologist-citizen approach can or cannot be imagined to meaningfully contribute to improving the communities and broader societies we live in. Harding asks an important question that many conducting fieldwork with the uncomfortable others she specifically addresses in this text have asked themselves. Should fieldwork be part of activism against the social and political agendas our interlocutors uphold or promote? Can we use our insights to more efficiently deconstruct their ideas and 'dismantle their worlds'? Or is a more modest aspiration, such as that of (only) 'translat[ing the] assumptions their reality depends upon' enough? These are important open-ended questions which I have no intention of addressing here. I leave them mostly as food for thought but I also want to make the suggestion that no matter what action we choose or are able to take *besides or through* fieldwork, the first step is to shed our disciplinary disinclination and embark on fieldwork with the uncomfortable other.

Moral or political identification should not be a criterion that determines whether we can or should conduct field research. As James Laidlaw notes on Malinowski:

His claim to authority, and confidence in the rightness of his analyses, seemed to him to depend not on the quality of his observation or argument but on the personal relationships he was able to maintain with individual Trobrianders and the degree of mental identification he was able to achieve with them; not on professional skills and intelligence, but unexampled sensitivity and unimpeachable moral probity. And of course, by those latter criteria he was bound to fail. (Laidlaw 2018: 156).

Some of the same reasons, argues Laidlaw, were fuelling the anxieties and concerns of Writing Culture: 'a compulsion to try to convince their readers of the depth of their subjective identification with their informants, and the purity of their political sentiments' (ibid). As I have tried to show throughout this text, ethnography does not need to be confined between fieldwork with a 'sympathetic' or a 'radical' other. Not

only are there risks to consider, such as those Laidlaw flags, in basing our relationship with our interlocutors in our uncompromising alliance with their moral worlds, but there is a great deal of issues worth exploring that 'ge[t] lost when the discipline is confined within such narrow brackets' (Goodale 2021: 198). And not just by not undertaking research with uncomfortable alterities but also when we do but have not entirely shaken the narrow brackets. An 'anthropology of the full spectrum', as Mark Goodale (2021) called for recently, is an anthropology that is attentive to the 'urgent concerns' of today, such as the rise of right-wing extremism (see also Shoshan 2021), and which it approaches with the great analytical depth our discipline is so uniquely positioned to offer.

Indeed, as anthropologists we can work to expand our discipline's horizons of knowledge production and appreciate the value in approaching and understanding (even) the uncomfortable other. Importantly, however, the anthropological encounter with the uncomfortable alterity cannot 'take place in a specular way, as the Other were 'less' than the 'self': a 'fallen self', or a 'lower self'", which would be an approach based on intolerance (Zanotta Machado 2020: 26), but in a symmetrically tolerant or respectful way, seeking the self in the other and the other in the self.

As Gingrich stresses, discussing alterity exclusively in terms of difference is to essentialise; to 'represent[t] difference as something altogether external to identity', in a 'dichotomous arrangement', when actually 'othering and belonging are mutually constitutive components of identity' (Gingrich 2004: 4). A more useful approach, Gingrich suggests, is 'Spivak's constant shift of positions between identity and difference, one becoming part of the other in different constellations' (2004: 11; see also Fabian 2006). In light of the earlier discussion of the (uncomfortable) other's ambiguous relation to the self, this insight encourages us to embrace this ambiguity, to explore and learn from it. I want to close this text with Leonardo Carbonieri Campoy's (2022) reflection on the anthropological craft being about 'learning to keep the question about the other and about ourselves open' (2022: 66; my translation).

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Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding:  
ethnographies with 'uncomfortable otherness'

# These men in love with mining companies and pickup trucks: Morality and knowledge practices of the deserts and movements of the economy

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## **Abstract:**

This article's protagonists are traders and small businesspeople who express their enthusiasm for the start-up of a mining company while admiring the pickup trucks that such an enterprise circulates in a city in the north of the Brazilian state of Goiás. I place the perspectives of these men in a story organized by the fear that this locality becomes a 'desert', then consider how they have been relating to recent transformations in the 'economy' of this city. I thus bring to the foreground certain moral dimensions of their lives and occupations and the role of pickup trucks as signs and operators of the knowledge practices to which they resort to situate themselves in the face of both long-standing anxieties and these new realities. Finally, I show how this 'economy of the city' is outlined by an interweaving of certain branches and productive activities with practices, stories, circulations, rivalries that are markedly masculine, and which are updated in those places and paths where pickup trucks are present.

**Key-words:** Anthropology of the economy; Mobilities; Socio-environmental conflicts; Mining; Masculinities

# Esses homens apaixonados por mineradoras e caminhonetes: Moralidades e práticas de conhecimento dos desertos e movimentos da economia

## **Resumo:**

Esse artigo tem como protagonistas comerciantes e pequenos empresários que manifestam seu entusiasmo pela entrada em funcionamento de uma mineradora enquanto admiram as caminhonetes que tal empreendimento faz circular numa cidade no Norte de Goiás. Situo as perspectivas desses homens numa história organizada pelo medo de que essa cidade vire um “deserto”, considerando então como eles vêm se relacionando com transformações recentes na sua “economia”. Trago assim para o primeiro plano certas dimensões morais de suas vidas e ocupações e o papel das caminhonetes como signos e operadores das práticas de conhecimento a que eles recorrem para se situar diante tanto de ansiedades de longa data quanto dessas novas realidades. Mostro por fim como essa “economia da cidade” se delinea por uma imbricação de determinados ramos e atividades produtivas a práticas, estórias, circulações, rivalidades marcadamente masculinas, e que se atualizam naqueles lugares e caminhos onde estão presentes as caminhonetes.

**Palavras-chave:** Antropologia da economia; Mobilidades; Conflitos sócio-ambientais; Mineradoras; Masculinidades



# These men in love with mining companies and pickup trucks: Moralities and knowledge practices of the deserts and movements of the economy

*André Dumans Guedes*

In September 2022, I returned to Minaçu, a location in the north of the Brazilian state of Goiás where I have been carrying out fieldwork for years. I booked a room in the same hotel as always, located in the most upscale area of the city, just a few meters from the fence and gate that delimit the area of the asbestos mining company that, as they say there, ‘created’ that place. Although I have always been interested in what is going on in those parts, the most significant part of my research has been carried out a few kilometers away, on the other side of the city, in the outlying neighborhoods where my main interlocutors live. I met most of them at the office of the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) there. From that place, since 2008 I made friends, created strong bonds with some families, and started going to their homes. The lives, struggles and reflections of these people are the privileged themes of practically everything I have written about this universe to date.

But in this small group of men who used to meet daily in front of my hotel, I also had some long-time acquaintances. On previous visits I had become accustomed to finding there, sitting on the sidewalk in woven wire chairs, in the late afternoon and morning, the owner of this establishment and some of his neighbors and colleagues - all of them middle-aged white men, belonging to the local middle class, usually presenting themselves as traders or small business owners. That September 2022, it didn’t take long for me to realize that participating in conversations in circles like this would be a little more complicated than on the other occasions I had been there. We were on the eve of the presidential election, and it was quite quickly that we all realized that we had divergent preferences: they would vote for Bolsonaro, I would vote for Lula. Concerned about maintaining some cordiality, we avoided this topic in our conversations. Even so, despite our efforts to avoid controversies, the political polarization of that moment was also felt when we approached other issues, making explicit and spicing up certain disagreements that I had known existed between us for a long time.

They were aware that I had come to the city to work with people linked to MAB. In addition to its political-electoral affinities with the left and Lula’s Workers Party, this is a social movement that organizes and operates from a critical perspective on large projects and economic enterprises like dams. A scholar and activist of this cause since my master’s degree in urban and regional planning, I arrived in Minaçu (and to my doctorate in social anthropology) precisely to do research on the social and environmental effects caused by the construction of three large hydroelectric plants in the limits of this municipality, between 1980 and 2010. Minaçu also interested me because there these dams coexist with projects of a different nature, but which, like them, are characterized by the immense damage that their operation causes to the communities and ecosystems in their neighborhoods (and to the planet): large-scale mining companies. For their part, and in their capacity as businessmen and traders, these men are staunch defenders of these activities, and of the ‘movement’ that, in their perspective, they bring and ensure for ‘the economy of the city’.

In those days, one issue was capable of competing with the election for the attention of these subjects: the arrival of a new mining company in the region—a firm called Serra Verde—and the beginning of work to install what would be, according to them, the largest mine in Brazil dedicated to the exploration of rare earth metals. These men and I remembered, in different ways, Bolsonaro’s speech at the United Nations in which,

arguing why he would not demarcate new indigenous lands, the then president made it his priority to explore this 'great abundance of gold, diamonds, uranium, niobium and rare earth metals' (El País 2019). Writing for anthropologists, I don't think I need to explain here why this statement bothered me so much.

More important for my argument in this text is the mention of certain entities that, in this context, are also evaluated by me and them in opposite ways: the 4 x 4 trucks and pickup trucks that seemed to be the only vehicles consultants, managers, directors and engineers involved with this venture used to move around those parts. Pointing them with their fingers, looking for them, talking about them all day long: that's how the men at the hotel door talked about the mining company and the future exploration of rare earths metals. From my point of view, the attention they paid to these vehicles seemed obsessive, or on the order of veneration. Since my doctoral thesis, I have been clear that in country interiors like that, people have, in general, an interest in machines and engines that is at odds with my ecological sensitivity and my own lifestyle (resident of the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro and with easy access to public transport, it is without any major complications that I can live without having a car, and be proud of it). What displeased me in those conversations in 2022 is that this 'generic' passion for automobiles seemed to me to manifest itself in a particularly violent way: because there it would appear intrinsically linked to a pioneering and conquering truculence that, in those parts of the Brazilian Central-West region and in the proximity of projects such as dams, mining companies and agribusiness, would be brought to a paroxysm. After all, we know that the occupation of these backlands [*sertões*] - from the March to the West of the first Getúlio Vargas government, through the emergence of Brasília and the development and colonization plans of the military dictatorship - was associated with incentives to the automotive industry and the construction of large highways<sup>1</sup>. Symbols par excellence of this industry (which is itself a pedagogical metonymy of capitalism), pickup trucks speak to us of a civilization structured both by the opening of roads and the burning of fossil fuels, and thus stand to be emblematic icons of colonialist violence and environmental crises. This truculent power of these vehicles is constantly and proudly evoked by those who drive them, and is expressed in these terms that are often inlaid or stickered on their bodywork: 'all terrain', 'attack', 'frontier', 'power', 'ranger', 'storm'<sup>2</sup>. It is undeniable that in this case we are faced with singular conceptions of how someone can relate to the environment, the landscape, the land: faced with this power, the resistance and possible obstacles offered by the paths would be easily overcome; the very idea of a path, or the characteristic specificity of this or that place would, at the limit, be relativized—any terrain can be traversed and transformed into a path; over any savannah, bush or forest (and over whoever or whatever was there) you can go over it.

My discomfort with these men became even more acute because of the sexist and elitist comments that frequently appeared in these conversations. Over time, I began to realize that these were not just anecdotal diversions from the topics that most interested them, but crucial elements in the constitution and explanation of that 'economy of the city' that so obsessed them. Later, I will present a comical narrative that I heard from one of them, at the hotel door. For now, I will limit myself to highlighting how the prejudiced approach of

1 A central native category for my doctoral thesis and the book that came from it (Guedes 2011, 2013a), the *'tract'* [*trecho*] mentioned in the title of these works has its origins in the experience of the workers on these projects. This term 'comes from the major highway building projects where it is common practice to divide the total volume of work into lots, contracting these out to various companies (...) [who assume responsibility for different] sections, or *tracts*, of the project. Workers on the same road when they meet may often ask each other: 'What tract are you on?' followed by a reply identifying the construction firm responsible for the tract and the kilometre points delimiting their stretch of highway. The term *tract* escaped its initial boundaries and - as though Brazil were one immense construction site - came to designate all the large-scale construction projects and the men who work on them, the *tract* labourers [*peões do trecho*], nomads par excellence and by necessity.' (Corrêa 2007:11).

2 The fact that all these terms are in English makes the 'Goiás edition' sticker, particularly popular in Minaçu in 2022, even more suggestive. And all this brings us to this immense problem that, without the space or competence to address adequately, I will only mention here: the 'influence' of the conquest of the North American West on the social and historical formation of the worlds constituted by the colonization of the Brazilian 'backlands' (such as, for example, the Central-West Region that I discuss here). Beyond the imaginary surrounding the figures of the 'cowboy' (Pimentel 1996; Machado 2022) or the 'pioneer' (Heredia, Palmeira & Leite 2010; Marques 2012; Cordeiro 2018), let us remember how this influence materialized in public policies that were decisive for the contemporary structuring of these areas (Minaçu included): for example, in the already mentioned March to the West of the first Getúlio Vargas Government. A recurring theme in Brazilian historiography and social thought, this influence (or the comparison between the Brazilian and North American cases) was a topic widely discussed in the ethnographies that, in the 1970s, focused on 'Central Brazil' (Esterci 1972; Velho 1979; Ribeiro 1980) - but which, later, seemed to disappear from Brazilian anthropological production.

two of the characters in this story - the ‘scam worker’ [*o peão golpista*] and the ‘woman in the motel’—made me feel quite uncomfortable. Even more so because, in addition to offending the egalitarianism of my political values, this story did so through humiliating references to the residents of the outskirts and rural areas of the city, where my long-time interlocutors and friends in this municipality live. From the perspective of the men in these conversations, these interlocutors and friends of mine are the people who potentially and ideally occupy the roles of those characters in the story. By establishing a significant connection between these two relatively separate worlds in which I was doing research (the hotel door and the outskirts), this story of bad taste interests me doubly here. This occurs because my relationship with these ‘uncomfortable alterities’—the theme of this dossier—also offers a promising entry for a renewed reading of the problems and constituent entities of all these worlds of Minaçu with which I have been working for so long.

I express these discomforts from the start because of the analytical approach they offer to my focus in this article: these men’s ‘obsession’ with pickup trucks and mining companies. Or rather: I want to show that what, from my perspective, took the form of an ‘obsession,’ may appear in another way for these merchants and small business owners: as practices whose reasonableness can be understood if we make explicit some of the concerns, reflections, and values that constitute their lives. In an article focused on the challenges faced by ethnographers who set out to study Bolsonaro voters, Pinheiro Machado and Scalco (2021) remind us that nuance—the consequence of an analytical effort aimed at understanding the cognitive complexity of these people, as well as the situated nature of what they say and do—is part of the ‘anthropological responsibility’ of those who set out to describe them. As other authors in this dossier argue, we are not far removed from objectives that have long guided our practice in the discipline: attempts to ‘interpretively understand social action’ according to the ‘subjective meaning’ (Weber 2009: 3) that it has for this or that agent; or the effort to achieve that ‘final goal, of which an ethnographer should never lose sight (...) [-] to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world’ (Malinowski 2002: 19, author’s emphasis).

In general terms, my argument is based on an ethnographic description of what these men do in these conversations: paying attention to the circulation of these pickup trucks around Minaçu, they seek to map out the agencies and subjects that are becoming relevant in this town, debating—amidst gossip and dirty jokes—the ‘economy of the city’ and seeking ways to position themselves within it. The knowledge practices, expectations and anxieties that I had access to in these circles prove to be interesting not only for explaining these ‘economic’ dynamics and transformations—but also for understanding the values and worldviews that define them as men. Through these values and visions, the native meanings of what the ‘economy’ of this place is also what emerges<sup>3</sup>.

In the next section, I present, according to a perspective shared by the population of Minaçu in general, a description in which the history of this locality is organized by reference to the old mining company (the asbestos mining company) and the fear that such place will become a ‘desert.’ In the following two sections, the focus shifts to the present, and to the way in which the men mentioned in this introduction relate to recent transformations in the ‘economy’ of the city. If these transformations cannot be exclusively linked to the arrival of this new mining company (the rare earth metals mining company), this event intensifies and symbolizes them in a very relevant way. First, I discuss this relationship in terms of the knowledge practices that these subjects resort to in order to situate themselves in this new reality, which helps us understand why these pickup trucks are so important to them. Second, I dedicate a section to some moral dimensions and questions of belonging emerging in this recent context. In conclusion, I quickly reconsider the data presented throughout the article based on the interpretation of that comical narrative I mentioned before

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to draw attention to the quotation marks that indicate a native category. I am following the approach suggested by Neiburg (2010) regarding what would be at stake in a shift from an ‘economic anthropology’ towards an anthropology of the economy. Thus, instead of assuming the existence of a domain of social life characterized by a certain peculiar type of phenomenon (the ‘economic’), it is up to the ethnographer to map and describe what, in a given social world and from the perspective of those who inhabit it, can be found associated with the *economy* - hereafter in italics - as a native category.

## A mining company that is the mother of a city

Although expressed in a particularly enthusiastic manner by those men who gathered in front of the hotel, this ‘desire’ for mining companies is something that is widespread throughout Minaçu. What is disconcerting at first sight is that this manifests itself so vehemently in people whose personal and family histories are often marked by violence and oppression that these people themselves clearly and critically link to these same enterprises. This is particularly explicit with regard to SAMA Minerações Associadas, the asbestos mining company that was responsible for the emergence of Minaçu in the 1960s and 1970s, and which is still known today as ‘the mother of the City’.

This company gained some national renown due to the political conflicts and legal disputes that, over the last decades, have arisen due to the illness and death of workers who were exposed to the fibers of this mineral (for a more up-to-date discussion of the subject, see Amaral 2019). Throughout the years that I have conducted field research there, I have heard countless references to the ‘asbestos disease’ and the suffering it has caused.

Back then, there were no rights, no, there were so many who died from asbestos, which is harmful... This is an ugly, tiring suffering. When a person coughs, when asbestos disease appears in a person, oh, there’s no way. Cancer takes over... I remember when it happened to the woman who worked as a caretaker at the workers’ house. A cleaner (...). They removed an asbestos tumor from her, but there was no cure for it. When this thing appears, there’s no cure. And back then it was like that we ate asbestos... We were having lunch and asbestos kept falling into the plate. So we ate it. It was that white powder everywhere. When we went to work there was no support to hold the asbestos. Only later did they line people’s houses, they lined them with plaster. And in the morning we would sweep the door of the house, so it wouldn’t get in the cracks. The loose dust... I lived there [in the mining company] for 26 years. And I think I’m very lucky not to have anything until today... (Guedes 2011: 68).

Dona Clementina was already quite elderly when she told me this story in 2010, and she remembers how the problem was even more serious in the first years of SAMA’s operations, when she was young and worked and lived in the company’s restricted area. Despite the filters and technical innovations that would have—in the company’s arguments—solved the problem, the controversy continues to this day. In 2017, the Supreme Federal Court (STF) banned the extraction, production, sale and use of asbestos throughout the country, due to the risks that this substance poses to human health. But the mining company gained extra momentum during the Bolsonaro government, especially after a law enacted by Governor Ronaldo Caiado authorizing the return of the extraction of this mineral. In November 2022, however, a decision by the STF ordered the immediate suspension of this activity. The legal battle continues to this day.

During all the years I worked in this city, I heard few people deny the facts or reject the arguments presented in statements like Dona Clementina’s. Even in a small group like the one on the sidewalk of my hotel, involving small business owners and middle-class people, there is a kind of consensus regarding the environmental damage and harm to the health of workers and residents caused by the mining company’s activities. This acknowledgement was usually accompanied by an adversative clause, in a formula I heard over and over again: ‘Yes, the company has harmed a lot of people, and that’s not right... But if it closes, Minaçu will end!’ It is therefore to examine this fear - that Minaçu will ‘end’—that I now pay attention.

The Fundação and Brumadinho tailings dam failures have put mining companies even more in the spotlight, alerting a wider audience to something that experts, activists, and communities living near these projects have long been denouncing: the vastness, diversity, and multidimensionality of the risks and harmful socio-environmental effects associated with these economic activities (Zonta and Trocate 2016; Zhouri 2018). In January 2024, as I write this text, we are watching on television the drama of the residents of Maceió who are witnessing—literally—their world falling apart due to the subsidence of the ground resulting from the collapse of mines where rock salt was extracted underground. Scenarios like these make the efforts of

authors like Acselrad et al. (2021) even more relevant in mapping some of the strategies through which these mining companies seek to deal with their critics and build consensus, anticipating potential objections and authoritarily restricting the political debate regarding their activities. According to this line of investigation, these mining companies use their economic resources and political power to try—through innovations in their governance and social responsibility practices (Gaviria 2015) or appropriations that resignify the languages and discourses of their opponents (Kirsch 2014)—to ‘socially stabilize the terrain in which they operate’ (Giffoni 2019: 13) and prevent discussions about other, less predatory modalities of relating to the environments from happening. By naturalizing mineral exploration as an inexorable destiny, these companies would resort to what philosopher Isabelle Stengers (2015: 66) called ‘infernal alternatives’: if communities want to benefit from the jobs, income or taxes generated by these companies, they would have to tolerate some environmental pollution, or resign themselves to the fact that ‘accidents’ like those that occurred in Mariana, Brumadinho or Maceió could eventually occur. In the case of mining, these infernal alternatives would structure true ‘socioeconomic blackmail devices’ (Acselrad & Bezerra 2010), in which supposedly scientific studies would convey the idea that a region that does not exploit the available natural resources (those associated with its ‘economic vocation’) would be making its ‘development’ or ‘progress’ unfeasible.

Consideration of these policies and strategies used by mining companies is necessary—but it is not enough to understand what is happening in Minaçu. We also need to take into account certain singularities of its history, as well as the ways in which people narrate and reflect on what their lives are like there, so that we can understand why, in this place, these ‘socioeconomic blackmail devices’ can prove to be even more powerful. When expressing their fear that Minaçu will end, the reference of local residents to this ‘end’ cannot be seen only in a figurative or hyperbolic sense. For my interlocutors, the cities do in fact end, disappear, become ‘deserts’. Right there in the north of Goiás, references to places like Campos Belos, a neighboring municipality that saw its population fall by half after the depletion of mining in the area, are common. Stories about what happened in this region during the gold rush of the 18th century are also popular today. In this period, in the space of two or three decades, villages and settlements lived their days of prosperity only to be abandoned or almost entirely depopulated, some of these locations literally disappearing from the map. Other former mining centers in the region did not suffer such a drastic fate, and still exist today. Cavalcante, a municipality neighboring Minaçu that enjoyed a short-lived prosperity in the past, is, according to my interlocutors, one of the smallest and poorest cities in the state.

When they refer to SAMA as the ‘mother of Minaçu,’ this is also what the residents of Minaçu are talking about. Obviously, this epithet is used to express the power and ‘paternalism’ (or perhaps it would be better to say ‘maternalism’) of these large companies that, as is the case in countless other corners of the country (Dias Blanco 2022), are capable of determining and commanding the existence of certain locations as if they were their parents (invariably, as authoritarian parents). But something else is being said here: this expression also lends itself to a comparative analysis of the different ventures and investments that, since the city’s emergence in the 1960s, have driven the *movements* of the city’s *economy*—and here the italics indicate natives categories. Like the other municipalities in the north of Goiás mentioned above, Minaçu’s history is also marked by the emergence of ‘fevers’: activities that suddenly and temporarily promise opportunities for extraordinary profits, attracting outsiders and making life in the locality where they erupt turbulent and busy [*movimentada*]—whether due to the ‘sudden waves of superficial modernization’ (Martins 1998: 690) triggered by investments in infrastructure or development projects, or due to price fluctuations in the commodities markets, making certain extractive practices, both legal and illegal, particularly attractive at certain times. From the 1970s to the first decade of the 21st century, Minaçu experienced the ‘cassiterite fever’, the ‘gold fever’ and three ‘dam fevers’—the large hydroelectric plants whose construction led me to choose this area as the field of a doctoral thesis in anthropology.

It is also in contrast to these fevers that the SAMA mining company is thought of as the ‘mother of Minaçu’. To make this clear, it is necessary to evoke a certain specific meaning of the term ‘mother’, one that signals the stubborn rootedness of those people who - in a universe where everything seems to be in motion [*em movimento*] - insist on remaining in the same place. The reference here is to so many of these women who remain in the city while their husbands, daughters and sons go out ‘into the world’, ‘trekking through the tract’ [*correndo o trecho*] in search of adventures or better living conditions elsewhere. By remaining, these mothers make their houses and lands persist, as fixed reference points; persisting this way, the latter not only mitigate but also enable those wanderings, movements and circulations. In the short history of Minaçu, the waves and fevers, and the turbulence and *movements* associated with them, have passed. On the other hand, for decades on end the asbestos mining company remained there. Having remained—residents argue—it was also the city itself that was able to continue existing.

In her ethnography of a quilombola family whose territory is located in Nova Roma—a neighboring municipality of Minaçu—Perutti (2022: 137) tells us about this

perception largely shared by the residents of Nova Roma that the existence of that municipality is sustained by a tenuous thread. Sayings such as ‘this is almost a desert’, ‘only the old and the children will remain’, ‘this place is a hole’ or even ‘a hiding place’, express the idea of the near end of a city that has barely begun.

It is this ‘imminence of the desert’—this heavy premonition that the place where one lives can or will ‘become a desert, with no prospect of employment, no people, no movement’ (Perutti 2022: 25)—that I want to bring to the forefront. This *movement*, as a native category, refers to the circulation and to the comings and goings of money, employment, wealth and income—to what these people claim that firms are capable of attracting to a city. But this meaning is often subordinated to the idea of *movement* as the very ‘movement’ of life, and of life in common. Places with no prospect of employment and improvement are places that become depopulated, that have fewer and fewer people and less *movement*. Fewer people generate less *movement*, less *movement* brings fewer people. And when *movement* ceases, life fades away—in the sense that it is the maintenance and creation of relationships and encounters what is at stake. Hence the concerns of the quilombola family studied by Perutti (2022) about ways of ‘inhabiting the desert’: how to live in these places that are often on the verge of disappearing, places transforming into cities that are ending, cities of retirees, dead cities. Hence also the importance they attribute to this ‘weaving of friendship’, which evokes a whole set of practices and knowledge related to the production and maintenance of certain bonds with relatives and neighbors, with the living and the dead, with humans and non-humans, since ‘in a place conceived as a ‘hole’, about to end, maintaining and creating relationships appears as a matter of life or death’ (Perutti 2022: 26).

### **Following pickup trucks and engineers as a knowledge practice of the *economy* and its *movements***

Let’s go back to the sidewalk in front of my hotel. There we find those shopkeepers and small business owners telling stories, debating and arguing, claiming to be the ones who know the most about this or that productive activity or who best understand what’s happening in the city and its *economy*. But while they talk and listen, they also scan, with their eyes wide open, the *movements* around them. With his finger raised, Miltão points out, emerging from the corner, the compact and solid metal block whose whiteness, almost always reflecting the sun, blurs our vision for a moment. ‘And look at that Hilux from Barro Alto I was talking about, look at it coming over there!’ As he speaks, a 4x4 double-cabin pickup truck (another one!) passes by us, fresh from the factory, stickered with the alphanumeric code that authorizes its entry into the construction site in the area where, in the near future, the new rare earth metals mining company will operate.

Like their human occupants, these pickup trucks indicate, instruct, confirm and provide information. But if the former do so more explicitly, through stories or the news they bring with them, the latter provide only clues, suggestions and hints, through signs that are often subtle and only arouse interest in those who know how to identify and interpret them—identification and interpretation which often occurs in conversations like the one I am considering here. ‘Look at that dented door. That was the truck which, that afternoon during the storm, almost overturned there on the corner of the courthouse, after work...’ The close examination of the bodywork, the wheels, and what is damaged or dirty (or dirty in this or that way) provides these men with signs that evoke events and occurrences, incidents and accidents. We are dealing here with certain specific modalities of ‘education of attention’ and the ways of narrating related to them (Ingold 2000): articulations of details, signs, modes of movement, people and things that elicit and feed gossip, stories and explanations. Such articulations interest us here because they actively engage these men in their environments, while at the same time connecting that reality within their reach with other spaces and situations—such as a road or construction site, the streets of this or that neighboring municipality, the yards and garages of a specific company, the lodgings of another, the industrial plant under construction of a third one. In this way, knowledge is produced about what is happening in Minaçu, about what is happening elsewhere, and about the passages, connections, and relations between that specific place and ‘the world’ [*o mundo*].

In these stories and assessments, these men are particularly interested in the trajectories of these pickup trucks; they are interested in knowing where they came from and where they are going—and the ways in which they moved. Did the vehicle come in a hurry, or did it accelerate? Was it traveling slowly, with someone at the window, the driver concerned about pedestrians or the speed limit? Was it zigzagging, out of balance, driven by a drunk or show-off driver? It is the circumstances and places where these trucks stop, however, that offer opportunities for a more calm investigation of these signs, and for less hurried stories to take shape. This also explains the tendency for conversations like the one I am considering here to take place in front of hotels and mechanic shops—establishments that are often neighboring each other, both of them places for stopping, pausing, resting; for mechanical repairs and human sleep, for care, cleaning and refueling of bodies and vehicles. Because of this, it is the mechanical knowledge itself—the expertise or skill of mechanics and tire repairmen, and which to a lesser extent any lay driver possesses—that, in these conversations, seems to have gone beyond the garages and gas stations, translating and transforming itself into the surveys, reports and narratives that interest us in this section of the text.

It is no surprise then that, in circles made up almost exclusively of male individuals, spicy details and sexual references grease the wheels of these stories. At the door of my hotel, I heard the following account:

The engineer picked up a woman and took her to a motel. A worker at the company [*um peão*] already knew that the engineer liked to get up to mischief, and had been keeping an eye on him for a while. The worker sent him a message on WhatsApp. ‘I’m here at the motel door, and I saw you come in there with the company’s pickup truck. Send me some money, send me a pix, or I’ll film you leaving and send it to the boss and your wife!’ But the worker didn’t count on the engineer’s cleverness, who had been through similar things before. The engineer then took some hand sanitizer and removed the tag from the truck, rubbing it with his shirt until the sticker came off. Then he put the woman to drive the car, hiding in the back seat. Without the tag, the worker didn’t even realize that that was the pickup truck he wanted to film. And the engineer managed to escape...

A key element in this story, the tag is a colored sticker stuck to the side of the automobile containing an acronym for the name of the company that uses it and a number that identifies each of the vehicles that, in a given project, that company has in operation (See photo 1). The tag thus brings together, at the same time, information that identifies a particular pickup truck (just like the license plate of any vehicle) and the company that uses it (which a company logo also does). At Minaçu at that time, the tags were justified to control

and restrict access to the closed area where the construction site of the rare earth metals mining company's industrial facility was located, and immediately identified the machines that had them affixed as engaged in this project. From the perspective of the company responsible for each particular vehicle, the tag is essential for planning and controlling its maintenance, registering information about its history in the management systems: who drove it, the tasks and objectives for which it was used, the places where it circulated and stopped, how its review and supervision have been carried out, idiosyncrasies and problems in its operation.

Photo 1: a pickup truck and its tag, in yellow and black



Photo by the author.

The story told above is also interesting because, in addition to its narrator and his listeners, one of its protagonists—the worker [*peão*] who had been ‘keeping an eye’ on the engineer for some time—is himself paying attention to the pickup trucks and their signs, and seeking to use the knowledge resulting from this surveillance. We are not far removed here from those ‘modalities of movement and mutual observation of everyday life’ that Comerford (2014: 109) talks about when examining how, in small communities in the interior, ‘attention to the displacements, absences and presences of others, and knowing oneself to be the object of this attention to one’s own displacements, transforms such movement into the focus of narrative, of moral judgment, of subject matter’. These curious glances watching what is happening in other people’s lives generate gossip and stories about the movements and antics of an engineer like the one caught in the motel. But without any detriment to these tittle-tattle and obscenities—rather feeding them and feeding off them—such curious glances elicit ways of speaking and knowing the *movements* of the *economy* of a place. It is this other type of knowledge that I am dealing with now.

Didactic and using images that I discovered were common there, Roberval, the hotel owner, explains to me:

A project like this from the mining company really helps the city, it gets things *moving*. Just look at the streets, those more than two hundred pickup trucks driving up and down. Just think about what this means for the tire repair shops and garages in the city, in terms of work, of the income generated... Look at Edvelton’s repair shop. The pickup truck is there, the three boys have a job, and they’ll earn a little money. The oldest took the course on Maranhão Avenue (and isn’t there a job being created there too?). Look at the crane removing the engine from there, which will be sent to a reconditioning shop on Amazonas Avenue. There will be work for these people too, just as there will be orders for the auto parts store...



This is a kind of popular Keynesianism<sup>4</sup>: a way of following and narrating a productive activity in terms of both the flows of money and income that made it possible and those that it generates. The work, activities and *movements* on a mining construction site or in a workshop are thus evaluated by mapping the trickles and chains that connect what happens within these specific spaces with other sectors, businesses and places.

This way of knowing and assessing wealth is far from being a novelty in the lives of these men, but it is particularly important in those circumstances, when various companies were swarming around the city. This occurred due to the specific procedures and work required in the installation phase of the rare earth metals mining company (roughly speaking, the moment in which the machinery and infrastructure of this enterprise are still being assembled). But also because, like any mining company nowadays, the one being installed there has its operations guided by outsourcing and subcontracting processes that distribute the tasks and stages of production along an extensive chain - something that culminates in this multiplicity of different companies and businesses, of the most varied nature and size, crowding the city. Over the last few decades, the old asbestos mining company had also been undergoing this 'economic' or 'productive restructuring'<sup>5</sup>. But it was the arrival of the new project that radicalized this process, increasing the number of agents involved in mineral extraction activities in a staggering way.

In order to make their assessments and judgments about the rare earth metals mining company, these men had to take this plurality of agencies into account. They mapped out opportunities and measured the benefits brought by this mining company trying to follow some of the circuits through which its activities went beyond its strict or formal domains, seeking information about some of the channels through which the wealth it produced trickled down to other subjects and agencies. For this purpose, they monitored these pickup trucks. Among the multiple vehicles involved in this dynamic, the latter were particularly common on the city streets (unlike, for example, large machinery, which was relatively restricted to the construction site and the mining area). Furthermore, it was the pickup trucks that transported daily, from the construction site to the city and vice versa, those whom my interlocutors seemed to hold most dear: the senior employees and the engineers, those primarily responsible for the enterprise. Monitoring the pickup trucks and the monetary circuits they activate thus makes it possible to map out which subjects, agencies, flows and opportunities come to the forefront when this new mining company arrives in the city. In Comerford's terms (2014: 110), we deal here with how such observation and narration practices contribute, in this new context, to a certain knowledge of 'the relations at play in this social universe' - who and what becomes, in this scenario, a protagonist, or a relevant subject or agency worthy of interest.

Having learned with these men to pay attention to the tags, I conducted my own survey, following vehicles that I saw on the city streets. Like my interlocutors, I never even got close to the construction site, nor did I engage with the companies through institutional channels. Over the course of a week in January 2023, I inventoried 31 different companies, each with its own tag, and was able to identify the line of business

4 A central concept in economic theory, the 'Keynesian multiplier' refers to the idea of the British economist John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) that when an entity spends money it becomes income for other people or companies that provided the purchased good or service; by spending this money, these latter will generate more demand and income and benefit other people and companies, and so on, in a virtuous cycle that multiplies spending and income.

5 I employ the terms used by economists and sociologists to describe more general transformations in the way companies and institutions operate over the last forty years, designating this 'flexible form of capitalist accumulation, based on reengineering, on the lean company, (...), [which] had enormous consequences in the world of work: (...) a growing reduction of the stable factory proletariat (...), flexibilization and deconcentration of the physical productive space; an enormous increase in the new proletariat, the factory and service subproletariat, [of] 'outsourced workers', subcontracted workers, part-time workers (...); an increase in middle and service wage earners (...); an expansion of what Marx called combined social labor where workers from different parts of the world participate in the production and service process' (Antunes 2005: 28-29). In the scope of anthropology, we are faced here with what Anna Tsing (2008) called the 'supply chain' or 'logistics chain capitalism'. 'Supply chain capitalism here refers to commodity chains based on subcontracting, outsourcing, and allied arrangements in which the autonomy of component enterprises is legally established even as the enterprises are disciplined within the chain as a whole' (Tsing 2008: 149). Although I disagree that bringing these 'supply chains' to the forefront is sufficient to understand the 'constitutive diversity of contemporary global capitalism', Tsing's (2008: 148) effort seems interesting to me because it focuses on transformations in the forms of production (and in the ways of analyzing these forms) that, having already been well worked out by other social scientists - for example via the concepts of 'global commodity chains' (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986), 'global value chains' (Sturgeon 2008) or 'global production networks' (Santos 2010) - have received little attention from anthropologists. For Tsing (2008: 149), on the other hand, 'questions raised by supply chains are the key to deliberations on wealth and justice in these times' (2008: 149).

in about half of the cases. I thus came across a world populated by companies that offered environmental engineering consulting services; equipment supply and local support; construction and civil engineering; engineering and infrastructure solutions; electrical services; bus, truck, equipment, and vehicle rentals; unmanned construction machinery and equipment rentals; garbage collection; open-pit mine implementation and operation; infrastructure works for industrial and commercial sectors; foundation and containment engineering; catering; drilling and blasting; explosives; and heavy machinery maintenance. The tag's numerical codes gave me a good approximation of the number of vehicles used by each company, and a reasonable estimate of their varying sizes: some had only 1 or 2 vehicles; most had less than 10; others worked with dozens; and two 'contractors' [*empreiteiras*] (the term comes from my interlocutors) had more than 100. With the exception of a few companies that do rental and maintenance, most of these tag-carrying companies were from outside the city—usually from Goiânia or other cities in Minas Gerais and Goiás where there is also mineral exploration. In approximately half of the cases, the vehicles in question were 4x4 pickup trucks. In addition, there were a few buses (which, like the pickup trucks, also circulated around the city to transport workers) and the rest were specialized vehicles receiving some repairs in tire repair shops and garages in the city.

Some small local businesses have achieved the 'honor' of being able to identify their vehicles with a tag. The only one whose owner I knew personally was the buffet restaurant I used to frequent, which expanded its kitchens and started to have five or six vehicles distributing lunch boxes to hotels and the project area. More modest, the participants in the conversations in front of my hotel had not achieved this 'trophy', and were content with other opportunities to 'be part of this supply chain' (a common expression among them): providing services to these 'tagged' subcontractors (which two of them, owners of a hotel and a mechanic's shop, managed to do) and selling goods to those who worked there (one of them had a grocery store; another arranged with his wife and maid to wash uniforms and do small sewing and repairs on clothes).

The efforts to monitor these trucks and the attention paid to these partial flows of income and money find a kind of synthesis in a local formula that, present in my fieldwork since its beginning, counts the total number of jobs created by a company. In 2008, for example, it was common to hear people saying that SAMA created 'eight hundred direct jobs, plus two thousand indirect ones'. At that point, the jobs of outsourced and subcontracted companies (the 'indirect ones') appeared to prevail over those provided by the company itself ('the direct ones'). In the most optimistic forecast I found regarding Serra Verde—and which coincides with the numbers published in a local newspaper (*O Popular* 2020)—this company would generate 1.5 thousand direct jobs and 6 thousand indirect ones. From the perspective of our protagonists, these numbers are exaggerated. But more relevant than this or that numerical estimate is the formula that expresses them, the emphasis on these indirect vacancies indicating the way in which these people are familiarizing themselves—resignedly and pragmatically—with the way in which mining companies and their 'offspring' have been experiencing, over the last few decades, their 'productive restructuring'.

### **In a conversation: expectations, anxieties and desires**

In this section, I explore the expectations and anxieties that these men harbor regarding this new enterprise and the opportunities and problems that emerge from it. I emphasize from the outset the need to approach these expectations in the plural, so as to recognize their variety, complexity and ambivalence, as well as the diversity of contexts, conceptions, experiences, and situations that elicit and reproduce them. Seeking a way to try to do some justice to this 'plurality of concrete worlds [and] perspectives' (Bakhtin 1988) that shape them, I draw inspiration in this section from Carneiro's (2015) descriptive experiments: I combine first-person statements (recreated by me and therefore distinct from the testimonies present in the previous sections of the article) with the use of free indirect discourse, 'the kind in which the distance between the native's word and

that of the ethnographer tends to a minimum' (Goldman 2015). To this end, I rework and group data produced during field trips in 2022 and 2023 with information I have been collecting since 2008 in order to present them in the form of a fictional chat involving precisely the men I discuss in this article. This type of description has an additional advantage: the alternation of voices and themes within the same conversation helps to translate into written text some of the dialogical dynamism, intellectual complexity and hubbub (the 'plurilinguism', 'heteroglossia' or 'polyphony', as Bakhtin would say) characteristic of this type of interaction.

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Roberval is satisfied with his business, since all these firms and outsiders have actually made it possible to expand his hotel. Carlão continues to operate the same little shop as always, located beside the Roberval establishment, offering groceries, personal hygiene products, sweets, drinks and cigarettes and everything else that may be necessary to the guests of this hotel, the truck drivers at the entrance of the asbestos mining company and those who frequent the nearby tire shops and gas stations. Edvelton worked at SAMA in the past, and after leaving there he opened a mechanical workshop on that same avenue. Miltão also worked at SAMA, and is now grinding and packaging coffee that he grows on his farm; he recently got a stall at the city fair, which is at least helping to make his product a little better known. Tiquinho does a little bit of everything: fixes pressure cookers, sells the lettuce and carrots he grows in the garden, sells fish bait and alcoholic drinks to neighbors, travels around the city with his tamales cart, prepares medicines with homemade roots.

With the arrival of the mining company, everyone had, at some point, some expectation of making some money. With so many people at his hotel, Roberval remains optimistic. The others participants in these conversations, today, are more skeptical. But even in the case of those who already benefit from new customers or from an increase in sales of the goods they offer, the certainty that a deal will be closed coexists with other emotions: some anxiety, some revolt, some pride, some resignation, some concern for those for whom one is responsible.

Anxiety to make the most of a situation that everyone knows is temporary—to make the most of it for as long as possible. You do have to be in a hurry, there is some urgency to get something extra, some extra money while the construction site is there. This turmoil they are witnessing, these people from abroad coming to work in Minaçu, these accommodations for them sprouting everywhere, these loads of workers and the mess they make [*peãozagens*], this will only last a year—at most, two. The time needed to build the industrial installation necessary for the mine to operate. When that happens, there are only a few people needed at the mine. Then it's all about modernities and modernization, machine machine machine and a only a little bit of man—and qualified ones. And doesn't this current situation remind one of what happened when the Cana Brava and São Salvador dams were built? The works in this case were completed with a speed that surprised many people. And many people went bankrupt, because these unsuspecting people thought that those construction sites, that bunch of pedestrians and engineers on the streets, that demand and consumption, that all of this would stay in the city for longer, as had happened in the almost fifteen years it took to build the first hydroelectric plant, Serra da Mesa. Of course, over these fifteen years things varied a lot, there were some periods of greater movement, others where everything was somewhat at a standstill—but in any case the works continued and for fifteen years there was movement, there were opportunities. Wasn't that when you filled your pockets with money, huh, Roberval?

— ... but this all makes us revolt. Don't you? Because it is the riches of this land, of our soil, our nature, that is going away. Forever. These people come, explore, extract, build pipelines, lines, paths, wires, and the energy and ore flow. Our riches go away like this, and the profit goes elsewhere. And how is Minaçu? There's a little bit left, a crumb. There is one job or another left for the city's mechanical workshops, an engine to rectify, a burner to repair, a new accessory to install, a pickup truck to wash. And let the little ones compete for those crumbs among themselves, let them compete to see who gets the job, who gets the service, the

opportunity. Have you noticed the increasing number of automobile repair shops popping up? Have you seen how competition is increasing? And only half a dozen jobs emerged. All this is rubbish.

—Ah, but leave this revolt aside, this bitterness! You have to overcome sadness and take advantage of the opportunity to work, and try to be part of such an impressive project. And be proud to be part of the chain. Didn't you hear what the mayor said? 'The supply chain will extend, it will be regional.' Weren't the president, the governor, together the other day, talking about Minaçu? This will be the largest rare earth metals mine in the country. Look how many people from abroad are watching, look how many people from all over are coming here. The geologists coming from Minas Gerais, the engineers coming from Rio de Janeiro. The Chinese. The Americans. Have you ever been to the construction site and seen the size of the machines, the amount of knowledge and technology gathered there? It is a privilege to be involved in such an important undertaking. They say that they have now brought a jumbo like never before seen in Goiás. A drilling machine like this can only be found in subway works in large cities, in the largest cities in the world...

—... was there cruelty, was there exploitation? Yes, there was. Did anyone die with hardened lungs because of the asbestos? Yes, they did. Are there those who are still in court today seeking compensation, and have received nothing? Yes. SAMA thought she was the owner of the city, did she want to rule everything? Did the company want to boss the mayor, the councilors? She did. But look on the other hand, she was a presence, and that was a way of being present here. She had a certain commitment, the company was involved in the life of the city. Was it not SAMA who emancipated Minaçu, which was previously part of the municipality of Uruaçu? And we would find SAMA on the radio, in *Diário do Norte*<sup>6</sup>, in teaching materials in schools. Everywhere. In sponsored teams, parties, shows, bands, in the traditional horseback rides [*cavalgadas*]. It had centrality, visibility. She was everywhere. It was part of everyday life in the city. Did she control the worker? Yes, she controlled. In the beginning, were the Kalungas, the quilombola people who lived on other side of the river, almost forcibly dragged to work at the company? Yes, they were. Deceit was used by the company against those who were coming from Maranhão? It was. Is there a lot of nonsense about the company being a mother? Is it a pretext to control the people? Of course. But the company had its doors open to those who were willing to get involved with it, to become part of the family. Are all companies the same? Yes, they are. But are they different? Yes, they are. Look at the difference between Furnas, the firm that built the Serra da Mesa dam, and Tractebel, the one that built Cana Brava and São Salvador. One was state-owned, the other was a private company. Ask those affected by dams if there has been any difference in dealing with them. Was there a difference? There was. Here Serra da Mesa had, and still has, a little bit of a presence. Every end of the day, just see the two buses full of people arriving back, those that this firm still employs. The people notice, stop, watch the workers returning home. This Tractebel... It doesn't even have an office here in the city - or does it? Do you know anyone who works for her? Two buses full of sweaty and tired males at five in the afternoon (people notice, stop, watch - you can see): is it little, nothing? Yes, it is almost nothing. But does it make a difference in the way people evaluate a firm, and feel treated? It does indeed.

—And listen to what my boy came to tell me the other day. What boy? My oldest, the one who got his D driver's license last month, the one who is already driving a truck to Serra Verde. That's my pride. Yes, he has already been formally hired [*fichado*] in Serra Verde. In Serra Verde, the firm that really runs the project, the owner! The real mining company - not just any contractor [*empreiteira*] or outsourcer [*terceirizada*]. Yes, it makes a difference. In Serra Verde there are more rights... Working there, my boy could start seeing the psychologist. The firm pays. And you can also exercise at the gym, for free. (What gym? Don't you know that Serra Verde is now occupying that weight room that previously existed at SAMA? They are taking up a lot of space that was just sitting there, abandoned). But I don't really agree with what my boy said... He said

6 A regional newspaper.

that Serra Verde is a mother, and that the contractors and subcontractors are just old whores [*putas velhas*]. That's an exaggeration. Nonsense of a boy, who doesn't know the stories, who has just started working, who is easily impressed by these benefits, who wants to boast an advantage—he who got this better position (in Serra Verde!), he boasts all the time he is better than his colleagues who are all in outsourced companies or in contractors. But do you think is there really that much of a difference? Because I don't think that Serra Verde is a mother - or at least like SAMA was a mother. Did Serra Verde build a workers' village? Did Serra Verde invest in the city's infrastructure? Did she leave something for us, for the population? Did she build a hospital? No. I know, this SAMA hospital wasn't for everyone, it was inside SAMA, inside. But still, in emergencies, it saved the lives of many people here in Minaçu. I remember when...—Yes, I know, you're right, of course: who built the municipal hospital, the one that still works today, the one that serves everyone, was Furnas. Furnas, the firm that built the first dam, Serra da Mesa and which was a government, state-owned company. Furnas you can say she was a mother. Furnas also built a workers' village. So, don't we still have two neighborhoods today named after these companies which were real mothers? At this end of the city, we have Vila da SAMA; at the other end, we have Vila de Furnas. A company that builds villages [*vilas*], houses, hospitals, that provides stable employment; a firm that establishes someone, that allows someone to stay firmly in the same job, in the same profession, in the same place: that's what I call a mother.

—And all of us here are fathers, family men, right? We have to take care of those who depend on us. As fathers, as bosses, as citizens concerned with helping the people [*ajudar o povo*]... The guards here at the hotel, these boys that I employ, who are like my children, who I helped raise, who I finished raising...

## Conclusion (or the outline of some partial syntheses, which open up new problems)

Let's go back to that story about the worker [*peão*] and the engineer at the motel. Considering it as a kind of myth, and interpreting it as such, will help us think about the dismay that pervades this 'economic' sagacity of those who focus their attention on what is happening in the streets and mechanic workshops of Minaçu.

The structure of this story evokes other narratives I heard there, where subjects in unequal social positions face each other in conflicting interactions whose outcome contains a comic effect and/or a moral lesson. In an inversion of traditional hierarchies, in these narratives the weakest reveals itself to be more clever and quick, and, cunningly, prevails over the most powerful in the end<sup>7</sup>. The small scale gold miner triumphs over the geologist, the illiterate hillbilly [*jeca*] triumphs over the doctor, the well-travelled [*corrido*] triumphs over the well-read [*lido*]<sup>8</sup>.

But in the plot I presented here there is something like an inversion of this inversion of traditional hierarchies: and the one who gets along well and has the last laugh is the engineer, who leaves the worker [*peão*] disappointed and deceived—or to wait, in vain, for a pickup truck that, stealthily, passed by him without him noticing. This inversion of the inversion seems to suggest that these men I deal with identify not only with the engineer, the hero-protagonist of the story that entertains them; but equally with the worker [*peão*].

It is also the discomfort generated by this identification with the engineer's antagonist that drives these men I consider here, in other records and narratives, to try to highlight the difference between themselves and these workers [*peões*], reinforcing the dividing lines that reaffirm good distances - those that regulate, for example, class distinctions—which, they hope, still exist. Conversations like the one we consider here also make this

7 Around the same time that Da Matta (1997 [1978]) wrote about Pedro Malasartes—'a traditional figure in popular tales from the Iberian Peninsula, as an example of an invincible, cunning, cynical trickster [*burlão*], inexhaustible with devices and deceptions, without scruples and without remorse' (Cascardo 1988: 536)—and most likely in dialogue with him, Velho (1979) intuited the relevance of this character for the sociological analysis of patronage dynamics (in the sense that Mediterraneanist anthropologists attributed to the term and which guides me in the interpretation of our 'myth') in the same Tocantins basin that I discuss here.

8 A common opposition in the region where I work, it contrasts those who obtained their knowledge through travels around the world with those who acquired it at school—and who, usually, arrive there from metropolises and capitals, generally with the aim of carrying out a 'research' [*pesquisa*].

possible, as spaces where they, proclaiming their success as traders and businesspeople, affirm their ability to 'participate in the supply chain' of the mining company. In these men's efforts to distance themselves from the workers [*peões*], as relevant as a closed deal is the performance of the ability to do so (albeit as a subcontractor of a subcontractor of a subcontractor etc. of the mining company). I will deliberately use the image of the game to highlight the 'agonistic' taste for dispute and competition that permeates this situation, where an 'art of fighting' is combined with a 'dimension (...) of spectacle or public dramatization' (Comerford 2003: 23). In this fight, there is a kind of youthful rivalry that manifests itself through displays of virility that concern not only performance in the game itself—but also someone's ability to position himself as a real competitor; as someone who is not a mere pawn [*peão*]; as someone who is (still) powerful and gifted, and equipped with the necessary conditions to enter the field—or a motel room. Therefore, not everyone will be able to 'compete' in this 'market'. Framed in this way, the chances of obtaining income within the scope of the arrival of the new mining company appear as something restricted to a selected few—those who are capable or blessed with the possibility of 'being part of the supply chain'. The attention and importance attributed to tags also resides in the fact that they act as emblems or trophies, visible and public indicators of this potential participation—in the game, in the chain—and the prestige associated with it.

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Both in this story of the engineer in the motel and in the knowledge practices that I described there is a crucial role played by the spectator: the one who, on the sidelines, tries to retain something from plots in which he knows he is a supporting player, yearning for a fuller participation in this 'chain' of events. This spectator's attention to the *movements* in front of him is also justified by the fleeting nature of what passes before his eyes, quickly heading to the scenes where the relevant actions of those who are in fact the protagonists will take place: the construction site where the mining company's facilities are located or the inside of the motel room. Paradoxically, the viewer only has access to the behind-the-scenes and preparations of these scenarios; and the value given to this that is out of their sight suggests to me that this situation bears a resemblance to those 'occult economies' that the Comaroffs (1999) speak of.

From this outsider conqueror of other people's women and lands—the engineer—all that the worker [*peão*] thinks it is possible to extract is a *pix*. But even this limited and easily transferable amount of money does not seem assured, and it is also the efforts and cunning necessary to 'magically' capture something of these elusive beings and flows that are at stake in these observation practices. Significantly, the worker [*peão*] acts by resorting to blackmail. Let us remember then that this term already appeared in this article, when I made reference to those 'socioeconomic blackmail devices' that, in the argument of Acselrad and Bezerra (2010), help to explain the acquiescence of the local population to the operation of enterprises whose polluting and harmful effects are famously known. With this I want to suggest the relevance that, in this universe, these blackmail, scams and illusions assume, as well as the value attributed to these types of extortion that, with their 'magical allure of making money from nothing', bring with them the promise of 'delivering almost preternatural profits, yield[ing] wealth sans perceptible production, value sans visible effort' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 281). I remember that, in this story, the worker [*peão*] and the engineer are far from their places of work, and it is in these other places that the worker's opportunity to obtain exceptional financial gains arises. The way the engineer gets rid of the extortion (using alcohol gel to remove the tag from the truck) is also indicative of the latter's trickery, and suggestive that blackmail such as this is not rare in that world (chances are he had already gone through this and knew exactly how to solve the problem). In the view of Comaroff and Comaroff (1999: 281), these 'occult economies' are also characterized by the proliferation of stratagems like these—'schemes that put a *con* in *economics*'.

Despite the fact that we are in a situation where everyone seems to resort to blackmail, scams and extortion, the engineer's chances—compared to the worker—of being successful in resorting to these schemes and stratagems are relatively greater. Let us also remember that, contrary to what normally happens in narratives and jokes of this genre, in the story we consider here, the one who wins is the most powerful. What, above, I called 'the inversion of the inversion of the traditional hierarchy' characteristic of our myth seems to indicate some changes occurring in the correlation of forces between the subjects in question, as well as in the strategies they resort to in their interaction. In the same way that, over the last few decades, mining companies have known how to appropriate the discourses of their critics, subverting them and putting them to work in their favor (Kirsh 2014; Gaviria 2015; Giffoni 2019; Acselrad et al 2021), the interpretation I present here points out that they and their representatives have also been making a consistent use of these tricks and trickery that we usually see as 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985).

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Daily and meticulously monitoring the news and signs indicating that the asbestos mining company will soon effectively close its activities, these men are witnessing the slow death of the 'mother of the city'. They thus seem to suffer and regret this more than other residents of the municipality (for example, those friends of mine affected by dams living on the outskirts). The company's continuous functioning from the 1970s onwards was decisive for their small businesses to sustain themselves, for the acquisition of the status they acquired in local social life and for the relative stability they were able to experience throughout this time. The value of all this becomes even more evident when we remember the ephemeral and feverish nature of the comings and goings and the ups and downs of those *movements* that have always shaped the history and the *economy* of Minaçu.

But what the imminent death of this mother generates is not only suffering and lamentation—but also helplessness: like that experienced by an orphan who, finding himself alone in the world, and in the absence of his family references, becomes disoriented or bewildered. Here we find yet another manifestation of the anxieties generated by this 'imminence of the desert' that Perutti (2022) talks about, when this author evokes these many places (real and imaginary) that are dead, still, forgotten; these 'holes' where no highway passes nearby, where there are no companies—where there is no *movement*. This bewilderment permeates and stimulates the economic knowledge practices that I described in this article. As I indicated, the attention to the pickup trucks and the mapping of the movements that are related are associated with the efforts of these men to situate themselves in this new reality that is unfolding before them. In this recent scenario, the authoritarian, perennial and visible (omni)presence of the asbestos mining company gave way to a configuration where the 'new' mining company - that of rare earths metals—materializes (and disguises) in other ways. The latter is being installed in a remote area dozens of kilometers from the city, and is only accessible to vehicles with authorization to enter there—the tag. Furthermore, this new venture takes place via this multiplicity of outsourced and subcontractors that greatly complicates the identification of relevant agencies and subjects. It is also the effort to gain some knowledge 'of the relationships at play in this social universe' (Comerford 2014: 110) which explains my interlocutors' obsession with those trucks.

Just above I compared the anxieties of my protagonists, adult men who are fathers, to the restlessness and rivalry of young people who, fearing being excluded, do their best to participate—or to pretend to participate—in a game where there is no place for everyone interested in playing to compete in it. Now, I bring these anxieties closer to the bewilderment and disorientation of an orphan. Such analogies also interest me to sketch a synthesis of the anxieties and desires that circumscribe the dynamics of these conversations, thus allowing us to glimpse both the 'economic' scenario emerging recently in the city and some of the elements that, in a more perennial

way, structure certain images of masculinity for the subjects I deal with. I emphasize that this association between the *economy*, on the one hand, and the practices and moralities of men like these, on the other, is far from being circumstantial, or merely analytical: because as a native category, this *economy* is delineated by this substantial and markedly gendered imbrication of practices, knowledge, stories, circulations, games and anxieties. And here I return to the approach that promotes a shift from an economic anthropology towards an anthropology of *economics*, the latter considered as a native category. Coming into existence in automobile repair shops, garages, mines, roads and construction sites, *the economy of Minaçu* is what takes shape and begins to exist in these masculine places and paths that smell of ore and diesel oil, and that are marked by the dirt of grease, of the mud (Guedes 2013b) and of the filthy jokes told there.

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The orphan's helplessness, the child's revolt against his erratic mother, the youthful desire to participate in the game, the countryman's fear of being forgotten in the desert—all these weaknesses are articulated with the virile attributes embodied in this 'cultural hero': the engineer of that story. I suggest here that the latter's position and qualifications allow him to act in accordance with this 'provider ethic' whose central value is the 'ability to generate income to support the family' (Fontes 2018: 86; cf. Zaluar 2000). In line with this ethic, work is seen as something painful, in itself not a source of satisfaction, pride or identity, appearing more as a means than an end in itself. Our engineer, in fact, is presented to us far from any office or industrial installation, and at work time he is enjoying carnal pleasures that are available to him due to his social position (and, as my interlocutors insist, also because of the pickup truck he drives). His cunning and trickery, and this ability to simultaneously be a stud and a 'providing' husband and family man, represent an ideal that is indisputably valuable to all the men in those conversations. The valorization of this 'provider ethic' and the disregard for the concrete means through which such earnings are obtained (let us remember those blackmail and 'schemes that put a con in *economics*') seem to equally correlate with the centrality of pickup trucks in this world, and the environmental consequences resulting from all this. Their vast truck beds and their strength in transporting heavy loads suggest that what counts, ultimately, is what you take 'home'. This lack of importance attributed to how what is carried was obtained is the other side of what, in the opening pages of this article, I called the 'truculent power' of these vehicles: demiurgically and childishly, the pretension they claim to go over any obstacles and resistance, of overcoming the singularities of environments, turning all terrains, grounds and landscapes into paths and tracks.

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Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding:  
ethnographies with ‘uncomfortable otherness’

# From ‘Humiliation’ to Radical Beliefs: Navigating political subjectivities and ideological shifts in trajectories of radicalization.

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## **Abstract**

This essay delves into the analysis of the radicalization trajectory of supporters of the Early and Preventive Treatment (TPP), contextualizing it within the Brazilian political and social scenario during the 2023 elections. The focus lies on practices, both discursive and non-discursive, influencing contemporary adherence to far-right ideologies. In particular, the paper highlights how the far-right establishes effective communication with society, exploring Sonia’s central role in becoming an active part of a discursive community. The narrative examines her quest for knowledge, often grounded in fake news and studies without scientific review, related to the TPP. The article explores the dynamics between social inclusion, information-seeking, and the legitimization of identity, emphasizing the importance of situational discomfort in constructing the ethnographic project. The adopted approach highlights local practices as authentic political theories and underscores the need to understand how extreme ideologies are normalized and internalized by social subjects, providing a robust conceptual foundation for analyzing the complexities of radicalization and identity formation in the Brazilian political context.

**Keywords:** Political Subjectivities; Truth; Moral person.

# De la «Humillación» a las Creencias Radicales: Navegando las subjetividades políticas y los cambios ideológicos en trayectorias de radicalización. Resumen

## **Resumen:**

Este ensayo profundiza en el análisis de la trayectoria de radicalización de los partidarios del Tratamiento Precoz y Preventivo (TPP), contextualizándolo en el escenario político y social brasileño durante las elecciones de 2023. El enfoque se centra en las prácticas, tanto discursivas como no discursivas, que influyen en la adhesión contemporánea a las ideologías de extrema derecha. En particular, el artículo destaca cómo la extrema derecha establece una comunicación efectiva con la sociedad, explorando el papel central de Sonia al convertirse en parte activa de una comunidad discursiva. La narrativa examina su búsqueda de conocimiento, a menudo basada en noticias falsas y estudios sin revisión científica, relacionados con el TPP. El artículo explora las dinámicas entre la inclusión social, la búsqueda de información y la legitimación de la identidad, enfatizando la importancia del malestar situacional en la construcción del proyecto etnográfico. El enfoque adoptado destaca las prácticas locales como teorías políticas auténticas y subraya la necesidad de comprender cómo las ideologías extremas se normalizan e internalizan por los sujetos sociales, proporcionando una base conceptual sólida para analizar las complejidades de la radicalización y la formación de identidades en el contexto político brasileño.

**Palabras clave:** Subjetividades Políticas; verdad; persona moral.

# Da ‘Humilhação’ a Crenças Radicais: Navegando por subjetividades políticas e mudanças ideológicas em trajetórias de radicalização.

## Resumo

Este ensaio aprofunda a análise da trajetória de radicalização dos apoiadores do Tratamento Precoce e Preventivo (TPP), contextualizando-a dentro do cenário político e social brasileiro durante as eleições de 2023. O foco está nas práticas, tanto discursivas quanto não discursivas, que influenciam a adesão contemporânea a ideologias de extrema direita. Em particular, o artigo destaca como a extrema direita estabelece uma comunicação eficaz com a sociedade, explorando o papel central de Sonia ao se tornar uma parte ativa de uma comunidade discursiva. A narrativa examina sua busca por conhecimento, frequentemente fundamentada em notícias falsas e estudos sem revisão científica, relacionados ao TPP. O artigo explora as dinâmicas entre inclusão social, busca por informações e a legitimação da identidade, enfatizando a importância do desconforto situacional na construção do projeto etnográfico. A abordagem adotada ressalta as práticas locais como teorias políticas autênticas e sublinha a necessidade de compreender como ideologias extremas são normalizadas e internalizadas por sujeitos sociais, proporcionando uma base conceitual robusta para a análise das complexidades da radicalização e da formação de identidade no contexto político brasileiro.

**Palavras-chave:** Subjetividades Políticas; Verdade; Pessoa Moral.

# From ‘Humiliation’ to Radical Beliefs: Navigating political subjectivities and ideological shifts in trajectories of radicalization.

Wagner Guilherme Alves da Silva

## Introduction

‘Never has anyone cared about me, then overnight I became essential; it’s funny,’ Sonia told me in one of our conversations. A proponent of the use of unproven medications in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil and proud to identify herself as far-right, which she considers the ‘true Right,’ Sonia upset the already unequal conditions of our contact since our first meeting, presenting herself as someone who ‘knows the truth, and that’s why she acts, and that’s why you came here, to learn the truth of things.’

Seeing herself as a researcher who carefully collects and organizes data in the production of her individual position, Sonia asked me numerous times if I was ready to learn the ‘truth of things.’ My interlocutor subverted the figure of the researcher into that of the apprentice, one who needs to learn to read the world, to piece together the puzzle, and thus reconstruct the picture of truth, always defined as frightening, terrible, shocking.

At times, it was indeed shocking to encounter narratives about the pandemic and its modes of confrontation, and the equivalences produced between the individual body and the body of the nation, attacked by the virus of ‘extreme left-wing ideology’ or ‘communism,’ or more commonly, ‘petism’.<sup>1</sup> Sonia knew she occupied a privileged position, someone who could give me access to the world of ideological production of the far-right in the context of the pandemic, what I called ‘pandemic Bolsonaroism’ (Alves da Silva 2023).

Sonia was deemed an essential worker and therefore left her home every day during social isolation. For her, this was a way for the ‘powerful’ to protect themselves and let ‘poor souls die.’ It was when she felt at risk that she began researching the Early Treatment protocol, which consists of a combination of various medications, vitamins, and supplements as a means of preventing Sars-Cov-2 infection. My interlocutor laments what she considers the ‘shame and humiliation’ inflicted by information sources, scientists, and doctors on protocol users. For her, the protocol saved lives and was crucial in revealing the power struggle that, according to Sonia, motivated and sustained the pandemic.

Unable to isolate herself and living with her mother, an elderly woman considered at higher risk of developing severe forms of the disease, Sonia maintained her shifts at the supermarket, crossing a capital in the northern part of the country by bus every day. Exposing herself at work and in transportation, she began researching prevention methods and found various YouTube channels and Instagram profiles of doctors with tips, explanatory videos, and personalized consultations through question boxes.

The worker, who had voted for Jair Bolsonaro in the 2018 elections because ‘things couldn’t stay the way they were,’ began to radicalize as she exposed herself to content on the internet, especially in WhatsApp groups, where we met. Over the two years of our contact, I witnessed a process of deep radicalization and the consequent reorientation of her social subjectivity in the relational web (Duarte 1986; Mauss 2003: 1; Das 1995; Boltanski & Thévenot 1991). The pandemic and the feeling of being ‘left behind’ constitute a social event that descended into the worker’s everyday life, reorganizing her relationships, positions, and worldview. The

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<sup>1</sup> Petism and Petist are terms used by the Brazilian far-right to refer to left-wing sectors in general, conflating them with the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores). A person labeled as Petista is not necessarily a member or supporter of the party. These terms broadly designate the left rather than specifying any particular affiliation.

populist dichotomy of the elite against the people (Mudde 2007: 19; Laclau 2005; Glynos & Mondon 2016) was redefined around the idea of a power struggle, a struggle in which the powerful denied access to medications to kill right-wing people, the 'good citizens,' individuals committed to 'the truth of things.'

Similar to Nitzan Shoshan's (2016) exploration of the precariously employed young far-right individuals in Germany, this article explores the position of a precarious worker in Brazil within the context of national construction or the remoralization of the nation. Shoshan argues that the figure of the far-right extremist, often repudiated by the political community and democratic ideals, continues to exist despite not being considered reasonable. These individuals' trajectories resemble those of thousands of other precarious workers, whose situation would elicit empathy in any other context. Thus, extremism can be considered, as suggested by Shoshan (2016), as a ghost personifying the fears and anxieties of a nation laden with memories and taboos in the context of a global public health emergency.

This article, therefore, deals with the formation of political subjectivities in the face of critical social events (Das 1995) that drastically alter the subject's relationship with the objects of human experience (Harding *et al.* 2021), accelerating an already ongoing process of radicalisation.

It involves examining how disputes around the notion of truth construct objects in a discursive construction that responds to a certain relationship between knowledge and power (Foucault 2008). As the minimum unit of discourse, statements of truth and disputes around modalities of understanding and communicating the world and social phenomena elucidate Foucault's postulate that 'where there is truth, there is power, and where there is power, there is truth.' In its circularity, power does not do without contact with true objects, i.e., objects constituted by signs of truth (*ibid.*, 2008). As the author stated, the exercise of power requires the manifestation of truth, which is presented through the production of social facts through knowledge (knowledge opens up a field for power in a circular relationship).

In this context, the social subjects represented here will be understood in their work of argumentative dispute about an ultimate truth of things, the concealment of which would respond to a conspiracy between the powerful and the system. It is evident that the challenge of working with extreme realities frames the entire analysis and re-centres its necessity, especially with the concern to give voice to social subjects who defend the indefensible. However, I question, before anything else, the political-epistemological consequences of not understanding how the set of techniques, tactics, and infrastructure that shape discourses operate, positioning individuals on trajectories of radicalization.

## **Researching, knowing, acting, and protecting: trajectories of radicalisation**

Sonia and her friends were engaged in the constant, daily work of 'knowing' the truth. The process of knowledge was described as cruel, and painful, but capable of repositioning the social subject in the framework of social relations, allowing them to see what 'we couldn't see before, then everything changes, everything, family, friends, everything changes, and we start to be called crazy.' What my interlocutors referred to as 'knowing' is nothing more than the process of deepening into conspiracy theories and the radicalisation process. Thus, the more they 'know,' the more displaced they become from the general social framework, and thus, they consider WhatsApp and Telegram groups as possible places of congregation of experiences.

The term 'trajectories of radicalisation' aims to describe the social process that marks the creation of a fundamental difference, highlighting the social subject from the relational flow and morally repositioning them in the world (Udupa *et al.* 2017, 2023; Shoshan 2016). This process is mediated by technologies and their technical infrastructures and dynamic algorithms (Udupa *et al.* 2020; Pohjonem & Udupa & McDowell 2017; Cesarino 2020b), but not only. The process of radicalisation occurs differently in the online and offline universes, and although these two dimensions feed each other, both have organisational landscapes and contexts that feed and structure them.



Sahana Udupa and contributors, in proposing the concept of extreme speech (Udupa 2020) instead of hate speech, emphasizes that extreme discourse highlights the profound contextualisation of online speech acts in various cultural, social, and political contexts on a global scale. This approach takes into account the cultural variation of speech acts, the norms associated with them, and the historical contexts that shape them. In this perspective, the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable discourse is not clearly defined by the author, constantly reassessed in public and political discussions, and the boundaries are continually readjusted, employed, and distorted. The analysis of extreme speech encompasses digital cultures that challenge the limits of legitimate discourse in terms of truth-falsehood and civility-incivility (Udupa et al 2019, 2020, 2023).

The term 'trajectories of radicalization' aims to mark that people radicalize over time, the conditions of radicalization occur inside and outside virtual environments, but reposition the individual in their immediate social networks (it is a process of moral conversion), and it implies a fundamental relational pole in justifying the 'fight' against the evil people, the indefensible, those who do not study and, thus, do not position themselves in the fight for the nation (Udupa et al 2019; Kleinman 2006). This was how Sonia and her friends saw me, and our relationship was marked by accusations of a lack of commitment to the fight, little knowledge, and a 'negligent' attitude toward the overall picture to which I was exposed.

In a movement similar to anthropologist Nitzan Shoshan (2016), the goal is to reconstruct the everyday landscapes of otherness and constructions of the enemy, reflecting on the conditions and possibilities for ethnographic encounter, especially because my position as a researcher was a fundamental point of access and ethnographic negotiation. The technical infrastructures for access and sharing of news and the possibilities of building virtual communities of hate will be presented through the subjects' experiences in their narratives of 'knowledge.' Throughout my research, my position was clear to my interlocutors.

However, they constantly told me that I only knew 'one side of the story, the wrong side.' Presenting herself as a kind of guru, guide, or even as a guardian of a fundamental truth, Sonia was willing to present me with the truth, and expose me to the content of knowledge, but warned me that the critical point was not the content I would deal with but how I would use it and where I would place it in my personal history and political experience in Brazil.

Throughout the development of our relationship, Sonia constantly sent me videos, news, and information profiles to give me access to the 'truth' about the pandemic and medications. In trying to convince me of the benefits of medications, she always spoke of individual freedom in a scenario of deep knowledge of the implications of choices. Sonia also taught me about the body and its integrative view, that is, understanding it as a general system of functioning that relates its physical, nutritional, and moral aspects. 'You have to know, you need to learn,' the videos taught, were constant phrases uttered by Sonia and the people she introduced me to for further conversations, thus constituting a semantic field of communication about the body and disease in the pandemic context.

Navigating through social groups on Telegram, and WhatsApp, and watching hundreds of live streams and IGTV videos on Instagram, Sonia was 'connecting the pieces,' doing what one of her colleagues called 'patchwork,' that is, the difficult work of pasting the pieces of a fragmented reality in the reconstruction of a totality, the truth to be accessed. The closer the final reconstruction of the picture, the more radicalized her position became, mixing fake news, individual beliefs, mysticism, and theories that considered deaths from COVID-19 as resulting from a new energetic moment on planet Earth (Alves da Silva 2023).

However, knowing implies acting, either in the reconstruction of the 'truth' or in the fight against those who, in some way, 'try to prevent us from knowing' (Sonia). The search for information, whether in social groups or through videos and video lectures on Instagram or YouTube, repositions the individual in the social fabric (Alves da Silva 2023; Pavessi & Valentin 2019; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009) through the idea that there are evil individuals in collusion with big pharmaceutical industries with profit interests in people's deaths. Access to truth, therefore,

implies accessing a possibility of deviation from an 'evil' plan, so acting is fundamental. Therefore, the search for 'truth' and the process of knowing imply establishing a warlike landscape in which the enemy and the reason to be fought are constructed (Udupa et al 2023; Nelvo 2020; Cho 2008; Kleinman 2006; Das 1995).

Just as in politics, it is the collective fight for truth and the defense of what is moral, just, and effective that motivates and gives meaning to the collective activity concerned with the body and the individual. An inheritor of individualistic ideology, this perception is surrounded by elements of political struggle illustrated in the speech of the then President of the Republic, which opens this chapter. In the name of defending individuality, freedom, and individual choice, this political rationality manages to align public health and governability, indicating an entirely new relationship between technology, health, and nation-building.

Sonia's perspective emphasizes the importance of knowing and acting based on that knowledge. She justifies how she came to know the truth about the pandemic and how this truth reshaped her understanding of health and politics:

It's like this: before the pandemic, anything, you go to the doctor, you go to the hospital, you don't wait at home. But now, the person has to stay at home, die at home, without air? So it's like, oh, it's science, it's the truth, and then every hour it's something else, wash food, don't wash food, while the worker is starving without being able to work. On television, only death, just death, but with doctors saying that we can prevent, we can do something. Who do we believe? It's the choice you mentioned, we keep choosing. I myself thought, you know, for everything, we take medicine to prevent, and now nothing? Strange, that's when I saw it, that's when science spoke about the medicines, doctors, journalists being persecuted, everything, everything. I read a lot, I see a lot of studies, many doctors, you know, persecuted everywhere. So it's connecting the dots, linking things. The virus appears, and then you can't use the medicines you have? What do you do then, die waiting? (...) There's something that I know Janaína told you because she told me everything; it's true, you know, about believing in what we trust. The doctor spoke, presented everything, you know, the data, talked about the people they treat, and then we started to understand what that medicine does. Like Ivermectin, did you know it doesn't metabolize in the stomach? It's in the intestine, so it's not toxic. But then it's like this: everyone chooses what to do with what they've found out. I chose, you chose, it's a choice, we're not obliged to anything in this life, we choose. I chose the right thing, I chose, but I chose, so sometimes you might think I'm stupid, but I read and researched a lot, you know? (...) There is persecution, yes, don't come with that, there is, if you don't want to see it, want to stay blind, it's your problem, your choice, but there is, I'll send you the screenshot I received here.

Conspiracy theories<sup>2</sup>, disastrous worlds, and the struggle between good and evil provide the framework (Goffman & Titton 2012), first for the interpretation of social reality for these agents, and medical authority reinforces the appeal to medications. These professionals not only recommend and support these substances but also provide explanations about their efficacy and metabolism process.

The perception that society or the Brazilian nation, composed of righteous citizens—as Sonia defined—is sick and, therefore, needs to be rehabilitated through therapies and therapeutic itineraries. According to the framing model proposed by Goffman and Titton (2012), an individual's experience in the world is, in a sense, a result of how they frame the reality that surrounds them. Therefore, what each individual considers as real results from how they decode, signify, and interpret the world. Thus, frames are always undertaken from an individual perspective, meaning, '(...) the facts and events on which some awareness is directed are only integrated

<sup>2</sup> I am defining and classifying as conspiracy theories all interpretations of the pandemic that combined medical and political elements to construct a worldview framed as a struggle between good and evil. By doing so, I aim to demonstrate how these alternative interpretations have intersected with latent social vulnerabilities, making politically disconnected discourses more acceptable. However, the reference point for the concept of conspiracy is factuality. Despite being linked to social processes and existing inequalities, these interpretations are not supported either by scientific discourse or factual analysis. This is evidenced by the fact that the peaks of the pandemic coincided with the peaks in the consumption of medications, indicating that these remedies did not lead to a reduction in deaths or infections. This factuality underscores the concept of conspiracy.

into a person's experience when interpreted and encoded as objects of attention' (Hangai 2012: 2). In the case of social groups and the quest for knowledge, the massification of messages and the broad reach allow individual perspectives on reality, decoding processes, and signification of facts to compete with collective conceptions—shared readings of the world among 'citizens of virtue,' those concerned and committed to the truth of facts.

## **Social Media, Identities, and Communities**

Sonia's engagement with conspiracy theories and the radical redefinition of her worldview through social media not only altered her perception of the pandemic but also allowed her to challenge traditional modes of knowledge and authority. By immersing herself in these alternative discourses, Sonia felt she had gained access to a privileged form of understanding, one that she perceived as superior to the conventional narratives propagated by mainstream media and academic circles. This newfound knowledge enabled her to articulate and critique issues such as healthcare access and social inequality from a standpoint that she saw as aligned with, or even surpassing, the traditional expertise of the middle and upper classes. For Sonia, the capacity to mobilize a semantic field previously reserved for these groups granted her a sense of empowerment and legitimacy that was both deeply personal and politically charged.

Considering the sentiment of anti-intellectualism within Sonia's perspective reveals a profound distrust in traditional scientific authorities, which is emblematic of broader socio-political trends exacerbated by the internet. Sonia's alignment with alternative viewpoints on COVID-19, such as the use of unproven treatments, reflects a rejection of what she perceives as elitist scientific communication. This skepticism is amplified by online spaces that often capitalize on and magnify anti-intellectual sentiments. Social media platforms provide a fertile ground for the proliferation of conspiracy theories and alternative narratives by framing them as counter-cultural or resistant to a purportedly corrupt establishment. Such platforms not only validate Sonia's views by presenting them as part of a broader, populist struggle against an out-of-touch elite but also offer a sense of community and agency. This interaction underscores how the internet can transform anti-intellectualism from a fringe perspective into a potent political and social force, leveraging the power of collective grievance and the perceived marginalization of traditional scientific discourse.

In this process, Sonia did not merely see herself as part of a community but as a distinctive voice within it. She embraced the role of a seeker of truth, one who had uncovered insights often hidden from broader societal discourse. This self-perception was crucial to her identity; she wanted to be portrayed as someone who was actively engaged in a quest for knowledge and understanding. Her engagement with alternative narratives and her critical stance against mainstream information sources were not just about aligning with a particular political ideology but were intrinsically tied to her desire to be recognized as an authoritative figure in her own right. Additionally, Sahana Udupa and contributors' (2020) approach to 'extreme speech' is relevant here. Sonia and her interlocutors, by adopting and disseminating conspiracy theories and alternative viewpoints, are not only participating in a polarized discourse but also engaging in a communicative practice that redefines the boundaries of what is politically acceptable. Through her lens, the pursuit of truth and the critique of established institutions became a means of asserting her position and challenging the status quo.

Sonia's insistence on her perspective as one of deep understanding and critical insight was intertwined with her rejection of the conventional representation of her socio-economic class. She felt that the dominant narratives of her time failed to adequately address the real issues faced by people in precarious conditions. Her discourse was, therefore, not merely an opposition to established knowledge but a reassertion of her own agency within a broader socio-political context. By positioning herself within this new semantic and discursive space, Sonia sought to redefine her place in the social hierarchy and challenge the traditional power dynamics between different classes and forms of knowledge.

However, my understanding of how Sonia interpreted the pandemic scenario through means that gave her agency and connected to significant communication issues in health intersected with my own personal experience with COVID-19. Having lost three relatives in the same week to SARS-CoV-2, it was difficult for me to hear about alternative treatments and the emphasis on individual responsibility for one's own health. My personal experience drew me closer to a normative perspective of science, which I had previously been more critical of. For me, these modalities of understanding the world could be defined as conspiracy theories, but for Sonia, they represented the possibility of constituting a coherent understanding. This tension highlighted the challenge of maintaining an empathetic and critical stance as an anthropologist while grappling with the emotional weight of personal loss and the scientific discourse I had once critiqued.

Another pivotal element in the clash of perspectives was the incident in which Sonia attacked me in a WhatsApp group. As a member of this group for several months, I had introduced myself as a researcher interested in conducting interviews at a time when journalists were leaking conversations from such groups, and doctors were facing disciplinary actions by the Federal Medical Council. On this occasion, I was perceived as a disguised journalist and was subsequently attacked by the group members, including Sonia. A primary weapon in this attack was the exposure of my social media profiles and a Facebook post by a cousin about the death of our family members. The group attributed these deaths to divine intervention due to my 'denialist' stance on early treatment for COVID-19 and held me responsible for the fatalities. This episode was central to my relationship with Sonia, as she reinforced these accusations within the group, despite privately sending me a message expressing solidarity. This incident not only deepened the tension between my personal and professional identities but also highlighted the complex dynamics of trust and hostility that can emerge in ethnographic research, particularly when the researcher is personally implicated in the subject matter.

The dynamic between Sonia's radicalized perspective and my own values as a researcher was a constant point of tension throughout our interactions. While my approach was grounded in understanding and empathy, the values and theories that Sonia espoused often starkly contrasted with my own academic and political stance. This tension underscored the challenge of navigating ethnographic research in politically charged environments, where the researcher's positionality and the interlocutor's worldview can come into sharp conflict.

Ultimately, Sonia's narrative exemplifies the broader impact of conspiracy theories and alternative discourses on individual and collective identity. Her transformation from a skeptical worker to a self-identified bearer of hidden truths highlights how such discourses can reshape personal and social understandings, allowing individuals to feel a sense of empowerment and legitimacy. For Sonia, the act of 'knowing' was not just about acquiring information but about asserting her place within a new epistemological framework that she believed better addressed her lived experiences and societal grievances.

In portraying Sonia's experience, it is crucial to recognize her perspective as a genuine attempt to seek and represent a form of truth that resonated with her lived reality. Her desire to be seen as a knowledgeable and critical voice was not merely a personal ambition but a reflection of a broader struggle for recognition and legitimacy within a landscape marked by profound inequalities and contested narratives. By engaging with her perspective, we gain insight into how alternative discourses can offer new ways of understanding and addressing the complexities of social and political life.

Spivak's critique of post-structuralist thinkers underscores a critical dimension of Sonia's engagement with alternative narratives. Spivak argues that these philosophers often overlook the epistemic violence of imperialism, perpetuating a notion of the subject who speaks and writes on behalf of the marginalized, rather than acknowledging their own agency and lived realities. This critique aligns with Sonia's experience, as her immersion in alternative discourses and conspiracy theories reflects a response to traditional modes of knowledge that she felt were inadequate in addressing her socio-political context. This is why Sonia is averse to my position as a researcher; she understands that, ultimately, I hold the power of representation. By contesting

the ways she wants to be portrayed, she emphasizes her position as someone who seeks knowledge, portraying herself as an 'active' person.

Sonia's radical redefinition of her worldview through social media allowed her to challenge conventional narratives and authorities in ways that parallel Spivak's concern. By engaging deeply with these alternative perspectives, Sonia felt she had accessed a privileged form of understanding that surpassed the traditional expertise of the middle and upper classes. This aligns with Spivak's critique, as Sonia's process of 'connecting the dots' and critiquing mainstream media and academic circles mirrors the critique of how dominant epistemic frameworks often ignore or marginalize alternative voices.

### **Modes of Reaction: The Moral Repositioning of the Subject and Protection Strategies**

Sonia and her colleagues believed they needed to protect themselves not only from 'bad people' but also from the audacity of scientists trying to tell them what to do. Sonia's experience in acquiring knowledge was different; the doctors she consulted with, followed, and interacted with on social media during the pandemic told her that using the advocated medications was a matter of choice, but that choice could only be made with the necessary knowledge. For Sonia, scientific communication was quite rigid and impersonal, not considering the particularities of her life, unlike the doctors she was in contact with through Instagram Q&A sessions.

The warlike landscape, as she called it, produced by the capture of public health discussions within the political grammar of national defense made Sonia feel constantly under attack. It was as if she couldn't share what she discovered in her research, making her spend even more time with social group friends, whom she called 'family.' In an excerpt from my field diary, I noted:

She feels she can't communicate what she researches because she will be perceived as crazy, extremist, and ridiculed. She also said that people, 'like you,' probably referring to researchers, like to speak with difficult words to seem smarter. I really think she can't understand scientific communication, which is always very technical, driving her into the videos that the far-right spreads about the body and the nation. Sonia's refusal might be a rejection of a knowledge system in which she doesn't participate. She feels included and believes that in social groups, her voice and opinion are respected. That's why they attack in groups, she told me. They feel they will be exposed, so they expose themselves first. There's something interesting here, which is how the far-right managed to handle agency and communicative forms in a context of political, health, and expert system crises (Field Note, November 2022).

'They laugh at us, make us look like fools,' Sonia said as she narrated her resentment towards how traditional media portrays those who dare to see what no one wants to see. For her, it's not just about the conditions of joining the group, but also about the lack of care in depicting what is discussed there because everything has a deeper meaning. We're not a bunch of crazies, as they want to portray in the news for people to think. By decontextualizing the uses, which is an emergency, right, an emergency because something needs to be done, and not highlighting the struggle of medicine based on experience fueled by the medical desire, or some doctors, to save lives, caricatures were produced as portraits of these users. Throughout our contact, Sonia insisted a lot that I reaffirm the active nature of her participation in the groups, to separate her from any possibility of association with the image of an alienated person, a word she abhors, 'I think it's horrible because they only use it for us, for them, nothing. When you write your book, put there that we study a lot, we seek a lot of information, and maybe that's why we resent when they don't give relevance to our knowledge work.'

Sonia's resentment is deeply tied to her experiences of humiliation, both personal and collective. Her frustration with mainstream scientific communication and her subsequent alignment with alternative viewpoints can be seen as a response to the perceived disregard and belittlement of her experiences and knowledge by established authorities. The humiliation she feels is compounded by the broader socio-political

context in which her views are dismissed and ridiculed. This process of humiliation fosters a defensive posture, where Sonia and her peers seek to reclaim their dignity and assert their autonomy through alternative narratives. The far-right's ability to capitalize on this resentment involves framing their perspectives as a legitimate counterpoint to a dismissive elite, thus transforming personal humiliation into a collective political stance. This dynamic illustrates how deeply felt emotions of humiliation can fuel radicalization and reshape one's engagement with socio-political and scientific discourses.

To interrupt the flow of humiliation, the activation of groups is crucial as it allows working on the very process of degradation and ridicule, giving these new connotations and meanings. If, as Didier Eribon (2008) demonstrated, the insult reverberates deeply in the individual's consciousness, especially for what it says to them, we can understand the groups as a rejection of what the process of ridicule recalls and affirms. It is, therefore, a response to this memory, a way of not accepting the social space reserved for these individuals, and a vehement assertion that 'this is not me.' Thus, being brave by choosing to see what no one wants to see can be considered a result of this work on the very substance of exposure, the composition of new layers of meaning for such a traumatic event in a person's life: exposure and ridicule by friends 'of a lifetime.'

If we consider, as Avishai Margalit (1998, 2007) does, that humiliation induces in the person a feeling of being subhuman, incomplete, and worthless, it becomes clear that the individual's first task exposed to this dynamic is their holistic recomposition, that is, their redefinition and reaffirmation as a complete and total person. Maria Elvira Diaz Benitez (2022) demonstrated in her careful ethnography of women attacked with acid in Colombia that the attack aims to produce a permanent state of humiliation and degradation because the goal is to strip the person of their humanity through a theatricalization of excess (Blair 2005). Thus, the feeling that someone can be degraded allows Sonia to degrade, or at least gives her elements to justify her actions. Sonia and I met in a group, as known so far. What I haven't told is that Sonia was one of the people who joined a degradation process to which I was subjected in a WhatsApp group.

Sonia, using screenshots sent by another member of the Facebook group, mocked the death of three of my family members from COVID-19, associating the deaths with divine intervention. Minutes after her message, she sent me a private one saying she regretted my pain and that no one should feel it. After the performance in front of her peers, in private, she told me she understood the extent of my pain and asked me to understand that her colleagues; they were just hurt, like me. Everyone felt left behind by the science communication strategies at the beginning of the pandemic and needed to work at a time when many of us were isolated. She said they needed to understand better, and social media was fundamental to them, because they did what 'none of the famous doctors did'. It was in this process that they started taking medication to feel 'a little protected.'

Sonia became more radicalized<sup>3</sup> over the two years we had contact. Despite our first meeting already being under adverse circumstances, her positions became increasingly political as the 2023 elections approached. The entire universe Sonia was part of transformed into a machine for producing interpretations of social reality, proposing solutions to what they called the 'disease of the nation'—meaning the left supporters (Alves da Silva 2023). Despite her adverse position, Sonia started joining WhatsApp groups because she felt excluded, despite being considered an essential worker.

Her resentment stemmed from the contradiction of being essential and therefore unable to isolate, as many of us did. Her difficulty in understanding the disseminated protocols and also regarding the future brought the worker closer to the social groups managed by the far-right in Brazil, with a reductionist and scientifically unproven proposition. Conspiracy theories and the division of the world into good and evil did not appear,

3 By 'radicalization,' I understand the process of deepening engagement with alternative theories, effectively distancing oneself from scientific conventions, and applying a biologist model to the understanding of the 'political struggle' (Alves da Silva 2023). This process involves an increasingly profound immersion in narratives that challenge established scientific knowledge and use biological concepts in a distorted manner to explain social and political phenomena. Radicalization, in this sense, is not merely a rejection of scientific consensus but also an epistemological reorganization that redefines ways of understanding and acting in the world, attributing political meanings to scientific concepts

in this sense, as symptoms of individual anxieties (Harding & Stewart 2003), but as a possible response, mixing political views and structural precarities, to the crisis in question. Conspiracy theories allowed Sonia to assemble the 'pieces' and rebuild her own framework of understanding.

Thus, far-right movements during Covid-19 in Brazil captured the communication space inaugurated by the public health emergency to propose connections and interpretations that were not only more easily assimilable but also conferred agency to the social subject. That is, through access to the 'truth,' the person could choose whether to take the medications or not. Sonia's radicalization process is intertwined with her perception of becoming as competent as a specialist. The political developments during the pandemic allowed political groups to inaugurate communication channels that addressed classical problems in science communication, such as the ability to understand technical terms, and presented these as individual choices.

Thus, what I have referred to here as conspiracy theories or alternative explanations, based on my own political-moral framework and particularly informed by the incident of my family members' deaths, constituted for Sonia a lingua franca of the war scenario she perceived herself to be living in. For her, connecting the dots, engaging in 'patchwork,' implied gaining possession of a world of entirely new meanings, where she was not a mere passive observer of the technical unfolding of health discussions. Instead, it was a world in which she actively sought to understand the environment she inhabited and to position herself in relation to it. This world mediated by language cannot, however, be reified as merely semantic. It involves a process of feeling 'equal,' of being able to speak like doctors and to make decisions independently, based on the values of liberal democracy, albeit inverted, of individual freedom and autonomy in a manner similar to what Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco (2021) termed the 'right to shine.'

As an anthropologist, my methodological approach has consistently emphasized the importance of understanding and representing the native perspective. However, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a paradoxical challenge, compelling me to defend the scientific perspective that I have often subjected to critical analysis. Engaging with interlocutors who adhered to conspiracy theories and alternative treatments for COVID-19 necessitated a nuanced approach. It became imperative to critically examine these perspectives rather than merely documenting them. This challenge was compounded by my personal experiences with the pandemic, particularly the loss of family members to COVID-19. These experiences inevitably influenced my stance, creating a distance from the alternative theories that some of my interlocutors, like Sonia, espoused.

This duality—my role as a researcher committed to empathetically understanding my subjects and my personal connection to the scientific discourse on COVID-19—became a central tension in my fieldwork. The negotiation of this tension was evident in the interactions and conversations between Sonia and myself, highlighting the complex interplay between personal experience and professional responsibility. Thus, the pandemic underscored the intricate balance required in ethnographic research, where the imperative to critically engage with interlocutors' beliefs must be weighed against the need to empathetically understand and represent their perspectives.

## Conclusion

Navigating the complex dynamics of ethnographic research with subjects who hold opposing beliefs can be an immensely challenging endeavor. My interactions with Sonia underscore this difficulty, as her radical departure from conventional scientific understanding starkly contrasted with my personal experiences and professional stance. For Sonia, conspiracy theories and alternative explanations about COVID-19 represented a means of reclaiming agency in a world she felt was increasingly hostile and dismissive. Her rejection of mainstream scientific narratives was not merely a matter of disagreement but a profound reassertion of her own worldview and sense of self in the face of what she perceived as an oppressive status quo.

This tension was particularly acute given my own personal loss—having lost three relatives to COVID-19, my emotional response to Sonia's views on alternative treatments and conspiracy theories was deeply charged. My personal grief and subsequent alignment with the scientific consensus created a significant distance between our perspectives. Sonia's engagement with alternative narratives was, from her vantage point, a form of empowerment and resistance against a system she felt marginalized by. In contrast, my position was informed by a need to defend the scientific framework that I had once critically examined, now seen as a vital bulwark against misinformation and potentially harmful practices.

The interplay between my professional commitment to understanding and representing diverse perspectives and my personal conviction in the validity of scientific knowledge highlighted a fundamental challenge in ethnographic research. Sonia's radicalization and the emotional and intellectual friction it created were emblematic of the broader struggle faced by researchers in politically and emotionally charged environments. The difficulty of maintaining an empathetic and rigorous stance while grappling with opposing beliefs and personal experiences underscored the nuanced balance required in ethnographic work. This tension not only illustrated the complexities of engaging with divergent viewpoints but also revealed the profound impact of personal experience on the researcher's approach to understanding and representation.

The analysis of Sonia's case reveals the complex interplay between personal experience and political ideology, particularly within the context of the far-right's rise during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sonia's story exemplifies how the far-right adeptly harnesses societal anxieties and grievances, positioning itself as a champion of the 'truth' against perceived elitist and technocratic establishments. This manipulation capitalizes on feelings of exclusion and resentment, exploiting these emotions to forge a sense of belonging and agency among its adherents. Sonia's radicalization is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a reflection of a broader social process wherein the far-right's narratives provide an alternative framework for understanding a world in crisis.

The experience of Sonia should be leveraged as a critical lens for understanding the broader dynamics of the far-right's appeal. Sonia's radicalization serves as an illustrative case of how individuals from marginalized or disaffected backgrounds can be drawn into extremist ideologies through processes that blend personal grievance with political messaging. Her story underscores the necessity of examining how far-right movements deploy narratives that resonate with and validate the experiences of those who feel disenfranchised by mainstream political and scientific institutions. This approach not only enriches the ethnographic narrative but also contextualizes Sonia's experiences within a larger social and political framework.

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Broadening the horizons of anthropological understanding:  
ethnographies with ‘uncomfortable otherness’

# The battle of the Zé Gotinhas: The schismogenesis of images and political audiences on Brazilian social media

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## **Abstract:**

Centring on a dispute between different versions of an icon of public health and immunization policies in Brazil, we explore the analytic potential of the rival images and their embedding in a dynamic structure of long-term schismogenesis fed by former president Jair Bolsonaro, his political allies and publics. The conflict over different versions of Zé Gotinha published at the beginning of Covid-19 vaccination – one produced by the illustrator and designer-activist Cristiano Siqueira, another commissioned by Eduardo Bolsonaro, a federal deputy and a son of the former president—inserted in the context of a semiological guerrilla war, allows us to examine the different images as, simultaneously, part of a confrontation that begins with the images and ends in the structural forces perpetuating the schismogenesis between allies of the former president and his adversaries. Over the course of the text, we identify symbolic offensives and retreats in accordance with the political situation of the moment.

**Keywords:** Jair Bolsonaro; Bolsonarism; Activist design; Zé Gotinha; Covid-19; Schismogenesis.

# La Batalla de los Zé Gotinhas: La cismogénesis de las imágenes y audiencias políticas en las redes sociales brasileñas

## **Resumen:**

Centrándonos en una disputa entre diferentes versiones de un ícono de las políticas de salud pública e inmunización en Brasil, exploramos el potencial analítico de imágenes antagónicas y su integración en una estructura dinámica de cismogénesis a largo plazo, alimentada por el ex presidente Jair Bolsonaro, sus aliados políticos y públicos. El conflicto por las diferentes versiones de Zé Gotinha publicadas al inicio de la vacunación contra el Covid-19 (una realizada por el ilustrador y diseñador-activista Cristiano Siqueira, otra encargada por Eduardo Bolsonaro, Diputado Federal e hijo del ex presidente), ambas en un contexto de guerra de guerrillas semiológica, nos permite examinar las diferentes imágenes como, simultáneamente, parte de una confrontación que comienza con las imágenes y termina en las fuerzas estructurales que perpetúan la cismogénesis entre aliados del ex presidente y sus adversarios. A lo largo del texto, identificamos ofensivas y retrocesos simbólicos de acuerdo con la situación política del momento.

**Palabras clave:** Jair Bolsonaro; Bolsonarismo; Diseño activista; Zé Gotinha; Covid-19; Cismogénesis.

# The battle of the Zé Gotinhas: The schismogenesis of images and political audiences on Brazilian social media

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What happens when supposedly antagonistic variations of an icon (Peirce 2005) confront each other in a context of permanent political clashes between different publics in the social media environment? What implications did the Covid-19 pandemic have for the semiotic dispute surrounding the use of a public icon in Brazil, governed at the time by Jair Messias Bolsonaro? Can a response materialized in an image be shown to be a recognizably effective act?<sup>1</sup>

In the following pages we explore the schismogenic potential of images in a confrontation between two versions of Zé Gotinha (Droplet Joe), also understood here as images embedded in a communicational structure that potentializes the clash between publics and citizens through social networks in the context of the start of the Covid-19 vaccination campaign in Brazil in 2021. This confrontation involved the dissemination of an image produced by the illustrator and member of the Design Ativista movement, Cristiano Siqueira—also known as Cris Vector—and another image posted on social media by the federal deputy for São Paulo, Eduardo Bolsonaro—the son of former president Jair Bolsonaro and one of his informal spokespeople.

Although academic research and publications on design activism—as a practice or *praxis*—and on *Design Ativista*—as an organised movement—have proliferated in recent years (Batista 2023; De Albuquerque 2018; Junior de Moura & Guimarães 2020; Queiroz & Villas-Boas 2020; Junior, Moura & Henriques 2021), we have yet to see a significant volume of studies on the ways in which images produced by activist designers are reproduced and circulated (Martins 2022), or image-based research on the clashes between different political fields in contemporary Brazil. The latter has previously been the subject of investigations that have concentrated principally on the far right on social media and from a discursive viewpoint (Solano & Rocha 2019; Cesarino 2022), paying little attention to imagery. While these studies provide a source of inspiration, here we adopt a different approach that allows us to expand the analysis to new frontiers.

Based on the facts described below, we argue that the battle of Zé Gotinhas reproduced and fed back into the political schismogenesis prevalent in contemporary Brazil, at the same time as it worked to broaden publics, insofar as it promoted a kind of partial encompassment of the opposite, given the gravity of the situation involved—the Covid-19 pandemic. At first glance, this episode reactivated the schismogenic cycle for the antistructural publics to which it was targeted, but it also radiated ambiguous messages of retreat for both fronts on which the battle took place.

The article is organised into three sections. In the first, we explore the concept of schismogenesis in Bateson (2008) and Cesarino (2022), its importance for a better understanding of the communicational ecosystem (Nunes & Traumann 2023) managed by Bolsonaro and his sons and their favouring of the architecture of social networks. Next, we discuss the different versions of Zé Gotinha, exploring the figure's expanded range of significations—through the addition of unpredictable elements—and its insertion in a battle of meanings. Finally, we discuss the limits of the communicational effectiveness of Cris Vector's illustration and how Eduardo

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<sup>1</sup> We use the terms icon, index and symbol in the senses proposed by Peirce (2005). An icon is a sign whose signifying potential derives from a relation of similarity with the thing represented. Symbols are signs whose representative capacity derives from a relation established with the represented thing by force of convention. Finally, indices extract their denotative potential from being taken as part of the represented phenomenon.

Bolsonaro's indirect response can simultaneously demonstrate the ambiguity of the Bolsonarist messages, attest to a disturbance in its communicational ecosystem and represent a form of regaining control of the crisis, experienced until then by the federal government through a strategic retreat—tactically presented as a controlled mitigation of the schismogenic process.

## Schismogenesis and the digital world

Describing phenomena observed between 1929 and 1935 when he was living among the Iatmul and other Sepik peoples in New Guinea, Bateson (1936) proposes the term schismogenesis for 'a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals' (1936: 175), part of his then embryonic social psychology. Two types of schismogenesis can be discerned, which the author calls complementary and symmetrical. The first type refers to the behaviours of two individuals—'A' and 'B'—exercised in different ways, such that the behaviour of the former affects the actions of the latter, accentuating B's behaviour while also simultaneously reinforcing characteristics of A's own behaviour. This cycle of actions can be altered over time. The second type, which can also be used to comprehend progressive changes, implies that individuals or groups respond to the behaviours of other individuals or groups in symmetrical fashion, amplifying these behaviours over time. Seeking to explain the difference between complementary and symmetrical schismogenesis, the author emphasizes the difference in meaning between schism – when groups sharing the same doctrine distinguish themselves politically—and heresy—when one group possesses 'doctrines antagonistic to those of the parent group' (Bateson 1936: 177, note 1).

The formulation of schismogenesis as two distinct types does not mean they are set in concrete: reiterating the analytic range of these categories, Bateson points out that the theory of schismogenesis can help us comprehend or explain phenomena like the 'intimate relations between pairs of individuals' or the 'progressive maladjustment between neurotic and prepsychotic individuals' (1936: 178 and 179) in cultural contacts and in politics, or even in *potlatch*. There are mutual influences between symmetrical and complementary schismogenesis, such that one type can possess elements of the other, especially when the number of pairs of relations increases. Some conditions exist for these cycles of mutual and progressively augmented oppositions, among them the maintenance of individuals in a state of holding together, 'by some form of common interest, mutual dependence, or by their social status' (1936: 182-183), or when there is a disparity between these individuals—as in the case of the dissociation between assertive and submissive in the Iatmul case.

To avoid conceiving schismogenesis as a progressive schism *ad infinitum*, Bateson recognised forms of controlling the process. A readjustment in schismogenic relations occurs when two pairs of relations are brought into contact; the change in the terms of a rivalry can lead to an easing of tensions (1936: 194). This will prove important below insofar as mitigation of the conflict may be in the interest of both groups, for distinct reasons and with different objectives.

In politics, Bateson considers the rivalry between nations to be a variant of symmetrical schismogenesis, while the class war is interpreted as a manifestation of complementary schismogenesis. Not even the relations between an authoritarian government and those ruled escape his attention in the politics of schismogenesis. Although he considers this vast scope of possibilities for observing politics a difficult field to study, its analytic potential is transparent:

...it might conceivably be worth while to observe to what extent in their policies politicians are reacting to the reactions of their opponents, and to what extent they are paying attention to the conditions which they are supposedly trying to adjust. It may be that when the processes of schismogenesis have been studied in other and simpler fields, the conclusions from this study may prove applicable in politics. (Bateson 1936: 186-187).

Bateson does not develop the theme further. An exploration of schismogenesis and its repercussions in the dimension of institutional politics, between rulers and ruled, or even between nations, is limited to the few pages of the section ‘Schismogenesis in Other Contexts.’ Although Bateson recognises that the very idea of symmetrical schismogenesis came to him from a dialogue on European politics (1936: 266), there are no more coordinates to observe in *Naven* for investigations in this field, seen at the time of the book’s population as just one potential topic.

In Cesarino (2022), schismogenesis acquires not only amplitude but also a scalar range and a certain updating for the challenges posed by this universe. Applying the concept of antistructural publics<sup>2</sup> (ibid: 49) to the Brazilian context and the relationship between the former president Jair Bolsonaro and his voters, evangelists<sup>3</sup> and less present spectators, we encounter a system ‘in crisis or far from equilibrium (...) [in which] the state of liminality is prolonged’ (Idem 2022: 67). This involves a kind of slow-drip testing of limits that tends towards the erosion of liberal democracy and the existing political system. For his opponents, this presents itself as a threat, while for his allies it manifests as a kind of interrupted jouissance. In them, we can see a continual actioning of extremes (ibid: 76),<sup>4</sup> generating what the author calls a ‘double twist of the inverse mimesis type’ (ibid: 76), at the same time as there occurs an ‘encompassment of the opposite’ (ibid: 81, 83). The flagrant antagonism between antistructural publics and the dominant public is such that what might appear merely a manifestation of left-wing political opposition acceptable in other contexts becomes seen by the members of this Bolsonarist communicational ecosystem as an existential threat (ibid: 139).

The distancing from other groups, by a group guided by values like the heterosexual nuclear family and arming the civilian population (ibid: 90), is also reinforced by metacommunication (ibid: 119). Represented by the Greek letter  $\mu$ , metacommunication refers to the questions asked by an agent concerning which relations are being constructed in a given context, such as, for example, a friend-enemy relationship.

The construction of friend-enemy relations by the former president concerning his public was not limited to the electoral period in 2018—the year when Bolsonaro beat the PT (Workers’ Party) candidate Fernando Haddad with 57.8 million votes. Rather, it was part of a new sense of what it means to govern, namely the sustaining of a process of continuous schismogenesis (ibid: 181) in which the constant is a ‘dynamic of advances and retreats that maintain schismogenesis as the encompassing pole’ (ibid: 185). This, in the words of Nunes and Traumann, signifies that ‘with Bolsonaro, governing means confronting’ (2023: 69).

This confrontational style of government was not exercised in the abstract but was supported by a communications ecosystem that spanned from daily briefings in front of the Alvorada Presidential Palace in Brasilia to equally daily posts on instant message and social media platforms like Twitter/X (2023: 47). Presenting himself as the first digital president in Brazilian history (ibid), Bolsonaro’s communications strategy eliminated the need for intermediation by the traditional media, placing him in direct contact with his voter base, reinforcing a kind of reign of the communicator in politics (ibid: 39). Consequently, Bolsonarist communications do not take the form of a single uniformly distributed message: rather, they include his closest

2 Based on the combination of the categories of counter public and refracted public (Cesarino 2022b) and inspired by the idea of antistructure in Victor Turner’s work, antistructural publics (ibid: 167) comprise those groups that orbit Bolsonarism through its communicational structure and act in opposition to the dominant publics and political opponents. Instead of acting to maintain the social order, however they test the limits of liberal democracy and seek to destabilize political institutions (ibid: 165).

3 A term native to Marketing Digital designating users who become advocates for a brand and advertise its products either for free or for payment.

4 An example of this mobilization of extremes can be identified precisely in the public statements of former president Jair Bolsonaro concerning the origin, efficacy and alternatives to Covid-19 vaccination. These declarations seem to have been deliberately made to mobilize groups who see themselves as politically antagonistic. Thus, by asserting that the effectiveness of a Chinese vaccine was unproven, the antagonistic publics were mobilized to praise the former president’s pronouncement, on one side, and accuse of him of being a vaccine denialist or anti-vaxxer, on the other. This ‘digital first’ movement anticipates that both groups will take to the social networks, generating an impact for the president’s declaration, irrespective of their positioning, so that the message will reach even more people for distinct reasons.

supporters and ‘all those who are part of his audience—influencers, algorithms and regular users’ (Cesarino 2022: 180), stimulating a kind of *micro-segmentation*—as we shall see below.

When we talk about the interface between politics and communication—as we have developed over the preceding pages, informed by the idea of schismogenesis—we are speaking both about the technological architecture of social networks and about new behaviours of citizens as activists and voters. This integration is not fortuitous: political positionings are embedded in the data structure, metadata (data about data), algorithms and graphic user interfaces of social networks (Cesarino 2022; O’Neil 2020). This deep structure favours the scenario of prolonged schismogenesis insofar as it does not take into consideration the positive or negative quality of comments and reactions, only their overall number.

Social networks also modify the forms of exercising citizenship and political rights (Beiguelman 2021; Castells 2017, 2018; Manin 2013; Martins 2019; Neves 2016). These networks have enabled the emergence of new fields of dispute, the integration of the image of the electorate into the dispute and the active participation of the public as an agent in the construction of public opinion (Martins 2019: 33) and ultimately as a transformer of the very ‘meaning of politics’ (Cesarino 2022: 201).

The practical effects of a logic of prolonged schismogenesis – integrated into the digital first communicational ecosystem—and the expected reaction of digital activists from progressive, leftist and even moderate fields, collaborated in transforming the public sphere (ibid: 91). It is in this environment of digitally-mediated symbolic confrontations that two versions of the same iconic figure emerged, historically associated with public health policies in Brazil: the Zé Gotinha drawn by Cristiano Siqueira and the Zé Gotinha published by Eduardo Bolsonaro.

### The battle of the ‘Zé Gotinhas’ in a semiotic guerrilla war

**Fig. 1:** Post by Cristiano Siqueira, ‘Cris Vector,’ published on Twitter, on a re-reading of the Zé Gotinha character published by federal deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro.



**Source:** Twitter/X account of Cristiano, @crisvector. See <https://twitter.com/crisvector/status/1370467998306349057>. Accessed 10 February 2024.



At 5:13 pm on March 12, 2021, the designer and illustrator Cristiano Siqueira—also known as ‘Cris Vector’—published two illustrations on his Twitter/X social media account featuring the same motif: the figure Zé Gotinha (Droplet Joe) combined with Covid-19 vaccination.<sup>5</sup> The post also included a caption, *E a esquerda segue pautando a direita*, ‘And the left continues to set the agenda for the right,’ accompanying the two image files. On the left, a version of the mascot (A) with a muscular body and a determined facial expression, displaying the symbol of the Unified Health System (SUS) like a tattoo and holding a large syringe like an assault rifle with the logo of the Butantã Institute—the main Brazilian producer of vaccines based on Chinese supplies and at that time associated by the Bolsonaroists with the then governor of São Paulo, João Doria Jr. (PSDB)—emblazoned on the syringe tube. On the right, a screenshot of a post on the same social network, made by the federal deputy for São Paulo Eduardo Bolsonaro (PL), containing an illustration of the same character (B) with a less protruding scope, a smiling expression, wearing the Brazilian flag like a cape and holding a syringe that merges with the elements of an assault rifle.<sup>6</sup> This is also accompanied by a caption: ‘Our weapon now is the vaccine’ (Figure 1).

The first image was published on January 7, 2021, by Cristiano himself on his social networks,<sup>7</sup> while the second was published by the federal deputy over two months later, on March 12, two days after a declaration from the then pre-candidate for a third presidential mandate, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, on the absence of Zé Gotinha in the Covid-19 immunization campaign. Made after the now president had irately alleged that ‘Bolsonaro sacked [Zé Gotinha] because he thought he was a PT supporter,’<sup>8</sup> Eduardo Bolsonaro’s post offers evidence of a reaction to the declarations of the PT leader and attest to their effectiveness.

Appearing together in Cristiano’s post, both illustrations attribute new meanings to Zé Gotinha, expanding the semiotics (Silva & Ferreira 2016) of the figure’s iconography, adding signs and evoking different values, while at the same time enabling a reinterpretation of what an immunization campaign might be. Roughly speaking, these two versions of the character reveal one approach that aims to defend scientific knowledge and democratize access to epidemiological treatments, and another approach that presents the Brazilian flag as a superhero cape and promotes a pro-gun agenda—suggesting an attack on the virus and, simultaneously, on political adversaries, adhering to the friend-enemy logic of Bolsonaroist metacommunication.

The origin of the tensions expressed in these images, as well as the implications of the pandemic for Cristiano’s production of images and for the communications strategy of deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro’s mandate, are not entirely self-explanatory. The concentrated nature of the signs present here requires the mobilization of other elements for an adequate analysis of the schismogenic dynamics inherent to movements involving the containment and expansion of social fissions.

Cris Vector, as he is known professionally and on social networks, is a designer and illustrator based in São Paulo. With 117,000 followers on Instagram and 83,000 on Twitter/X, Cristiano adopted a pseudonym that evokes the digital techniques he uses in his illustrations, namely those relating to vectorization.<sup>9</sup> His work is internationally recognized, having worked on projects for corporations like Nike, Deezer, ESPN, Gillette and Pepsico.<sup>10</sup> Since 2018, at least, he has posted images on his social networks with illustrations on political topics, ranging from the celebration of left-wing politicians like Fernando Haddad, Manuela D’Ávila and Marielle

5 A disease caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus and its mutational variants. From March 11, 2020, the disease reached the level of a global pandemic, as declared by the World Health Organisation. See ‘OMS Declara Pandemia de Coronavírus.’ G1, March 11, 2020. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/bemestar/coronavirus/noticia/2020/03/11/oms-declara-pandemia-de-coronavirus.ghtml>. Accessed 10 February 2024.

6 Like the handle, magazine, grip, retainer and butt similar to those of the M4A1 carbine model or the M16 rifle.

7 See <https://twitter.com/crisvector/status/1347266309705392137/photo/1>. Accessed 10 February 2024.

8 See *Estado de Minas*. “Eduardo Bolsonaro posta ‘Zé Gotinha’ apontando seringa como fuzil.” 12 March 2021. Available at [https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2021/03/12/interna\\_politica,1246154/eduardo-bolsonaro-posta-ze-gotinha-apontando-seringa-como-fuzil.shtml](https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2021/03/12/interna_politica,1246154/eduardo-bolsonaro-posta-ze-gotinha-apontando-seringa-como-fuzil.shtml). Accessed 10 February 2024.

9 Vectorization involves a set of digital industrial design techniques that produce, instead of pixels, forms that are read by editing software as mathematical formulas that can be reduced or enlarged without loss of definition.

10 See Cristiano Siqueira, “About.” Available at <https://crisvector.myportfolio.com/about>. Accessed February 10, 2024.

Franco<sup>11</sup>—a Rio de Janeiro councilwoman murdered in March 2018—to illustrations strongly critical of the Jair Bolsonaro government and its supporters.

Also in 2018, Cristiano joined a social movement with a unique profile, created and stabilized as a result of the electoral period, known as Design Ativista (Martins 2022). As Manuel De Landa pointed out—in his proposal for a philosophy of society—a social movement, which is structured in a network and possesses elements of self-organization, can be recognized as a hybrid of interpersonalities and institutionalities (Castells 2017; De Landa 2006). Reflecting the hybrid dimension of the designer movement's activities, the illustrator sometimes works on projects in partnership with organizations like the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) and sometimes on individual projects—mobilizing his own network of followers on the social media platforms on which he has accounts. His activity as a political militant, communicator and citizen designer (Heller & Vienne 2018) often involves rapid public manifestations in support or repudiation of a political idea, declaration or event, generally marked by a feeling of ally-adversary opposition that may also incorporate practices for expanding the meanings of symbolic coordinates already known to his public.

In their research on East Timorese fabrics called *tais*, Silva and Ferreira (2016), inspired by the concept of resonance in physics, propose the idea of an *increase in semiotic amplitude* to describe the expansion of meanings in signs when they enter into contact with other signs and expressive mediators. These processes make new denotations of signs possible (ibid: 57). For the purposes of this article, considering the increase in semiotic amplitude in the social media posting of versions of the Zé Gotinha figure signifies that both the Cris Vector version and the version circulated by Eduardo Bolsonaro added elements to a widely-known icon, allowing them to access new publics by also conveying new meanings.

At this point, however, the reader may ask: what are the effects produced by the mobilization of images of Zé Gotinha in an already fissioned field? To answer this question, we must return to the character's creation.

Created in 1986 by the artist Darlan Rosa, in partnership with the Brazilian Ministry of Health and the United Nation's Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the character 'Zé Gotinha' was initially conceived with the main objective of popularizing child vaccination against polio.<sup>12</sup> Although the iconic design dates from 1986, the figure was only named in 1988 after a national competition was held in which any citizen could suggest a moniker for what was then an anonymous character.<sup>13</sup>

The aesthetic choice of the figure's name and visual features were part of a strategic change in the institutional communication policy of the Ministry of Health under the José Sarney government (1985-1990). The explicit objective was to break down the population's resistance to vaccination and evaluate an alternative to the preceding campaigns, whose messaging had been designed more to scare people using the threat of morbid disease and death. Following the high level of public uptake, Zé Gotinha became the official icon of the National Immunization Program.

Thirty-three years later, the figure was appropriated by both Cristiano Siqueira and Eduardo Bolsonaro—by the unknown artist responsible for the latter's illustration—and transformed into support for a semiotic and political battle that went far beyond the communicational objectives for which it was originally created. Zé Gotinha thus underwent a semiotic amplification (Silva & Ferreira 2016) insofar as the tension over the meanings contained in the two versions constituted, amid a prolonged schismogenesis, a skirmish in a semiological guerrilla

11 In parallel to the consolidation of right-wing social movements and political parties in Brazil, which led, among other things, to the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, there was a regrouping of left-wing political forces. Three left-wing leaders mentioned in this article emerged as symbols of resistance and opposition: Marielle Franco, a Rio de Janeiro councilwoman for the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), murdered in March 2018; Manuela D'Ávila, a former federal deputy and then state deputy of Rio Grande do Sul for the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B), who also ran as vice-presidential candidate alongside Fernando Haddad, Lula's former education minister, former mayor of São Paulo-SP for the Workers' Party (PT) and the presidential candidate nominated by Lula. Also a symbol of the opposition to the Bolsonaro government, Fernando Haddad is now currently finance minister in Luís Inácio Lula da Silva's third term as president.

12 A vaccination given orally, also known as *gotinhas* or 'droplets,' hence the name of the character.

13 See "Casa do Zé Gotinha," Fiocruz. Available at <https://www.bio.fiocruz.br/index.php/br/comunicacao/casa-ze-gotinha>. Accessed 10 February 2024.

war (Eco 1973). The effectiveness of Cristiano's action and the insertion of the federal deputy's action-response within the communicational ecosystem of Bolsonaroism will be the theme of the concluding section of this article.

## The conservative Zé Gotinha in the long-term schismogenesis

Following the critical event of the Covid-19 pandemic, Cris Vector began to respond to episodes from everyday Brazilian political life touching on the virus in ways similar<sup>14</sup> to those he had already been using since 2018. His response showing two main tendencies: on one hand, praise for professionals in the field of infectiology and nursing, an intransigent defence of the public health system (SUS) and the objective demand for vaccines; on the other, criticism of the actions and declarations of the former president of the republic concerning the deaths caused by Covid-19, the origins of the virus and the vaccine and the rivalry generated between the presidency and state governments over solutions to the pandemic. The Zé Gotinha illustration (A)—originally posted by Cris Vector on January 7, 2021<sup>15</sup>—is an example of the first tendency, incorporating new elements into the originally friendly figure of the SUS mascot in order to challenge the actions and discourses of the president and his collaborators.

Eduardo Bolsonaro (Partido Liberal: PL), elected a federal deputy for São Paulo in 2018 with 1.84 million votes—the highest vote in recent Brazilian history—not only acted as a political ally of the federal government, but was also publicly considered one of its main spokespeople. Possessing a strong presence on social media platforms, the parliamentarian acts on the international front of the Bolsonaroist offensive and was even considered for the post of Brazilian ambassador during his father's administration, as well as chairing the Chamber of Deputies Foreign Relations and National Defence Committee between 2019 and 2021. Eduardo Bolsonaro also declared himself to be the 'Latin leader' of the international conservative movement envisioned by the political strategist Steve Bannon<sup>16</sup> and is an articulator of the Brazilian edition of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC-Brazil)—working with members of the security forces expressing ideological affinities with the former president Jair Bolsonaro.

From the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil, Eduardo Bolsonaro made a series of public statements, many of them polemical and with a schismogenic potential. These were aimed both at the level of interpersonal relations and at the level of cooperation between nations, ranging from the virus's origin to the prophylactic measures and forms of containing the pandemic. This was when he was not making pungent criticisms of the work of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI), which investigated possible crimes committed by the Bolsonaro government during the pandemic. Whether coining the term 'Chinese virus,' corroborating the idea of a supposed link between the emergence of the virus in China and Chinese food habits,<sup>17</sup> alleging that lockdown would contribute to the virus's proliferation,<sup>18</sup> or even criticizing the climate of surveillance surrounding the use of sanitary masks,<sup>19</sup> the parliamentarian's statements amplified or explored paths not yet adopted in the attitudes and discourses of the president of the republic, acting like an unofficial spokesperson.

<sup>14</sup> Obviously, illustrations on other topics were published during this period, though we shall not examine them here.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.instagram.com/p/CJwZTVyl2Qp/>. Accessed 10 February 2024.

<sup>16</sup> See G1. "Eduardo Bolsonaro se Declarou Líder Latino do Movimento Conservador Comandado por Bannon," 20 August 2020. Available at <https://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2020/08/20/bannon-ex-estrategista-de-trump-que-foi-presos-mantinha-contato-com-os-bolsonaro.ghtml>. Accessed 10 February 2024.

<sup>17</sup> See Rittner, Daniel. "Fala de que chineses 'comem tudo o que sol ilumina' ainda causa ressentimento em Pequim." 19 January 2021. Available at <https://valor.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2021/01/19/fala-de-que-chineses-comem-tudo-o-que-sol-ilumina-ainda-causa-ressentimento-em-pequim.ghtml> Accessed 10 February 2024.

<sup>18</sup> See G1. "Twitter Coloca Aviso de Publicação Enganosa em Post de Eduardo Bolsonaro." 12 April 2021. Available at <https://g1.globo.com/bemestar/coronavirus/noticia/2021/04/12/twitter-coloca-aviso-de-publicacao-enganosa-em-post-de-eduardo-bolsonaro-sobre-lockdown.ghtml>. Accessed 10 February 2024.

<sup>19</sup> See Ribeiro, Tayguara. "Enfia no rabo,' diz Eduardo Bolsonaro sobre o uso de máscara contra Covid." 11 March 2021. Available at <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2021/03/enfia-no-rabo-diz-eduardo-bolsonaro-sobre-uso-de-mascara-contr-covid.shtml>. Accessed 10 February 2024.

His statements advocating the use of hydroxychloroquine combined at least four vectors of resignification of the Covid-19 pandemic: a) pointing to an external culprit; b) alleging a deliberate exaggeration of the disease’s impacts; c) criticizing the methods proposed to contain the pandemic; d) seeking an immediate prophylactic for Covid-19 without passing through the protocols of scientific discussion.

In Cesarino (2022), we are presented with the dynamic structure that explains prolonged schismogenesis at the level of both the dominant public—which is also active and taken into account by the Bolsonarist communications ecosystem—and the antistructural public. In the former case, we can observe the cycle of statements, which provoke public indignation, answered with a message of reparation and a retreat by the politician, generating a feeling of relief among this public. In the case of antistructural publics, the declarations of the former president generate an enthusiastic response: approaching a state of making the schism concrete, they are followed by a retreat and breed a feeling of disappointment (ibid: 200).

To understand how the semiotic battle of the Zé Gotinhas fits into this dynamic structure, we can turn to a table comparing the versions of the character designed by Darlan Rosa and Cris Vector and the one posted by Eduardo Bolsonaro (Table 1).

**Table 1** – Comparison of versions of Zé Gotinha

	<b>Darlan Rosa</b>	<b>Cris Vector</b>	<b>Eduardo Bolsonaro</b>
<b>Body build</b>	Infantile	Muscular Adult	Thin adult
<b>Physiognomy</b>	Slightly happy	Determined	Happy
<b>Clothing</b>	-	-	Brazilian flag as a cape
<b>Accessories</b>	-	Syringe with a hand rest, held like a rifle, with the logo of the Butantã Institute	Syringe with all the elements of an assault rifle except the barrel
<b>Tattoos</b>	-	SUS logo	-

Cris Vector’s communicational ingenuity for semiotic guerrilla warfare now seems clearer. His character has aged in relation to the first Zé Gotinha, developed muscles and a sense of determination expressed in his physiognomy, clutching the vaccine in his arms decisively like some kind of healthcare soldier wielding an assault rifle. The ideas of heteronormativity and a pro-gun politics may indeed appear here, but carefully calibrated so that its intentions are not mistaken: the illustration seems to have been designed to capture the attention of the Bolsonarist support base and generate some kind of positive metacommunication between this public and the idea of becoming vaccinated. The Zé Gotinha by Cris Vector does not cross the boundary separating a show of force from an existential threat to life. Rather, it establishes an ambiguity that proved effective in traversing the apparently impassable abyss that separates antistructural publics from dominant publics. Like a spanner that falls into the gears of a machine and, being the same colour as the rest of the metal parts, is only noted when the machine malfunctions, Cris Vector’s illustration really may have set the agenda for Bolsonarism. The intersection of influences of characters and people—Lula > Cristiano > Zé Gotinha—combined with Bolsonaro’s declining digital popularity at the start of 2021 (Nunes & Traumann 2023: 49), allowed the Zé Gotinha who fights against Covid-19 and defends the public health system (SUS) to affect, even if momentarily, the prolonged schismogenesis of Bolsonarism, subtly blurring the heteronormative and pro-gun values with the defence of vaccination and public health.

The effectiveness of Cristiano’s illustration resides, therefore, not only in its viralization but also in the generation of noise within the Bolsonarist communications ecosystem by circumventing the metacommunicational

friend-enemy coordinates of his publics, twisting the meaning of how a defender of public health and a fighter of the virus should be depicted, achieving a semiotic amplification through the association of unexpected new elements with the previously childlike and inoffensive figure of Darlan Rosa's Zé Gotinha.

This political tactic required an equally unexpected response from the Bolsonarist public insofar as, back in January 2021, Covid-19 vaccination was not launched as a national campaign, but rather as an initiative of the São Paulo state government led by governor João Dória (PSDB), a recognized right-winger. Hence, the pressure came from multiple directions: from the moderate left, in the shape of Lula, and from the moderate right, in the shape of Dória. They were accompanied by the entire traditional media, which, save for a few outlets, published daily articles and reports on the former president Jair Bolsonaro and his handling of the fight against the Sars-Cov-2 virus. This may have prompted the decision to create a conservative Zé Gotinha.

Considering the history of parliamentarian Eduardo Bolsonaro's public statements, the posting of an illustration of the famous icon of Brazil's national immunization campaigns would appear incongruous at the very least. Initially, it could even be interpreted as a change of stance—and there are many reasons why this might have been the case.

However, we argue that the divulgation of a conservative Zé Gotinha comprises a kind of tactical mirroring of a semiotic amplification and signals an initial retreat but with the tacit objective of keeping the Bolsonarist machinery running. The illustration was first published with the caption 'Our weapon now is the vaccine'—a screenshot of which was posted by Cris Vector—subsequently posted with the caption 'Our weapon is the vaccine,' leading us to two interpretative possibilities: the first is that the initial post contained a kind of 'Freudian slip,' while the second is that the presence of the 'now' would imply that the vaccine had previously not been a concern of either Eduardo or the government to which he was affiliated—including through kinship—and for which he was a proxy spokesman. These hypotheses do not lessen the chances that this action was taken for the purposes of strategic gain in a schismogenesis that may perhaps have culminated with Jair Bolsonaro's impeachment or the blocking of his candidature for 2022. While the political messages circulating through the Bolsonarist ecosystem had previously spanned from criticism of vaccination to neglect, now the parliamentarian was celebrating immunization: while before, in complementary fashion, Eduardo opposed the 'Chinese vaccine' for the 'Chinese virus,' from this point on he adopted the icon of Brazilian vaccination.

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's position in calling for the rehabilitation of Zé Gotinha reintroduced into political debate not just a character but an icon almost impossible to be interpreted as negative and that reiterates the commitment of those who evoke the figure to public health and fighting the pandemic. Cris Vector's semiotic amplification brought the character closer to meanings associated with the Bolsonarist publics and more familiar to them, clearing the way for a crossing-over of audiences—that is, the mitigation of continued schismogenesis in order to acquire a new public, who in turn could become new voters for the political left in 2022. Since Bolsonarism is reproduced from and on a permanently unstable battlefield, this operation involving the semiotic countereffectuation of schismogenesis demanded an equally refined response.

The impression of a change of stance<sup>20</sup> did not mean that the efficacy of the vaccines used in Brazil was no longer downplayed.<sup>21</sup> The hypothesis of a self-enclosed symmetrical schismogenesis would thus imply considering only that 'the left continues to set the agenda for the right', as Cristiano stated in his post cited earlier. Instead, we can observe an apparent amplification of the meanings associated with Zé Gotinha in this everyday confrontation of positions that turned the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic into a daily reenactment of a semiotic guerrilla war. The adoption of a character, now particularized—or customized—with

20 See Marques, Hugo. "Família Bolsonaro Abraça a Campanha de Vacinação." *Veja*, 28 March 2021. Available at <https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/familia-bolsonaro-abraca-a-campanha-de-vacinacao/>. Accessed 10 February 2024.

21 See Mendonça, Ana. "Eduardo Bolsonaro Compara Tomar Vacina com Tratamento de Viciados em Crack." *Estado de Minas*, 15 June 2021. Available at [https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2021/06/15/interna\\_politica.1276958/eduardo-bolsonaro-compara-tomar-vacina-com-tratamento-de-viciados-em-crack.shtml](https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2021/06/15/interna_politica.1276958/eduardo-bolsonaro-compara-tomar-vacina-com-tratamento-de-viciados-em-crack.shtml). Accessed 10 February 2024.

signs around which ideological elements orbit, like those of a *sui generis* nationalism and a pro-gun agenda, implied both the temporary suspension of the schismogenic cycle and the neutralization of criticisms of the positions of the former president Jair Bolsonaro concerning vaccines, possibly coming from dominant publics and that could affect the cohesion of antistructural publics. The Zé Gotinha that incorporates signs of Brazilian-style conservatism presupposes a left-wing Zé Gotinha, associated with the Chinese vaccine and the Chinese Communist Party—one that in reality never existed. On the other hand, given that this social media post did not preclude subsequent declarations criticizing vaccination, the conservative Zé Gotinha can be seen as merely a strategic retreat in the interpersonal and institutional communications of the parliamentarian, contemplating both potential allies discontent with the government handling of the pandemic and those seeking to offer a public response to the criticisms made of the federal government. In other words, a Zé Gotinha carrying a rifle and draped in a Brazilian flag was a microtargeting tactic, precisely because of its polysemic character.

This offensive-retreat, this form of appearing while ceding ground and keeping a flag raised, incorporated into the movement of acquiring semiotic amplitude a practice of microtargeting or microsegmentation. Originating in the areas of communication and marketing, this term refers to the dissemination of symbols, indices and signs with the potential to reach small groups of people with a high degree of precision. Apply this definition to the context of elections, Madsen observes that:

Fundamentally, the electorate is heterogeneous in their beliefs, desires and preferences. Due to this, campaigners may go beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and design persuasive attempts that are intended for a specific subset of the population rather than the population as a whole. This is micro-targeting: the design of messages that are specifically developed to resonate with a desired target audience. By collecting relevant data about each voter, campaigners can build models that segment the electorate into increasingly specific and sophisticated categories. (Madsen 2019: viii)

There is no space here to discuss the ways in which the tactics of micro-targeting have been imported from the electoral campaign into the communications strategy of the federal deputy's mandate. However, the context in which the illustration of the conservative Zé Gotinha was posted amplified the polysemic nature of the image of a muscular Zé Gotinha fighting Covid-19, ranging from an attempt to mitigate criticism of the federal government's actions in relation to the vaccine to recognizing the impact that President Luiz Inácio's statement had achieved on public opinion. This image, which is also composite, provides clues to its role in re-signifying the pandemic. Moreover, this polysemy of the image contains specific messages, highly condensed in a reappropriated icon. In other words, the *in praesenti* polysemy of its publication is the source for the signifying particularity that presents the conservative Zé Gotinha as an equally effective response to the statements of Lula and Cris Vector's image, temporarily suspending the divergences between what Zé Gotinha signifies to the Bolsonaro public and the rest of the Brazilian population. Force of circumstance thus lead to the rebirth of a conservative Zé Gotinha while the machinery of perpetuated schismogenesis was restarted.

The oscillation from heresy to schism—from existential threat to intra-doctrinal opposition—signified a softening of the schismogenic process in order to avoid a political defeat on the issue of public health. Although its ultimate purpose may be difficult to apprehend, the offensive-retreat can be judged to have kept open the passage between antistructural publics so that new voters could also be won over in 2022 while their captive publics were vaccinated<sup>22</sup> against any offensive by groups opposing the then president in relation to immunization policy, the fight against the pandemic and the economic response to the impacts of Sars-Cov-2 on the Brazilian population.

22 A term from political communication terminology referring to the emission of a message intended to protect a public from adverse counter-arguments.

## Conclusion

Over the previous pages we have explored schismogenesis in politics as discussed in Bateson and Cesarino, the favourable environment provided by digital social networks for the construction of relations with a schismogenic potential, and finally recent forms of citizen participation in politics through social media.

Examining the controversies surrounding the icon Zé Gotinha, transformed by new signs in a context of prolonged schismogenesis, we shed light on a semiotic guerrilla war that unfolded through a series of retreats and advances. In this context, Eduardo Bolsonaro strategically and deliberately suspended the schismogenic process in order to mitigate a communicational tactic of his opponents and exploit the opportunity to amplify the reach of his message on the Covid-19 pandemic.

Observed from the perspective of the symmetrical conflict only, the battle discussed here—amid the fears, uncertainties, desires and political commitments provoked by the Covid-19 pandemic—allows us to interpret Cris Vector's post on the Twitter/X social network as an act of rebellion with a high degree of effectiveness in 'set the agenda for the right.' However, if we approach the specific battle between Cristiano and the parliamentarian as a clash between proxies for Lula and Bolsonaro respectively, insertable in a dynamic structure of offensives and retreats based on a friend-enemy logic aimed at the construction of a new form of communicational and political action of the far right in Brazil, something else becomes apparent: we can not that the momentary effectiveness of Cristiano's illustration of Zé Gotinha simply led to one more of the countless strategic course corrections undertaken by the Bolsonarist communications ecosystem. Through a careful suspension of the schismogenic process, this enabled the creation of a character highly advantageous to the argument that Jair Bolsonaro had in fact advocated Covid-19 vaccination.

While one version of the figure initially invoked an infallible response to the disarticulation of the Bolsonarist ecosystem through a kind of semiotic camouflage, the other version demonstrated the resilience of Bolsonarism, which, even in situations of tacit threat, manages to recognise a danger to the maintenance of its publics, comprehends it at some depth and neutralizes the threat with equal efficiency.

This symbolic efficacy helps us understand Jair Bolsonaro's electoral performance in 2022, which, despite his low popularity ratings and the strongly critical campaigns of opponents—in which the battle depicted here was just one episode—meant that the candidate for re-election was defeated by a margin of less than 2% of votes. Here one of the dimensions of this efficacy is manifested: the disarming of indices with a high semiotic impact on antistructural publics through the oscillation between heresy and schism, existential threat and partial identification, in order to correct the course of its actions. In other words, a strategic symbolic adaptability rather than a supposed rigidity.

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