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Etnologia Brasileira: Behind the Scenes

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Introduction

At the 2011 meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA) in Belém, Brazil, I organized a session on the transformations presently undergoing what is referred to in Portuguese as “*Etnologia Indígena*” (Ethnology of Indigenous People). Although the SALSA gathering draws participants from across the globe, the only participants in my session were Brazilians. Five years later, the abstracts for the SALSA meeting in New Orleans (where this paper was originally presented) gave the impression of business as usual in the world of anthropologists.

One abstract for the 2016 SALSA conference mentioned the upsurge in the study of songs. Surely one reason for this, besides the fundamental importance of music in Amerindian societies, is that it is a topic that can generally bypass thorny political issues. Indians are indeed preoccupied with the danger of losing their repertoires of song. On the one hand they complain of the young only being interested in the world of the whites,¹ but at the same time they are beginning to recognize the symbolic importance of their cultural capital in the defense of their rights to land and governmental services. Indigenous groups frequently perform singing and dancing at public events, and non-Indians are an increasingly indispensable element in the performance of rituals, being called upon to contribute to defray the cost of performing them.

This paper seeks to dispel any illusion that in order to conduct fieldwork in present-day lowland South America one needs merely to be up to date in one’s reading of the anthropological literature and to have an original research project. To show why this is the case, this article reflects on two issues: the 2016 resolution concerning ethics in the human and social sciences passed by the Brazilian Conselho Nacional de Saúde and the little-discussed ethical dilemmas that de facto confront present-day anthropologists conducting research in indigenous communities in Brazil. An underlying theme is fiction: on the one hand, that of having to tailor one’s projects to the overarching state bureaucracy, and on the other having to carve up reality into what, for diverse reasons, can and cannot be said.

George Mentore’s call for papers for the SALSA session where this text was first presented brought up the question of fiction, noting that it is considered by some to be distant from our initial scientific agenda.² This recalls what Strathern (1999) has written concerning the chasm between observing phenomena in the field and transmuting them into written accounts for a thesis or publications. It could be argued that it is not always recognized just how much our endeavors are already imbued with fiction. It is not a question of giving free rein to one’s imagination, but rather transmitting the idea of giving a full picture of the reality that we are describing whilst in actuality omitting a great deal that could be said. Some anthropologists in Brazil continue to defend the aim of scientific objectivity, whereas others, myself included, consider knowledge to be inseparable from power relations.

Brazil, where I live and work, is in a deep crisis—economically and politically. In the context of this crisis, the word ethics is currently paired with corruption as its antithesis, and both are discussed daily in the media. With Congress dominated by Cattle, Bullets, and Bible lobbies (the label forming an agreeable alliteration in Portuguese: *Bois, Balas, e Bíblia*), mere lip service is paid to the 1988 Constitution that guarantees the rights of Brazilian Indians to their own values and culture.³

Current Brazilian Legislation Concerning Research Ethics in the Human and Social Sciences

The question of legislating on ethics dates back to the aftermath of World War II, with Brazil following the lead of other countries and international bodies that authored various declarations and recommendations (Victora et al. 2004). The Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA), created in 1953, formulated its own Code of Ethics in the 1980s (see ABA 2012) and set up an ethics commission after the end of the military dictatorship. State ethics rules for research date back to 1996 when the National Health Council (part of the Ministry of Health) passed Resolution 196/96. These standards covered all research relating to human beings, though its main focus was medicine. It specifically mentioned research with indigenous communities, whether medical or otherwise. Social scientists expressed concern that the interests of the medical field dictated the standards. In 2001 the president of the ABA, Ruben George Oliven, affirmed that Resolution 304 (Conselho Nacional de Saúde Código de Ética 2000), passed the previous year to expand the scope of these regulations to cover research with indigenous populations, went beyond the competence of the National Health Council (Victora et al. 2004).

There ensued a discussion, lasting years, concerning the need for specific standards for the human and social sciences. This culminated in Resolution 510, ratified by the minister of health in April 2016, which established a code of ethics for the human and social sciences under the aegis of the National Health Council.⁴

Since 1988, anthropological research must be submitted to the federal National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) for preapproval and consent from the community where research is to be carried out before research may begin. In addition to these approvals, one must also now have the project evaluated by a university ethics committee (*Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa* or CEP). The latter lacks autonomy and is subordinate to the federal Ministry of Health. The ministry hosts a national website (*Plataforma Brasil*) where researchers must fill in a form and upload attachments, annual and final reports, and any amendments to the original project.

When anthropologists were consulted about this legislation in mid-2015, it was made explicit that it was the outcome of a long struggle mediated by the Brazilian Anthropology Association, amongst others, for the recognition of the specificity of our research, and that Resolution 510 conceded the maximum degree of autonomy that the National Health Council was prepared to allow anthropological researchers, at least for the time being. Some of the main points in this legislation will now be discussed in detail to clarify how they are ill-adjusted to the specificity of research with indigenous populations.

Resolution 510 characterizes research in human and social science as dealing with people's social relations, their cultural values, forms of subjectivity and communication, along with other cultural features (Ch. I, It. XVI). Some of the items mentioned are common sense, such as the need to pay the expenses of participants in research, including food and transport (Ch. I, It. XXIV), and should not need to be made explicit.

There are a number of provisions in the resolution that reflect a misunderstanding of how field research necessarily unfolds over time. For example, Chapter VI, Article XXVIII:I establishes that one must obtain approval from the ethics committee before beginning research. It is premature to foresee all the practical implications of this as it is only now being gradually implemented. One student informed me that it took a year to have his doctoral project on indigenous music approved by the ethics committee. This occurred in a context where he is expected to complete a doctorate in four years. There have already been cases of projects being sent to the wrong committee, entailing unnecessary loss of time.⁵ The ethics approval procedure will also put further pressure on students not to change the direction of their original project, which is often profoundly modified by experience of fieldwork. One is now expected to inform the national online ethics committee of such changes each time they occur.

The rigid framework imposed by the resolution is reflected in its approach to obtaining permission from researched communities. While the need to obtain free prior informed consent (FPIC) is stressed (Ch. I, Art. II:I), in practice this is often extremely difficult, as our

interlocutors do not necessarily fully understand what we are doing in the field. For example, when researching the Mebengokre kinship terminology my interlocutors thought this was merely a question of translation, unaware that their complex system involved an entirely different classificatory logic. A traditional Metyktire-Mebengokre (Gê-speaking Kayapo) chief, Jobaô, told me in the early 1980s that anthropologists spend their days chatting to people.⁶ Doctors and nurses give injections and dentists pull out teeth, but the role of anthropologists is somewhat nebulous. In 2004, Alcida Ramos accused the National Ethics Commission of failing to differentiate between consent to collect material such as blood samples and to collect myths, but it did not heed her criticism. The inadequacy of the free prior informed consent framework for fieldwork, where the trust of one's interlocutors is built up gradually, receives considerable attention in two collections of essays on ethics in anthropology, one published in 2004 by Vitoria, Oliven, Maciel and Oro, and the other in 2013 by Sarti and Duarte.

Another example of the inadequacy of the FPIC framework is illustrated by the provision that states consent for participating in research can be withdrawn at any time (Ch. III, Art. IV). One of my doctoral students has undertaken research with the Terena (Arawak) in the state of South Mato Grosso. Here the indigenous Kaiowa and Guarani, but also the Terena, are suffering high levels of violence. The student was presented with a huge list of demands that included such items as having some Terena taken to university to attend a course. No resources were available to cater to such demands. After the student completed five months of fieldwork in January 2014 there was a change of chief. The new chief forbade the use of the student's data obtained in that village in his thesis, demanding that he hand it over; the student duly complied. The new chief stated that future research was to be carried out exclusively by indigenous academics. He claimed that anthropologists "steal culture" (*roubam a cultura*), obtain the title of master or doctor, and then never return to know how people are doing. The chief also expressed the view that anthropologists fail to take "projects" (i.e., economic development projects) to the community. This is by no means an isolated case, and it is noteworthy that each researcher tries to get by one way or another without this issue being discussed in public. The expectation that anthropologists can help formulate projects for obtaining resources for indigenous communities is currently widespread.

In addition to specifying relations between the researcher and the community, the Code of Ethics also deals with the potential impact of research on individuals in the studied community. Chapter I, Article II:XIX warns against research leading to social disapproval. One of my doctoral students dealt with an Amerindian people where marijuana could be considered the mainstay of the community. It is sold in town to non-Indians, and has led to various non-Indians cohabiting with Indian women in order to cultivate marijuana without the hindrance from the authorities. The researcher considered calling marijuana by some fictitious name, but decided that this was not a solution. Obviously, the police in the region are aware that the Indians grow and sell marijuana, but to write about it in a doctoral thesis would provide evidence that could be used against them in legal proceedings. In the end it was decided that no mention could be made of this illicit behavior. It is this fiction of intentionally eliminating a slice of social reality that merits discussion as a complicated de facto ethical dilemma. Despite the case in question being prior to the current legislation, the avoidance of mentioning the cultivation of marijuana for sale outside of the community is in accordance with Chapter II:VIII, guaranteeing that the researcher will not use information obtained during research that would be prejudicial to the participants.

The same section of the resolution discussed in the previous paragraph also stresses the right to privacy of participants in research in relation to personal information and choices, and the safeguard of intimacy from public control, via the state or otherwise (Ch. I, Art. II:XIX). Another section guarantees the right to secrecy besides the privacy of participants (Ch. III, Sec. II:IV). A fellow anthropologist was asked why she had never written about polygamy, something that exists among the people she studied. She replied that it would be difficult to do this while living under the roof of a polygamist since this would constitute an invasion of intimacy.

The ethics code considers undercover research to be undesirable and to be avoided if possible. Undercover research is only to be allowed if information concerning research objectives and procedures would alter the behavior studied, or when it is the only possibility of

conducting the study (Ch. I, Art. II:XV). If possible, consent is to be obtained at a later date.⁷

Anthropologists have for a long time given pseudonyms to people referred to in their research when necessary in order to protect them; however, this is not always sufficient when those referred to are individuals who stand out in their communities or who are stigmatized, such as homosexuals among the Ticuna, who will be discussed below.

Under the ethics code, the anthropological researcher is made responsible for guaranteeing the confidentiality of any personal information collected (Ch. III, Art. VIII:IV). This provision poses a dilemma concerning some of the census material I collected in the field. Various cases were uncovered of children fathered by lovers, and sometimes I was asked not to reveal this. This is a legitimate ethical issue that has been resolved, for example, by the French software Puck (Kintip 2017),⁸ where sensitive data can be identified only number and not by name.

In line with the general assumptions related to privacy, consent, and confidentiality, participants in research have the right to decide whether their identity will be revealed and what information they have provided the researcher can be made public (Ch. III, Art. VIII:V). One of the families that I am close to is considered Indian by “whites” and as “white” by the Indians. An interethnic marriage between a Metyktire and an indigenous spouse from the Upper Xingu National Park (Alto Xinguano) meant that the lingua franca at home was Portuguese, and the children learnt neither the language of their father nor their mother. The only way that it would be possible to write about this in any detail for publication would be to fictionalize it, in order to protect the identity and privacy of those involved.⁹ The question of being regarded as an Indian by whites while having one’s ethnic identity questioned within indigenous communities is a widespread existential dilemma worldwide; it needs to be addressed one way or another.

Protecting the identity of participants, including the use of their image and voice, as demanded by Chapter II, Item VII, is not so simple in reality. In 2012, a Metyktire man asked me for recordings of myths made for me by his now-deceased father. He said he wanted them exclusively for his own use. He has a brother, so his request raised the question of inheritance rights, a question that takes us to the domain of kinship. In September 2015, one of the employees at the Instituto Raoni in Colíder, Mato Grosso, the regional administrative base for the Metyktire, told me that someone had demanded a minimum monthly wage to appease his sadness if his dead relative’s photograph were to be left on the wall. The solution was the immediate removal of the image to avoid payment for exhibiting the photograph. This was deemed to be a contradictory demand for an association that promotes the interests of the Metyktire, one that uses images of them to enlighten visitors about who the association represents.

My own images from the field have been hidden away for years due to quandaries of this nature. UNICAMP University wishes to put images from my research online that I had donated some years ago to solve problems with conservation. I consulted a lawyer to try and arrive at a legal and ethical way for the images to be accessed; things came to a standstill after paying the equivalent of return airfare to Europe and refusing to pay the lawyers any more. Fees for lawyers are not an item deemed to be a normal part of research projects, but they are increasingly becoming necessary due to the judicialization of research. The legislation passed in 2016 considers the possibility of research resulting in legal claims as an expected outcome. The right to compensation, when deemed necessary, is now included in the document concerning consent for participation in research.¹⁰

In addition to the habits and customs of those participating in research, Chapter II, Item III stipulates respect for cultural, social, moral and religious values. One problem with this is that it presupposes a world of doxa (Bourdieu 1977) devoid of conflict. To give but one example of this perspective’s limitations, one need only point to the increasing polarizations between Catholics and Protestants in many indigenous communities. The Terena in South Mato Grosso are nowadays divided into what tend to be endogamous groups of Catholics and Protestants. Generally, Protestant converts tend to condemn shamanism, dancing, and alcohol consumption, whereas Catholics tend to show less animosity to indigenous beliefs and practices. Thus the values of one part of the community are not synonymous with those of the entire collectivity.

Chapter III, Section I, Article XIII stresses that in communities “whose culture” (*cuja cultura* [sic]) recognizes the authority of the leader or of the collectivity over the individual, as is the case of certain traditional indigenous or religious communities, authorization for research should respect this particularity besides obtaining individual consent. This could pose problems for researchers. Among the Mebengokre, and many other indigenous peoples, authority is a polemical issue, and the holder of authority is hotly contested. For example, in a thesis project I supervised concerning the Ticuna in the Brazilian Amazonia, Patricia Carvalho Rosa (2015) described how individuals engaging in homoaffective relations expressed interest in discussing their struggle for tolerance and acceptability within their communities instead of having to move away to urban areas where these relations are less stigmatized. Community leaders frequently condemn such behavior, clashing with those demanding change.

The most potentially dangerous clauses for anthropologists raise the possibility of compensation to research participants for damages (Ch. III, Art. VIII:VI),¹¹ including immaterial damages to their honor, image, or privacy (Ch. I, It. VIII). This could be manipulated in a variety of ways, not least by lawyers encouraging lawsuits in pursuit of monetary gains. Decades ago a Brazilian anthropologist, Adélia Egrácia de Oliveira (1970), stated that the Juruena (now known as Yudjá) Indians were “marginal” to the Upper Xingu Complex. Her intention was to locate the Yudjá culturally in relation to a complex formation composed of a number of interacting indigenous groups. The people in question were not part of this complex, in the sense of not participating directly in it. This innocent use of the word “marginal” was later manipulated by claimants to false land titles in the Xingu Park into the untrue allegation that the Yudjá had been brought to the Park from elsewhere. When the anthropologist in question wrote her work, she could not possibly foresee how her words would later be distorted.¹²

When ethics protocols and principles are publicly discussed, the risk level of research in the social and human sciences is a major issue. The coordinator of the ethics committee at UNICAMP, Renata Celeghini (2017), argued that research with human beings always involves some risk because questions asked by researchers can cause anxiety, depression, and discomfort. She offered an example by way of illustration: if you were to ask an elderly person if he is able to undress without assistance, you may cause him distress.

Anthropologist Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte is the Coordinator of the Workgroup on Research Ethics in the Forum of Associations in Human, Social, and Applied Social Sciences that was set up with the objective of forming a Council of Research Ethics in the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation, rather than, as at the present time, in the Ministry of Health. Commenting on the 2016 resolution, he remarked that,

A pressing challenge of the Human and Social Science Ethics Committee will be to modify the current state of research regulations pertaining to indigenous peoples. At present the Committees for Research Ethics/National Commission for Research Ethics (CEP/Conep) protocol classifies all research with indigenous peoples to be borderline high risk. However, such an approach perpetuates a thoroughly outdated paternalistic attitude that is already thoroughly outmoded throughout the entire country.¹³

In May 2017, a petition was circulated by social and human science professionals, noting the lack of dialogue on the part of the existing ethics committee and the continuing failure to adjust the legislation to the specificity of the human and social sciences (See Fórum Ciências Humanas, Sociais e Sociais Aplicadas 2017).

The Need to Repatriate Knowledge

We now turn to issues that are of major concern, both to students and to participants in research. Although these concerns related to knowledge repatriation are ethical, they are not adequately encompassed within the ethics code. Below I point to additional relevant factors.

Participants are guaranteed access to the results of research (Ch. III, Sec. II, Art.

XVII:VI) in addition to permanent access to the register of consent (Art. XVII:X). There is mention of the need to “socialize” knowledge resulting from research in a format accessible to those studied (Ch. II, It. IV). In 2012 one of my Metyktire interlocutors asked me bluntly whether my research was for them or for me. This concisely sums up the resentment felt by an increasing number of Indians. With compulsory school education now the order of the day, it could be argued that transforming academic texts into pedagogic materials is a task that could be taken on by schoolteachers rather than anthropologists. The lack of access to the results of research is particularly relevant in the case of anthropologists from abroad who publish in languages other than Portuguese.

The question of the need to return knowledge derived from research done in Amazonia to Amazonian native peoples has not yet received the attention it deserves. It is a complaint made by an increasing number of Amerindian peoples. For decades, because they had greater access to financing and more postgraduate courses in anthropology, European and North American researchers were in the majority in Amazonia. Much of the published literature exists only in English or French and, to a smaller degree, German. With the advent of new technologies, it will hopefully become easier to have these works translated into Spanish and/or Portuguese.

Brazilian university students complain about being forced to read a foreign language to have access to books and articles concerning their country. A related language question recently involved a Mapuche doctoral student who won a battle with the Anthropology Department at UNICAMP to have his competence in his native Mapudungun recognized as an accepted foreign language, along with Spanish and English. Initially he was required to learn French, something that he argued was colonialist. The university accepted his master’s thesis in Spanish, rather than requiring him to defend it in Portuguese, which in his view would have impoverished his self-expression.

Funds for translating books into Portuguese and for publishing them in Brazil are rarely available. A case in point is Verswijver’s 1992 publication concerning Mebengokre (Kayapo) history. He has not yet managed to find a publisher in Brazil, and the English edition of the book has been reduced to pulp to economize the publisher’s storage space in Belgium. An even more striking example is the two-volume collection of Gê myths published in 1978 and 1984 by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), edited by Wilbert and Simoneau. Despite some of the material being available in Portuguese, much of it is not. If it were to be translated into Portuguese, it would be an invaluable source of research for Brazilians interested in indigenous cultural heritage. The question of where the onus lies for repatriating such material—with the foreign editors of the volume or with Brazilian publishers or universities—needs to be discussed.

The Purpose of Knowledge

Related to the availability of the fruits of research is the question of the purpose of knowledge. Research’s purpose is by no means self-evident; it is inseparable from the issue of for which audience one is writing. In Brazil, anthropologists are increasingly aware that what they write is likely to be read by some of the people studied, and this makes a difference in what can and cannot be said.

In a recent symposium on Amazonian sexualities (Lea 2015), I noted that it is difficult to approach this question without exoticizing it. In two theses completed in 2015, in which sexuality and gender were central issues, there was no mention of sexual practices, especially those concerning homoaffective relationships, in order to not breach conventions of respect towards those involved (Dias 2015; Rosa 2015). As sexuality involves intimacy, it has generally been approached via anthropological research concerned with medicine and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. There is the further complicating factor that in Brazil those engaged in the study of gender and sexuality are more attuned to dialogue with public policy makers and defend their academic territory as separate from “*etnologia*,” which in Brazil refers specifically to the study of indigenous peoples.

Spokespersons, Factionalism, and Contested Community Authority

An issue related to the purpose of knowledge is who is speaking on behalf of whom, and with which underlying intentions. For example, the Mebengokre leader Raoni told me at the beginning of my research in the late 1970s that there was no more sorcery among his people. It was only when I began to understand the language that I noted people talking about it and making accusations. The chief expressed the ideal (as his office demands) but not necessarily the reality of village life. The ethics committee at UNICAMP suggests that one can attach questionnaires together with one's project without realizing that this is not necessarily part of the anthropologist's methodology.¹⁴ I have always been critical about the use of questionnaires by anthropologists, insisting on the invaluable nature of listening to what people say spontaneously, which tends to be more revealing and less ethnocentric than even semistructured interviews.

Precisely what a community is and who can be deemed to represent it is a complex question. When I arrived with two students at the Metyktire village of the leader Raoni in 2011, some members of the village complained that the "community" had not been consulted. In astonishment, I showed them the authorization from Raoni. But they expressed the viewpoint that leaders who are off in the cities do not represent the communities in the villages.

In April 2015, a young Yawalapiti woman (married to a Kayabi and living in the city) at a meeting of indigenous women in São Paulo claimed to be the spokesperson (*porta-voz*) of her people as a member of the Upper Xingu Women's Association. She declared defensively that infanticide is no longer practiced, but she did not delve into the question of what is understood by this misnomer. This example is illustrative of the continued need for an anthropological perspective on existing controversies. Our sociocultural backgrounds enable us to weigh in on polemical issues without speaking on behalf of indigenous communities.

One episode struck me as an anthropological swan song. At the SALSA conference in 2011, during a session concerning the Belo Monte dam's impact on the environment and indigenous communities, the Metyktire leader, Mekarõ, who presided over the event, had his words translated (or better, improvised upon) from his native language into Portuguese. Weeks later this same leader acted as translator for his paternal uncle Raoni. Indians are increasingly demanding to have their own voices heard instead of having non-Indian spokesmen talk on their behalf. Despite this insistence, their voices are almost never made audible in the Brazilian media, especially on the main TV channel, *O Globo*, which is staunchly pro-agribusiness.

During meetings of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the desirability of soliciting an "Indian" to participate is often expressed, as if there were some essence that could represent Indians in their totality. A case in point was a meeting in April 2015 in São Paulo concerning the protest movement against the Tapajos hydroelectric dam project. Someone ventured that at the next meeting an Indian could be brought from the Tupi-Guarani Jaraguá community on the outskirts of São Paulo. It is an illusion to think that an individual from this village could represent the viewpoint of the Mundurucu, any more than the ill-fated anthropologist in the following episode.

In May 2015, it was announced that a doctoral student from a British university was to give a talk entitled "Who Are the Many Mundurucu?" at the Federal University of Western Pará. Some Mundurucu reacted with indignation, accusing him of having first appeared among them in 2013 but never having made clear whether he was working for FUNAI or intending to do research. Their letter of repudiation mentions how wary the Mundurucu are of outsiders due to the Tapajos dam project that threatens their land. They claim the researcher did not obtain authorization from the "community." They said they wanted no more researchers in their territory. Their document stipulates that "any and all information collected about us cannot become data for research which could interest the undertaking [dam complex] or mere academic careerism." The anthropologist replied in an open letter. In response, one Mundurucu came out in his defense, making it clear that there was factionalism involved.

In the 1980s female researchers criticized anthropologists for trying to generalize about

an entire people instead of specifying women's perspectives versus those of men. Nowadays, with the proliferation of villages and an ever-expanding urban Indian population, it becomes ever more problematic to generalize. There is increasing intergenerational conflict and questioning of traditional authority figures; the young and the educated vie with the elders for power and prestige.

Postmodernist anthropology has received much criticism in Brazil, and yet the move away from broad generalizations to focus on the discourse of specific people with whom the anthropologist has established relations is a sign of the times; it is also a kind of unintended consequence of the increasing internal differentiation within indigenous collectivities. In recent years this has led to my students increasingly adopting a writing style influenced by postmodernist authors. Like these authors, they describe their relationships with their interlocutors and specify from whom information was obtained.

Whereas anthropologists are increasingly careful to avoid speaking on behalf of indigenous peoples, white *indigenista* activists working on behalf of indigenous causes do not share this same awareness. In 2015 a letter attributed to the Metyktire circulated among SALSA members. It went viral and was to be translated into English and French. The letter was forwarded to the SALSA mailing list of November 8, 2015, where it was described as a "beautiful letter," and considered for publication in a book in France. The letter seemed to resonate so strongly with anthropologists because it projected a vision encapsulating how they would like to be envisaged by the people they study. I contacted one of the supposed signatories to ask if he had actually signed the letter, but he was unaware of its existence. If an anthropologist had written the letter it could have been considered a case of identity theft and of unjustifiably speaking on behalf of the Indians. As it turned out, two non-Indian Catholic employees of an indigenous association had written it in the style of an epic poem, totally alien to the Mebengokre. These employees signed not only their own names but also those of three Metyktire leaders and the whole Mebengokre nation. The letter invoked "the light of God." Considering the Metyktire's fight against the onslaught of attempts to convert them to Christianity, mention of God in this context carried significant implications. However, as one of these employees informed me, the letter had been intended as a private one, offering consolation to its addressee, and not as a document to be circulated in public.

In contrast to the romanticization of anthropology by some of its practitioners, part of the Brazilian press, especially the newsweekly *Veja* (as far back as 2010) has taken to demonizing anthropologists. This is not related to what anthropologists do, but rather is in line with attempts to demoralize Indians. The latter are increasingly portrayed as "*coitadinhos*" (pitiables), while anthropologists in turn are accused of trying to hinder their increasing assimilation into national society due to their own research interests in alterity.

Anti-Indian Climate

In Brazil the existence of racial democracy is a fiction perpetuated by nationalist authorities, although racism concerning Brazil's black population has long been a subject of debate among black activists and social scientists. At the 2016 meeting of the Brazilian Anthropology Association, a working group focused on the question of racism as an important issue affecting indigenous populations today.

In some regions it is difficult to distinguish between Indians and *Quilombolas* (members of quilombos or Maroon communities). In certain cases there is an overlap or fuzzy boundary between Indians, Quilombolas, and residents of "traditional communities" (including rubber tappers, rustic riverbank dwellers, and others).¹⁵ At the state level there is an increasing tendency to lump Indians and Quilombolas into a single category, as if, from the perspective of public policymakers, all subaltern groups are equivalent. One right-wing politician, Federal Deputy Carlos Heinze, went as far as to lump together Quilombolas, Indians, and gays and lesbians as all "worthless" (*que não presta*).¹⁶

The image of the Noble Savage continues to haunt the popular imagination by dint of its antithesis, the "ignoble savage," with many considering present-day Indians to have been corrupted by "our society." People ask if the Indians I work with wear jeans and use mobile phones, as if the use of these items constituted a rite of passage amounting to assimilation.

One of the ways in which racism affects the indigenous population is by attributing the practice of barbaric customs to them. This is exemplified by a debate over practices wrongly labeled “infanticide.”

There is not the space here to enter into a discussion of this complex issue in any detail beyond a brief discussion of the Muwaji law. On August 26, 2015 the federal Chamber of Deputies approved a law to combat “infanticide” in indigenous areas. The next stage is to submit this project to the Senate. The text includes a list of harmful practices: sexual abuse, individual or gang rape, and domestic violence. In order to prevent abortion and the rejection of unwanted babies, all pregnancies are to be registered with the health authorities. The proponent of the text referred to the victims of outdated traditional practices, stating, “Human rights are for everyone, independently of their culture.” This kind of demagoguery harks back to the days of evolutionism. The text holds legally responsible any citizen who knows of such situations and fails to inform the authorities, which may include anthropologists. The floor debate for the Muwaji law included talk about “cultures that sacrifice lives not prevailing” (Câmara dos Deputados 2015). One speaker noted that this project could end up imprisoning whole tribes. Another speaker affirmed that the proposal is unconstitutional, as it denied indigenous peoples the guarantee of their cultural identity. In the light of this proposed legislation anthropologists must be increasingly wary about what they say or write about values that clash with national norms.

In Brazil, prevailing ideology advocates neoliberal development and economic growth. The only sector of the economy currently thriving is agribusiness. In Sinop, in the state of Mato Grosso, the sea of soybean plantations stretches as far as the eye can see, and in the town of Colíder, the regional administrative base for the Metyktire, the posters outside the main supermarkets show blue-eyed blonde families (representing recent migrants with a European phenotype from Southern Brazil), as if to deny the existence of the region’s indigenous population. An abundance of items that Indians cannot generally afford pack supermarket shelves. It is noteworthy that they tend not to verbalize the effects of this wealth that is denied them, but it certainly affects them psychologically—suggested by the increasing dissemination of alcohol and the associated eruption of domestic violence.

A major dilemma facing contemporary Brazilian Indians is how to achieve a balance between town and countryside. Urban life has its allure, but the struggle to maintain land in the forest or the savannah requires occupation of rural areas. Town life is associated with access to formal education, which is seen as providing opportunities for wage employment. The reality of mass unemployment often frustrates aspirations for jobs, especially for those who are less qualified. To avoid the appearance of lending credence to those detractors who use any pretext to usurp indigenous lands, the increasing attraction of town life is not being discussed as it deserves.

Conclusion

This text has sought to reflect on the changing role of we anthropologists carrying out research with indigenous peoples in Brazil and on the increasing constraints that we are subjected to, both in terms of the legislation we must comply with and in terms of the way we are envisioned by contemporary indigenous peoples and non-anthropologists. Attention has also been drawn to the growing demand for the repatriation of knowledge directly to Amerindian communities and in the form of Portuguese-language publications, especially from non-Brazilian researchers.

The Statement of Professional Responsibility by the American Anthropological Association’s Committee on Ethics (2012) begins by evoking the use of anthropological knowledge “to solve human problems.” In present-day Brazil, anthropologists are almost entirely impotent to affect the course of events, which is not to say that they should cease trying. They are potentially important allies in the fight for human rights and attempts to defend the interests of indigenous populations and other minority groups against those of major corporations, agribusiness, and fundamentalist religious groups.

The Brazilian 2016 resolution on ethics states that one of the benefits of research is to promote the ecological balance of the environment (Ch. I, Art. II:III), but anthropologists

lack the power to bring this about. Anthropologists could use their specific knowledge in the fight against deforestation and climate change because their training has enabled them to look beyond economic orthodoxy and understand the importance of preserving the environment as the basis for maintaining sociocultural diversity that, with its heterogeneous heritage of knowledge, can contribute to the survival of the planet.

Anthropologists are often people possessing some degree of ambivalence with regard to the values of the societies into which they were born. However, their chances of subverting prevailing hegemonic ideas are ever more constrained. The works of Lévi-Strauss (e.g., 1967) and Chomsky (e.g., 1965) continue to inspire anthropologists to delve into the enormous range of particularities that can be engendered by the universality of the human mind, but anthropologists lack the power to disseminate their ideas. For example, childcare in indigenous societies (in my experience) emphasizes the importance of the peer group from an early age. In wider society, discussions still ensue about the ills caused by working mothers' lack of attention to their children. If one could turn to other societies for rethinking our own (something now unfashionable), there would be much to gain.

Some time ago, on the basis of participating in a number of courses for training Mebengokre (Gê) bilingual teachers and future leaders, an analogy came to my mind between computers having made typists obsolete and Amerindians wishing to do away with nonindigenous anthropologists and taking over research for themselves. Certain collectivities, such as the Awá (Tupi), with relatively recent contact with non-Indians, continue to look to anthropologists for assistance.¹⁷ Others, such as certain Xavante communities (Gê), want nothing more to do with anthropologists.¹⁸ Until recently, education for Amerindians was limited to the primary-school level, but increasingly there are university courses being opened up and quotas being reserved for Amerindian students. Education has rapidly been embraced by indigenous populations as a means to realize their aspiration for upward social mobility.

Anthropologists are increasingly being called upon to dialogue with those engaged in public planning, for example, to administer the payment of compensation for the negative effects caused by public and private megadevelopment projects. This includes involvement in so-called mitigation projects for major corporations, such as the Vale do Rio Doce (one of the biggest mining companies in the world, privatized by the Brazilian government in 1997), and Norte Energia, the consortium that built the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in Altamira on the Xingu river in Amazonia. Discussion is needed on the issue of whether anthropologists identify with such goals. Concomitantly, indigenous communities increasingly look to anthropologists as people who can formulate and administrate projects, both to improve the infrastructure of their communities and to provide them with an income with which to purchase an ever-increasing array of consumer goods.

Rhetoric is bandied about at universities concerning the need for interdisciplinary approaches, but in practice this is almost entirely absent. For example, it is evident that anthropologists rarely have access to adequate linguistic training. In the same vein, the average anthropologist who works with Indians is totally unprepared for understanding large transnational corporations, such as the Vale do Rio Doce and hydroelectric conglomerates that make a major impact on the lives of many Indians. A variety of mental lenses are required for viewing differing scales of social reality, but the collaborative effort of distinct disciplines is rarely achieved in practice. Multi-sited fieldwork and multivocality are issues that have been incorporated into contemporary anthropology, but in themselves they are insufficient to come to grips with the complexities of the modern world.

It is a fiction that the Brazilian Code of Ethics as codified in Resolution 510, ratified in 2016, is the appropriate instrument to ensure ethical practice in social anthropology and related disciplines because it is excessively rooted in the framework of medical research envisaged from the standpoint of the clinic and hospital. The unwarranted subordination of anthropological research to the National Health Council, mentioned by then-ABA president Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (2004:12) continues unabated.

Postscript

In November 2015, the agribusiness lobby in the Chamber of Deputies set up a Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry (CPI) to investigate FUNAI and INCRA (the Brazilian Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) with regards to its demarcation of indigenous Lands and quilombo territories. It was an attempt to criminalize these institutions in order to dismantle them.

In March 2016, Victoria Tauli Corpuz, special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples for the United Nations, wrote a damning end-of-mission statement on her visit to Brazil (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2016). She was then accused by the agribusiness sector of interfering in the country's internal affairs. By mid-July 2016 the parliamentary enquiry into FUNAI and INCRA was also attempting to criminalize the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), a major NGO that focuses on the environment and indigenous populations, the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI), a Catholic organization engaged in the defense of indigenous rights, and the ABA (see Ministério Público Federal 2016). The parliamentary investigation was shelved in August 2016, only to be reinitiated in October 2016 as "CPI FUNAI and INCRA 2."

In February 2017, the president of the ABA, Lia Z. Machado, sent out a letter requesting support for the association, then under attack as object of investigation in CPI FUNAI and INCRA 2, where it was alleged to have illicitly used public resources and huge quantities of foreign capital to substitute for the state in the demarcation of Indigenous Lands and the recognition of territories of the descendants of quilombos. Machado's letter stresses the ABA's ethical procedures, an emphasis that resonates with the formalization of its code of ethics.

These two recent parliamentary enquiries show that political interests can always be used to manipulate the facts in the attempt to demoralize anthropologists with spurious allegations, as Machado's letter points out. She states that the association was forced to use its scanty resources to hire lawyers in 2016 to defend itself from the ill-founded suspicions raised against it in the first parliamentary enquiry of FUNAI and INCRA. Although allegations against the ABA were dropped at the end of May 2017, at the end of the enquiry, criminal charges have been made against twenty-one anthropologists, along with indigenous leaders, missionaries, and others engaged in human rights work concerning ethnic minorities (Melito 2017). This situation is ongoing, with a total of sixty-seven people facing charges (Brito 2017).

The current government, headed by Michel Temer, has halted the demarcation of Indigenous Lands and increased deforestation. In 2016 it made frustrated attempts to hand over FUNAI to a military general. In January 2017, the presidency of FUNAI was given to an evangelical pastor. He resigned shortly afterwards due to allegations of political manipulation within FUNAI and has now been replaced by the previously considered general. At the same time, FUNAI is becoming increasingly inoperative due to its dwindling resources.

It is in this context (recalling McCarthyism), characterized by the widespread and systematic disrespect for the human rights of Brazilian indigenous peoples, that the reader may evaluate the Kafkaesque restrictions currently placed on anthropological research and better understand the problematic issue of state-dictated ethics. More specifically, it appears that the medical establishment, through the support it enjoys from the state, has effectively hijacked the human and social sciences and established stranglehold over them. When contrasted with the violent attacks against indigenous communities that routinely occur at the behest of those engaged in agribusiness, the supposed risks of anthropological research are nothing less than surreal.

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Notes

¹ “Whites” is the standard term used in Brazil to refer to the non-indigenous population, irrespective of actual skin color.

² The title of the panel was “Ethics and Aesthetics in the Anthropology of Amazonia.”

³ A further discussion of these issues can be found in Lea (in press).

⁴ At the SALSA Conference in New Orleans, in January 2016, I discussed a preliminary version of that resolution that was circulated among anthropologists in mid-2015. All translations of the legislation are mine.

⁵ On June 6, 2017, an event was organized at the Institute of Philosophy and Human Science (IFCH), at UNICAMP, São Paulo, to explain how the ethics committee works. The seminar will be available online once it is edited. The director of the committee, a chemist, informed the audience that, at the present time, around 80 percent of the projects that are submitted are returned to the researcher for further clarification.

⁶ A reviewer noted that elsewhere in the Americas the term “Indian” is considered pejorative. In Brazil it is the standard term used by the Indians themselves and by “whites” (non-Indians). The term Amerindian is also used when referring to Amazonia legal, an area more extensive than Amazonia in geographic terms, but that does not include the southern states of Brazil.

⁷ The example given in the recent seminar on ethics at UNICAMP shows how far removed non-social scientists are from the reality of our discipline. It was said that if a restaurant wishes to know whether its workers wash their hands before touching food, then explaining this beforehand would affect the outcome of the research. After the results have been obtained the motives for the research must be revealed, and only those who give their consent may have their data used.

⁸ This is part of the activities of the Parisian research group “Traitement Informatique de la Parenté” (TIP). Personal names are automatically anonymized at download.

⁹ This case reminded me of the gripping story about racism in 1920s New York and Chicago in the novel entitled *Passing* (1928) by Nella Larsen. It is available as an audiobook at Librivox.org.

¹⁰ This was stressed at the seminar on ethics at UNICAMP on June 6, 2017, and the failure to mention this possibility was the reason given for rejecting a number of projects. It was also stated that there has already been one case of research resulting in a court case with someone suing a researcher for defamation.

¹¹ Article I defines damages resulting from research—somewhat enigmatically—as those that are greater than the ones existing in daily life.

¹² This issue is discussed in two expert witness reports for the Federal Justice, Lea (1997a, 1997b).

¹³ My translation of the original text by Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte (n.d.), posted on the Forum of Associations in Human, Social and Applied Social Sciences website: “Um desafio que se apresentará logo adiante aos representantes das CHS é o de fazer reverter a atual situação da pesquisa com indígenas, considerada liminarmente como de alto risco pelo sistema CEP/Conep, mantendo e aprofundando uma visão tutelar fartamente ultrapassada no espaço nacional.”

¹⁴ Further details can be found via Pró-reitoria de Pesquisa Unicamp (Fórum Ciências Humanas, Sociais e Sociais Aplicadas 2017).

¹⁵ For a fuller definition see the following, Comunidades Tradicionais—O que são <http://www.seppir.gov.br/comunidades-tradicionais/o-que-sao-comunidades-tradicionais>.

¹⁶ This is quoted in a video clip, Youtube 2016. Heinze is currently part of the Parliamentary Enquiry into the Brazilian Association of Anthropology mentioned in the postscript.

¹⁷ This information was given to me by Uirá Garcia, an ex-postdoctoral student.

¹⁸ Personal communication from Francisco Caminati, a sociologist working with the Xa-

vante. This view was expressed by Cipassé when he was the chief of the village Wede'ra. Caminati discusses this question in an unpublished paper (2016). I was also informed by a group of Xavante, years ago, that they would only have a dictionary of their language when they themselves could make one.

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