

The Anthropologist's Body and the Challenges of the Near Experience

DOI

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/2179-0892.ra.2019.161080>

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ABSTRACT

This article intends to reflect on the centrality of the anthropologist's body in the field research and how this centrality influences and produces the ethnographic writing. The paper pursuit discusses the effects and meanings of this corporeality for the ethnography making, and to reveal that the physical/material presence of the researchers in the field produce specific places of speech that affect the ways of seeing, doing, thinking and writing anthropology. Through of a certain feminist perspective, the intention is to reflect on the ethnographic body condition, which is marked by biography, historical contexts, theoretical choices and interactions in the field, producing displacements, differentiations, exclusions, juxtapositions of the anthropologist's bodily senses, constantly located on the border, between worlds.

KEYWORDS

Corporeality,
field research,
ethnography,
feminism, border

*Alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro, me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictório.
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan simultáneamente*
Gloria Anzaldúa,
Borderlands/La Frontera The New Mestiza

In ethnographic research, to be in the field, and to write from it, is to come across the evidence of one's own body and deal with its material and symbolic visibility, putting it in question. Its material presence, which occupies a certain space, moves in a certain way, has a certain language, expresses marks of gender, sexuality, generation, race/ethnicity, region, nationality, etc., has effects on places and situations where the interactions between the anthropologists' and their interlocutors take place. Our marked bodies make us materially visible. This corporeal visibility is engendered by what it raises in a certain locality or context, what makes our body intelligible for others.

In the ethnographic dialogue, in which the researchers' bodies are observed, classified, desired, refuted, and questioned, traces, noises, whispers, silences, signs appear and interfere in the production of the ethnographic writing, that often begin during fieldwork. In the understanding of otherness, we become others from the perception of these others and this relationship is made first of all by the body, with its experiences, gestures, movements, practices, habits, clothing, color, smell, ways of speaking, walking, expressing, etc.

Some researchers (Despret and Stengers, 2011; hooks, 1995; Corrêa, 1995; Moreno, 1995, Golde, 1986; Matebeni, 2017; Mariano, 2017) approached these issues and brought up dilemmas, for example, of being a woman and researcher in adverse contexts, where violence, harassment and affection situations took place, both during the fieldwork and in academic environments. Local classifications that marked their bodies, design very specific places and positions and, consequently, create distinct forms of writing.

Throughout this article, I intend to dialogue with these questions and problematize the meanings and effects of corporeality to the making of ethnography. My assumption is that this corporeality lies in a space-between, in a border existence that is established through a *close* experience throughout the field research practices, and that produces distinct effects on the ways of doing, thinking and writing anthropology.

For Thomas Csordas, the first existence of the individual is bodily, or, to put it another way, the body is the subject of culture, not just its object. Moreover, the body only exists in relation to the world and thus becomes body-in-the-world. The author names this problematic of corporeality, locus of existence and source of the experience. "In fact, corporeality is our fundamental existential condition, our corporeality or bodiliness in relation to the world and other people" (Csor-

1 In the original Portuguese version of this article, I chose to assume the feminine form when I refer to "anthropologists" in general, "*antropólogas*", instead of the masculine universal form "*antropólogos*", proposing a provocative generalization. In English, this distinction does not apply as "anthropologist" is a gender-neutral word – except for sentences as "the anthropologist herself...".

das, 2013: 292). From Merleau-Ponty's and Pierre Bourdieu's theories, the author offers a methodological proposal for anthropology in which corporeality has a central place that necessarily collapses the dualities body-mind, subject-object, structure-practice.

Corporeality shows that the subject-body is necessarily interconnected with the environment, as Tim Ingold argues, or space, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty's words: "There would be no space if I had no body" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003: 149). Therefore, there is no delimitation between subject-body and world, since both intertwine continuously, in uninterrupted motion.

Thus, without the possibility of being invisible or neutral, our bodies inhabit and cross paths of life, according to Tim Ingold's perspective. Being-in-the-world, in body state, then, places us as part of it, along lines connected to the surrounding environment, as if they were part of the same web: "Being, I would say now, is not being in one place, but being along paths. The path, not the place, is the primordial condition of being or rather becoming" (Ingold, 2015: 38).

What, would be the specificity of the anthropologist's body in this reflection? Obviously, I do not bring unique answers, but suggestions and possibilities for thinking about a certain state of the ethnographic body, which is materialized in different embodied forms of writing. A hybrid and inhomogeneous frontier body state that is marked by its biography, its theoretical choices, its socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts and its field experiences (Peirano, 1995, 2008). I bring inspirations from the *Chicana* ideas of Gloria Anzaldúa and a certain *mestiza* feminist perspective, in Latin American Castilian.

La mestiza constantly has to shift out of usual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (Western mode), to divergent thinkings, characterized by movement away from setting patterns and goals and toward a whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes (Gloria Anzaldúa, 2012: 101).

A *mestizo* perspective, which denies a dualistic thinking, positions itself in an interstitial space whose elements - people, things, relationships, lifelines, paths, experiences - makes up a kaleidoscope, full of colors, sizes, shapes. As we look at the display of this kaleidoscope, different colored pieces of varying dimensions form images as we rotate the object back and forth. Slowly, many-pointed stars, squares, diamonds, and other startling shapes are created as the angle of the object changes according to the movement of our hands on it. These multiple combinations occur by the reflection of light falling on the tilted mirrors or triangle-shaped glass inside the object. These variations multiply and change places with each movement of our hands. Although the drawings that are formed are

symmetrical and geometric, a multiplicity of images imposes itself on our vision. Varied combinations are formed, with ever different and proliferating designs.

These combinations, from Anzaldúa's inspirations, escape the crystallized formations and the construction of hegemonic rationality with a single objective. They suggest a divergent and broad thinking, that is capable of shattering the subject-object duality and crossing geopolitical, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic boundaries, and so on.

It is important to point out that I am not referring to the idea of *mestizaje* (*mestiçagem*) from the point of view of race relations, so fundamental for thinking about the structures of racism in Brazil, which I will not address in this article. I draw on Gloria Anzaldúa's perspective to think of the productive and creative place of and at the frontier to think of the anthropologist's corporeality in particular situations and locations.

The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands are particularly noteworthy to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (Anzaldúa, 2012: 19).

Living on the frontier means, for the author, to build a perspective of multiplicity while maintaining a center of resistance against concrete and material forms of oppression. The *outsider within* point of view, as proposed by bell hooks (1984) and Patricia Hill Collins (1986), among other authors of black feminist thought, also dialogues with this perspective, while suggests the place of the margin occupied by black women, including intellectuals, as a production site of a specific knowledge, made by the appropriation of being between two or more worlds, which enables the transit between them, to understand their languages and perspectives. Thus, the margin produces a peculiar gaze at the world that cannot be crystallized by a single thought on this side or beyond the walls.

In this sense, as a feminist anthropologist and professor in Brazil, I find myself at least in a double position: I assume and face the academic, historical, political, social, and economic conditions of profound inequalities, setbacks, and conservatism, and at the same time I open myself for the multiple possibilities offered by the alterity relations experienced in ethnographic making. In this position, I cannot abandon my own body and my subjectivity as a middle-class, Afro-descendant woman, among many other markers. And through my own body, I allow myself to be made visible and questioned the moment I plunge into the process of field experience. This visibility does not necessarily communicate

my subjective trajectory and can be read by other perspectives. This place is on the border between many worlds and many voices and must deal with many lifelines and paths at the same time. And at this crossroads, one can lose or inebriate themselves in the maze. These trajectories are not chosen beforehand because anthropological research can offer unusual paths. "Not knowing what to discover is, of course, a truth of discovery," wrote Marilyn Strathern (2014: 353).

In this sense, the "close experience" that is carried out in field research between anthropologist and interlocutor is not without involvement, or rather, engagement (not necessarily emotional but as an implication). Clifford Geertz, in the 1970s, proposed to think of the double play of "experience-near" – "experience-distant" as a metaphor to the anthropological production, between fieldwork ("being there") and writing ("being here"). At that time, the author indicated the risks of what he called "spiritual empathy" toward "informants." The close experience should "find out what the hell they think they are doing" (Geertz, 1974: 29) and understand by what means "natives" perceived their ideas and realities. Thus, this proximity was based on a certain emotional distance from people to understand the symbolic system of a culture and not to make, in his words, "a communion of spirits".

For a long time, the commitment of certain anthropologists, specially woman anthropologists, to the people, community, group or collective was seen as a "failure" in research neutrality or as a certain activism that blurred the anthropological gaze and interfered with the production of knowledge. There was a hierarchical distinction between applied anthropology and anthropology, and of course, a certain homogeneity of anthropologists (especially white men) was assumed concerning marks of gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc. It can be said that they were images of bodyless anthropologists.

From the period of interpretive anthropology here, many advances, debates, and reflections have been developed about the complex situations involving field experiences and the relations between anthropologists and their interlocutors. Particularly in Brazil, anthropologies, inside and outside academic walls, have been rethought, among other issues, due to affirmative action policies for black, indigenous, trans and disabled people in universities (undergraduate and postgraduate) and the new demands of emerging social movements. Thus, grows the number of black² and indigenous anthropologists, who write from their close experiences on aspects involving their own places of origin. Still, young anthropologists have been arising, who identify themselves as *suburban women (mulheres periféricas)* who produce knowledge about the peripheries of large cities from the margins, such as Dayane Silva (2019), and transgender people who develop situated knowledge, such as Viviane Vergueiro (2015), from their experiences being transgender, transsexual or transvestite. Also, and at the

2 In 2019, the Black Anthropologists Committee was formed for the first time at the Brazilian Association of Anthropology: <http://www.portal.abant.org.br/2019/05/03/comite-de-anthropologists-the-blacks-them/>

same time, there is a growing demand from young students for bibliographic references in the syllabi to give visibility to black, indigenous, Latin American, Brazilian writers outside the white, male, Eurocentric and hetero-cis-normative academic circuit. Another academic and scientific background has been claimed by the student body, and among these claims there is the need to recognize differences and inequalities that herald other possible corporealities.

POSSIBILITIES FOR AN EMBODIED ETHNOGRAPHY

Turning to corporeality as an anthropological paradigm, as Csordas (2008) announces, allows us to reflect on the possibilities of the body also for the anthropologist in the different perspectives that she assumes when taking part of a certain research context and elaborating ethnographies. From my point of view, this suggests the possibility of making a *mestiza* ethnography, inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa: appropriating the place of ambiguity and the frontier as an intellectual condition. This is a multi-sited and plural position, which is affected by situations of inequality, discrimination, and power. This does not mean adopting a single point of view, but walking between paths of practice and emic knowledge that stimulate our theoretical reflections and, at the same time, propel new forms of ethnography know-how.

An intriguing provocation is in the proposal of transfeminist³ thought, such as that of Jacqueline Gomes de Jesus.

There are two kinds of theories: those that cannot touch their defenders' hearts without hurting them; and those who, most lovingly, with trembling little hands touch the faces of their defenders, but quickly turn away. (...) Transfeminism is on the first category: its premises and consequences are not known without their finger on the icing of the birthday cake of our certainties (Jesus, 2015: 19).

3 In dialogue with black feminism, transfeminism in Brazil has driven hegemonic feminisms, not always without resistance, to rethink and incorporate in their reflections the multiple possibilities of female, male and non-binary bodies and gender identities.

When we take seriously the knowledge produced by our research interlocutors, we face the false distance that exists between theory and empiricism, between us and others. As Michel Agier (2015) points out, anthropological research in the contemporary world is in a frontier situation, where relative estrangements occur, which are at the same time between places, temporalities, and people. These are unstable and indefinite moments and experiences, made by errant movements that cause decentralization. This decentralization makes it possible, from the point of view of anthropology, to escape the identity trap, that is, to attribute to identity the virtue of a truth, which is closed to any representation of the other that lies beyond the wall. For Agier, the wall is to the border as the identity to otherness, as opposing categories.

Thus, being on the frontier means shifting the anthropological perspective to the processes by which differences are constructed and moving between walls, crossing them, and looking through them. This suggests that research can incorporate, as part of its reflections, how and what places and experiences enable forms of oppression, discrimination, and inequality.

Patricia Hill Collins (1986) points to the need to link the trajectory of the researcher to the scientific inquiry, overturning the idea of impartiality and distancing from the scientist in relation to her research. She suggests that experiences of inequality can be shared between collectives and, from there, can build a common thought that may denounce and confront situations of injustice. These shared experiences, which are diverse and plural, enable the production of ways of knowing through dialogue, care, commitment to what is produced, and recognition of a multiplicity of knowledge agents.

Djamila Ribeiro emphasizes that it is necessary to recognize social locations, that is, positions defined from hierarchical and unequal structures. In these structures, everyone can speak, but this speech is never neutral.

[...] even in the face of the imposed limits, dissonant voices have been able to produce noises and cracks in the hegemonic narrative, which often, dishonestly, makes them accused of aggression precisely for fighting against the violence of imposed silence (Ribeiro, 2017: 87).

We may think that the proposal of “giving voice” to the interlocutors, which gained strength from the 1980s on in the so-called “postmodern anthropology”, which, at that time, brought a fundamental discussion about the problem of authorship in ethnographic writing, dialogues with the contemporary problems of the place of speech. At that time, several debates emerged in academic settings with black feminism and feminism of color theorists (Angela Davis, Gayatri Spivak, Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, among others), who denounced the maintenance of racism and sexism in intellectual circles, with feminist anthropology (Gayle Rubin, Michele Rosaldo, Sherry Ortner, Marilyn Strathern, Verena Stolcke, Mariza Corrêa, etc.) and postmodern anthropologists (eg George Marcus, James Clifford and Michael Taussig), who have drawn criticism about Colonial thinking in anthropology, a debate that has been increasingly highlighted today, with other contours, including feminist, LGBT, black and indigenous movements from the epistemologies of the Global South.

Currently, the problem of authorship can be thought of as a variation around the most recent discussion in Brazil about the place of speech and what voices and individuals may or may not speak, in whose name and cause. These issues have produced transformations and provocations in different researches in the

field of gender and sexuality studies, urban anthropology, ethnology, racial-ethnic studies, etc. Our interlocutors are now students of anthropology, anthropologists, and teachers who read our texts, make their criticisms, charge political positions.

In these disputes, the discussion about auto-anthropology deserves to be included. Marilyn Strathern questions the idea that doing anthropology “at home” among their own is necessarily a broader anthropology, with more depth of knowledge than that made by a greater distance.

Of course, merely being a “member” of the broader culture or society in question does not guarantee that the anthropologist will adopt the appropriate local cultural genres. On the contrary, he/she may as well produce something practically unrecognizable (Strathern, 2014: 136).

For Strathern, what is at stake is how voices are described in texts and how ethnographic authority is produced. That is, what kind of author the anthropologist becomes in the texts she writes. So, the question isn't who is writing, necessarily, but how authorship emerges from ethnographic writing.

When black, indigenous, transgender, suburban people, etc. check the legitimacy of the anthropologist in the production of knowledge about them, they are not necessarily claiming the construction of an auto-anthropology but evidencing the reproduction of various inequalities in the academic field and it is evident that this social condition cannot be ignored. In this sense, as Strathern explains, “what is at stake is how ethnographic authority is constructed in reference to the voices of those who provide the information and the role assigned to them in the resulting texts” (Strathern, 2014: 136).

Therefore, both the place of speech and the idea of “giving voice” challenge ethnographic authority. However, they have nuances and differentiation. The debate about the place of speech denounces, among other problems, the primacy of male and white intellectuals at the head of scientific productions and decision-making in the academic world (Despret and Stengers, 2011). The proposal of “giving voice”, in turn, refers, in postmodern anthropology, to radical changes in ethnographic writing in order to recognize the domination of Western colonizing thought and to produce other ways of doing anthropology through new forms of writing and authorship, away from the figure of a single author and a single narrative.

Since the 1980s, so-called postmodern anthropology has included the process of subjectivity and fiction especially in the writing and authoring of the anthropological text. At this same time, important feminist reactions within anthropology also emerged, such as the collection by Ruth Behar and Debo-

rah Gordon (1995), to put into question, on the one hand, the secondary place of women researchers and, on the other hand, the importance of producing research and reflections that contributed to the understanding (and denunciation) of gender inequalities, also in non-Western societies. Ten years earlier, in 1970, Peggy Golde⁴ edited a collection, *Women in the Field*, with articles by American anthropologists that revealed, in different situations, the impacts, challenges, and risks that involved the presence of women in field research. Thus, inspired by Golde's initiative, Behar and Gordon published *Women Writing Culture*, reacting explicitly to the book by James Clifford and George Marcus that shied away from including feminist perspectives.

In both cases, it was a matter of pointing out a censorship in the dominant discourse of anthropology: in the first case, a "forgetting" of the contribution made by women anthropologists to field research; in the second case, an "erasure" of the names of women anthropologists from the history of discipline in the United States. The distinction between the two terms is not without consequences: Peggy Golde was reacting to what she thought was an injustice; Ruth Behar, it seemed to her and the other contributors of the magazine a purposeful marginalization. The debate over the difficult relations between feminism and anthropology is thus not just an update of the feminist struggles of the 1970s for the conquest of equal rights: it is now a question of the very tradition of discipline, constituted as a canonical (male) body of texts, whose authority and precedence has been assured through teaching for a few generations (Corrêa, 1997: 71).

According to Mariza Corrêa, there is a twofold effort by feminist anthropologists in the last decades of the 20th century: to debate the denaturalization of differences between men and women and to reveal the little recognition of female anthropologists in the most prestigious academic spaces. The relationship between feminism and anthropology, on the one hand, shows a potentiality for critical thinking about gender inequalities in different social spheres, including the academic universe, and, on the other, offers dilemmas for ethnographic research and writing because feminisms and anthropologies depart from different premises.

As Marilyn Strathern (1988) explains, the feminist perspective is based on the idea of a world divided between men and women and assumes male domination as the starting point of their claims and struggles. The anthropological point of view, on the other hand, builds an alternative world that assumes intelligibility in writing, in order to produce knowledge from ethnographic experiences that do not necessarily have male and female duality. In the field experiences, anthropologists, both women and men, will not necessarily be recognized as 'women' or 'men', depending on their roles, approaches, and ways

⁴ According to Mariza Corrêa (1997), Peggy Golde's collection, first published in 1970, proved to be a response to Jungmanse and Gulkindied's book, *Anthropologists in the Field* (1967).

in which they relate to people.

For Donna Haraway (1995), feminism, as embodied and situated knowledge, is a science that critically positions itself in an inhomogeneous social space marked by gender. "Feminism has to do with multiple subject sciences with (at least) double vision" (Haraway, 1995: 31). In this sense, feminist knowledge is not embodied in a fixed and dichotomous position, but in what she calls "field nodes".

Feminist embodiment, then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientation, and responsibility difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning. Embodiment is significant prosthesis; objectivity cannot be about fixed vision when what counts as an object is precisely what world history turns out to be about (Haraway, 1995: 30).

In this sense, proposing possibilities for a feminist ethnography in the body implies not neglecting specific forms of oppression, including those that have built a binary world with a structurally unequal relationship between men and women, and at the same time expanding ethnographic reflections to other possible corporealities. Non-dichotomous, multiple, contradictory, divergent corporealities. This idea comes close to a "cyborg writing", which "struggle[s] against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (Haraway, 2000: 97). This writing is done through a cyborg consciousness, which is opposed to holistic thinking, seeks to transgress boundaries, to play seriously with them, through irony, to assume contradictory positions and risky mergers.

An embodied and situated feminist ethnography includes silences, marks, noises that do not necessarily go in one direction and do not produce a unilateral but rather kaleidoscopic view. It creates understandings, misunderstandings, ruptures, and approaches that are not necessarily part of the first layers of writing presented in articles, reports, publications; they are in the subliminal lines, blurred and erased, and always present in the trajectory of the researcher. Thus, assuming the position of anthropology from the edge is to enable these lines, which mark the ethnographic trajectories, to be part of writing, as craftwork (Mariza Peirano, 1995), always incomplete, partial and borderline.

FIELD VULNERABILITIES AND (IN)VISIBILITY

Bringing these lines across in writing offers ethnographic moments that overflow the contours of supposed universalizing knowledge and may be open to risks, mismatches, vulnerabilities and (in)visibilities of both anthropologists and their interlocutors.

Immersion in the field can lead to physical and emotional insecurities and situations of true vulnerability, as shown, for example, by Eva Moreno (1995) that reports, ethnographically, a rape she suffered during her field research in Ethiopia. Through a narrative of pain and entanglement in a model of non-Western male domination, she describes the different views on this violence she was a victim of and reports on how the perpetrator achieved impunity through legal and cultural mechanisms, although rape was not seen as common behavior by different interlocutors.

Through writing, twenty years after the event, Moreno is able to more rationally elaborate the episode of extreme violence and shares with the academic community the fact that sexual violence is not an isolated fact but must be recognized as an important issue in field research, especially when conducted by women in male-dominated contexts. Thus, she transforms her experience into an ethnographic question that is part of her biography, where she becomes, in a way, the subject and object of her own analysis. The author describes, reflexively, the way in which she was understood as a woman, for certain interlocutors, and the way she found herself in this situation.

Alinne Bonnetti and Soraya Fleischer (2007), in the mid-2000s in Brazil edited a collection that gathered articles from twelve anthropologists who exposed dilemmas, challenges, and doubts regarding their field researches and how they created strategies to deal with adverse situations, for example, in a misogynist, religious, activist environments, very distinct or very close to their own cultural universes.

Other important issues to anthropology, such as racism, were problematized during Laura Moutinho's (2014) fieldwork in South Africa when she came across the ultra-racist world of the paramilitary group Afrikaner Resistance Movement, during Terre` Blanche's, its leader, burial. Accompanying his funeral rite at Ventersdorp, in addition to a racist hatred in the group that deeply disturbed the researcher, she was compelled to observe the shared pains of losing a great leader.

I watched the funeral, the street demonstrations, and the speech of the pastor of the Reformed Afrikaner Church. I watched the prayer and excited faces. I noted my own strangeness at what sounded to me, at first, close to collective madness. Gradually, I came to realize that what surprised me most in the whole scene, in all the racism I could see in every sound, gesture, and word, was the love shared between those people. It was frightening to note how this sentiment is equally at the basis of building one's own racism against other people. I remember vividly how suffocated I felt. Not only does hate produce horror, I thought at that moment (Moutinho, 2014: 78).

Thus, what was felt like profound violence by the anthropologist, such as Afrikaner racism, to her followers was another experience, of pain, because of the loss of one of their biggest leaders. Laura Moutinho had to deal with the dilemmas of her humanist perspective in the field, and from then on, she investigated precisely the meanings of ultra-racist movements in South Africa.

More recently, other researchers have also analyzed their places during fieldwork, occasions they suffered different forms of harassment and violence, such as in the article by five Brazilian women who conducted research in Bolivia (Caroline Freitas, Rafaela Pannain, Heloisa Gimenez, Sue Iamamoto, and Aiko Amaral, 2017). In different areas of knowledge, they describe everyday situations and challenges faced regarding serious gender issues that are generally considered irrelevant in academic discussions.

The central point that guides this work is the understanding that current academic standards ignore harassment and sexual violence as problems of the field and of academic production as a whole, isolating them as problems specific to women. Thus, as stated above, it is essential that these issues are addressed by the academic community as a whole, in methodology courses and research seminars, for example, and not only restricted to mutually supportive groups of women, despite how important they are (Freitas, Pannain, Gimenez, Iamamoto and Amaral, 2017: 367).

Topics such as sexual violence and harassment, risks, and suffering involved in field research situations and experiences, despite the publication of some collections such as Don Kulick and Margaret Wilson's (1995), are little discussed, shared and published. This silencing has been questioned among young generations of anthropologists in Brazil, who have demanded that the agenda return to academic forums, such as the special issue by *Revista Cadernos de Campo* (n. 26, v.1, 2017). The articles gathered show subjective and affective issues involving fieldwork and reveal the materials behind different research dealing with gender, crime, religion, immigration, among other topics.

Such issues, that address the adversities, obstacles and challenges of the field, are important not because they confess subjective and personal histories, but because they bring to light the many layers of ethnographic experiences and interventions that, purposefully or not, our presence in the field entails. Thus, a state of ethnographic body is delineated, where writing externalizes contradictory and divergent experiences and includes the body situated as the protagonist of the production of anthropological knowledge.

One of the articles in the special issue mentioned above, by Fabiana Albuquerque (2017), approaches the discussions I bring in this text. From her research

on vulnerability and immigration in the city of Verona, Italy, she reflects about her own place as a Brazilian black researcher in the interaction with her interlocutors, who see her as a marked body whose cultural symbol projects to her corporeality not only during her work, but, also, in academic interactions with professors or with the strict airport controls, that call into question her integrity and legitimacy.

The body is the main element of interaction: arriving, first of all, it is the first message to be conveyed. Based on this, doors may or may not be opened. Therefore, from it, one seeks to deepen or not the level of relationships, often initiated from stereotypes. And when it comes to interviewing, participating and observing, in fact, it is essential to become aware of a body and, in the case of many women, a "marked body" (Albuquerque, 2017: 324).

As the five authors mentioned above and Fabiana Albuquerque demonstrate, these concerns should not only be part of the debates between researchers of gender and sexuality studies, or feminists and LGBTs. They should be part of anthropological knowledge across the board and perhaps assume that ethnographic writing has an important bodily dimension.

Loïc Wacquant's research on boxing in a black ghetto in the United States, late 1980s, is one of the precursors in including the researcher's own body's production process during his field immersion. Wacquant uses the body as an instrument of investigation and as a vector of knowledge. By learning the boxer craft over the course of three years, the author comes to know the urban dynamics of a black suburban neighborhood and, at the same time, the bodybuilding process of the fighters from behind the scenes of a gym, with its smells, sweats, their gestures, diets (food and sexual), emotions and solidarity networks. The author's reflexivity process takes place as he engages with training, his colleagues, his coach, and shifts his learning from head to body. "The head is in the body and the body is in the head. Boxing is a bit like playing chess with the guts" (Wacquant, 2002: 274). In a way, he becomes "an armed native", that is, a boxer who thinks from his body experiences, practices, in the gym's daily life without abandoning his theoretical and methodological tools as a sociologist and ethnographer. Embodying the pugilist *habitus*, Wacquant gets carried away by the dynamics of the fights and their competitions but is quickly reminded by his trainer that, deep down, he is not a "real" boxer but a researcher. He plunges body and soul into boxing, transforms his own body with the disciplinary rigor of training, yet his body is understood, from a "native" standpoint as that of a white, French male researcher. There are two visions of the same body, pierced by different perspectives, which are only possible

through the author's position, grasped by the dynamics of the ghetto, but that does not abandon its sociological purpose.

More contemporary anthropological research, such as Thiago Oliveira's, in João Pessoa, Paraíba, brings other strategies to deal with adverse field situations. Oliveira, in his master's dissertation, produced an ethnography on homoerotic cruising spaces in the city, such as public restrooms, parks, beaches, cinemas, and saunas. Especially in the restrooms, his interactions with the interlocutors were not conventional, through dialogue, since encounters in these spaces are mediated by looks and gestures, whose shared symbols are specific to men who wish to have sex with other men stealthy and even impersonal, not necessarily making use of the conversation.

Bodies pile up in seemingly disorderly ways, communicating the desire for multiple simultaneously with the hedonistic and voyeuristic exercise of observation. The spoken word occupies little space so that communication is made by the fractional use of the body: hands touching the penis, looks, neck movements inviting to the recondite or to the joint. In response, a nomadic walk, the lowering of pants or shorts, fingers in the mouth, and the rubbing of hands over the volume in the pants. The mouth as a constituent part of the body takes on other functions: no longer emitting words, but receiving fluids, sucking. Giving and receiving, gift and counter gift, exchange and steal. The body reinvents itself, reassembles and undoes its tireless fullness in order to provoke its own limits within and beyond space and language (Oliveira, 2017: 49).

To engage in his ethnography of sexual experiences, Thiago Oliveira experimented with synesthetic approaches that could account for perceptions that sharpened senses other than speech and vision. Mingling with cruising men, his body was always at stake in the interlocutors' interactions, expectations, and desires. In the same tuning, there is the research of Paulo Rogers Ferreira (2008) who produced an ethnography about sexualities in a rural village in the Ceará countryside, and showed the existence of homoerotic practices among men who are fathers and married but does not have their virility and heteronormativity questioned. The author proposes a new reading about peasant societies, where the infinite possibilities of the body build ethics and aesthetics of the affects.

In my field research experiences since 1997, as both a postgraduate student (master and doctorate) and an anthropology professor at the university until today, twelve years later, I could not go unnoticed, first, as a middle class woman from São Paulo, in the backlands of Goiás, in the Midwest of the country, and, second, as a woman marked by being cisgender⁵, linked to a public university, in my research with transvestites and transgender women in different regions of Brazil.

5 The term "cisgender" has been used in recent years in Brazil by trans movements to define and mark gender identities in which the sex designated at birth and gender identity converge (Vergueiro, 2015). Simply put, the term "cis" means "non-trans". This duality has provoked many political and academic controversies. On the one hand, the term cisgender is important because it marks the bodies that were produced from a heteronormative hegemonic model where male means men and female means women. On the other hand, cis-trans duality also reproduces a binary idea that can be questioned.

In Goiás, among peasant families, I conducted doctoral research on the relationship between gender and sociability mainly through popular rural festivals, such as *folias*, pilgrimages, livestock and rodeos (Nascimento, 2008)⁶. From the first moment of interaction with my hosts in the municipality of Mossamedes, my body was classified and understood as feminine, even though I was not part of such cultural conventions. The first night I spent at Paraíso Farm in 1997 was the day before I departed for the pilgrimage of Divino Pai Eterno. I was establishing my first contacts with the residents of that locality for the elaboration of the master's dissertation. The owner of the house then proposed kind of a joke to me, the girl who had just arrived from São Paulo and knew very little about the rural world. He asked me to peel a "sweet lemon" and stood beside me, watching. He tried to do the same with his penknife but soon gave up. "It's no service for a man," he explained. He seemed pleased with my effort and kindly told me that I was a hard worker, a trait that I ended up incorporating, or was incorporated into the role of an anthropologist.

Since then, I've had the opportunity to follow and participate in women's activities in the same region for a few years. The kitchen, one of the main female spaces, became my workplace in a double sense, as woman and as anthropologist. In this domestic universe, I understood that the forms of sociability were based on the "man with man, woman with woman" rule (Nascimento, 2012) and that for me to have the opportunity to immerse myself in their daily practices, I should participate in them as a woman, just as they understood me. It made little sense to circulate in the male spaces, such as pastures and corrals, where men dealt with their oxen and horses and the milked their cows. My most participative position alongside women also made it difficult for me to approach men, as married people rarely spoke publicly to single or strange women like me.

Apart from the gender difference, other distinctions were present by my own body constitution. In this locality, people usually greet each other with only a slight handshake, without practically shaking them. Even among close friends, there are almost no greetings with kisses on the cheek, so common in other Brazilian regions, just a half hug, that is, putting one's arm on the other's shoulder. Once when I introduced myself to some people, I simply reached out to a polite greet, said my name, not referring to my background, profession, etc. However, the contact through my hands already informed me that I was not from there - my smooth, not calloused, hydrated, thin hands. The corporeal difference from the hands of other women, hardened by the effort of rural labor, was evident. But even with class, regional, and corporeal differences, they assigned me a feminine role, and I could see the importance of sexual segregation less as a form of male domination than as a way in which social relations were constructed and sexual differences made sense.

6 The master's dissertation turned more particularly to the pilgrimage of Divino Pai Eterno and, later, to the doctorate, I expanded the range of popular festivities to think about the centrality of gender differences in the forms of sociability and leisure.

After more than ten years of research among rural families in the hinterland of Goiás, I made a thematic and geographical tour. As a professor of anthropology at the North Coast campus of the Federal University of Paraíba in 2007, I conducted an investigation in the region where the university is located with transvestites and transgender women living in small towns bordering the federal highway BR 101, such as Mamanguape. In this research, following the trajectories of the interlocutors, I had the opportunity to map three circuits: the prostitution, through which they could move around different regions and cities of the country and abroad; the gay beauty pageants, in which they gained legitimacy and visibility; and the LGBT movement, in which access to rights was claimed and homophobia, lesbophobia, and transphobia were combated (Nascimento, 2014).

In these field experiences, unlike Goiás, me and my advisees⁷, at all times, were reminded that, despite assuming a female gender identity, we were different, we had bodies that were not like theirs, marked by genitals, aesthetics and distinct gender performances (about this, a recent article by Olivar, 2019, offers an interesting counterpoint, as a non-indigenous man doing research in an interethnic context of female prostitution). We were *rachas*⁸ and we couldn't share all the spaces with them and enjoy the same forms of sociability. Some approached us by identifying themselves as "women like us", others drifted away just because they saw us as women who resembled nothing of their desired female corporealities, with high heels, makeup, and glamorous garments, just like the ones used by gorgeous and well-scented divas. Thus, we built approximation strategies and, gradually, strengthened friendship and proximity ties with some of them. Photography proved to be an important tool. We were able to register them in their homes and especially in the dressing rooms and stages where they participated in the Miss Gay and Top Drag contests. Through photography, we established a channel of exchange, and the photographic images, which resulted in exhibitions⁹, made their beautiful bodies visible and valued. Throughout the fieldwork with transvestites and trans women, the production of a hyper-femininity that was far removed from the (un)femininity of the researchers was evident. Somehow, we became anti-feminine or counter-feminine in our relationship with our interlocutors by our body aesthetics as anthropologists, an almost stereotypical image of "women" without much care for clothing, shoes, hair, and makeup.

Recently, after the research on the North Coast of Paraíba was finalized, I coordinated a survey, from 2015 to 2017, whose main objective was to understand forms of urbanity based on the transits and mobility of transvestites and transgender women in three different regions of the country: João Pessoa's Metropolitan Zone, in Paraíba; the city of São Paulo, in the Southeastern region, specifically the Butantã neighborhood; and the triple Amazon border, in the

7 Livia Freire, Luzicleide de Lima Bernardo, and Verônica Guerra, at the time undergrad anthropology students at UFPB.

8 TN: A very informal neologism to describe women that consider their genitals' shape. "Rachar" also means to break in fissure.

9 Between 2010 and 2013, we organized a traveling exhibition "Variations of the feminine - poetics of the trans universe", in partnership with the Secretariat of Women and Human Diversity of the State of Paraíba. The exhibition was organized in João Pessoa and other cities in Paraíba, such as Campina Grande and Cajazeiras. The exhibition featured photographs by Paulo Rossi, Silvana Nascimento, and Verônica.

Alto Solimões region, between the cities of Letícia (Colombia), Tabatinga (Brazil) and Santa Rosa (Peru)¹⁰.

In this research, we show how transvestites and transgender women produce corporealities that build forms of life and resistance that contest notions of public space, corporeality, and gender. Through a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), and believing in the idea of sharing as a condition of a certain anthropological project, the research was mobilized by transfeminism, *putafeminismo*¹⁰, the demands of the trans movements and by trans writers and researchers that have produced vast knowledge in recent years (Guilherme Almeida, 2012; Luma Andrade, 2012; Andrea Becerra, 2009; Jacqueline Gomes de Jesus, 2015; Leticia Lanz, 2014; Miquel Missé and Gerard Coll-Planas, 2010, Amara Moira, 2016; João Nery, 2011; Viviane Vergueiro, 2015; Jota Mombaça, 2017, among many others).

As collective research, carried out by many hands, it became part of the academic training of students in anthropology and offered the possibility of starting them in field research in an unconventional way. They have had to deal with a situation of vulnerability and violence from people who do not want to be publicly identified and fear both police violence and the exposure of their images in the media and social networks. They also fear that their lives will be gaping and controlled, as many of them engage in sex-work in secrecy, unbeknownst to their families.

It is also necessary to emphasize the existence of a tense relationship between our interlocutors and the universe of academia that, for many years, considered them only as an “object” of research, until, in recent years, they finally begun to be protagonists of their own knowledge and authorship, a production about themselves. Although there is a growing presence of transvestites, transgender women and transgender men in universities, a large part of this population has experienced transphobic violence in the school environment since childhood, causing them to stop studying and often dropping out so they could abandon a hostile environment where they did not feel integrated and were dehumanized.

With transvestites and transgender women in different regions of the country, I was able to denaturalize the anthropologist's corporeality. Not only has my femininity been called into question - by me and them - but my way of dealing with internalized body practices, for example, in walking, gesturing, talking, straightening my hair, getting dressed, and being in the world with a certain body. From the moment I had the opportunity to talk with my hostesses, from Paraíba to Alto Solimões, and they recognized me as an anthropologist (establishing many differentiations between me and them), I positioned myself in a border space, productive and creative, that did not mean a withdrawal, but a state of close presence,¹² which was and is made by and through, first and foremost, the body. Close presence, cyborg, *mestiza*, which opens to the gender-becoming of

10 The research is entitled “Trans-Cities: Experiments between People, Borders and Places” and was funded by Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de S. Paulo (Fapesp) and Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisa da Universidade de São Paulo/USP (Edital Novos Docentes). The following USP undergraduate students participated in this project: Alexandre Martins, Beatriz Rossi, Maria Iachinski Natalia Corazza, Sabrina Damaceno and Lucas Vechi; and postgraduate students in Anthropology: Veronica Guerra (Federal University of Pernambuco / UFPE), Thiago de Lima Oliveira (USP), Luiza Lima (USP), and Letizia Patriarca (USP). The research also counts with the collaboration of Flávia Melo, professor of anthropology at Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM) and José Miguel Nieto Olivar, public health professor at USP.

11 TN: *Putafeminismo* refers to feminist politics, theories and practices elaborated by sex-workers, from Spain, Argentina, Brazil and other Latin American countries.

12 I freely borrow the expression “close presence” from the inspirations and studies of the project “Corpo em Teia”, of which I am part, directed by Lu Favoretto, artist and founder of Cia Oito Nova Dance, in São Paulo, in collaboration with Fernanda Miranda da Cruz, Ph.D. in Linguistics and Professor of the Department of Letters at UNIFESP (Guarulhos). “Near Presence was a term coined by Fernand Deligny to refer to people who lived daily with autistic children” (Cruz, 2018: 136), ordinary people who lived with children in rural communities in the French countryside without the presence of verbal

other people-bodies, in a movement for new ways of practicing implicated (Bruce Albert, 1995) and affected (Jeanne Favret-Saada, 2005) anthropology.

FINAL COMMENTS

In this text, I sought to problematize the anthropologist's corporeality as a being-writing-in-the-world, crossed by her actions in the field, by the conditions of her existence, cultural, political, economic, etc., and by her localized knowledge, which forms what I suggested as a *mestiza* ethnographic theory.

Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of *mestizo* consciousness, which the author employs to reflect about the experience of *Chicana* women living in border cities between Mexico and the United States, is inspiring to think of the anthropologist's subject-body.

The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between evils and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our cultures, our languages, our thoughts (Anzaldúa, 2012: 102).

The *mestiza* takes the place of ambiguity and contradiction and from it empowers herself. One of the challenges is to equate analytical categories, political categories, emic categories and spin the kaleidoscope so that the plural mode can prevail rather than the monochrome mode. Let oneself be permeated by multiple points of view and experiences. The ability to recognize and think of border experiences necessarily produces an ethnographic theory that weaves in plurality and displacement. This displacement drives anthropological knowledge in multiple directions, in circular, linear, spherical, grounded, aerial, among others. This does not mean a simple relativism, but to assume the principle of multiplicity and, from it, to describe, analyze and compare ideas, concepts, practices, experiences, cosmologies.

The embodied plural mode expands beyond the sense of vision that for decades has accompanied the concept of participant observation in field research in anthropology (David Le Breton, 2012). Thus, doing anthropology with a body expands one's senses beyond the domain of the gaze and allows us to get inebriated by voices, speeches, screams, creaks, gestures, silences, mobilities. As Ingold claims, one must think with one's body aligned with the world, connected lines always in motion. To understand and describe these lifelines, through the feminist ethnographic perspective, the anthropologist, with a body, takes

communication, or rather in a state of presence in which body dialogue was paramount beyond language. a state of presence in which body dialogue was paramount beyond language.

her place on the boundary between worlds, following paths marked by inequalities, differences and alterity relations that allow encounters and mismatches that inspire thought, revive the senses, decolonize the vision.

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Author's contribution: Does not apply.

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Received on December 26, 2017. Accepted on June 12, 2019.

