

Anthropology, covid-19, and Indigenous responses in Brazil: methodological and vital reflections

Antropologia, covid-19 e respostas indígenas no Brasil: reflexões metodológicas e vitais

Bruno Marques^a

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7027-6166>

E-mail: bmarques23@gmail.com

Amanda Horta^b

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0602-5669>

E-mail: amandahorta@gmail.com

José Miguel Olivar^c

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7648-7009>

E-mail: jose-miguel@usp.br

^a Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Diversidade Sociocultural. Belém, PA, Brasil.

^b Universidade Federal de Ciências da Saúde de Porto Alegre. Departamento de Educação e Humanidades. Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil.

^c Universidade de São Paulo. Faculdade de Saúde Pública. Departamento de Saúde, Ciclos de Vida e Sociedade. São Paulo, SP, Brasil.

Correspondence

Bruno Marques

Av. Perimetral, 1901,

Campus Pesquisa Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Coordination of Humanities. Belém, PA, Brasil, CEP 66077-830

This dossier was initially proposed to foster possibilities and discuss challenges regarding the conditions of qualitative research conducted by and with Indigenous peoples in Brazil, especially in their methodological aspects, within a global health crisis where the possibilities of spatial displacement become non-existent or drastically reduced – research activities usually described as “remote,” but which present their own complexity depending on the perspectives at play. But, as will be seen below, the reflections brought by the texts exceed these initially proposed limits.

The issues addressed here stem from a concrete experience, which involved the proposers and participants of this dossier: the Anthropology and Indigenous Responses to COVID-19 Platform (PARI-c)¹, as a result of the research project titled “Indigenous Responses to COVID-19 in Brazil: social arrangements and global health” – an extensive network of Indigenous and non-indigenous researchers from all regions of Brazil, from which a diversity of methodological strategies sought to account for the varied conditions of collaborative research with Indigenous peoples and their experiences during the covid-19 pandemic. PARI-c was funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and developed by cooperation between the University of London (UoL), the Federal University of Health Sciences of Porto Alegre (UFCSPA), the Federal University of Southern Bahia (UFSB) and the University of São Paulo (USP). Four regional teams were organized to conduct the research: Northeast; Southern Brazil; Midwest and Southern Amazon;

¹ Available at: www.pari-c.org

and Northern Amazon. The four articles included in this dossier report some of the research experiences in each of these teams, adding up to nine Indigenous authors and thirteen non-indigenous. PARI-c produced seven case studies, 56 research notes, 15 films and a series of podcasts which focused on various themes related to the covid-19 pandemic among Brazilian Indigenous peoples.

We designed this dossier, therefore, precisely to disclose reports and reflections on the multiplicity of methodological strategies mobilized in PARI-c, responding to the (social, economic, political, environmental, sociotechnical, cultural...) particularities of the communities and researchers involved. Both the description of what was lived during the pandemic and the expectations for the future, whether in terms of public health policies that consider their realities, or as cosmopolitical arrangements in which a heterogeneous group of “more-than-human” beings enter the public debate arena regarding the covid-19 pandemic, result from this research. This dossier seeks to share learnings in the field of qualitative research related to public health in Brazil, interweaving issues of temporality, sociotechnical challenges, and the ontological implications of what has been generated by these different initiatives.

These texts describe the formation of the four regional teams, thought from the research project’s inception as a way to incorporate already existing networks in which the proposers were inserted. Throughout the research work, however, they eventually created new networks or restored previously existing ones. During the covid-19 pandemic, hybrid research methods (offline/online, remote/on site, asynchronous/synchronous) sought to account for a work that should be developed without spatial displacements in a pandemic context. As seen in the texts, periodic online meetings via Google Meet, use of WhatsApp, audios, videos, phone calls, comings and goings of texts... established the connection and flows between researchers, non-indigenous and Indigenous, who were not present in the study locations (communities, villages and neighborhoods) and the Indigenous researchers who were present.

Of the articles in this dossier, “Modos imaginativos e colaborativos de fazer pesquisa:

dispositivos e disposições com cuidado” [Imaginative and collaborative ways of doing research: devices and provisions with care] develops an in-depth description of these “remote” methods of research. This paper reflects on digital devices as “participants in the sociotechnical research networks, directly interfering in how knowledge was produced and circulated,” and not only as supports for exchanging information at a distance. In this regard, one should note the ambivalence regarding the cell phone used by the Guarani Mbya in their lives. On the one hand, this digital device can enclose youth against kinship and shamanic networks (and this technology is associated with what non-indigenous people call depression), isolating them. On the other, it can be a fundamental tool to maintain relationships with relatives living in other villages and regions, even enabling articulation of campaigns, protests and exchanges of varied knowledge. This text also describes the synchronous online meetings held on the Google Meet platform, labeled by Kaingang researcher Iracema Gah Té as “little squares,” through which, as the authors report, different ambiances and affections intersected via the images and sounds that each “little square” brought to the composite scene of the Southern Brazil team meetings, creating connections and affections between participants. The conversation dynamics in such meetings are also presented, describing how Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples participated in these contexts of online communication.

“Do monitoramento autônomo à pesquisa colaborativa virtual: parceria com o movimento indígena do Nordeste durante a pandemia da covid-19 como apoio ao controle Social” [From autonomous monitoring to virtual collaborative research: partnership with the Northeast Indigenous movement during the covid-19 pandemic as support for Social control] presents to us this web of sociotechnical devices, online meetings, information exchange by various supports (“virtual collaborative research”) mobilized by Indigenous and non-indigenous researchers from the Northeast team, against disinformation regarding the covid-19 among the Indigenous peoples and movements in northeastern Brazil. The word “information” is key to understanding this text, which reports on the

efforts of this region's Indigenous movement from the onset of the covid-19 pandemic to establish an extensive support network via partnerships with researchers and civil society entities.

The authors describe a context of underreporting of covid-19 cases by Special Indigenous Health Districts (DSEIs), lack of articulation between different agencies, and deliberate misinformation by the Federal government, in which generating "general information and empirical data on the situation of Indigenous populations was one of the main action strategies" employed by the campaigns carried out by Indigenous movements in the Northeast with support from partners, resulting in the elaboration of bulletins, maps, studies, etc. If the previously commented article provides a more detailed description of the research methods PARI-c used and its relational dimensions, "From autonomous monitoring..." shows some possible political results and effects regarding mobilization, the constitution of networks and strategies to combat the pandemic, in a "virtual collaborative research," to support social control in the Indigenous Health Care subsystem.

In the wake of this reflection, we must point out the contribution brought by "Tecer outro Cesto de Conhecimentos? Pesquisa colaborativa e remota na pandemia de covid-19" [Weaving another Basket of Knowledge? Collaborative and remote research in the covid-19 pandemic], article that centers the issue of writing. Based on PARI-c's research experience in the Alto Rio Negro (Amazonas), the paper reflects on the possibilities of collaborative knowledge production with Indigenous researchers, "considering the health emergency, territorial immobility, social inequalities, epistemological differences and ontological policies." "Hybrid knowledge" (Giatti et al., 2021) is generated by contributions in contexts of global or syndemic crises, with "women's writing" being a fundamental aspect in the authors' reflections. The article introduces a method of text production carried out by this PARI-c regional team (Northern Amazon), narrating the experience of researcher Elizângela Costa (Baré people) in producing research notes and a case study, in direct collaboration with researchers Dulce Moraes and José Miguel Olivar. The affective

relationships between all three researchers, their nicknames, asymmetric academic relations and symmetrical movements are presented through an "intense back and forth process of Word text documents, with colors, underlining, comments, development proposals, questions, doubts, provocations," aiming at a textual expression for a wider audience and, as argued by the end, not a collaborative process for "data collection," but rather the "textual configuration and reconfiguration of what may be another Basket of Knowledge."

Regarding the reflections on the experiences of Indigenous researchers conducting interviews brought by the texts, we must highlight an inflection. In examining this research methodology, all texts posit the same idea—that of kinship relationships as "openness" and research relations as "closure" (or vice versa), having methodological implications in the different equations that the research teams elaborated in the articles. One question raised by the texts is: "How should I interview (my) relatives?" In the article "Metodologias de vida, pesquisa e luta: a experiência panhî" [Methodologies of life, research and struggle: the panhî experience], Sheila Baxy Castro Apinajé explains that she conducted interviews with elders, young people and children, adding that whenever she interviewed an elder, she also invited their grandchildren to listen in on the conversation, since, due to television exposure, the youth no longer want to hear their words. For her, research is "a moment of passing, transmitting and exchanging knowledge." In the same article, Julio Kamêr Ribeiro Apinajé argues that the researcher must make the interviewee feel empowered in their knowledge, which closed questions make impossible: "when one arrives with a ready-made question, it's as if the researcher is excluding all the knowledge a person has. The interviewee will feel belittled, as the researchers themselves are uninterested in hearing what the interviewee has to say."

"Imaginative and collaborative ways of doing research: devices and provisions with care" examine these reflections from a research ethics perspective, contrasting between the risk of capturing and fixing Indigenous knowledge and the possibility of "unearthing" knowledge, "bringing them out of oblivion, neglect, or silencing, placing them in

new circuits and connections.” Such tension is more centrally examined by Vherá Mirim, who, when transcribing and translating interviews, felt uncomfortable by the possibility of exposing ancestral knowledge that, for him, should not circulate among non-indigenous peoples. These questions posed by Vherá Mirim, as well as other Indigenous researchers at PARI-c, led to discussions in the Southern Brazil team regarding the means of “carefully practicing ways of enunciating, storing, articulating, and multiplying knowledge.”

Despite the initial purpose of this dossier of discussing “research methodology,” we must highlight that the discussions posed by the four articles are more comprehensive; to say the least, they are inscribed in something closer to what is commonly called “research experience.” But in trying to follow these overflowing contributions—and looking to describe the affectation provoked by such texts—, we can go further. What is often presented to us the following articles in terms of research, method, research object, among others, is life. Perhaps this sounds extravagant at first glance; however, what indigenous researchers put in their reports and reflections on the research experience at PARI-c is not the generic relationship between life and research, but rather the singularities of peoples, individuals, relatives and ways of doing research.

Such overflow over the original purposes is not fortuitous. A cross-cutting idea in the texts is that the initial object of PARI-c research – “Indigenous responses to COVID-19” – is not an alienable phenomenon from a larger whole, which, in the reflections put forth, takes the form of Indigenous lives. Thus, in the texts, we find reflections on an “object” whose contour is always in tension and intersecting with the world, life, kinship networks, shamanism, different temporalities, among other aspects. Moreover, “research method” and “resistance”—or “persistence”—often echo each other in these reflections.

Throughout the texts, the reflections take terms like research “object,” “objective,” “method” and twist them in some way. What is probably being tensioned here is the idea of “scope,” “limit.” And to do so, we recall Deleuze’s contrast between contour-limit and tension-limit. According to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the contour-limit would be a

“perimeter or term that constrains and defines a substantial shape”; alternatively, the tension-limit, “in the mathematical sense,” would be “the point to which a series or a relation tends” (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, p. 121). (This contrast resonates the last part of “Methodologies of life...,” in which the non-indigenous authors, based on the reflections of two Indigenous researchers, argue in favor of the Apinajé’s open conceptions of methodology and object, positing that, for them, the “research object” would not be a “centripetal force” but a “centrifugal force,” that is, a point of departure and not of arrival). In the following texts, everything takes place as if the limits and scope of the analyzed reality – shape of the object – constantly tend beyond themselves—the flow of research and life experience.

“Methodologies of life, research and struggle: the panhī experience,” article that narrates the Apinajé people’s (Tocantins) research experience, this aspect is examined more directly. Sheila Baxy Castro Apinajé, one of its authors, argues that what they found during the research was not an object—“the Indigenous responses to COVID-19”—, but rather “life,” “the behavior of a humanity” and “resistance,” based on “a way of life anchored on land.” These seem to be four aspects of a movement of life and thought (at the limit, here, indiscernible) that disrupts a certain modern epistemology. Each of these aspects highlights potencies in this movement.

If what one finds is not an “object” but “life,” this points to a movement analogous to what Roy Wagner (2012) argues about the object “culture.” As with the “Indigenous responses to COVID-19” during the research experience at PARI-c, what for an external observer is “culture,” for the Indigenous peoples is life itself. If what one finds is not an “object,” “but the behavior of a humanity” (emphasis added), this points to the uniqueness of such life: neither generic humanity nor absolute particularity. The singular indefinite article “a” (placed before “humanity”) is key here. Following her argument, Sheila also critiques the idea of the “generic Indian,” claiming that the research experience at PARI-c has allowed “other people to see what the Apinajé are like.” If what one finds is not an “object” but “resistance,” this points to how this life and behavior of a humanity takes place within a

complex, contrasting, and conflicting relationship with other lives, from other humanities (ones that probably think their relationship with the world in the form of “object”). Finally, if all this is based on a “way of life anchored on land,” this “territoriality” also involves ontological relationships with non-humans and other-than-humans.

Subsequently, Julio Kamêr Ribeiro Apinajé presents the *Pẽpkaàk* ritual as a “source of thought” for elaborating questions, insofar as the “knowledge structure of the ritual is a methodology for training the youth, protecting the territory, and preparing the community to face all kinds of situations.” His research experience at PARI-c involved working at one of the sanitary barriers, that of Aldeia Prata, built by the Apinajé people to reduce covid-19 contagion. According to Júlio, the experience of working and researching at the sanitary barrier, which involved the elders’ remembrance of past epidemics, in the context of a “new stress situation” in which they were also “preparing for the future,” was “a moment marked by three simultaneous moments”: “during this whole process I was between times (past, present, future).” The *Pẽpkaàk* ritual would be precisely what allows to articulate “past, present and future knowledge,” establishing the sine qua non conditions for panhĩ researchers at PARI-c to analyze the covid-19 pandemic.

In doing this, we as researchers are using the methodology and conceptions of this ancient ritual as a reference point, as if we were referencing some thinker, some theoretician, as anthropologists and non-indigenous researchers do when referencing their articles, dissertations and theses.

Both Sheila and Julio echo in their reflections an idea also discussed by other three articles in the dossier, positing that “the Panhĩ does nothing in isolation, it is always collective” and bringing up important questions about the experience of researching among relatives. In “Imaginative and collaborative ways of doing research: devices and provisions with care,” the key concept for reflecting on the research experience in PARI-c is precisely that of “care” (following the works of María Puig de la Bellacasa, among other feminist researchers). To do so, it narrates the experiences of two Guarani

Mbya researchers, who live in villages in Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo. Its axis centers on the “illness experienced by the female researchers in their bodies and collective lives,” constituting “an inescapable agent in methodological and analytical paths.” In this sense, “caring, being careful, taking care of oneself, caring for others, thinking with and through care [...] proved to be daily actions” in the research practice over the 14-month duration of PARI-c.

Interestingly, it is in “Weaving another Basket of Knowledge? Remote and collaborative research in the covid-19 pandemic” that the concepts of ritual and care intersect in PARI-c’s research experience. To reflect on research, Elizângela Costa (Baré people) developed the conceptual image of a “Cesto de Conhecimentos” [Basket of Knowledge], which stems from experiencing the ritual *kariamã* (in the Nheengatu language), a “formation process, as if it were a school,” performed by the shamans of the Negro River. In this “ritual for young girls,” knowledge is passed on to them, some of which makes up the “Basket of Knowledge, put into practice when the pandemic struck São Gabriel da Cachoeira” (municipality in Alto Rio Negro, Amazonas). At the end of her text, Elizângela writes:

The pandemic was defeated because women mastered the practice; that is, they all knew how to do it. This knowledge was rekindled within them, the memory revived in the search to safeguard and save lives. For my part, I know that I am just a small seed that persistently wants to be born, to grow and to be nurtured by many female writers or researchers in this universe.

This Cesto de Conhecimento is the sine qua non condition of care and, consequently, of experience in this PARI-c research conducted at Alto Rio Negro, as the very writing on the “Basket of Knowledge” of Alto Rio Negro Indigenous women was, for Elizângela and her writing/practice allies, one more way of combating the covid-19 pandemic in their land. The idea of a “cosmopolitics of care” permeates this article. We can thus close this presentation in this direction.

Ritual, care and politics. Three strong ideas present in the texts of this dossier. Sheila Baxy Castro Apinajé argues that “research is an experiment, an attempt to create something new,” as it not only

records experiences, but presents “a way to act directly in combating the pandemic, talking to people, leaders, families, with the intention of transforming our future.” The relations between research and action—both transformative practices—is constantly discussed by the articles. We observe this in the qualified information generated by the Indigenous movement and its partners (in “From autonomous monitoring to virtual collaborative research: partnership with the Northeast Indigenous movement during the covid-19 pandemic as support for Social control”); in the writing experience of an Indigenous woman protagonist of the campaign “Rio Negro, we protect it!” and in the concept of “action-research” (Tripp, 2005), discussed by “Weaving another Basket of Knowledge? Remote and collaborative research in the covid-19 pandemic”; in the action of Apinajé researchers at sanitary barriers, living and thinking multiple temporalities during the covid-19 pandemic (in “Methodologies of life, research and struggle: the panhī experience”); and in the modes of care researched by (and with) the Guarani Mbyá in a context of illness in which “nothing comes from their world” (in “Imaginative and collaborative ways of doing research: devices and provisions with care”).

Ritual, care, politics and research—in the sum and articulation between the articles of the dossier, we glimpse the crossing between these four concepts, which inspires, at least for now, one last analogy. Marisol de la Cadena, in her well-known text on “Cosmopolítica indígena nos Andes” [Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes] (2019), tells us about Mariano Turpo, a *pampamisayoq* (ritual specialist) and Indigenous politician from near Cuzco (Peru), and his experience of land struggle against the *hacienda* [plantation] in the 1960s. De la Cadena (2019, p. 21) describes how these “Indigenous politicians” are hybrid beings, “participating in more than one, less than two socionatural worlds.” Under threat from the *hacienda*, Mariano wanted to “reclaim the land” for his *ayllu*, word in the Quechua language that,

beyond a set of relatives, “elicits the relations between human beings and other-than-humans who interact in a given territory, marking it as a specific place” (de la Cadena, 2019, p. 22). By wanting to “reclaim the land,” argues De la Cadena, Mariano established a political-discursive continuity with the leftist militants in the 1960s (enabling a “class-indigenous” alliance). But by “land,” Mariano was also ascribing a surplus meaning: “more than one, less than two sociocultural worlds.” It was not merely about the land as the property of an *ayllu*, but the very relations and “creation” and “caring” practices with those other-than-humans who constitute an *ayllu*. “Land” here was an “equivocation,” a “homonymous term that allowed two partially connected worlds to fight together for the same territory” (de la Cadena, 2019, p. 23). To conceptually account for these “overflowings,” these relations of terms and meanings that connect worlds without necessarily confusing them – “more than one, less than two” – Marisol de la Cadena borrows Isabelle Stengers² concept of “cosmopolitics” (2018), constituting an analytical tool for “onto-epistemic openings” in categories of modernity.

Reflecting on the texts of this dossier, and on this crossing between ritual, care, politics and research, as well as the polysemic meanings of “research” at play, perhaps we have on the horizon a “cosmoresearch,” in which the “objects” have other limits, “methodologies” can be “of struggle,” and the “research” takes place in transforming and active interaction with life and the cosmos. This dossier brought some examples of research-experiments (as defined by Sheila Apinajé) conducted along PARI-c. We hope that reading these articles may contribute, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2018) argues in “Descolonizando metodologias: pesquisa e povos indígenas” [Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples], and as Giatti et al. (2021) discuss about “hybrid knowledge” in health care debates, to constitute better responses to the global syndemic crisis.

2 As Bruno Latour (2004, p. 3) writes, “Stengers intends her use of cosmopolitics to alter what it means “to belong” or “to pertain.” She has reinvented the word by representing it as a composite of the strongest meaning of cosmos and the strongest meaning of politics precisely because the usual meaning of the word cosmopolite supposed a certain theory of science that is now disputed. For her, the strength of one element checks any dulling in the strength of the other. The presence of cosmos in cosmopolitics resists the tendency of politics to mean the give-and-take in an exclusive human club. The presence of politics in cosmopolitics resists the tendency of cosmos to mean a finite list of entities that must be taken into account. Cosmos protects against the premature closure of politics, and politics against the premature closure of cosmos.”

References

- DE LA CADENA, M. Cosmopolítica indígena nos Andes: reflexões conceituais para além da “política”. *Maloca: Revista de Estudos Indígenas*, Campinas, v. 2, 2019. DOI: 10.20396/maloca.v2i.13404
- GIATTI, L. et al. Pesquisa participative reconectando diversidade: democracia de saberes para a sustentabilidade. *Estudos Avançados*, São Paulo, v. 35, n. 103, p. 231-253, 2021. DOI: 10.1590/s0103-4014.2021.35103.013
- LATOUR, B. Which cosmos for which cosmopolitics? Comments on Ulrich Beck’s peace proposal. *Common knowledge*, Baltimore, v. 10, n. 3, p. 450-462, 2004. DOI:10.1215/0961754X-10-3-450
- STENGERS, I. A proposição cosmopolítica. *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, São Paulo, n. 69, p. 442-464, 2018. DOI: 10.11606/issn.2316-901X.voi69p442-464
- TRIPP, D. Pesquisa-ação: uma introdução metodológica. *Educação e Pesquisa*, São Paulo, v. 31, n. 3, p. 443-466, 2005.
- SMITH, L. T. Descolonizando metodologias: pesquisa e povos indígenas. Curitiba: UFPR, 2018.
- VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, E. O nativo relativo. *Mana*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 8, n. 1, p. 113-148, 2002. DOI: 10.1590/S0104-93132002000100005
- WAGNER, R. A invenção da cultura. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2012.

Author’s contribution

All authors were responsible for the study coordination, research and conceptualization. Marques conceptualized and drafted the article.

Received: 11/07/2022

Approved: 11/07/2022