

Brazilian Anthropology in times of intolerance: The challenges of confronting neoconservatism

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Abstract

The present article analyzes the challenges Brazilian anthropology faces in the current political context, marked by setbacks, intolerance, repression, and censorship relative to previously achieved democratic advances. Here, we reflect upon different dynamics in the field of anthropology in diverse political conjunctures in Brazil over the last five decades. The first section of the article analyzes the historical context in which Brazilian anthropology became institutionalized, during the military dictatorship. We then highlight the social engagement of anthropologists in the struggle for human rights during the re-democratization of Brazil in the 1980s and anthropologists' participation (together with the groups they study) in the gradual implementation of "identity policies". The second section evaluates the impact of these changes in the field of anthropology and the dilemmas experienced by anthropologists in the new context of political confrontation. The concluding section analyzes and interprets the neoconservative movement and the strategies and challenges anthropology faces in contemporary Brazil.

Keywords: Brazilian anthropology; public intellectual; human rights; neoconservatism; intolerance.

Antropologia Brasileira em tempos de intolerância: Desafios diante do neoconservadorismo

Resumo

Este artigo se propõe analisar os desafios da antropologia brasileira diante do contexto político atual, marcado pelo retrocesso, intolerância, repressão e censura diante de avanços democráticos anteriormente conquistados. Para isso reflete sobre diferentes dinâmicas no campo da antropologia, em diferentes conjunturas políticas no Brasil, nas últimas cinco décadas. Na primeira parte, empreende uma análise do contexto histórico em que a antropologia brasileira se institucionaliza em plena época da ditadura militar. Em seguida destaca o engajamento social de antropólogo(a)s na luta pelos Direitos Humanos, no momento de redemocratização do país, na década de 1980, e a implantação gradativa das “políticas de identidades” com a participação de antropólogo(a)s junto aos grupos que estudam. Na segunda parte, busca avaliar o impacto dessas mudanças no campo da antropologia e os dilemas vividos pelos antropólogo(a)s no novo contexto de enfrentamento político. A última parte analisa e interpreta a movimentação neoconservadora e as estratégias e desafios para antropologia no Brasil contemporâneo.

Palavras-chave: Antropologia brasileira; intelectual público; direitos humanos; neoconservadorismo, intolerância.

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The 1988 Citizen Constitution inaugurated a democratic system in Brazil, guaranteeing individual and social rights. Changes and achievements were achieved in subsequent years, generally due to the struggles of movements composed of the new subjects of rights. At the end of August 2016, a new disruption of democratic institutionality in Brazil began in the form of the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. Following this, anthropology has become especially haunted by the specter of censorship that has settled over Brazil. This is due to the fact that Brazilian anthropologists have been systematically producing important scientific knowledge regarding the new subjects of law that emerged on the national scene in the last half century. In this specific way, Brazilian anthropologists they carried out a long-standing national disciplinary tradition of seeking to understand social diversity by encountering ethnic and social alterities in their own country.

Anthropology was institutionalized at the multinational level in the 19th century, when Brazil was still largely in a colonial context. The world's first anthropologists set out to encounter distant alterities in order to understand and commit to the groups they studied. In the Brazilian context, however, these alterities were often not distant, but literally “right next door” – making up, in fact, the body of the nation that Brazilian national elites sought to construct. In other words, from the beginning of anthropology in Brazil, the understanding, incorporation, and protection of the “Other” has been a political and national question.

Although anthropologists' views, interests, and fields of research have changed in Brazil over time, some guiding principles of anthropology can be taken as *longue durée* references. Among these has been an ethical and moral commitment and engagement with the sociocultural diversity of peoples present in Brazil. Perhaps because of this, anthropology has always been susceptible to tensions and threats related to the practice of anthropological research in contexts where democratic freedom becomes vulnerable.

There are several historical cases of anthropologists being targeted for political persecution in their countries of origin (and/or practice) for defending rights that supported and promoted sociocultural diversity. Although they were still in their respective phases of academic institutionalization, Spanish anthropology during the Franco dictatorship and Portuguese anthropology during the Salazar regime serve as important historical references that mark a period of intellectual repression of anthropological research and data. Even the United States saw a drawn-out politicized struggle between Boasian anthropology and Madison Grant's racist eugenics during the first decades of the twentieth century – a struggle that had concrete consequences for Boas and his supporters (Spiro, 2009). There are several examples in Latin America of anthropology suffering different forms of control and attack. This happened with the social sciences in Brazil in 1964, during the period of military dictatorship and, more recently, after the democratic rupture that began in 2016.

In Brazil, the violent repression that occurred in the years following 1964 was the reflection of an authoritarian state that, among other coercive actions, persecuted and dismantled important academic centers in which the social sciences had gained prestige and visibility. This led to the interruption of important research projects, as well as the persecution and criminalization of some of Brazil's best professors. This situation culminated even more violently with Institutional Act 5, issued on December 13, 1968, which caused the removal of several professors across the country through compulsory retirement or forced exile (Motta, 2013: 23-58).

On the other hand, it was also during this most critical period of the military regime, with the full force of AI 5 pressing down on Brazilian intellectual life, that Brazilian anthropology became institutionalized and gained prestige in the academic field. The first graduate programs (masters and doctorate) were created during these years, first at the National Museum in Rio in 1968, followed by USP in 1970, Unicamp in 1971, and UNB in 1972. Other, similar, programs were created after 1975. It should be noted that this institutionalization of anthropology in academia occurred in spite all the difficulties imposed on the pursuit of university activities and the exile of some of the country's primary anthropologists, particularly those most engaged in the struggle against the dictatorship, such as anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, an activist and Minister of Education for a short period during President João Goulart's ousted government in 1964.

Even in the midst of the military regime, Brazilian anthropology had already created its own academic lexicon in the first decade of 1970, setting it apart from sociology and other related fields. It also defined a field of research that encompassed different fractions of national society. It was during this period that the first Brazilian anthropologists, newly graduated from the country's main universities, systematically became interested in the "oppressed" and "excluded" Other as an object of investigation (Corrêa, 1987: 6). In this way, the legitimacy of anthropological research began to be based on an anthropologist's ability to interpret rural or urban ethnic groups or social minorities while playing a relevant political role, as public intellectuals, in the defense of these populations.

With the end of the military dictatorship in the 1980s, new scenarios for research and the performance of anthropologists in the public sphere became established. This was the moment of the re-democratization of Brazil and most anthropologists were mobilized in the role of public intellectuals engaged in the struggle for human rights, actively participating in discussions aimed at building a public agenda for diversity to be incorporated. Many of insights and demands of anthropologists and the groups they worked with ended up being incorporated into the new Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988.

When called upon by the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA), some anthropologists became interlocutors within the Constituent Assembly, particularly in the discussions surrounding indigenous rights, *quilombolas*¹, traditional populations, differentiated education, cultural heritage, etc. In the production of this new agenda of rights, cultural differences began to guide narrative constructions about the new notions of citizenship being claimed and negotiated by social movements with State and Brazil's various governments.

Also beginning with the 1988 Constitution, many anthropologists began to devote themselves to promoting and defending the rights won by the groups they studies while, at the same time, expanding their investigations into sociocultural diversity. Different types of claims in the field of rights thus began to mobilize the new social actors, who soon saw in public policies opportunities for the affirmation of particular political identities and consequent social gains. Many anthropologists began to address these struggles in the face of the different demands of the social groups they were researching (Palmeira, 1989; Oliveira (ed.), 1998; Arantes et al. (eds.), 1992; Lima, 2001 and 2005; Novaes & Lima, 2001; Grossi et al., 2006; Fonseca et al., 2016; Eilbaum et al., 2017).

In Brazil, these conceptual changes operated in the field of culturally differentiated rights and identity policies and were associated with processes of democratic construction implemented mainly during the period stretching from 2003 to 2015. This coincided with the arrival of a President of the Republic (in 2003) who belonged to a political party that had its historical roots and ideological basis in the country's social movements.²

1 Article 68 of the 1988 Constitution of Brazil granted the remaining quilombos the collective ownership of the lands they had occupied since colonial times. A **quilombo** is a Brazilian hinterland settlement founded by people of African origin: the quilombolas, or maroons (as called in Central America). The inhabitants of *quilombos* (called *quilombolas*) were escaped slaves or resistant ancient slaves who achieved to maintain their settlements.

2 The Lula government began on January 1st, 2003, when Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva assumed the presidency of Brazil. It ended on January 1st, 2011, when the presidency was transferred to Dilma Rousseff, who remained in office until August 31st, 2016, when the Senate decided to impeach her, with then-Vice President Michel Temer taking over the post of President of Brazil.

Within these academic debates, one of the recurring emphases was the questioning of some of the principles of liberal universalism, particularly those which take as their premise the contractual equality between individuals. In these debates, the symbolic efficacy of liberal universalism was never denied. The idea of diversity as an obstacle to the universalizing and homogenizing logic of the so-called nation-building was heavily critiqued, however. This is because since the late nineteenth century on, the political project of the creation of a “truly Brazilian” national ethnic unit has produced mono-ethnic and monocultural representations of Brazil and Brazilian life with the specific and stated aim of erasing any sub-national cultural differences.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this project sought to actively eliminate such differences, primarily through the construction of a hegemonic image of Brasil as a mestizo nation. Following re-democratization, however – and particularly during the years of the Workers’ Party governments – discourse shifted to the appreciation of these differences, which were legitimized under the tutelage of public policies implemented by the State. In this way, the right to difference gained prominence and visibility in the (inter)national political imagination. This, in turn, has given rise to new strategies of social and political mobilization in the search for the recognition and guarantee of rights.

From this struggle emerged various political demands in the public sphere, translated by the growing and complex plurality of civil society. These had diverse intersections mobilized around diverse markers of identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and sexual orientation, among others.

New legal subjects originating in these varied social movements have risen in the public scene and have become spokesmen for the claims of indigenous peoples, blacks, Afro-descendants, *quilombolas*, rural populations, urban youth, white women, black women, lesbian, gay, transgender, *travestis*, the homeless, and “landless”, among other minorities. The rhetoric of identity and diversity thus became an important discursive and practical category, employed to influence public policy agendas in Brazil.³

In addition to resignifying the meanings of social inequality, the new identity policies also challenged law and governance mechanisms and agents in general, pushing them to deal with other kinds of claims, whose common denominators were not just the old antagonism between social classes, inspired by the Marxism that had predominated academic debate of the 1960s and 1970s.

The years that followed the Constituent Assembly were thus auspicious in terms of social conquests, the expansion of rights, and the politicization of citizenship as a way to reestablish social ties. In terms of economic policy, especially during the period from 2003 to 2011, there were significant changes in the fight against social inequality. Redistributive and income transfer policies were implemented, particularly the Bolsa Família Program.⁴ There was also a considerable increase in labor formalization and significant increases in the minimum wage, among other social inclusion measures. In the sphere of education, the expansion and creation of new higher education institutions throughout Brazil also opened opportunities for the inclusion of vulnerable young people in public universities, including large numbers of Brazil’s black youth through affirmative actions that implemented racial quotas⁵ in universities.

3 For a recent review of anthropological production in Brazil see Souza Lima, Antonio Carlos de (org.). 2018. *A antropologia e a esfera pública no Brasil : perspectivas e prospectivas sobre a Associação Brasileira de Antropologia no seu 60º aniversário*. See also Trajano Filho et al., 2004; Feldman-Bianco (ed.) 2013 and Simião et al., 2018.

4 The *Bolsa Família* was the main income transfer program of the Lula government. This initiative aimed to lift families out of extreme poverty through a monthly cash transfer.

5 The expansion of new federal universities was the result of the Federal Government Program to Support the Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Brazilian Federal Public Universities, which was part of a series of Federal Government actions in the Ministry of Education’s Development Plan, implemented during the Lula da Silva administration. Racial quotas for university entrance exams were gradually implemented through the initiative of the various higher education institutions and through the mobilization of teachers and students, being implemented in both undergraduate and graduate programs. This was a result of pressures from the growing racial identity movement in Brazil.

In part, all of this was due to the idea of a participatory democracy that was intended to be the model of state political organization and which, in the national public sphere, left an important constitutional legacy, especially as it managed to expand the existing spaces for social participation while creating new spaces for more inclusive public policy formulation.

It was in order to meet the demands for participation of social and ethnic-racial collectives in the construction of public policies that the rights of ethnic populations were recognized. This resulted in the demarcation of indigenous lands and *quilombola* territories through procedures of formalized land regulation. ABA-associated anthropologists provided important legal support for this process through the Committee on Anthropological Reports, employing methodologies and theories suitable for the identification and delimitation indigenous and quilombola lands, as well as in the preparation of expert opinions regarding territorial, environmental, criminal, adoption and guardianship issues, etc. (Leite (ed.), 2005; Oliveira et al., 2015; Oliveira et al., 2016, Andrade, 2017; O'Dwyer, 2002 e 2018.)

From 2003 on, the government initiated a broad dialogue with Brazil's social movements, contemplating both those identified with the struggles for recognition and guarantees of fundamental rights (the feminist and LGBT movements, etc.), as well as trade unions, and the landless workers' movement (MST), among others. Special ministries and secretariats focused on the promotion of human rights in different segments of Brazilian society were created: Secretariats for Policies for Women, Sexual Diversity, the Promotion of Racial Equality, as well as other spaces accessible to a more inclusive dialogue.

Within the scope of the Ministry of Culture's (MinC) actions, the notion of *culture*, as understood by anthropology, became a key reference point for the public policies that highlighted the demands of the historically different disqualified social actors. Among other actions taken by the Ministry were the Plural Brazil, Living Culture and Culture Points Programs, launched by the MinC in 2004. It is important to highlight that, in the context of building a new democratic agenda in Brazil, culture and cultural heritage were converted into passports for the achievement of rights, as well for participation in the construction and management of public entities such as the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN), particularly in the formulation of its cultural heritage policies. Additionally, cultural demands allowed participation in several newly created sectoral Collegiate Councils of the National Council on Cultural Policy (CNPC) (Motta, 2018).

Democratic ideals and cultural pluralism were thus combined into a discursive, multicultural political formula (Taylor, 1994), often used by marginalized social groups⁶ as a strategy to oppose an exclusionary and unequal model of civil society that denied the rights of those who recognized themselves culturally different (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

The Return of Intolerance and Academic Censorship

With the new rupture of democratic institutions in Brazil in August 2016, a cycle ended; a cycle begun by the so-called "Citizens' Constitution" of 1988. Another cycle has now been set in action, marked by regression, intolerance, repression, and censorship.

Political discourse in this new context has been authoritarian and restrictive, targeting all previous advances, especially with regard to rights. In particular, it targets the logic of identity policies, which until now has defined the post-1988 agenda of public debate. The ideological basis adopted by the present government is extremely reactionary and has produced censorship of anthropological knowledge.

⁶ Anthropological production is part of listening to and studying the new subjects of rights. Anthropology and Human Rights was the name given to seven (7) volumes published by the Brazilian Association of Anthropology, some of which are listed in the bibliography section of the present article. Characterizing cultural diversity and thinking about its relationship with legal rights has become an anthropological and interdisciplinary concern.

To a great degree, this is because anthropologists have systematically produced important scientific knowledge about the new legal subjects that emerged on the national scene over the last 30 years, employing analytical categories – such as gender – that do not fit the political perspective of the current regime. It is worth remembering that since 2005 (Machado, 2017), although more forcefully since 2015, conservative segments of the Brazilian Parliament have been anticipating and paving the way for a forceful reaction against the new subjects of rights and to anthropological and social scientific knowledge in general.

As is well known, the kind of knowledge produced by anthropology, as well as the particularities of its ethnographic method, has always created a critical examination of power relationships in the process of knowledge production. Thus, the displacement of the subjects studied by anthropologists tends to intensify the reflexive character proper the disciplinary field itself. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that the involvement between subject and object in anthropology derives from the zeal with which anthropologists in general tend to deal with social relations and the intricate processes in which their research themes are immersed. Furthermore, contemporary anthropological methodology always analyzes – and often seeks to question – the relationships between subject and object in the production of knowledge.

With the intensification of the repressive process in Brazil, counter-narratives began to be built regarding rights in general and identity policies in particular. Anthropologists thus became the target of frequent attacks that threaten the exercise of their academic and professional activities.

As evidence of this, from the end of 2015 until the first half of 2017, in surprisingly arbitrary fashion, the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) was asked to explain and defend itself in front two Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry (CPIs): the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) CPIs. The reason stated for this was unfounded accusations about the supposed ideological content attributed to the technical studies and expert reports carried out by specialized anthropologists involved in the delimitation and demarcation of indigenous lands and quilombola territories⁷, reports frequently requested by the Federal Public Prosecutor and other competent federal agencies to supplement the technical information underlying procedural instructions (Machado, Motta, Facchini 2018: 17).

Installed through an initiative of the Parliamentary Agricultural Front (FPA – also known as the “ruralist caucus”), the two CPIs were conducted under the pretext of investigating alleged frauds and deviations occurring in the processes of land demarcation taking place under the responsibility of FUNAI and INCRA (Câmara dos Deputados, 2017a). Acting with the due bias of those who put their own interests ahead of those of the *res publica*, the arguments presented by the ruralist caucus intended to criminalize indigenous peoples, *quilombolas* and – above all – the anthropologists involved in the demarcation of these peoples’ lands.⁸

It is no coincidence that the ruralist caucus represents the specific interests of landowners and farmers, reacting to any environmental preservation measures while advocating for the expansion of legal deforestation limits. Additionally, it is possible that this group is linked to the recent burnings taking place in the Amazon rainforest, as it is also responsible for the uncontrolled release of pesticides with the support of the current regime.

7 See ABA, 2015: PROTOCOLO DE BRASÍLIA. Laudos antropológicos: condições para o exercício de um trabalho científico. Brasília: Associação Brasileira de Antropologia.

8 Through its Presidency and its Coordinating Committee on Indigenous Affairs, ABA contributed to the drafting of the CPI FUNAI INCRA 2 Parallel Report (on ABA and anthropologists), which subsidized the separate vote of the members opposed to the votes of the majority (Câmara dos Deputados, 2017b). The wording of the arguments against the CPI’s accusations was based on the entire history of the Association and the historical contributions of its members.

This involvement of one of the oldest Brazilian scientific associations as an accused party in a CPI reflects not only a disrespect for national scientific production, but also a frontal assault on the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. It is worth remembering that more recently, Brazil's Executive and Legislative bodies – whose current composition is mostly ultra-conservative – have been committed to not only to promoting institutional reforms seeking to suppress rights based on the notion of a pluralist society, but also to the erosion of the Brazilian State and the curtailing of federal resources.

Non-compliance with existing legislation, often with the collusion of the judiciary, has not only been limited to the territorial rights of indigenous and *quilombola* peoples. The same lack of commitment can be seen with regards to environmental rights. A series of environmental disasters have been occurring in Brazil and the government and its agents seem unable to find the causes or the culprits, nor take precautionary measures to solve the problems.

The first of these occurred in 2015 with the rupture of the Samarco mining company tailings dam in Minas Gerais, resulting in a public calamity unprecedented in the country's history. The following January 2019 rupture of the Brumadinho tailings dam, located in the same state, also caused a major environmental disaster. Adding to the panorama of environmental catastrophes in Brazil, we've seen the uncontrolled forest fires in the Amazon, which have mobilized national and international attention in view of the extent of the destruction and global environmental impacts this causes. Although the highest incidence and proportion of the burnings is found in the northern region of the country (known as the Legal Amazon) fire outbreaks were recorded throughout practically all of Brazil in 2019, occurring in 27 different federal units.

It is important to emphasize in this context that the current President of the Republic of Brazil already publicly declared his intention to change Brazil's environmental laws even before being sworn in. His declared intention was to change environmental laws and to make environmental licensing processes more flexible and his day-to-day practices in the current political management of these issues – while not actually supported by law—have been proving to be dizzying in their capacity to promote misrule.

In this regard, it should be noted that the National Institute for Space Research (Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais INPE), which since 2015 has been receiving real-time deforestation data through satellite monitoring, recently warned the world of the existence of fires in the Amazon region and the dangers presented by these fires. The INPE's warning was based on statistical criteria and scientific evidence and was made through a note published on the website of the Brazilian Environmental Institute (Instituto Brasileiro de Meio-Ambiente IBAMA), which the President has also threatened with extinction.

The release of INPE's warning, however, provoked the current President's indignation, as well as that of the Minister of the Environment. Both men contested the veracity of INPE's information, saying that the Institute was lying and constructing counter-narratives to disqualify its findings. In retaliation, the President summarily dismissed the renowned Brazilian physicist who was the director of INPE's research body. Scientific groups throughout Brazil (including the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC)) protested this arbitrary behavior, but the Minister of Science and Technology remained silent and continues to do so in the face of the dismantling of the sciences in Brazil.

Environmental licensing is extremely important for the preservation of the Brazilian environmental heritage, allowing the nation to safeguard traditional populations from large infrastructural projects and environmental impacts.⁹ The Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA), together with the association's Committee on Traditional Peoples, Environment, and Large Projects has actively participated in government discussions and organized forums, together with representatives of civil society and indigenous and traditional peoples who are engaged in the struggles to preserve indigenous rights and the environment.

⁹ Environmental licensing is an administrative procedure by which the environmental agency (federal, state, or municipal) authorizes the installation and operation of potentially polluting projects or activities. It was subject to control and oversight by previous governments.

In addition, many anthropologists have developed important projects and research related to environmental impacts and their effects on traditional and indigenous populations.¹⁰

In this context, so adverse to the recognition of rights, violence against indigenous peoples, *quilombolas*, members of the landless movements, peasant leaders, and etc. is increasing. In addition to frequent raids on already demarcated indigenous and *quilombola* lands – usually undertaken for logging and mining – there indigenous and *quilombola* leaders are being slaughtered at the behest of landowners and squatter in regions where land disputes flourish and economic interests are at stake.

The wave of violence and crime is also growing alarmingly in the country's main urban centers. In the city of Rio de Janeiro, for example, in the face of the rise in street and organized crime in recent years, parallel and illegal police forces, better known as “militias”, have begun organizing the security of residents of peripheral urban communities and slums against drug traffickers and criminals in general.¹¹ It should be noted that this *modus operandi* is being replicated in other urban centers across Brazil, everywhere populations are vulnerable to violence and the presence of State public security is practically non-existent. The current government's push for the liberation of private firearm ownership (currently restricted among the general population) is often reinforced by the appearance of government representatives in the media who profer grotesque allusions which incite gun violence in civil society. One of the most obvious side effects of this has been the extermination of civilians, in some cases supported by the State, as has been happening in Rio de Janeiro.

At all levels of government, alliances are being woven with business sectors linked to commodity exports and the financial capital of private banks, with the objective of financing the electoral campaigns by representatives of agribusiness, mining, “militia”, and evangelical parliamentarians, such as occurred during the last election for the national Congress and Senate. Congressional caucuses have also been organized that act around common goals and interests that are embedded in corporate strategies.

It is notable that even under the previous government, needed to establish ambiguous alliances with conservative and evangelical forces in order to stay in power. Now strengthened under the current regime, one of the focal points of the so-called evangelical caucus (allied with conservative Catholic segments in the National Congress) has been frequent attacks on the recognition of reproductive rights. A bill is currently in front of Congress that threatens legal guarantees for abortion in the case of rape, risks to the mother's life, and fetal malformation. This bill would even criminalize pregnancy prevention in the case of rape (Machado, 2016). Conservative political forces in have been organizing themselves in the Brazilian legislature (Almeida, 2017) since at least 2005 seeking to regulate public morality and attack policies of gender and sexual diversity (Machado, 2017). The intolerance and prejudice of these groups has only now fully been made public, however, and on the floor of Congress, as they fight against all previous advances in the fields of sexual and gender equality.¹²

This position has been clearly expressed through the pronouncements of the current minister (an evangelical pastor politically conservative) who occupies the newly created Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights. Among her recurrent themes are the fight against feminism, the criminalization of abortion, the elimination of supposed “gender ideology” in schools, and a series of other moral positions that, in her public narratives, become immutable values based on religious conversion. The Minister sees all of her beliefs as a base for applying public policies contrary to diversity.

¹⁰ See, among others: Zhouri et al, 2018; Beltrão and Lacerda, 2017; Oliveira and Cohn, 2014; Zhouri, 2012; Cunha and Almeida, M.2009, Almeida, W., 2008, Santilli, 1997 and Sigaud, 1988.

¹¹ Militias are armed groups that co-opt members and former members of State security forces, such as police, firefighters, and correctional officers. Usually these groups are maintained with financial resources received from extortion of vulnerable populations in areas where there is no State-directed public security.

¹² Anthropological works based on the analysis of the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality illustrate these new social subjects and point to the strength of the new lifestyles and rights that were built over the past several decades. They show the distance of “lived life” from the narrative imposed by conservative morality. See among others, Lima, 2018; Carrara, France and Simões, 2018; Carrara, 2016; Silva and Blanchette, 2017.

There is no doubt that such a setback in the name of moral and religious conservative values has directly affected the work done by anthropologists, especially in the public sphere, and particularly in the face of astonishing evidence that the current context is leading directly to increased violence against women, violence and death by homophobia, death through criminalized backstreet abortions, and etc. A moral panic has been created by the accusatory category of “gender ideology” and this panic is being used to advance and symbolically effective counter-narratives that are used to disqualify the work of anthropologists and social scientists who research this theme.

On the other hand, it is important to note that gender studies in Brazil are expanding and attracting more and more university students, not only in the field of anthropology, but also in the social sciences in general. This fact highlights the importance of this field of research and the performance of anthropologists in different fields, who are being asked to position themselves in different public spaces by giving conferences, interviews in newspapers, making television appearances and dialoguing with the media in general. As we’ve mentioned above, anthropologists have also been called upon by the Executive Branch to consult on public policy guiding plans, especially during the past government where the politics of diversity gained importance in the State. Such visibility, however, has resulted in intolerance in the current context and is encouraged at all levels of government, most visibly in the prohibition of any reference to gender and sexuality in the National Education Plan (PNE), sanctioned in 2016.

The field of education does not differ from the panorama described above. With Proposed Constitutional Amendment 55 (PEC), which freezes funds for education for a period of 20 years, the conditions of labor in public universities have been drastically affected. In recent months, this situation has become even more critical due to new budget cuts by the Ministry of Education in public higher education institutions, threatening the closure of many of them, as well as serious damage to ongoing research while hindering future prospects in the field of scientific production. Radical budget cuts also threaten the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), one of the main federal agencies responsible for funding research in the national university system, and the Higher Education Personnel Improvement Coordinating Body (CAPES), an institution linked to the Ministry of Education that expands and consolidates graduate studies (masters and doctorates) throughout Brazil.

Education has also been impacted by the curtailment of freedom of expression and violation of rights. This has been reinforced by the current Minister of Education, who has turned his policies into persecutory instruments, both in relation to teachers and students and, in particular, with respect to any kind of knowledge production that does not correspond to the ideologies advocated by the current government.

Among the existing counter-narratives is “school without parties”, an ideological movement inaugurated in 2004, which has been gaining greater visibility since 2014, but only achieved notoriety during the current political conjuncture. Its members preach the end of an alleged leftist “indoctrination” within the schools and universities that is supposedly associated with “communism” and “gender ideology”. The ideological accusations the movement attributes to intellectual and educational activities are varied and proportional in intensity to the objectives the movement seeks to achieve, denigrating the scientific reputation of public universities and the image of their professors. The “school without parties” movement gained the support of catholic, evangelical, and fundamentalist groups, achieving greater media visibility in the current political landscape and producing a moral panic in different cultural sectors. Its attempts to regulate public morality and customs have also reached into the arts, museums, cinema, music industry, and other cultural areas.

The general conservative scenario that Brazil is currently undergoing has thus also reached the field of culture. One of the current government’s first measures was the abolition of the Ministry of Culture (MinC), which was incorporated into the newly created Ministry of Citizenship. This new ministry absorbed two organs previously linked to the MinC: the National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) and

the Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM). Cultural policies aimed at promoting cultural diversity have been paralyzed while there has been a violent dismantling of cultural heritage that has heavily affected IPHAN.

Political discourse in this new conservative and authoritarian context consistently misrepresents the importance of culture, science, and technology. It is especially present, however, in its accusations against anthropology, seeking to penalize the so-called “social actors of diversity” that emerged on the national scene from social movements that fought for recognition of differentiated rights in the 1980s and ‘90s.

When fundamental rights cease to exist, hope in the inventive capacity of new solutions is lost. The collective and democratic dimension of culture begins to disappear.

Neoconservative times and the challenges to anthropological practices

The setbacks, intolerance, repression, and censorship of the current political moment consolidate a hegemonic conservative narrative. We must thus ask whether or not we are facing the reappearance or resurgence of a long-term permanence of conservative and religious thought in contemporary times?

More must be asked, however. Are the forces that support the conservative thought the same? We prefer to call them as neoconservative¹³ forces. An analysis of the neoconservative forces in play shows that they do not represent the mere permanence of conservative and religious impulses. Faced with the strong progressive narrative of human rights and new social subjects, conservative forces needed to reorganize themselves as ostensible social movements in order to confront the human rights of legitimate social subjects, both in Brazil and in many other countries throughout the world.

Unlike the previous conservative narratives, neoconservatism – as it stands in Brazil from the Dilma government on – does not claim to speak for an explicitly political position (whether this be conceived of as right-wing or neoliberal) or in the name of a given religion. It does not deny its right-wing impulses, economic neoliberalism, or conservative Christian religiosity, but it does not construct its main narrative around these arguments. Although it clearly admits its antagonism to the Brazilian “left”, it claims to speak in the name of an objective “truth” while it accuses the left of holding “ideological” positions.

Neo-conservatism as an organized movement in social networks and Christian religious spaces has been consolidated by the organization and strengthening of conservative congressional caucuses: the evangelical caucus (for the traditional family, against homosexuality rights, and against abortion), the ruralist caucus (for the expansion of agribusiness and against indigenous and *quilombola* rights to land), and the weapons liberation caucus (for greater flexibility in the laws regulating the possession and use of firearms and against disarmament). The success of the election campaign of the current President, who as a former congressman and as a candidate defended and advanced the proposals of these three caucuses, sharpened and strengthened the neoconservative narrative by transforming it into a governmental narrative. By taking over the governmental, this movement has also gained the power of censorship and, by being based on social segments beholden to social networks and religious groups (especially evangelicals), it could become a proponent and propagator of eliminating rights and spreading intolerance.

Claiming to speak in the name of “truth”, this movement means to say that politics is or should be “neutral”. The term “ideology” has thus come to be used negatively, associated with the “left”, both with the political parties that define themselves as leftist and with the governments of Lula and Dilma. It was not enough, however, for this movement to simply criticize leftist positions in Brazilian politics: to affirm that politics should be neutral and that the new heralds of the right were themselves truth-tellers required an attack on the Brazilian social sciences.

¹³ Regarding the pressures of neoconservative forces and the neoconservative movement against the legalization of abortion, see Machado, Lia, 2017.

Since the 1970s, Brazilian anthropology, sociology, and political science have played an important role in the construction and evaluation of social public policies. In addition to teaching and researching, they have stood for the defense of human rights, of indigenous peoples, *quilombolas*, family farmers, urban and rural policies that decrease social inequality, environmental protection, integral and public healthcare, public security policies, and the defense of gender equality and sexual diversity.

According to the neoconservative political narrative, the Brazilian social sciences are putting themselves in an ideological position and the social sciences supposedly do not produce science but ideology. The Brazilian neoconservative attack on science is not restricted to the social sciences. Neoconservatives don't recognize research that points to global warming and often remark on social networks that they are against biological evolutionism and the belief that the earth revolves around the sun. The principal political target of the movement, however, has been the humanities and especially the social sciences.

Arendt (2007) recalls that the art of politics often demands "untruth" as a "justifiable means in political affairs" (Arendt, 2007: 8-9). The particular untruth we are dealing with here (i.e., the belief that it is right-wing politicians who are speaking "the truth") is part of the political scene, like any other untruth. Politics is inevitably grounded in debates and conflicts over interests and power struggled and, therefore, one can never politically speak in the name of an undisputed and neutral universal truth.

If politics is not neutral, is or should the social sciences be neutral? Our practices as social scientists necessarily imply disciplinary procedures and methodologies which underpins the scientific view. However, methodological reflection requires reflection on the subject's place within knowledge production and, thus, their social position.

The "axiological neutrality" proposed by Weber (1864/1920) for knowledge creation within the human sciences seeks to remove the researcher from a commitment to "value judgments", but does not remove the researcher's responsibility to reflect on the scientist's insertion in the world of socially and politically constructed meaning. This insertion in the world of meanings, in relation to values, is fundamental to the objectivity of research itself. Without it, there can be no knowledge. (Weber, 1999: 109). Weber's axiological neutrality eschews value judgements as guiding lights for scientific production. It states, however, that it is not possible to do science without recognizing the scientist's prior insertion in the world of culturally constructed meaning. Social science deciphers the social senses but always inserted in them. It is thus through constructed methodologies that can be reconstituted by other social scientists that the objectivity of the social sciences is achieved.

Starting from an understanding that the social sciences are ideological, the "school without parties" movement wants to prohibit any "moral education" in the educational system that is not "in accordance with the beliefs of students' parents". The movement would thus ban all references to "gender theory or ideology", the "sexual options", and the "promotion of teachers' political beliefs" (House of Representatives Bill 867 and Senate Bill 193 2016. See respectively Câmara dos Deputados, 2015 e Senado, 2016) . The movement embodies distrust and aversion towards the knowledge generated by the social sciences and would remove the teaching of the social sciences from the educational system, especially regarding politics, religion, gender theory, and sexuality.

Ironically, the movement's website makes use of Weber in presenting "school without parties"¹⁴ arguments:

¹⁴ The official website of the movement known previously as- <http://www.escolasempartido.org/> - appears in beginning of 2019 as currently suspended with the notice "under renewal", but in October, 2016, Weber's citation was there. Although Paulo Nagib, its forerunner, has deactivated his Facebook page profile, the website <https://escolasempartido.org/> in this format is again active. New bills are currently being filed in the Federal Chamber of Deputies and at the municipal and state levels. Semis points out how these new projects follow the same proposals and arguments as the early ones (Semis, Lais, 2019). Another new website is also being producing and available: <https://escolaeducacao.com.br/escola-sem-partido/>

In a classroom, the teacher has the word and students are doomed to silence. (...) It is unforgivable for a teacher to use this situation to seek to instill in his disciples his own political conceptions, instead of being useful to them, as is his duty, through the transmission of scientific knowledge and experience (Weber: 1967: 39 and 40).

The author of the site have apparently read very little Weber because they have completely inverted his thinking. While it is true that Weber was a critic of university professors who relied solely on conviction and not disciplinary knowledge, he was equally critical of teachers who were self-styled prophetic religious saviors. Weber was the German thinker who perceived the “disenchantment of the world” as stemming from both the growth of scientific and rational thought and in the decline of religion.

To those unable to endure the destiny of our time (the disenchantment of the world) in virile fashion, it is only possible to give the following advice: return in silence (...) to the open arms (...) of the old churches.... Either way, the returnee will inevitably be compelled to “sacrifice the intellect.”... Let’s learn the lesson! Nothing has so far been accomplished based solely on fervor and expectation (...) (Weber 1967: 50, 51 and 52)

It was Weber who affirmed and defended the deep linkages between scientific knowledge and morality and denied morality’s imprisonment within religion. He stated in his essay “Science as Vocation”:

Scientists can and should show that any position they adopt logically and surely derives from the ultimate meaning of this or that ultimate and basic view of the world. (...) Thus, the scientist can clarify that a certain position derives from one conception and not from another.... If, therefore, we are up to our task as scientists (which, of course, must be assumed here), we may compel a person to realize the ultimate meaning of his own acts, or at least help them in that regard. It seems to me that this result is not negligible, even with regard to personal life. If a teacher achieves this result, I am inclined to say that he puts himself at the service of “moral” powers, that is, at the service of the duty to bring clarity and a sense of responsibility into the souls of others (Weber: 1967: 46).

Weber is as far as one can be from the revindications of the “school without parties” movement that moral education should be banned and that school education should be restricted to “instruction in skills” (we must ask ourselves what this would be?). Weber understands that the teaching of the social sciences allows us to establish knowledge about social relations of meaning and that it allows the teaching of individual responsibility in the face of many varied and possible social meanings.

Habermas (1989: 43) does not propose axiological neutrality and understands the social sciences as producers of an “always contextualized truth”. Impartiality, in this sense, can only be understood in the context of a contextualized, non-abstract “truth” that depends on the conditions of knowledge production.

Haraway goes farther still, conceptualizing the objectivity of the humanities as partial and based upon “situated knowledge” or “localized knowledge” (taking up here once considerations made in Machado, Motta and Facchini, 2018). The term “partial” is not to be understood as an antonym of “impartial”, as it is used in the judicial system. In its legal meaning, the term “partial” is used to criticize taking sides with one or another of the parties in a dispute without analyzing the evidence. “Objectivity”, in the social scientific tradition being described here, means that knowledge is localized, specific, particular, an inevitably approached from a partial perspective. There is no knowledge without mediation: there is no knowledge that is not woven into a set of social relationships.

The “situated knowledge” of this social scientific position is an epistemological stance taken against the assumption of scientific neutrality. As Haraway affirms : “The only position from which objectivity could not possibly be practised and honoured is the standpoint of the master, the Man, the One God, whose Eye produces, appropriates, and orders all difference.” (1991:193). Haraway argues against an image of knowledge from above (which she considers to be almost an appropriation of a godly point of view) and remarks:

“Vision is always a question of the power to see - and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?” (1991:192).

Consistent with this position of situated knowledge, social science knowledge presents (or must present) the conflicts between social knowledge arising from different social positions and situations. Conflicts must always appear and cannot be ignored or glossed over.

Referring to Despret’s conferences, Arendt and Moraes, (2016) state that the social sciences should not avoid controversy as they are premised upon a higher criterion and accept controversial coexistence: “Not to interpret the hunter or the vegetarian is not to judge them by a criterion superior to both, which would resolve the conflict and avoid controversy. Accepting their controversial coexistence resists the temptation to resolve their contradictory truths” (Arendt and Moraes, 2016: 13).

This is not just the mere acceptance of polemics or controversies however: it is the understanding that there are conflicts between social positions linked to social meanings that are in dispute. The social sciences can and should – indeed, must – make conflicts and contradictions visible if it is to achieve any claim at all to “objective” truth (in Weber’s sense of axiological neutrality) or to “objective knowledge” in Haraway’s sense of partial connection.

Above all, rational knowledge does not pretend to disengagement: to be from everywhere and so from nowhere, to be free from interpretation, from being represented, to be fully self-contained or fully formalizable. Rational knowledge is a process of ongoing critical interpretation among “fields” of interpreters and decoders. (Haraway,1991:196)

Ethnography is necessarily based upon dialogue with the community or people studied and it is a crucial part of the anthropological method. Without dialogue with the subject of research there is no objectivity or understanding of social meanings. If the self identity of the subject does not, by itself, produce science, methodological instruments that mediate standpoints of view do. A critical positioning must be capable to see the plural and contradictory world of human created meanings. It is precisely this condition of dialogue, inherent in anthropological scientific practice, that the CPI FUNAI-INCRA seeks to mischaracterize as a “fraudulent method”, labeling it “collusion”. In this accusation, the deep knowledge forged by interactions between researchers and research subjects (indigenous and *quilombola* peoples, in this case) supposedly blinds researchers to the perspectives of subjects with adverse interests.

The proposers of the CPI FUNAI-INCRA employ a misunderstanding of “neutrality” in their requests and in their Final Report in order to attempt to interdict the work of anthropologists who carry out land and territory demarcation reports with indigenous groups and *quilombola* groups, who share time and housing in the communities they study. It is precisely the long or medium duration of these stays among the groups being studied that allow anthropologists to comprehend these groups’ ways of living and of organizing themselves in the territories they occupy and thus allow anthropologists to become specialists with regards to the analyzed groups’ habits and beliefs.

From the point of view of the CPI investigators, it would probably not be possible to maintain the methodological tradition of anthropological ethnography anywhere in the world. They also omitted from the CPI’s Final Report the fact that anthropologists, in addition to face-to-face ethnography, include historical data and diverse secondary sources as well as a review of the available literature on the group studied when making their reports.

In the production of anthropological reports on indigenous lands and *quilombola* territories, conflicts and disputes over the territory appear: they are not covered up or ignored. Disputes over land are not glossed or dismissed in partisan fashion: the meanings given by traditional peoples to their way of living, organizing, and feeling are analyzed as to whether these can be said to encompass rights to territory as provided for by the Constitution.

Request 86/2016 of Nilson Leitão and others involved in the CPI FUNAI-INCRA 2 states on page 1 that the “Brazilian Anthropological Association has penetrated into and is equipping organs and entities of the Brazilian state with complacency towards – not to say complicity with – anthropologists who ‘pray from their Bible” (Câmara dos Deputados, 2016:1). Other unfounded statements appear in the Report, such as that on page 13: “Thus, ‘engaged’ anthropologists are being guided and even forced to always conclude in favor of traditional occupation of the territory, (...) which would entail a series of frauds” (Câmara dos Deputados, 2016:13).

When, through scientific and ethnographic procedures, an anthropologist concludes that the conditions of territoriality of a given traditional or autochthonous people are met, as required by the Federal Constitution, then that anthropologist must take a position. This is not a subordination of anthropological inquiry to the goals of the peoples and communities with which anthropologists work, as members of the CPI FUNAI-INCRA accuse: this is recognition by anthropologists of the rights to territoriality as enshrined by Brazil’s prevailing legal order.

If scientific knowledge must be based on methodological foundations in order to produce knowledge, it is also a necessary for it to insert itself into the symbolic world in order to construct the various positions of meaning given by the social subjects and present the evidence for said positions. The objectivity and impartiality sustained by situated knowledge imply the maximum inclusion of divergent positions in the social context under analysis and in the clarification of the position of the subjects producing this knowledge. This thus requires the “interpretation and analysis of a whole set of social subjects and their relationships within a complex system of social relations, including contexts, circumstances, symbolic meanings, and material relations” (Machado, Motta and Facchini, 2018: 23).

It is up to anthropology and the social sciences to counteract common sense and neoconservative positions that do not recognize the social sciences and the knowledge they produce. There is no “neutrality” in the production of scientific knowledge about social and cultural worlds. However, because this production starts from a clearly stated point of view, the knowledge produced will be impartial (in the sense that it will present evidence and not false statements), indicating the system of social relations where a given point of view fits in. It is based on an explicit methodology and conducted according to rational disciplinary criteria. It is, in short, the production of scientific knowledge.

In times of intolerance, it is the duty of the social sciences to point out the misconceptions of political speech which claims to be true in the name of a non-existent political neutrality, to confront political speech that does not respect scientific knowledge or, indeed, produce knowledge. We must stand up to a neoconservative political speech that presumes the “sacrifice of the intellect” of which Weber speaks. Or, as proposed by moral philosopher Harry Frankfurt, we must reject and combat the sort of emotionally appealing discourse that intentionally confuses substantiated and unsubstantiated statements, which he labels “bullshit” (Frankfurt, 2005).

In times when the social sciences are accused of being ideological, it is up to social scientists to continually affirm that if the construction of scientific methodology cannot presume to do without a point of view (because we are inserted in a world of meanings), it is not *reduced* to said point of view because it obeys rational and rigorous methodological procedures, built into the field of research itself.

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