

ON DIALOGUES AND EXISTENCES: A POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY TO AGROECOLOGY

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Introduction

The “dialogue of knowledge” has been considered one of the foundations of agroecological construction. In addition to its different uses – an “ethical principle” (LEFF, 2002), a “political activity” (CAPORAL et al., 2009), or a “participatory methodology” (TARDIN, 2006; GUHUR, 2010) – the term has been expressing the agroecological effort to promote interaction between technical-scientific and non-scientific knowledge in a harmonious and inclusive way. For its supporters, the great strength of agroecology would lie here: “[...] within the arrangement of these knowledges, the being is reborn: that of nature, production, the agronomist, the scientist, the technician, the peasant, and the indigenous; the reconstruction of the being that founds the meaning of production and paves the way towards a sustainable future on new grounds” (LEFF, 2002, p. 36)⁴. The idea, in fact, is very seductive and has been the engine of engagement of one of the most visible facets of contemporary environmentalism. Our hypothesis, however, is that the political-epistemological support of the “dialogue of knowledge” overcomes the interactional richness of the aforementioned encounter, both in terms of its “benefits” and “disadvantages,” and considering the impediment it produces when more openly addressing internal development issues of agroecology itself. Would this encounter be more dense, conflictual, and complex than what is suggested by the term and its operationalization in the agroecological literature?

Thus, in this article we propose, firstly, an exercise of problematization of the agroecological “dialogue of Knowledge,” based on some critical considerations on the theme emerging from authors identified as actors within the field of environmental issues and agroecology itself. Secondly, we suggest a possible perspective of anthropological elements

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that may contribute to the understanding of interactions among agroecological agents in other terms. Our basis is the classical debate on the concept of culture, which is broadened to some contemporary conceptualization exercises regarding different ways of life as “ontologies.” We intend to argue that encounters between different “cultures” or “ways of life” cannot be reduced to an interlocution “between kinds of knowledge,” since such: (1) reduces and simplifies interaction conditions; (2) ensures scientific agents the primacy of what should be understood as “dialogue”; and finally, (3) defines the resulting political activity in terms of hierarchical conditions. From these inferences, the “encounter” is thus characterized as a disturbing and shifting approximation between two “social existences,” each of them amalgamated by different dimensions, whether technical, economic, social, political, epistemological, symbolic, among other possibilities: a “political tension of alterity,” being the epistemological articulation (the dialogue of knowledge) a possible solution to be carefully developed. Finally, we propose that the “new rural extension” or the “agroecological extension” is the locus of production of action/knowledge based on a “double extensionality”: from the technician to the farmer and, reversely, from the farmer to the technician, in which the articulation agent is not that concerned with “teaching,” but with “learning.”

Dialogue of knowledge, agroecological extension, and the “other”

Despite recent efforts to contextualize the agroecological “dialogue of knowledge” in broadened epistemological proposals – such as the perspective of complexity (CAPO-RAL et al., 2009), that of “environmental knowledge” (LEFF, 2002; FLORIANI and FLORIANI, 2010) and “epistemological pluralism” (GOMES, 2005) –, authors, such as Stephen Gliessman, Miguel Altieri, and Eduardo Sevilla Guzmán, were those responsible for formulating the idea of the dialogue of knowledge as one of the defining elements of agroecology. Underlying it, there is the conception of these authors concerning the contribution of social groups formed by peasants, Indigenous, *Quilombolas* (people who lived in *quilombos* – communities of slaves who have escaped from their masters), among others, to the agroecological field.

According to Stephen Gliessman, the question is raised from the understanding that “traditional” agroecosystems should become the reference of the agroecological proposal (GLIESSMAN, 2002). Likewise, Miguel Altieri considers that the study based on ethnoscience, including on the agricultural strategies of traditional agricultures, should consist in the sustainability of agroecology (ALTIERI, 2001). Eduardo Sevilla Guzmán and collaborators also propose the construction of an epistemology of orchestration between scientific and traditional knowledge in agroecology, but based on an inversion in the sense observed by the two aforementioned authors. An “endogenous” agroecology constituted based on specific social realities, having as a starting point the strengthening of the identity of rural social groups within the process of broadening the developmental model of modern agriculture (SEVILLA GUZMÁN, 2001). More than a “source” of sustainable production models and forms of knowledge concerning agroecosystems, ethnically differentiated agricultural groups and communities would be the basis of the social action for producing agroecology itself.

What would be the consequences of these different perspectives for structuring the agroecological extension? On the one hand, the keyword is “transfer” (ALTIERI, 2001, p. 21) or “acquisition” (GLIESSMAN, 2002, p. 303) of knowledge. The idea that agroecology should systematize traditional techniques have been grounding a kind of ethnoscience of “traditional” agroecosystems (KOOHFAN and ALTIERI, 2010) and implied, in its turn, the dissociation of local agronomic techniques from their social contexts of production as a possibility of transferring them to other places. Therefore, the agroecological extension would be responsible for promoting political-economic strengthening, disseminating environmentally sustainable techniques and practices, economically viable and validated by scientific knowledge. The incorporation of agroecological practices has been frequently interpreted as a “rescue” of potentially lost agricultural practices and knowledge (ALTIERI, 2001).

On the other hand, agroecological extension, according to the Guzmanian perspective, would be more concentrated on providing conditions for strengthening the endogenous potential – especially regarding the relation between exogenous elements and agroecosystem – than on take an asymmetric position of teaching and learning. From this perspective, political practice and sociocultural vivacity are associated: they would consist in diffuser centers of agroecological practices. The role of the technician and the scientist committed to this perspective would be to detect and foster the “endogenous” potentialities of the construction of sustainable agronomic practices, much more than “bringing” or “disseminating” techniques beyond a given social and ecological reality (GUZMÁN CASADO et al., 2000, p. 139). The prevalence and sensitivity towards the “social” is greatly emphasized from the Guzmanian perspective.

The echoes of these two ways of conceiving the relationship between the “scientific” and the “traditional” within agroecology are not trivial. Caporal and collaborators, for example, support that

[...] Agroecology seeks to integrate the farmers’ knowledge with that of different sciences, enabling both the understanding, analysis, and criticism of the current model of development and agriculture, and the establishment of new strategies for the rural development and new designs for more sustainable agricultures based on a transdisciplinary and holistic approach (CAPORAL et al., 2009, p. 17-18).

This integrative conception of agroecology would result in an agroecological rural extension such as “[...] an educational and transformational intervention, based on research-action methodologies that allow the development of a social practice through which subjects of the process seek the construction and systematization of a set of knowledge that leads them to consciously focus on reality” (CAPORAL and COSTABEBER, 2000, p. 32). The authors show deep concern when emphasizing that this “new rural extension” requires extension agents the ability “to understand aspects related to the lives of individuals and their social relations” (CAPORAL and COSTABEBER, 2000, p. 32), which, theoretically, would open up a great possibility for this perspective to comprise a broad

understanding of sociocultural configurations in the design of agroecological initiatives, considering the weight of these authors in the theoretical and political formulation of agroecology in Brazil and Latin America.

However, other researchers have detected a certain gap in the apparent balance between different knowledges in the construction of the agroecological doing, based on the technicist prevalence in the formulation of their projects. Siliprandi, for example, highlights: “[...] in spite of the strong social content of these definitions [...], the concern with the new agricultural technologies has always been preponderant in extension activities, and was often considered its only *raison d’être*. Thus, the so-called ‘social themes,’ although present [...], ended up being little discussed” (SILIPRANDI, 2002, p. 39). In a more incisive way, Almeida refers to this technicist emphasis as follows: “The eagerness to intervene in agricultural systems in an agroecological way has been [...] consolidating [...] the idea of the ‘agroecological package.’” According to the author, these [agricultural systems] act “disregarding or minimizing the complexity and diversity of the productive systems, and tending to standardize them to facilitate the technological activity, the methodology, and the achievement of results” (ALMEIDA, 2002, p. 33).

In a more markedly critical way, Gerhardt refers to the dialogue of knowledges as part of an epistemogenesis process within agroecology, not very different from the process of structuring other sciences, resulting in the process of purification and appropriation of “traditional” techniques:

[...] the agroecological scientification tends to sanitize local knowledge and practices. Appropriated by technicians, scientists, official bodies, and companies, knowledge affectively and intimately linked to the history experienced by social groups are “retrieved” [...] and classified as agroecologically relevant. Then, after being removed from their circumstanciness and taken to their research institutions, such are evaluated based on concepts and methods of “scientific agroecology” [...]. Finally, after such knowledge and practices being amended and “perfected” by this “science,” the greater the harmony between “retrieved” local knowledge/practice and preestablished scientific criteria, the greater its agroecological value will be. Afterwards, later, through extension agents, what has been “retrieved” can now return as an artifact, a technique, or a knowledge, but not only to the place where it was extracted from. After properly sanitized, knowledges so far dominated by people who locally put them into practice are now universalized, and can be applied and replicated (as “conventional innovations” are) in different realities (GERHARDT, 2014, p. 31).

Gerhardt’s criticism – a counterpoint to the proposal spearheaded by Caporal – allows the emergence of an ethnoscientific model of agroecological knowledge production, in which the “farmers’ knowledge” tends to be reduced to the set of agronomic techniques historically cultivated by them. All, however, intersected by the Guzmanian discursive perspective of attention to the “social.” The tension between “acquiring”

traditional knowledge and its return and “dissemination” to these groups in a standardized way is institutionalized in such a way that it is consisted even in a model of its own discursiveness, which refers to the famous “report of experience,” a format instituted including in the editions of the Brazilian Congress of Agroecology (*Congresso Brasileiro de Agroecologia* – CBA). In such, the description of an extension project is articulated with the specification of a “participatory” methodology, based on the “Paulo Freire’s method” and very often self-evaluated as successful. To illustrate that:

This study aims at reporting the field experience where exchanges of knowledge and agroecological experimentations occurred, during the National Meeting of Biology Students. Such resulted from a collective construction of four representativities (rural extension: EMATER and PAIS project; several farmer families; academy: biology students from Brazilian universities, and OPAC: ABIO), by visiting the property of the family cooperative AFOJO, at the municipality of Guapimirim, RJ, Brazil. The methodology followed the principles of agroecology, emphasizing a participatory research and a constructivist pedagogy seeking the democratization of knowledge based on traditional and academic learning. We opted for the practice of Green Fertilization Biointensive technique; and preparation of the Japanese Bokashi compound. The results were the learning and experimentation of a new soil management technique for farmers and technicians; integration among several entities related to agroecology; and the contribution of the very activities to local development (OLIVEIRA et al., 2011, p. 1).

This model contributes to the emergence of agroecological extension replete with hierarchical power relations, despite the permanence of the utterance of the dialogue of knowledge as a democratic relationship. What would be the motivations for such process that (re)produces hierarchical relationships seeking equivalence? Among a myriad of possible factors, our proposal is to seek answers in the conceptual structuring of the issue. In other words, the hypothesis is that the epistemic support of the dialogue of knowledge takes place, in an underlying way, by the use of conceptions of “culture” and “intercultural relationship” that converge to maintain the privilege of the scientific universe in defining the rules of the game of dialogue between technicians/scientists and farmers. To do so, we propose to the readers a possible perspective (among others) of the variations of the concept of culture within anthropology, which stimulates: (1) to understand at what point of the debate on the concept of culture the dialogue of knowledge is inserted; and (2) to find other references according to which such can be rethought. Let us approach them.

From cultures to ways of life

In its early days, the anthropological concept of culture was established, by the classical definition of Tylor, as “that complex whole” (TYLOR, 2005) consisting of four basic delineating dimensions: (1) it is an integrated totality; which (2) comprises the spheres

of thought “and” (instead of “or”) of human action; (3) from a causal structuring vector (thought produces action, or otherwise?); and finally, (4) it consists of a historical linearity in the form of evolutionary succession. More than a restricted and dated conceptual proposal, what is presented in this conception is a true methodological agenda that will exert a strong delimiting power of the way of doing anthropology until nowadays, both in the sense that some of these aspects are valued to this day, and in the exceptional effort to deconstruct them. This latter especially concerning the fourth characteristic, the evolutionary. Thus, a possible way of understanding the transformations of the concept would be to observe how each conceptualization effort (including those not addressed in this review) constructs an implicit or explicit critical dialogue with this perspective.

Franz Boas, for example, evoked “to surrender [due to] the vain purpose of constructing a systematic history of the evolution of culture” and, at the same time, “to start making broader and more solid comparisons [...]” (BOAS, 2004, p. 38-39). An attempt to escape the evolutionary linearity is also configured with Malinowski, for whom culture “is a system of objects, activities, and attitudes in which each of the parties exists as a means to an end; [...] it is a totality, in which the various elements are interdependent; [...] essentially, an instrumental apparatus; through it, the man is placed in a position to better address the specific and concrete issues he faces within his environment” (MALINOWSKI, 1986, p. 171-172). It is worth noting, for reasons that cannot be addressed in the scope of this study, that in Malinowski the aspects of “integrated totality,” “action-thought articulation,” and a “causal relationship” guided by a materialistic perspective (thought defined by action) remain, but are no longer based on a historical linearity (diachronic), from a synchronous perspective.

The perception that cultures constitute integrative totalities led to the first major post-evolutionist theoretical effort to suggest that most social events inherent to the so-called non-Western societies would constitute “totally social facts” (MAUSS, 1992), in which they would express “at the same time and at once, all sorts of institutions: religious, juridical, and moral [...] and economic – assuming particular forms of production and consumption, or firstly of delivery and distribution” (MAUSS, 1992, p. 41). In the constitution of cultures, not only events of different dimensions would be articulated, but in a single event different dimensions of this configuration could be overlapped and amalgamated. Therefore, for this bias of anthropological analysis of culture, it was about recognizing how certain “people,” “community,” or “society” presents its particular forms of “integrality” as well as its possible forms of dimensional overlap in events that constitute them.

In a long and multifaceted process of change in the objectives and scopes of the anthropological activity – comprising a period between the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1970 –, the recognition of different forms of “complex totality” is no longer an objective of interest in itself, strengthening efforts to search its their “determinants” or “structuring” causalities. With Lévi-Strauss, the search for the “secret origins” of the structuring of cultures (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1993, p. 349) implied a monumental work in search of the “structures of the unconscious” – psychic elements that enable the ordering of external stimuli, whether social and/or ecological – in relational models underlying the

sociocultural organization processes of different societies. Both the “complex whole” and the “domain of action” become epiphenomena of thought, this being the “first engine” for constituting the culture(s), in such a way social, political, and symbolic relations consist in the inductive access route to structures of the unconscious, the residence, therefore, an explanatory basis of cultural phenomena.

Other approaches sought to emphasize the understanding of cultural settings from their symbolic and discursive dimensions: “The concept of culture that I advocate [...] is essentially semiotic. Believing that man is an animal tied to the webs of meanings that he himself has woven, I assume culture as consisting in these webs” (GEERTZ, 1989, p. 4). Without aiming at achieving, like Lévi-Strauss (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1993), the “secret origins,” the novelty of this approach is that Geertz favors the discursive dimension at the expense of conceptions that propose broad conceptualizations of culture, based on the proposal for “reducing the concept of culture to a fair dimension” (GEERTZ, 1989, p. 4). In this sense, Geertz renounces the “complex whole” in favor of his understanding as “symbolic systems [used] by individuals in the construction of meaning” (GEERTZ, 2001, p. 112). Regardless of the differences (which are not properly addressed in this article), Marshall Sahlins presents, at some point in his work, a conception very similar to that of Geertz: “We take the distinctive quality of culture, not the fact that this culture can conform to material pressures, but the fact of doing it according to a defined symbolic scheme, which is never the only one possible [...]” (SAHLINS, 2003, p. 12).

Despite great differences between Lévi-Strauss, Geertz, and Sahlins, their respective approaches denote a historical moment in which processes of culture conceptualization, in addition to rejecting the idea of evolutionary escalation, are no longer focused on the explicative centrality of the “complex whole” as well as strengthen the causal relationship between “thought” and “action.” Among its many effects, the strengthening of the epistemological character of the different analyzed peoples and societies is generalized as contributing to the constitution of their “culture,” which can be perceived in the title of these authors’ works, for instance *The Savage Mind* (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1997) and *Local Knowledge: Further Essays In Interpretive Anthropology* (GEERTZ, 1997).

In the opposite, but symmetrical way, in the mid-twentieth century, a set of approaches emerge, according to which the structuring element of culture conceptualization is oriented towards ecological dimensions. If for the authors previously mentioned the symbolic ordering is autonomous and guides the material dimensions, from the ecological perspective the cultural apparatus would be determined by the inverse vector. “Adjustment” and “adaptation” consist in the motto. For the “cultural ecology,” according to Julien Steward, “[...] *el problema consiste en plantearse si los ajustes de las sociedades humanas a sus ambientes requieren de ciertos modos particulares de comportamiento o bien si estos permiten una amplia gama de posibles patrones de conducta*” (STEWART, 1955, p. 1). Although the author emphasized that “*de acuerdo con la mirada holística, todos los aspectos de la cultura son funcionalmente interdependientes unos de otros*” (STEWART, 1955, p. 6), not all these elements would be “structuring” for the private way of life of a people or society: “*el grado y la forma de interdependencia, sin embargo, no so iguales para todos los rasgos*” (STEWART, 1955, p. 6).

For Rappaport it is not about, as in Steward, seeking the “nucleus” of causal articulation between the ecological and the cultural, but trying to structure an “ecological anthropology” based on the culture conceptualization as an ecological “expression,” in which the anthropologist must seek the “*significado biológico a los términos clave – adaptación, equilibrio interno, funcionamiento adecuado, supervivencia – de sus formulaciones*” in it (RAPPAPORT, 1998, p. 264). In this sense, the author states, “culture” can be thought of as “[...] *los medios por los cuales las poblaciones humanas se mantienen en los sistemas ecológicos*” (RAPPAPORT, 1998, p. 265). In the case of these latter authors, the “complex whole” idea remains, but the dynamics of interactions is strongly ordered by the sense of ecological causality, the “action” is structured by “adaptation” and thought becomes an “expression” of such. Moreover, it is worth noting that this perspective has coexisted in a more tolerant way with evolutionary ideals (STEWART, 1955), in which its echoes can be perceived, implicitly, until nowadays.

At the end of the 1970s, but mainly in the 1980s, an almost simultaneous movement of problematization of these two vast fields of anthropological orientation have emerged – the “symbolic” and the “ecological.” In a 1975 book, little known among the Brazilian public until 2010, Roy Wagner initiates a debate on the very idea of “culture” and the effects of its operationalization on the professional activity of the anthropologist. For the author, there is, within the scope of the anthropological work, an “invention process” of the culture. The notion of invention is not mistaken by the idea of “illusion” or “fiction,” but as a “creation” of an articulatory sense that, throughout the everyday life, is not apprehended as such. The consciousness of a “way of life,” whether of the anthropologist in relation to the native, or its inverse, only “emerges” in the confrontation between these two social “existences.”

In this sense, the “complex whole” constitutive of cultures would be produced by integrative actions conformed and delineated within a “total system of conceptualization” (WAGNER, 2010). It would be the conceptualization of the experienced produced in the double confrontation process between the “I” and the “other.” Interestingly, for Wagner, both ecological and symbolic approaches are manifested as “controlling” exercises that make sense of the totalizing action required to anthropologically conceive “culture.” Wagner’s proposal makes room for the understanding that the anthropologist, in the process of transition between worlds, must be permeable to the conceptualization that natives makes of their own world, to the extent that the ethnographic situation is also “anthropological” for these natives. That is, in the transition between worlds, the paramount condition of conceptualization is also performed by the native, but not in the terms produced by the researcher. If, therefore, the process is equivalent, its “content” is not.

If “culture” would only exist in dialogically “invented” designs by the conceptual control of what is experienced in a fluid and transitory way, attention should be paid to at least three aspects that directly interest us. First, the anthropology produced by natives about us and about themselves would have value equivalent to anthropologists’ “anthropology.” Thus, the validity of different concepts of culture (as well as its parameters of complexity and causality) would be questioned as “universal” models of definition of ways of life. They could not, therefore, define what the “others” would conceive about their own way of life.

In other words, the concept of “culture,” whether guided by a symbolic or ecological perspective, could only serve as “one” perspective, not being appropriate to design it based on the understanding of the “other” of their own existence, because processes used by them to conceive their way of life would be relatively the same as ours, even if their “contents” would radically differ from ours. Hence, nothing enables to state that the model of culture conceived by us is more “coherent” than the other, including within its notion of complexity and causality. Secondly, if culture is presented as the substantiation of “flows” of the experienced, the concept of nature would also be, including the two dimensions constructed one as opposed to the other. In this sense, the ontological division between “nature” and “culture” itself, as well as the vectors of causality between them (“adaptation” or “symbolic ordering”), could not be randomly extended to other ways of life, since their understandings of the interaction between human and non-human elements could differ from ours. Finally, if these recognitions take place in tensions between conceptualization processes, an inevitable consequence is that the very anthropological thinking starts to question the use “per se” of the concept of culture as its basic ground of action, as we can observe in Latour:

Well, there are neither cultures – different or universal – nor a universal nature. There are only natures-cultures, which constitute the only possible basis for comparisons. From the moment we consider both the practices of mediation and the practices of purification, we perceive that neither the modern ones separate humans from non-humans, nor the “others” totally superimpose signs and things (LATOUR, 1994, p. 102).

If there is a process of contestation of the concept of culture, what would replace it? The recognition that the flows of the experienced “associate” human and non-human elements can be expressed by the well-known conceptual option of “socio-technical network,” well established by Bruno Latour: “there is an Ariadne’s Thread that would allow us to continually pass from the local to the global, from human to non-human. It is the thread of the network of practices and instruments, documents and translations” (LATOUR, 1994, p. 119). Thus, different forms of association between “active beings” are proposed, whether they are of technical, animal, vegetal, or human origin not apprehensible by preestablished vectors of ecological or symbolic causality. Another possibility, contesting that of Latour, would be Tim Ingold’s, expressed through the concept of “mesh” or “web” (INGOLD, 2015). According to it, the fundamental assumption is that “the organism (animal or human) must be understood not as a limited entity surrounded by an environment, but as an unlimited entanglement of lines within a fluid space” (INGOLD, 2015, p. 113). Thus, the author continues, living systems are characterized by a linkage, which “is both a condition for exercising the agenda and the foundation of skills.” That is, the different “worlds” would be “a life mesh(s) with tangled lines of growth and movement” (INGOLD, 2015, p. 111).

This process of profound reconfiguration of the status of the term “culture” within the anthropological debate has been driving some authors to state the existence of an “on-

tological turn” in anthropology, for replacing the long predominance of an epistemological or cognitivist orientation of the field. A good example can be expressed by the words of Viveiros de Castro, when stating that “[...] the notion of ontology is not employed here to suggest that the Indigenous thought expresses another metaphysics of the Being [...], but rather to emphasize that this thought is inseparable from a reality that constitutes their outward” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2001, p. 17).

Recognizing the inventive character of the concept of culture, as well as some of its aforementioned developments, demonstrate that, in addition to the effort for achieving equivalence between different elements, seeking to eliminate the evolutionary remnants in the anthropological debate, there is a “return” of the understanding of ways of life as complex totalities or totalizations, expressed in the use of terms such as “network” or “mesh.” On the other hand, an important “but” is posed to the question of causality, or determination, between “thought” and “action.” This does not mean, however, to deny the establishment of links between phenomena, but rather to acknowledge that they cannot be fixed a priori, and the multiplicity of different modes of association confirms and emphasizes the need for perspectives methodologically guided, though open and non-aprioristic, concerning different ways of life.

The criticism that ontological (LATOUR, 1994; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015) or phenomenological (INGOLD, 2015) anthropologists make about the cognitivist approach is that, by reducing the cultural phenomenon to “conceptualization,” “knowledge,” or “meaning,” such approach brings into the Western ontology the other ways of life, making them operate in a political dynamic whose field of possibilities is structured by the scientific perspective, even if its agents have good intentions and commitment. In this sense, the encounter between two “cultures” would imply something more than the approximation and dialogue between conceptions.

Viveiros de Castro, for example, states that in every intercultural encounter, the basic assumption is that of “equivocation”: “[...] it is not a subjective failure, but a tool of objectification,” says the author, “it is not an error nor an illusion [...], but the limiting condition of every social relation, a condition that itself becomes superobjectified in the so-called ‘intercultural’ relations, in which language games maximally diverge” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015, p. 93). It would not be a mistake or illusion because the pertinence of a “truth” or an unambiguous reality behind the conceptions would not be at stake, since different social existences would imply different realities. The interlocation between these “ways of life” would only engender a “dialogue” if there could be a translation process that, hence, would enable a communication that does not exclude the equivocation, but allows “controlling” it (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015). In this sense, “a good translation [...] is the one that betrays the target language, not the source language.” “A good translation,” the author continues, “is one that allows alien concepts to deform and subvert the translator’s conceptual toolbox so that the *intention* of the original language can be expressed within the new one, and hence transform the target language. Translation, treason, transformation” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015, p. 87).

That is, for the author, if equivocation is the premise, it is the basic assumption of the encounter between different elements, the estrangement, and the divergences of

understanding are a starting point of the interactions. Promoting the “control” of equivocations through a “betrayal translator’s translation,” would imply recognizing: (1) the potentiality of the latent conflict between different elements; (2) presuppositions and aprioristic schemes of understanding, even though “conceptual” and scientifically validated, are the basic ground for equivocation and the establishment of hierarchical schemes of conviviality, including for those who intend “to teach,” “to educate,” and “to train” the other; and, finally, (3) translating means transforming yourself by learning with the other, in a process that implies self-criticism of your existential prerogatives. Finally, it is worth noting that, for this perspective, controlling equivocation by translation would not consist in creating a condition of regulating universality for stabilizing differences: “The error or illusion par excellence consists, precisely, in imagining that the univocal exists beneath the equivocal, and that the anthropologist is its ventriloquist” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015, p. 95).

Anyway, what about the dialogue of knowledge?

It is at this point that we resume the dialogue of knowledge proposed by agroecology. Is it possible to locate cultural assumptions that meet its theoretical-conceptual construction in this debate? How can this exercise contribute to explaining the limits of this proposal and its developments?

Firstly, it is noticeable that the conception of the underlying culture of dialogue of knowledge operates in an epistemological/cognitivist condition of ecological-cultural orientation. This can be observed, for example, in the recurrent support that important trends of agroecology seek in ethnoscience. This implies stating that cultural assumptions settled in the agroecological debate are presented as simplifiers of the complexity of the involved social ways of life, because: (1) they are based on conceptions that aprioristically apply an operating model of cultural dynamics and; (2) they act on them based on these assumptions.

Secondly, as we have observed, the proposal of intercultural relationship that supports the dialogue of knowledge is constituted based on the harmonious encounter and the aspiration to univocity, to the extent that it is proposed as an epistemological ground of integration, via “dialogue,” between scientific and non-scientific knowledge. For a given anthropology, equivocation is the basic assumption of the encounter between different elements, and interlocution is hardly achieved in a common integrative language, but rather in the confrontation between different language games. Thus, a political process of agroecological construction can be thought of as a translation dynamics that aims to “control” the equivocation, not to eliminate it. This implies accepting that the scientific-political construction of agroecology has been created “within” and “by” confrontations, in the nonlinear tension between estrangement and approximation. Something which its stabilizing forces cannot conceal.

Thirdly, it is worth noting that the “dialogue” presupposition contributes to part of agroecological initiatives maintaining and updating colonizing political-epistemological actions – as rawly observed by Gerhardt (2014) – because its “dialogue” is constructed

within a field of possibilities structured in the scientific universe. As well as scientific ontology accepts several and different “conceptions” or “cultural worldviews” about “nature” (an assumption of your own and not necessarily of other ways of life), agroecology, for instance, accepts different “knowledges” for the construction of an “agroecosystem,” a term that is certainly exotic to any extra-scientific social reality. If the common denominator is scientific, the coadunation assumptions are as well, and the “traditional knowledge” will serve as the “expression” adapted to the ecological framework underlying it.

What would be the conditions, hence, of constructing a political dynamic of agroecological alterity, which could complexify, based on the contributions of anthropology, the consolidated idea of dialogue of knowledge? How, therefore, can we construct the epistemological project of agroecology from the perspective of interculturality without promoting dissociation between thought and action and guided by ideas of equivocation and translation?

Therefore, we proposed, in an incipient way and to be further investigated in other articles, that a political dynamic of agroecological alterity should be guided by two guidelines, one theoretical and another methodological.

Firstly, the idea of a double agroecological extensionality. That is, in addition to “an intervention of educational and transformative character” (CAPORAL and COSTABER, 2000, p. 32), although in a participatory way that is developed from the “I-other” relationship, a double learning vector could, first of all, be founded in the “other-I” sense (therefore, focused not on the teaching procedure, but on the act of learning). Thus, having as starting point the learning of the technician about the way of life of farmers and agriculturists, creating conditions for a counterpoint of the learning of farmers and agriculturists about the way of life of technicians. Thus, the double extensionality could consist in a *self-educational and self-transformative experience* in the tension between approximation and estrangement of technicians and farmers/agriculturists.

This would imply moving the focus of attention on the agroecological extension of popular education to the ethnographic experience. This, originated (but not reduced to) in the anthropological field, is configured as a principle of knowledge or method that is founded on two basic methodological procedures: the *in loco* experience (direct observation) and the oral survey (in the form of radically open interviews) of the researcher concerning the way of life to be investigated. Ethnography benefits from the estrangement-approximation tension between the ethnographer and the native to construct the affective-intellectual conditions of understanding and integrative description of such questioned world. A question that produces its double, namely the interest and curiosity of the native about the world of the ethnographer. It is based on ethnography that the translation proposal, as we analyzed in this study, is established. Radicalizing democratization conditions of this double condition of interest and curiosity about the world of the other has been the great contemporary anthropological challenge.

Finally, agroecological contexts of knowledge production and social transformation have much to contribute and benefit from this challenge. The starting point is the will to be totally immersed in it.

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Original Article

ON DIALOGUES AND EXISTENCES: A POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY TO AGROECOLOGY

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ON DIALOGUES AND EXISTENCES: A POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY TO AGROECOLOGY

Abstract: We intend to problematize the agroecological “dialogue of knowledge” and survey the conditions of anthropology for such problems. The fundamental argument is that, despite the proposal of non-hierarchical construction of agroecological knowledge (between “scientific” and “non-scientific” knowledge), its epistemological basis does not comprises the complex interactions produced among the agents in question, ambivalently contributing to a hierarchical and asymmetric relationship of power. We suggest that: the idea that agroecology promotes harmonious relations between scientists and farmers simplifies interactions tensioned by the dynamic approximation/estrangement; the conception of culture and cultural diversity implicit in the dialogue of knowledge is based on the dissociation between “thought” and “action”; a “political dynamics of alterity” would better define the agroecological relational scheme; the anthropological conception of translation would contribute to the promotion of a “double extensionality,” not based on the capacity to teach, but rather on the capacity to learn.

Keywords: agroecology; translation; dialogue of knowledge; double extensionality; interdisciplinarity

SOBRE DIÁLOGOS E EXISTÊNCIAS: UMA POSSÍVEL CONTRIBUIÇÃO DA ANTROPOLOGIA PARA A AGROECOLOGIA

Resumo: Este artigo pretende problematizar o “diálogo dos saberes” agroecológico e prospectar as condições que a antropologia dispõe para o tratamento dos problemas apresentados. O argumento fundamental é que, apesar da proposta de construção não hierárquica do conhecimento agroecológico (entre saberes “científicos” e “não científicos”), sua base epistemológica não dá conta das complexas interações produzidas entre os agentes em questão, contribuindo, de forma ambivalente, para uma relação hierárquica e assimétrica

de poder. Sugere-se que: a ideia de que a agroecologia promove relações harmoniosas entre cientistas e agricultores simplifica interações tensionadas pela dinâmica aproximação/estranhamento; a concepção de cultura e diversidade cultural implícita no diálogo de saberes está assentada na dissociação entre “pensamento” e “ação”; uma “dinâmica política da alteridade” definiria de forma mais adequada o esquema relacional agroecológico; e, enfim, a concepção antropológica de tradução contribuiria para a promoção de uma “dupla extensionalidade”, assentada não na capacidade de ensinar, mas de aprender.

Palavras-chave: agroecologia; tradução; diálogo de saberes; dupla extensionalidade; interdisciplinaridade

SOBRE DIÁLOGOS Y EXISTENCIAS: UNA POSIBLE CONTRIBUCIÓN DE LA ANTROPOLOGÍA PARA LA AGROECOLOGÍA

Resumen: Este artículo pretende problematizar el “diálogo de saberes” agroecológico y prospectar las condiciones de que dispone la antropología para resolver los problemas presentados. El argumento fundamental es que, a pesar de la propuesta de construcción no jerárquica del conocimiento agroecológico (entre saberes “científicos” y “no científicos”), su base epistemológica no da cuenta de las complejas interacciones producidas entre los agentes en cuestión, contribuyendo, de forma ambivalente, a una relación jerárquica y asimétrica de poder. Se sugiere que: la idea de que la agroecología promueve relaciones armoniosas simplifica las interacciones tensadas por la dinámica aproximación/extrañamiento; la concepción de cultura y diversidad cultural implícita en el diálogo de saberes está asentada en la disociación entre “pensamiento” y “acción”; una “dinámica política de la alteridad” definiría mejor el esquema relacional agroecológico; y la concepción antropológica de traducción contribuiría a la promoción de una “doble extensionalidad”, asentada no en la capacidad de enseñar, sino de aprender.

Palabras clave: agroecología; traducción; diálogo de saberes; doble extensionalidad; interdisciplinariedad.
