

**Terena agriculture and life-system. A speech and beyond**  
Agricultura e sistema de vida Terena. Um discurso e além  
*Agricultura y sistema de vida Terena. Un discurso y su más allá*

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**Abstract:** The paper is a commentary on the relationship between the life system of an indigenous community and some issues related to development. We structured the methodology around a core narrative provided by an indigenous leader. We present his speech and some annotations, in order to render explicit some of the claims and insights. We offer some comments in order to add context and to elaborate on the oral speech's intuitive dimension and ancestral wisdom. The paper aims at exposing this specific indigenous worldview concerning agriculture, education and development, embedded in a pedagogical tension between reporting the speech delivered to a group of students and bringing key highlights as well as literature references.

**Keywords:** traditional indigenous agroforestry; Terena community; indigenous education; land based learning; critical development studies.

**Resumo:** O artigo é um comentário sobre a relação entre o sistema de vida de uma Comunidade Indígena Terena e alguns temas relacionados ao Desenvolvimento. Estruturamos a metodologia ao redor de uma narrativa de base, o discurso de um líder indígena. Apresentamos a sua preleção, com algumas anotações, para explicitar melhor o seu contexto e o seu alcance. Adicionamos comentários que contextualizam e elaboram reflexões a partir da dimensão mais intuitiva da fala, rica de sabedoria ancestral. O texto objetiva expor uma visão indígena acerca da agricultura, educação e Desenvolvimento, na tensão entre o ato de expor uma fala apresentada a um grupo de estudantes, e acrescentar chaves de leitura e apontamentos da literatura.

**Palavras-chave:** agrofloresta tradicional indígena, comunidade Terena; educação indígena, aprendizagem baseada em terra, estudos críticos do desenvolvimento.

**Resumen:** El artículo comenta la relación entre el sistema de vida de una Comunidad Indígena Terena y algunos temas relacionados al Desarrollo. Se estructura alrededor de una narrativa de base, un discurso de un líder indígena. Presentamos su prelección, con algunas anotaciones, para explicitar mejor su contexto y su alcance. Añadimos comentarios que contextualizan y elaboran reflexiones a partir de la dimensión más intuitiva del habla, rica de sabiduría ancestral. El texto persigue una tensión pedagógica entre la transmisión de un discurso presentado a un grupo de estudiantes y algunas claves de lectura y apuntes que intentan exponer el modo indígena de pensar y actuar envolviendo la agricultura, la educación y el desarrollo, en un país que anda teniendo dificultades para oír su gente.

**Palabras clave:** agrofloresta tradicional indígena; comunidad Terena; educación indígena. aprendizaje basado en la tierra. estudios críticos del desarrollo.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

What follows is a speech delivered by an indigenous leader in the context of an educational activity, integrated by some comments and reflections. Its general framework is a presentation of the GATI Project, a joint initiative of the Brazilian government, two national and three international institutions<sup>5</sup>, and Brazilian indigenous peoples, to revitalize and resume indigenous agricultural approaches. This paper we devotes specific attention to the GATI project in relation to the Terena community.

The speech is a relevant testimony of a creative vision that addresses livelihood and food security as fully integrated within the natural environment dynamics. We presented some comments and footnotes in order to highlight the importance of the speech in relation to the relevance of the indigenous discourse in discussing sustainability and development in Brazil. Brazilian agriculture is being affected by a mainstreaming of intensive chemical methods and monoculture crops. This is seriously damaging the life cycle, the education and the productive activities of Brazilian population. Indigenous peoples are more sensitive to it, due to their deeper connection with the rhythms of the environment, as they are sensitive to the increasingly damages affecting the environment.

The context of the speech is a meeting during a “Winter School”, *i.e.* a set of educational activities centred on a field study involving a 10-day journey by a group of twenty-five master students and their academic team, visiting five different initiatives related to sustainability and tourism within the Mato Grosso do Sul State, Brazil. The activities were an initiative of a joint group of four Universities within the Sustainable Territorial Development (STEDE) Erasmus Master Mundus programme, *i.e.* the University of Padua, the University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, the Catholic University of Leuven and the Catholic University Dom Bosco<sup>6</sup>.

Leosmar Antonio delivered this specific speech at a meeting that lasted a whole day, at the Indigenous Land “Mãe Terra” (Mother Earth), where he is one of the leaders and teacher. He also coauthors this paper along with four others: Josemar de Campos Maciel, former Leosmar’ master degree supervisor, Alessio Surian, the pedagogical coordinator of the students’ study activities, and two Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne University STEDE students who participated in the Mãe Terra visit, Estela Brahmllari and Bibiane Tarasconi.

We recorded and transcribed the speech, with the consensus of Leosmar. We then transcribed it jointly (Josemar and Alessio)<sup>7</sup>. Leosmar and the two Erasmus students revised it and gave further contributions to the paper.

It is important to stress the “relevance” of the speech delivered by an indigenous leader to an international audience. What gives relevance to the speech is the context where it was delivered. Those who listened, at that moment, were in a position to disseminate its message at a national as well as at an international level. As it will be noticeable, the speech is both embedded in ancestral knowledge as well as proposing an innovative vision. In other words, on the one side, the speech of the indigenous leader is a “repetition” within of a knowledge chain that is held, repeated,

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<sup>5</sup> Fundação Nacional do Índio (Funai), Ministry of Environment (MMA), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), Global Environment Facility (GEF).

<sup>6</sup> The program website is hosted at: <https://em-stede.eu/>

<sup>7</sup> Recording was done with an Olympus digital voice recorder (WS-823) the device was not invisible during the speech, in order to avoid disturbances for the assembly.

celebrated and defended by the community he represents. On the other side, this very speech is situated in the context of a project that is part of a formal education initiative, in agreement with government's institutions with their own views of sustainability and market perspectives. This twofold discursive approach allows the speech to offer a transcending dimension, based on and documenting some of the current initiative by indigenous movements in Brazil.

## 2 AGRICULTURE AND TERENA LIFE-SYSTEM

The following is a written transcription (with minor corrections) of the speech:

### ***I Hospitality***

*When us, the Terenas, refer to foreign people, we call them "iningone", "those who eat from the same dish". We consider them as brothers, as we share our meals<sup>8</sup>.*

*For us, meeting with visitors is a strategic activity. We are seeing with welcoming eyes the fact that people with different nationalities are visiting us, in our ancestral home. We are hoping that you can turn into people that are able to echo our voice. This voice should become stronger and contrast the messages conveyed by mainstream media that are portraying us as a problem for society<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, this is an important moment in order to deconstruct the mainstream idea concerning indigenous people<sup>10</sup>.*

### ***II Indigenous and non-indigenous are suffering***

*As indigenous people are suffering the agribusiness expansion<sup>11</sup> onto indigenous land<sup>12</sup>, the whole of society is worse off, even the most privileged part of society. Unfortunately, we are living in a globalised world. Even the people that are not contributing to global climate change (aquecimento global) are heavily suffering because of climate change. Indigenous peoples and society are allied. Indeed, humanity and we are allied. To defend indigenous people's rights is to defend everybody's rights.*

We are going to talk about one of the few programmes designed with the participation and the effective contribution of indigenous people, the Territorial and Environmental Indigenous Land Management, GATI.

### ***III The GATI programme and hope***

The GATI programme has a long history. This history begins in 1992 in Rio where representatives from different countries met to discuss global environmental issues. Indigenous leaders understood that the various governments were accomplishing their environmental preservation goals mostly because of indigenous people sustaining and maintaining the forest. Indigenous movements began to demand policies that would

<sup>8</sup> Self-identification among Brazilian indigenous communities is complex but deserves a note. Two peoples that nowadays live close to each other in the same region, in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul are the Guarani Kaiowá, that distinguish themselves as people that emerge, gathered around the domestic fire (PEREIRA, 2016). The Terenas, on their turn, are very skilled in agricultural techniques and in general negotiations to improvise their livelihood (PEREIRA, 2016). However, both of them share domesticity as a means for the elaboration of thought and life system.

<sup>9</sup> The problems that indigenous populations endure facing Brazilian press are well known, and specialists report them to the interests on the land. E. G., Ijuim, Aguilera Urquiza and Urquiza (2016).

<sup>10</sup> In Brazil marginalization and criminalization of indigenous peoples is a common way to demobilize native peoples. Nonetheless, their role in the formation of the country is well documented (OLIVEIRA; ROCHA, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Holanda (2001), provides a sample of a well-documented fact.

<sup>12</sup> This refers almost verbatim to "missions" fostered by Brazilian government towards the West in order to occupy lands and make them fit the exploitation already happening elsewhere (VELHO, 2009).

strengthen their forest preservation practices. They demanded programmes that we could implement in all regions, not limited to the Amazon region. Usually, grants are limited to the Amazon region. We started to design a programme that would address all indigenous peoples. We set up an equal partnership involving both Brazilian public authorities and indigenous movements. This shared effort turned into the public GATI programme. It was the result of several seminars that took place throughout Brazil. Seminars allowed indigenous people to offer their views about the way to implement the new programme. As you can understand, this was a very slow process. The thinking process that started in 1992 turned into a project, partly implemented at the end of 2012. Very often government's programmes fail when implemented in the indigenous land because they have too short a preparation phase when compared to indigenous time. They do not respect indigenous time. Since the elaboration phase, the GATI programme took into consideration indigenous time. It was different, in a sense.

Unfortunately, many indigenous caciques, leaders that contributed to making the GATI programme viable they are no longer among ourselves. Us, the new generation that is participating in this programme, we acknowledge the importance of their goals and of making such goals come true.

The various seminars that took place throughout Brazil contributed to re-think current policies. The various indigenous leaders were contributing their views on the programme's lines of intervention. Some communities focused on agro-forestry issues; other communities gave priority to fruit processing within their region; each community was seeking from the programme something that would enhance the specificity of the local community. The GATI programme did not offer something new, but rather it came to support practices that were decaying and that needed reinforcement and management in a sustainable perspective.

We started to implement the GATI programme in 2013. We needed to make a major effort in order to raise awareness about it within our communities, to make our caciques aware of it as very often programmes deploy a technical language that needs a sort of decoding, so that our leaders can understand them<sup>13</sup>.

Brazilian areas were defined as "reference and experimental areas" within the GATI programme<sup>14</sup>. An objective was to address all Brazilian regions and therefore not to limit it to the Amazon region. Six indigenous lands were involved "experimental areas" in the programme in Mato Grosso do Sul: three of these areas are Guarani-Kaiowa areas in the South of the State, and three Terena areas in the Pantanal region. Among the latter, the Cachoerinha land was involved and so was involved the specificities of its villages. The GATI programme ended in 2015. Usually, when the programmes end, the activities in the villages end as well. As the programme was closing, we prepared ourselves in order to carry on the activities after the closing of the programmes. We set up an organisation (with legal status): "Indigenous Environmentalist Action Collective towards Agroecology and Sustainability" (Coletivo ambientalista indígena de ação para natureza agroecologia e sustentabilidade), Caianas. The name refers to "thinkers" within society, who in Terena are called Kayanas. Today it is Caianas that is coordinating the activities that are taking place after the end of the GATI programme<sup>15</sup>.

Agroecology is included in primary education, translated into restoring the agriculture seeds variety, restoring and caring for spring water, restoring Terena's agroforestry system,

<sup>13</sup> *Caciques*, the leaders, are often elder people and not always males, in the Terena community. They see themselves as guardians of the ancestral tradition. An interesting game is referred here, that is, the negotiation between the preservation of ancient practices and the incorporation of a more technical outlook. That is, the old and the new generations. A game that the Terena were forced to learn, and they did it reasonably well (PEREIRA, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Antonio, Sant'Ana and Melo (2016), address part of this process.

<sup>15</sup> This process is partially documented by Benites et al. (2016).

cultivating maracuja (passion fruit) and açaí within an agro-ecology system, cultivating the first creole cocoa crops in Mato Grosso do Sul, youth inclusion within this agro-ecological movement through audio-visual resources. We consider these convergent initiatives. We understand that we are living in a context that is facing several systemic problems. This is a resistance movement. While we are encouraging our kids to participate in this process, to get closer to the land (and to live off the land), they experience a contrast between messages, such as the idea that growing crops is something of the past and that the village is not a place that would offer a future to them. Because of this, one of our strategies has been to attract the kids to the land by using audio-visual technologies that present the work that we are implementing.

The Terena people appear in scientific literature, in a number of documents<sup>16</sup>. The mentions always present the Terena as people producing food. This concerned also the war with Paraguay when the Terena people generously participated together with the Brazilian army. The Caianas movement attempts to strengthen such culture of food self-reliance. We understand that full sovereignty means that people organize themselves in order to produce their own food in a healthy way. This is why it is important that at a very early age, our children learn how to grow their food and to contribute to school food. This is important to make our kids understand the importance of the land. The vegetable garden is not a place of the past but a space for freedom and socialization. Regardless of the fact that our young people are going to become doctors or dentists, what is important is that they are going to be able to continue to cultivate their food in a healthy way.

Another Caianas' initiative concerns the strengthening of our shaman practices. We do not think it is possible for somebody to adopt a sustainable attitude when this does not imply the spiritual dimension. Our understanding of the sustainability includes the cosmological and spiritual dimension, the interdependency of the natural, and the supra-natural dimensions with the social dimension. This supports the sustainability of everything we do, of all our initiatives and our actions<sup>17</sup>.

#### **IV Difficulties**

*Spring-water is an example of the difficulty to dialogue with other bodies. For example, a river's pollution might be the result of the pollution of just one segment such as the upstream portion and that might depend upon a farm. Often, the actors that are polluting the land and water do not adapt themselves to respect the environment unless they don't see an economic benefit<sup>18</sup>.*

*We have a concern in relation to the growing indigenous population and the reduced size of the indigenous land. Historians, archaeologists, anthropologists reported this indigenous area as an area of 36.000 hectares while today the Terenas own less than 3.000 hectares. This means that more than 33.000 hectares are still property of landowners<sup>19</sup>. We are worried about this. The landowners are using the land for agribusiness. They are not concerned about the future of the land. When we might recover it, the land will be in a poor and unproductive state.*

*The Aldeia Mãe Terra is an example of this. It was reclaimed, retomada at 4.00 on 28 November 2005. In Brazil, the land regularization process is very slow. The judicial system*

<sup>16</sup> Bittencourt and Ladeira (2000), Oliveira (2013) and Ximenes (2016).

<sup>17</sup> The incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems within the discussions related to life systems, that sometimes are hastily included under the umbrella of sustainability is both challenging and resourceful (GAUTHIER, 2011; VARGAS, 2011; 2012; FLEURY, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Colonial relations play a huge part in this game of misuse of the environment, as documented in some reference works (MIGNOLO 2005; QUIJANO, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Gilberto Azanha (2005) traces some of this history and spells out the myth of the unoccupied lands, frequently invoked when Brazilian government or elites refer to the legitimacy of the long process of occupation.

*is not favourable to indigenous people. The Brazilian State project does not make space for indigenous people. The judicial system keeps us waiting for verdicts concerning our territories' property act. We have been waiting for a long time. This is not happening through the judicial system. That is why we decided to self-demarcate our territories. This leads to retomadas. Through a retomada we re-claim back our traditional territory<sup>20</sup>.*

*When we did it in the case of the Aldeia Mãe Terra,<sup>21</sup> the land was much degraded. We needed urgently a process of restoration of the land. For us, it was as if someone had taken away our mother from us and mistreated her deeply. We had to take care of her again and over time, we were able to regenerate part of it. This process of restoring and giving life to the land, our mother, meant to have the "mata" growing again, allowing animals to come closer and to return to this land. It is important to take care of the forest. It is also a way to provide food to people. We are cultivating a great variety of crops over a small piece of land. We are doing it in the traditional way and not by offering GMO seeds to local communities as it is happening within the system that promotes monocultures. The way we are cultivating seeks to promote the autonomy of the local communities. It is our understanding that the Brazilian State is not favouring such autonomy. Several of the local varieties of species run the risk of disappearing and we are seeking to restore biodiversity. The richness of our heritage includes 19 varieties of cassava, 7 varieties of beans, 7 varieties of sweet potatoes, sugarcane, banana, rice. These varieties sustain rural people's food sovereignty<sup>22</sup>.*

*To support these activities we are also participating in a collective process that should also turn into meetings to discuss the territorial management of indigenous land. This process is called Agroecoindígena and in the first meeting 9 different indigenous peoples participated from 29 different communities across 9 different Mato Grosso do Sul municipalities to reflect together about the challenges facing our territory<sup>23</sup>. We are also welcoming guests from other countries to visit our territory and to understand how we manage the land and the importance of indigenous people in managing and protecting biodiversity and water in the Pantanal region. This is a strategy. It is a matter of deconstructing what it means to manage land. We are planning a second meeting in June 2019 with 38 different peoples from different Brazilian regions to reflect on territoriality and socio-economic resilience.*

*An additional activity concerns the drafting of an Environment and territorial management plan (Plano de gestão territorial Ambiental), i.e. mapping our territory from our own perspective which is underway. By doing this from our own perspective we can understand the condition of endangered species. This is enabling us to engage in bio planning. In this way, we aim at making proper use of our territory and at enabling future generations to benefit from our territory. Our territory provides water to very important rivers and it is strategic to the maintenance of the Paraguay River. Humanity, society and us, we are allies.*

*As Caianas, we also signed an agreement with the Mato Grosso do Sul State University. Within this partnership, we host students and offer our education to them, mainly to agricultural students. At university, students receive formal knowledge that supports the capitalistic*

<sup>20</sup> It is important to stress that a *retomada* is a movement of resistance and claiming back, not of invasion (CAVALCANTE, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> *Mãe Terra*, Mother Earth, is the same expression as in Pacha Mama, widely used by Latin American populations. More than an emotional reference, the idea is a particular political and social arrangement, sensitive to the links to the environment (ANJOS; FEHLAUER, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> The association between indigenous peoples and nature conservation is a well-documented feature of the Brazilian social tissue in general. Antonio Carlos Diegues (2000) provide a wide review of data about it.

<sup>23</sup> A partnership was established between EMBRAPA and AGRAER, Brazilian institutes of research and knowledge transfer, the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul and the Terenas. The first edition of the event took place in 2016. There is some documentation in official institutional homepages (<http://www.sedhast.ms.gov.br/agroecoindigena-ira-fortalecer-a-agroecologia-nas-comunidades-indigenas-e-dar-visibilidade-na-preservacao-do-bioma-pantanal/>).



*system. Hosting them on indigenous land is an opportunity to deconstruct such formal knowledge. We are trying to spark a dialogue between our thousands of years old traditional knowledge and knowledge from the university that has an affinity with our ideology and philosophy of life. So we invite students neither to feed knowledge nor to use technologies that have been used to eliminate us. Knowledge can free people but it can also oppress people. We do recognise the importance of scientific and academic knowledge in relation to the new reality that we are experiencing. For example, this concerns the dramatic fluctuation of rain periods and climate change. In relation to these changes, we understand that we have to promote inter-scientific dialogue.*

*For example, there is a series of books that attempt at the same time to document the process and to advance some reflection to motivate our younger generations to take part in this history<sup>24</sup>.*

To conclude our meeting we would like to sing together a Terena farewell song that says "see you at the next sundown".

### **3 SOME COMMENTS TO RESONATE A GENERATIVE MEETING**

There is a very ancient and rich tapestry of indigenous peoples native to Brazilian land (OLIVEIRA; ROCHA, 2006). Officially, the IBGE, Brazilian Institute for Demography and Statistics maintains a regular database that officially lists more than 260 different languages and some 254 different peoples<sup>25</sup>. It must be taken into account the fact that, in the Seventies, based upon developmentist assumptions, in Brazil there was the widespread idea that indigenous populations were either going to be extinguished soon, or else, those that would survive were to be considered *mestizos*, and not indigenous any longer<sup>26</sup>. Nonetheless, the indigenous populations resisted, albeit with difficulties. Some of them faced a serious risk of extinction. A major part of these populations still preserves specific insights and ancestral wisdom that other peoples can draw from, in order to integrate their worldview, especially when dealing with issues such as sustainability and respect for the environment.

The Terenas deserve special attention, because of their enormous capacity for improvisation and negotiation in adverse conditions. Thus, we would like to provide some comments to the above speech by presenting some historical considerations and then following up by addressing some key issues. Comments will touch upon the issue of the cultural reproduction of the community, given the importance that the Terena assign to the school. This appropriation of a foreign institution is important because it ensures the survival and the continuity of their worldviews within a communicative framework.

### **4 LAND, COSMOLOGIES AND LIVELIHOOD**

From a historical perspective, the relationship between Terena communities and territory is very specific. The formation of the current settlements and of its demography design has suffered from the events that took place in the XIX century. Border system changes in Latin

<sup>24</sup> Antonio, Sant'Ana and Melo (2016); Benites *et al.* (2016); Bavaresco and Menezes (2014); Siqueira Jr. (2016).

<sup>25</sup> IBGE (2012). Available at the homepage of the Instituto Socioambiental (Socio-Environmental Institute): [https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Quantos\\_s%C3%A3o%3F](https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Quantos_s%C3%A3o%3F)

<sup>26</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss (1996) wrote a famous manifesto that adopted the extinction idea. Fortunately, he was wrong. And so was Davis (1978) who somehow positions them as victims.

America and the war by Brazil, Argentina and Chile against Paraguay deeply affected the land tenure by the Terenas (BITTENCOURT; LADEIRA, 2000).

During the war they volunteered in huge numbers to enroll in the Brazilian army and, in other cases, they offered support to the Brazilian war initiatives (SANTOS; FERREIRA, 2017). At the end of the war, the Brazilian central government had altered the system of land tenure, giving to settlers the territories that formerly belonged to the indigenous peoples, in order to form a social and productive system that had more points of contact with the modern state. This approach upheld a vision and a relationship with the environment, which privileged occupying and transforming the land into a kind of rural factory in order to produce commodities for the development of the Big Country (BRASIL, 1975).

For the Terenas returning from the war and finding their land occupied and transformed, triggered a kind of a diaspora within their own land (SEBASTIÃO, 2016). First, they became workers (*peões*) for farmers who owned the lands that had previously belonged to the Terenas. Later they became people “protected” by the State and restricted to some reservations<sup>27</sup>. However, this contrasted with Terena’s view of territory and of land tenure.

To begin with, Brazilian indigenous peoples call each other “relatives”, and there is a great deal of fluidity in their relation to the environment and specifically, to land tenure. Although it is improper to describe them as nomadic people, the notions of fixed borders, limits and militarization, *i.e.*, the need to work inside the roman/modern framework of “*se vis pacem para bellum*” is very abstract to them. The frontiers and the imposition of the languages of the colonizers, such as Spanish (in Paraguay and Bolivia) and Portuguese in Brazil, in their ancestral occupied lands, was a first interference in a life-system mainly linked to the cultivation of ties and linked to agricultural practices (PEREIRA, 2009). It brought and it is still bringing a good deal of challenges to adaptation capacity<sup>28</sup>.

In the case of the Terenas, the relationship with those abstract notions gave rise to different stances of improvisation that shaped their actual configuration. They made a major effort to remain in the lands they formerly lived in, trying to cultivate those areas that could opt out of the green revolution. For the Terenas the whole problem with the land began with the Paraguay war (1864-1870) and it worsened through the establishment of the Brazilian Republic and its institutions, oscillating between the attempt to protect and to domesticate indigenous populations.

More recently, with the expansion of intensive agribusiness, its aggressive approach to land and its enhanced productive system, Terenas’ agroecological approach has become a political move of resistance and social action. As we have seen above, the GATI project spread across the whole of Brazil serving as a signpost for new potential perspectives addressing the big issue of sustainability. In addition, beyond the agricultural and sustainability discourse, one can see a movement towards documenting, claiming and enforcing the law in terms of the recognition

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<sup>27</sup> This process concerned the Brazilian areas that hosted Terena populations. As early as in 1960, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira had already documented what he termed as a kind of “assimilation” (CARDOSO DE OLIVEIRA, 1960). One can see an alternative view offered by the first Terena to become a doctor in Brazil (CARDOSO, 2004) and by Vargas (2011). They enhance the negotiation dimension of such process as well as a strong sense of survival and resistance by the Terenas. In a similar way, Monteiro (2009) notes that amongst the Terenas the ability to negotiate and to redesign identities spreads even to religion.

<sup>28</sup> There is a number of studies trying to understand the phenomenon of the multiple meanings of frontiers and landscape for populations artificially gathered in the same space. A good example is an essay by Costa (2015).



and legalization of indigenous lands by the Brazilian state. From this perspective, Leosmar's discourse links together *retomadas* and agricultural activities. The core tension is between land tenure in relation to productivity vs. ancestrality. The indigenous communities battle hard in order to ensure both, even against the bad will of a major sector of the Brazilian establishment, as documented by authors such as QUEIROZ (2015).

A second important element to take into account is the specific Terenas worldview within the general framework of indigenous people's worldviews. In this domain, there is a good number of differences and specificities. The academic attempt to study them and to document them is just making the first steps, as only recently indigenous communities are being perceived as having an efficient and interesting way of positioning themselves in relation to the environment and to other cultures. One word that is very common and that betrays this situation in Brazil is *tutela* (guardianship). Since its inception, the Brazilian State has dealt with indigenous communities as vulnerable and passive ones. This has led to abuses and extinctions. This situation is unacceptable and the Country has to overcome it<sup>29</sup>. In spite of their noteworthy kindness and proneness to negotiate and to accept visitors and hosts, the Terenas endured waves of violence from the Brazilian State and institutions (SEBASTIÃO, 2016). The most significant form of violence has been the progressive restriction of Terenas access to their ancestral lands. This restriction came together with the attempt to impose the confinement in small and fragmented reservations. The GATI project was an attempt to move beyond this restriction.

In fact, the indigenous movement that appears as an effort of pacific resistance develops as a net of negotiations and strategies. These strategies have deep roots in ancestral knowledge. One of the most important ones is the well-known idea that one cannot distinguish sharply between an indigenous individual and his/her experience of the environment. Indigenous peoples do not see their identity as separate from the Land and its flows. A famous indigenous way of saying states that in the view of the peoples of the forest the land does not belong to the indigenous people because the indigenous people belong to the land. The whole idea of the hiatus between the human species and the environment was a strategy built to give more space to efforts of submission and exploitation of the environment, gradually converted into a deposit of resources<sup>30</sup>. This worldview, that implies a move of splitting strategy, during the evolution of Western science, is strange and even hostile from an indigenous point of view. Indigenous see it as plunder, an illegitimate move against the flow of life (SHIVA, 2016b).

This difference appears plastically, described in the daily life of agriculture in a common Terena village, but especially at the *Mãe Terra* land, as a respect for the rhythms of each species, which implies a sense of the interaction that takes place amongst water, plants, soil and animals. The Terenas cannot be reduced to the time of the working day, that is, the time of the watch. Rather it concerns systematic following of specific rhythms of the environment, whose pace is set by the "owner of the forest", that sometimes mingles with the very forest, sometimes gets a Christianized face. What is specific and becomes visible in this different approach to the environment, it can be touched and sensed in the way the Terenas appropriate schooling, cultural transmission and the creation of knowledge, which is the topic of the next paragraphs.

<sup>29</sup> In that direction, Lima (2015) presents a recent manifesto. Discursively the appearance and the use of the word guardianship is functional to hide the project of vassalage and subalternity.

<sup>30</sup> Shiva (2016a) points to the importance of recovering a worldview that does not divide sharply between environment and human beings, overcoming what is by now a typical westernized and abstract frame of mind.

## 5 PEDAGOGICAL DIVERSITY, LAND ISSUES IN BRAZIL AND THE PROBLEM OF SUSTAINABILITY

While Brazil offers very limited recognition of indigenous people educational rationale and perspectives (FLEURI, 2018, p. 234), from a decolonial perspective, scholars such as Gauthier (2011) recognize indigenous knowledge as scientific knowledge which deserves both an attitude of respect concerning the underlying epistemological beliefs as well as an understanding of methodological ways implied in producing such knowledge. It is necessary, nevertheless, to dedicate attention to the specific appropriation of the schooling system and its products, with a particular indigenous outlook and specificities in narratives and frameworks (VARGAS, 2015). Leosmar states that such an approach leads to the recognition of the spiritual and supernatural dimension in conceptualizing “sustainability”. This recognition shows affinity with the perspective summarized by Vandana Shiva and rooted in the Chipko forest conservation movement:

I think real science has to be a spiritual endeavour because real science is understanding deep patterns, understanding lasting process, and understanding how things hang together. Spirituality is the same thing. It is about understanding our place in the universe, it is about connecting to the rest of life, and that connection creates, in its very existence, a humility of you just being a small part of a very, very large, limitless place. And while creating humility in you, it also creates a responsibility that what you do has an impact on a lot — on the whole fabric, on the whole web of life. (SHIVA; MERLINO, 2014).

The Chipko movement has deep roots in Hindi spirituality, but it also has a strong political grip, in the sense that Himalayans defend their land, but also defend themselves against the aggression typical of modernity, in an analogy with the Terena people (HAIGH, 1988; SINGHAL; LUBJUN, 2010).

How to nurture this sense of connection and responsibility? The appropriation of school by the Terena’s in Mato Grosso do Sul favours indigenous teachers transforming schooling

in an important mechanism for their political thoughts and as a place to understand stories, reviving memories and Terena’s language, through which they perform a reading of the past and strengthens the group’s historical memory, which legitimizes the current demands for rights, especially territorial. (VARGAS; CASTRO, 2015).

During the STEDE students visit the Terena’s Mae Terra Aldeia it was remarkable to see that what affected students the most in the dialogue with Leosmar Antonio was the acknowledgement of the supra-natural and ancestral dimension in discussing sustainability and the interdependency of the spiritual dimension with the natural and social dimensions. Some of the shared insights and impressions will be unfolded here, in order to answer a specific call that has been reported from the speech, above. It is, namely, the idea that there is, surely, something dense to be expressed and spread about the whole experience of non-indigenous meeting indigenous people and effective learning with their kindness and sophistication.

As a first step, one must emphasize show Terena’s Mae Terra core pedagogic issue was and is understood as the reproduction of the ancestral life-system<sup>31</sup>. This was identified with the teacher of the School (Maria) encouraging children to re-connect with their environment, their language and their (ancestral) narratives through vegetable garden activities. Such activities did not have a primarily “functional” dimension, *i.e.* they were not meant to give them a productive

<sup>31</sup> This is a common attitude among most indigenous communities (AZEVEDO, 2009).

responsibility as the vegetable garden responsibility is Maria's husband. Children contribute with "complementary" actions, *i.e.* in the first place, they are not encouraged to "perform" / to develop a competence but rather to get acquainted with the garden and its season and the opportunities they offer children to explore their native language. This is a matter of cognitive surprise for STEDE students whose pedagogy and curricula are based on competences – namely, a performative framework, and on a definition of sustainability that provides no room for the supra-natural and spiritual dimension and hardly takes into account the cultural dimension, as it favors a tri-dimensional analysis based on economic, natural, and social data.

STEDE students' appreciation of re-conceptualizing "sustainability" through a "spiritual" lens was evident in the immediate feedback they provided to the Terenas at Mae Terra and in video-recorded interviews that served as reflective exercise at the end of their stay in Mato Grosso do Sul. One student, Estela Brahimllari summarizes STEDE students' understanding of Mae Terra's worldview in the following way:

*Despite the specific socio-cultural context, the visit of the Terena Community brought an interesting insight into issues recurrent in our home countries. It was interesting to discover an unusual mindset on familiar issues and reflect on the possible influencers of such attitude.*

*For instance, it was interesting to discover how young people went away to study and then came back to live and work in the community while there is a tendency worldwide of young professionals leaving the countryside to live and work in the big cities. While questioned on the subject, one of the young people who had recently finished her studies, admitted the internal struggle and doubts about her future once confronted with the possibility of living in the city. Her choice of returning in the community appeared to be not a simple emotional one, but the rational choice of a professional who understands deeply the potential and needs of the land she grew up in and the contribution she could provide to her community's work.*

*In addition, it was impressive to notice and feel the deep respect and care for the land and nature; the application of scientific and indigenous knowledge wholeheartedly and without reservations despite an unclear legal ownership of the land.*

This "generosity" triggered reflection among the STEDE students who discussed Terenas' motivation to invest "so much on a land they don't legally own". To STEDE students Terenas' actions seemed "much focused on the present while being projected in an unclear future" as they feared that in a few years most of the land may not belong to them or their children anymore.

Nonetheless, Estela Brahimllari observes that:

The interaction with nature appears to be a "generous giving and humble receiving" relationship entrenched in the present as a commitment that goes beyond the formal regulation of the relationship between humans and land. Leosmar referred to this interaction as 'their duty towards Mother Earth'. This attitude was touching and stupefying at the same time for most of us. Reflecting on the above-mentioned, the spiritual dimension appears to be the central influencing factor, which is missing in other realities that are lost in the rigid and fast lifestyle of modern societies. The spiritual dimension is cultivated in children through their interaction with the environment and becomes stronger with age. Thus, the discussion about sustainability during this visit came not as the usual rhetoric discourse but rather as a quest for balance between the inner, intangible and the outer, material dimensions of human existence.

A second STEDE student, Bibiane Tarasconi, shared her impressions about the experience in Mãe Terra with Terenas as follows:

It was the first time I heard a mention of spirituality in an academic context. Leosmar was very precise when he talked about it, meaning that we cannot discuss sustainability neglecting the spiritual dimension. By that, I understand that spirituality is to connect with our ancient roots, our origins, to realize that we are only a part of the whole living system and that we have to contribute to it to continue existing in a sustainable way. Historically indigenous people have a deep connection to the land as they see themselves as part of it. That is why they have a great responsibility to take care of the land, as previously mentioned in the quote by Shiva and Merlino (2014). Land ownership is not the most important issue for them because they do not see the limits between the land and the community, as they are deeply connected and interacting. However, they have to fight for their right to stay in the land. Moreover, there is a strong and genuine sense of generosity and fraternity among them, e.g. when a family faces difficulties due to a scarce harvest, the others will provide food to this family. There is a striking cooperation among them and a sense of belonging.

Addressing the methodological aspects of her academic studies, Bibiane Tarasconi observes that:

Since the beginning of the Master programme, the students had a few different field works, always with a very well defined and somehow strict methodological structure. However, during this visit we were all invited to feel free to feel, to let our hearts connect to the words of Leosmar and to interact with the reality lived by the Terenas. Before the visit, the pedagogical coordinator oriented us in this sense: “Be open. Observe a lot. Interact and especially, don’t think about framing the reality”. By letting the information flow and having the sensibility to identify and retain the most useful information for each of us, the students realised that knowledge does not always come in the form of a scientific article or a published book. Oral ancient knowledge is of great importance and has a unique value because it is much harder to get, and it is constantly evolving according to the narrator. It is precious!

STEDE students noticed a gap between their usual way of framing their field of study and the introduction to sustainability they heard at Mãe Terra. This gap is at the core of what authors such as Matthew Wildcat and his colleagues term as “land-based pedagogy”, a decolonizing way of learning. It is “resurging and sustaining Indigenous life and knowledge, acts in direct contestation to settler colonialism and its drive to eliminate Indigenous life and Indigenous claims to land” (WILDCAT; MCDONALD; IRLBACHER-FOX; COULTHARD, 2014, p. III).

Such educational perspective highlights how the expansion and the structuring of mass education contributed to alienate “educated” humans from their body and from the natural environment they live in. In particular, Shiva (2010) highlights the major cultural change that accompanied the industrial revolution and the development discourse in terms of the understanding of “resource”: from a part of nature implying life to a commodity. The root of the Latin verb “surgere” meant a spring, an act of continually rising from the ground.

The concept thus highlighted nature’s power of self-regeneration and called attention to her prodigious creativity. Moreover, it implied an ancient idea about the relationship between humans and nature: that the earth bestows gifts on humans who, in turn, are well advised to show diligence in order not to suffocate her generosity. In early modern times, ‘resource’ therefore suggested reciprocity along with regeneration. With the advent of industrialism and colonialism, however, a conceptual break occurred. ‘Natural resources’ became those parts of nature which were required as inputs for industrial production and colonial trade. (SHIVA, 2010, p. 228).

Land-based learning addresses this “conceptual break” and it shows affinities with Guilherme (2015) observation that there should be a more comprehensive and careful “understanding of

education when focusing on the issue of minorities, such as Indigenous peoples, so that we do not impose upon them a worldview that is alien and meaningless". Guilherme (2015) words of warning take into account the fact that traditionally missionaries such as Jesuits, Franciscans, and Salesians were the main institutional providers of education and schooling to local indigenous children. Also, that as native speakers diminish rapidly, die or become culturally assimilated by other groups the phenomenon of "language-death and rapid cultural change" appears to be accelerating (BOKOVA, 2012). Nonetheless, the 2010 census indicates that 246,793 indigenous students (aged 7-14) were into primary school (IBGE, 2010), an increase since the 2005 census. The specific features of indigenous pedagogies suggest the opportunity to support and to investigate the methodological dimension of teacher-training courses aimed solely at training native indigenous teachers. While their offer is still scarce, their number and geographical spread<sup>32</sup> make it relevant to review and to share the educational approaches and practices of those that are taking or took place.

## 5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

A group of foreign students, led by a team of teachers, visits an indigenous land in search of a pedagogical experience. What they find goes beyond it. To begin with, they were offered what is documented here, a speech that is very common amongst Brazilian indigenous peoples, and that provides an example of how deeply committed they are to the preservation of the environment. Second, they could experience of a way of seeing the environment that is not reductive or minimalistic, as a simple material background for a given life-system. Rather, it glows, one can experience it as a living whole, and a complex set of different systems. One has to learn how to interact with them, through specific educational activities and through a carefully organized daily life.

The main idea behind this whole reflection has something to do with a phenomenological gesture and with an active pedagogical perspective. Mainly, it has to do with the idea that sustainability can become a discussion centred on the lived experiences. The Terenas offer to the visitors some food that they prepare, and some of the dishes are made of Cassava or Mandioca, as they term it.

This has been their gift to civilization and humankind, the domestication of a vegetal species, which is of major importance for a relevant sector of the peoples in Brazil and of Latin America. Moreover, this very act is a call, a testimony that demands serious consideration. In fact, in order to produce this innovation, they have not destroyed, but rather they have conserved a land that preserves biodiversity, obeying to the authority of ancestral wisdom, resonating it.

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<sup>32</sup> Courses took place at the initiative of the University of the State of Mato Grosso (Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso [UNEMAT]), the Federal University of the State of Roraima (Universidade Federal de Roraima; UFRR), the University of the State of Amazonas (Universidade Estadual do Amazonas [UEA]), the Federal University of the State of Minas Gerais (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais [UFMG]), the Federal University of the State of Santa Catarina (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina [UFSC]), Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP), in partnership with the Forum of Indigenous Teachers of the State of São Paulo (*Fórum de professores indígenas do Estado de São Paulo [FAPISP]*).

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