

On the modes of existence and resistance: how Brazilian indigenous-inspired thinking can forge a communication by equivocation

Evandro J. M. Laia¹

Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto

evandro.medeiros@ufop.edu.br

Abstract

The disrespect for Brazilian indigenous peoples during the administration of former President Jair Bolsonaro shows an ethnocentric look and reinforces the history of a country in which resist not only epistemologies, but a diversity of disputing ontologies. Here lies matrices of thought that enable the imagination of other possible worlds, both in the proposal of the Manifesto Antropófago, by the poet Oswald de Andrade, and in the work of the writer João Guimarães Rosa. What we propose is no longer to take the thoughts of original peoples

as metaphors, but as analogues of concepts, taking seriously the possibility of building a translation of worlds inspired by the Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa, who alerts us, in his book-report, about the imminent fall of the sky, and the translation work of the indigenous Ailton Krenak, and his ideias to postpone the end of the world. It is from these points that we propose an approach that takes the process of mediation of the translation of shamanic worlds as a model for thinking about what we call communication by equivocation.

Keywords: Amerindian Perspectivism, anthropology, ontological turn, translation, communication by equivocation.

Sobre os modos de existência e resistência: como o pensamento brasileiro de inspiração indigenista pode forjar uma comunicação por equívoco

Resumo

O desrespeito pelos povos indígenas brasileiros durante o governo do anterior presidente Jair Bolsonaro demonstra um olhar etnocêntrico e reforça a história de um país em que resistem não apenas epistemologias, mas uma diversidade de ontologias em disputa. Residem aqui matrizes de pensamento que possibilitam a imaginação de outros mundos possíveis, tanto na proposta do Manifesto Antropófago, do poeta Oswald de Andrade, quanto na obra do escritor João Guimarães Rosa. O que propomos é não mais tomar os pensamentos dos povos originários como metáforas, mas como analogias

de conceitos, levando a sério a possibilidade de construir uma tradução de mundos inspirada no Yanomamishaman Davi Kopenawa, que nos alerta, em seu livro-reportagem, sobre a iminente queda do céu, e no trabalho de tradução do indígena Ailton Krenak, e suas ideias para adiar o fim do mundo. É a partir desses pontos que propomos uma abordagem que toma o processo de mediação da tradução de mundos xamânicos como modelo para pensar o que chamamos de comunicação por equívoco.

Palavras-chave: Perspetivismo ameríndio, antropologia, viragem ontológica, tradução, comunicação por equívoco.

1. Professor at Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP) - Brazil and Associated Researcher from the PhD Program in Communication at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora. PhD in Communication and Culture at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro with an internship at Applied Anthropology Department of Columbia University - Teachers' College - New York City. Permanent professor of the Postgraduate Program in Communication at UFOP and founding member of Emergências: coletivo de pesquisa, extensão e ativismo em comunicação (CNPq/UFOP).

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Introduction

On January 24, 2020, the former President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, in an interview about the newly created Amazon Council that would be chaired by the former vice president, the military Hamilton Mourão, made the following statement: “Increasingly, indigenous are human beings just like us. So we are going to make them integrate with society and really own their indigenous land, this is what we want here” (Corrêa, 2020). The speech was made in a live broadcast, over the internet, as the former president does weekly. The statement had negative repercussions among indigenous organizations in Brazil and abroad, after 2019, the first year of Bolsonaro’s presidency, in which, among other actions to disrespect diversity, the largest increase in the number of fires was registered in the Brazilian Amazon over the past 11 years, according to INPE (National Institute for Space Research). As a result of a dismantling policy, more than 25% of the Pantanal burned in flames in 2020, a historic record. And the fires in the Amazon, a humid forest, also surpassed 2019 marks, a year in which the number had already been 30% higher than the annual average (Ker, 2020).

The height of the government’s denial policy may have been the former president’s speech at the general debate of the 75th Session of the General Assembly of the UN, on September 22, 2020, when he stated that there are no fires in the Amazon forest because it is humid and that small fires are caused by the natives themselves. “The fires happen in practically the same places, in the eastern surroundings of the Forest, where the caboclo and indigenous burn their swiddens in search of their survival, in already deforested areas” (United Nation, 2020). In this same speech, he also affirmed the denial with which he dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic, considering that the Brazilian press politicized the virus, causing panic in the population. A few months later, in April 2021, when Brazil became one of the world’s epicenters of the pandemic, government interference in the health crisis and suspicions of corruption in the negotiation for the purchase of vaccines led to the creation of a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI) in National Congress to investigate the case (Castro, 2021).

Brazil is experiencing a process of social upheaval, of settling accounts with its colonial past. We observe this from the events of June 2013 protests, which took to the streets of the country, in the wake of international movements in networks, such as the Arab Spring, 15M and Occupy Wall Street (Castells, 2013). In the wake of this, President Dilma Rousseff was removed from her position in a coup, in 2016. Two years later, Jair Messias Bolsonaro was elected president of Brazil, in an election marked by the impossibility of participation of the then former President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, favorite in the polls, due to an impediment caused by his arrest on suspicion of corruption in an investigation full of inconsistencies, to the point that he was found not guilty a few years later. Jair Bolsonaro’s electoral campaign was marked by a process of disseminating false information that continued as a hallmark of his administration, including throughout the new Coronavirus pandemic (Laia & Guimarães, 2021). All this seems to have surfaced, or revealed, in Brazil, the wounds not only of the exploratory economic model backed by the colonial period, but also the intolerance, prejudice and disrespect for difference.

It is from this position that we think of mediation from a certain idea of translation in the experience of shamans, world translators, cosmology diplomats, par excellence. It is in the experience of accessing the possible others that they return to tell what they saw, negotiate between the parties and make the world(s) work, holding the sky above our heads, in the words of the Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa. Our proposal is that the translation of worlds from the Yanomami perspective is a model for thinking about what we call communication by equivocation, a mediation that allows the passage of difference from one side to the other in a less reductive way. For this very reason, this translation is of a type that deforms the source language and the target language, assuming the mistakes in the passage as points from which it is necessary to create, invent, make hacks. It is in these nodes that the possibility of communicating through difference resides.

It is productive, at this point, to resume the previous steps of this research. From field observations made during the World Cup, in Rio de Janeiro, in 2014, and in the protests of the Black Lives Matter movement, in New York, in 2015, we concluded that the entry of new actors in the media communication ecosystem provoked what we called journalism in equivocation (Laia, 2020). This theoretical construction, based on a certain idea of equivocation inherited Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's (2015) concept, proposes to see journalism from 4 markers:

1) journalism is a socio-technical network; 2) therefore, it is necessary to be attentive not only to the activities within the newsrooms, but to the entire production network of reports, expanding the scope of research; 3) as a socio-technical network, journalism is the flow of assemblages and not the things themselves, therefore, the concept of journalism is temporary and changes; and 4) the Theory of Journalism in Equivocation presents itself as a relational approach that invents concepts and draws conclusions from the design of the relationships between entities, and not from their appointments at the starting point of the research. (Laia, 2020, p.9-10)

A series of other applications of the concept, in our own work and in those of other researchers, were guided by the Cartography of Controversies (Latour, 2005), a method marked, especially, by the observation of the traces of the actors, humans and non-humans, in a network of relationships. It is also important to note that journalism in equivocation does not qualify itself as a binary practice, but a gradient one: "What exists are tones, shades of equivocation; a gradient, a palette of colors between purification and translation" (Neto & Laia, 2021, p.15), according to the observations of media news. There are more and less equivocate translations, that is, they point more or less to the maintenance of difference as such.

The approximation of the translation experience of journalism with indigenous interspecific communication, which proved to be productive and feasible, was the starting point for a broader challenge, which is posed here: to overcome the limits of these concepts to propose the equivocation as a place of communication, beyond journalism, betting on equivocate translation as a parameter to think about contemporary communication processes. In this paper, we present the bases of the concept of equivocation, based on Brazilian thinkers, in line with the themes of contemporary anthropology, to, from there, design what I call communication by equivocation.

The proposal to take analogues of concepts from non-Western peoples as a starting point is part of what has been called the Ontological Turn, in reference to the Linguistic Turn. This very term seems problematic to us since the very idea of ontology takes up the starting point of Philosophy, that invention of the West. However, due to the lack of a better way to refer to this, we continue to provisionally use this name to deal exactly with the way in which contemporary thinkers have taken non-Western peoples as a reference to think about the West. There is nothing new about this, despite the emergence of the topic. We begin this paper by presenting a chronological path pointing to bets on a equivocated translation, but still only inspired by the thought of the native peoples of Brazil: in the practice of Tupinambá anthropophagy, in the case of Oswald de Andrade; in the way of existence of the *sertanejos caboclos*, in the case of João Guimarães Rosa. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and other anthropologists advance in this direction, collecting experiences of shamanic translation and translating them to the white academic world in his work, of which, what interests us greatly is the concept of equivocation, an important operator to advance in the thought of the forest.

But this is just the way to reach the point where we have the presentation of an equivocated translation in an autonomous way, from the experience of the native peoples from Brazil *per se*, directly, as we see in the oral speech of Davi Kopenawa, recorded in book by Bruce Albert, and in the work of Ailton Krenak. Finally, to advance the argument, we clarify that this is a specific cut, and why not say, per-

sonal, of a researcher interested in thinking about a possible communication by equivocation not only in the Amerindian context, but also in the practices of the urban world, in which, clandestinely, almost subversively, difference finds ways to communicate. Even so, it is neither easy nor safe to draw parallels with the contemporary urban cosmos, so care guides this approach, but it is not a guarantee of success.

Animism Revisited

The itinerary that we propose towards a conceptual twist based on the mediation model of trans-specific communication of native peoples must start from the very world from which this model emerges, from the life and speech of women and men in the forest. As we have previously noted, the presupposition of other ontologies is itself a way of looking at other ways of existing from the place of modern Western civilization. Having clarified these issues, we admit, however, that in this paper, for the purposes of translation to the academic world, we assume a kind of betrayal, when once again, we start from the global north thought to think about this twist. But this is done with a view to the goal of our argument's arrival: taking texts, oral or written, of the original peoples, not as a metaphor, but in the same way as we allow ourselves to access texts that are recognizably academic. In other words: taking as a way of getting to know the world what was considered "primitive" until recently, under the label of animism.

The idea that it is necessary to isolate the object to be analyzed, fundamental to the empirical method of modern science, is founded on the withdrawal of the agency from being, cutting it out of the context in which it is inserted, breaking the whole existing between knowledge and knowledgeable, according to anthropologist Nurit Bird-David (1999). She explains this operation using a metaphor: a conversation between a human and a tree, like two entities capable of agency, which she calls relational epistemology: it only makes sense to know the tree from living with it in the environment, in the relationship, a model of access to knowledge practiced in non-modern social formations. If observed by a Westerner, a conversation between a human and a tree may not seem like a "serious" way of acquiring knowledge, considering the ontological separation between nature and culture, which originated the objectivist paradigm that dominates science. The method epistemologically considered "serious" would then involve cutting a piece of the tree to take it to the laboratory, where knowledge can be "discovered", systematized and later "acquired".

At this point, it is necessary to revisit the concept of animism, returning to David-Bird. The first definition, according to the researcher, appears in *Primitive Culture*, from 1871, developed by Burnett Tylor in the midst of scientism and the discoveries of the 19th century. For her, animism and science form an antithesis, the "primitive" is seen as delusional, a direction that largely inspired later anthropological theories. It is Claude Lévi-Strauss who first has a look that accepts non-Western knowledge as a complete world view. But, for that, it ends up reducing this vision to symbolic representation, without questioning the dualism of modern thought, according to the author. It "removes" the "primitive" from nature and places it in culture, without questioning this division, and without realizing that it may not make sense to non-Western peoples.

The context in which men and trees exchange information, as two entities with the capacity of agency, Bird-David calls relational epistemology: it only makes sense to know the tree from living with it in the environment, in the relationship, a model of access to knowledge practiced in non-modern social formations.

If the object of modernist epistemology is a totalizing scheme of separated essences, approached ideally from a separated viewpoint, the object of this animistic knowledge is understanding relatedness from a related point of view within the shifting horizons of the related viewer. (...) Both ways are real and valid. Each has its limits and its strengths. (David-Bird, 1999, p.77-78)

It is from this perspective that Eduardo Viveiros de Castro defines animism “as the idea that others that exist besides humans are people” (Castro, 2015, p.80). This is a fundamental assumption of his Amerindian Perspectivism, an anthropological theory founded on the ontology of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. One of the aspects of this proposal, which follows the movement of ontological turning, in Anthropology, is in the observation of the relationship of Amerindian peoples with objects, animals and artifacts: just as humans use objects and non-human beings, non-humans, objects or not, also use humans. There is no clear and exclusive separation between human and nature.

Phillippe Descola proposes a map to understand the possible arrangements of the nature-culture binomial in several different cosmologies. We need to consider that the very fact of organizing such diverse experiences, from such different worlds, configures itself as a type of reduction that serves very well to a communication that seeks efficiency, smoothing out differences, betting on a type of reductive mediation that works from the standard. Still, and precisely because this is a translation of non-Western ways of existence to the West, it is worth resorting to this scheme proposed by Descola in a didactic way, as it helps us, at least in principle, to locate ourselves as an approach to think of mediation as a translation of worlds.

In one of the examples presented by the anthropologist, he reports his own experience of ethnography in a community of the Achuar ethnic group in the Brazilian Amazon.

The Achuar are ignorant of these distinctions, which seemed to me so obvious, between humans and non-humans, between what belongs to nature and what belongs to culture. In other words, my common sense had nothing to do with theirs. When we looked at plants and animals, we didn't see the same thing. (Descola, 2017, p.14)

This mode of existence is not exclusive to the Achuar, nor is it exclusive to the indigenous people of the Amazon. There are other groups, elsewhere in the world, who live from a shared morality between humans and non-humans. For these peoples, the “animists”, both animals and people have a soul, endowed with human capacities, so there are alliances and solidarity between species. The difference is only in appearance.

There are other ways of organizing the relationship with the world, as Descola shows when he explains how the organization of Australian aborigines by totemic groups works, a group of women, children, men, plants, minerals and everything else that exists in the world, belonging to the same species. Again, in this case, it is not appearance that matters, but the common qualities shared by the members of a species, whose origin is derived from the totem, usually an animal that gives the group its name and functions as a prototype. This would be the totemic model, in which there is also no sense in separating nature and culture.

To leave the understanding of a world in which everything is natural and cultural at the same time, as in the Western way of existence, it is necessary to see ourselves as outside the world we observe. This movement only takes place in Europe from the 17th century onwards. This exteriority made possible the extraordinary development of sciences and techniques. At the same time, it installed an unprecedented way of exploring what came to be considered extra-human: nature, whose rivers, mountains and valleys lost their soul, becoming a commodity that could be sold.

Maintaining relationships of complicity and interdependence with non-humans, peoples from “primitive cultures”, as they were called until recently, were able to avoid the inconsequential exploration of the planet that accelerated after the colonial attacks of the 19th century. Descola makes an important warning, which we believe is fundamental to be already presented at this point in our argument, in this paper: it is naive to think that the way of life of the Achuar, or that any Amazonian indigenous people, can offer direct practical solutions to our problems in an urban world and industrial that consumes oil and practices intensive agriculture. The needs of these two worlds are very different. However, “what seems to us eternal, this present in which we are now locked up, is just one among thousands of other ways already described of living the human condition” (Descola, 2017, p.26).

Thus, thinking that before us others have already invented and reinvented ways of existing, we imagine another possible communication, based on a non-reductive mediation, inspired by the way of life of the original peoples. This is a challenge that has already occupied the work of Western thinkers (or almost). In the case of Brazil, also of Brazilian writers, who from poetry and prose have contributed to this work of invention, as is the case of Oswald de Andrade and João Guimarães Rosa.

Eating the *differença*

Just over a century ago, in 1922, the poet, writer, playwright Oswald de Andrade imagined his Manifesto Antropófago¹ (Andrade, 1976, p.15-20), launched at the Semana de Arte Moderna, together with other artists. It is in this text that he invents the figure of the technical barbarian, transubstantiation between the uncivilized man of the forest, the Tupinambá cannibal who eats the enemy, and the modern European man: from this was borned the idea of a return of modern man to the past, but a strategic return, with the aim of eat the barbarian difference and regurgitate the technicized barbarian becoming, a third thing. The manifesto begins with the enigmatic phrase: “Only what is not mine matters. Law of Man. Law of Anthropofago²” (Andrade, 1976, p.15). Much has been said about how this statement is a sign of the strangeness of Oswald’s work, even among modernists: against the recolonizing European vanguards of the beginning of the last century, he understood that, to look ahead, the future, it was necessary to look back, not only critically, but ironically, taking the original ways of life as social technologies, ways of living and survival. “We already had communism. We already had the surrealist language. The golden age³” (Andrade, 1976, p.15). There is much to point out about this, but undoubtedly the social technology that stands out as an operator of thought, for Oswald, is the carnival: “We have never been catechized. We have done the Carnival. The Indian dressed as a senator of the Empire. Pretending to be Pitt. Or appearing in Alencar’s operas full of good Portuguese feelings⁴” (Andrade, 1976, p.18).

Andrade resumes the ritual of anthropophagy among the Tupinambás, according to oral reports and literary records⁵, in which that other, understood as an enemy, went through a ritual of days, sometimes months of living with them, to then be eaten at a great ritual feast, completing the cycle of assimilation of difference in a non-reducing, radical way. This idea is expressed, anachronically, in the concept of Becoming, by Deleuze (1992, p.176). Becoming is not necessarily a personal individuation, in which material couplings are only the starting point. These becomings are integrated from the con-

1. It is not a comfortable task to translate a poetic text. It is also not my goal here. As I use short excerpts from the Manifesto, I translated myself and chose to present the original versions in footnotes.

2. In Portuguese: “Só interessa o que não é meu. Lei do Homem. Lei do Antropófago”

3. In Portuguese: “Já tínhamos o comunismo. Já tínhamos a língua surrealista. A idade de ouro.”

4. In Portuguese: “Nunca fomos catequizados. Fizemos foi o Carnaval. O índio vestido de senador do Império. Fingindo de Pitt. Ou figurando nas óperas de Alencar cheio de bons sentimentos portugueses.”

5. Perhaps the main one is the account of Hans Staden, the German mercenary who spent nine months in the 16th century being prepared to be devoured by the Tupinambás, at a point on the Brazilian coast between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, but managed to escape on a French privateer ship. The story is in the book “Two trips to Brazil”, which Staden wrote when he returned to Germany.

ditions of the moment of their formation, be it in time, in space, with people, animals, objects. They are flows of productive power, which take on different formations and meanings according to the context. An example: in a certain period, the composition of becoming-man was the relationship with the forces of the infinite together with man, for this very reason the image and likeness of God. Only in the 19th century did the Human-form appear, with a capital H, from a whole definition of what humanity is, in contrast to barbarism, to what man has of a savage. From this, Deleuze questions: “Today it is common to say that man faces new forces: silicon and no longer simply carbon, the cosmos and no longer the world ... Because the composite form would still be The man?” (Deleuze, 1992, p.114)

Even if anachronistically, the idea that what Oswald de Andrade proposes here reappears on the other side of the ocean, in Gilles Deleuze’s thought, seems quite interesting, especially in the concept of Becoming. Andrade proposes to devour, without distinction, what comes from outside and what comes from inside, in the sense of giving life to a third existence, a hybrid. Deleuze proposes, from the idea of becoming, precisely that an unnatural encounter that becomes productive from desire and not from production. Both constructions touch the edges of the western way of existence, precisely because they reach the limit of the separation between nature and culture. Our hypothesis is that Guimarães Rosa has gone a little further: he proposes the sertanejo mode of existence as a starting point for thinking about the world, as an epistemology. To do this, he betrays the Portuguese language, creating neologisms, abusing onomatopoeias, deforming the language that mediates the meeting between worlds from its own translation.

Here, we take a special look at the *onceiro-onça*⁶ becoming, in the short story “Meu tio, o Iuarua-rê”, a monologue led by the character of the former jaguar hunter, a man whose profession was to hunt jaguars, in the *Sertão*⁷ of Minas Gerais state, in Brazil, locus par excellence of Rosa’s stories. The narrator, indigenous, receives a traveler at night, at his home, to stay overnight. After a few sips of cachaça, sugarcane liquor, and a good conversation, the host begins to act in a different way, as he reveals stories that confuse the reader, such as when he says he has a big nail, so he doesn’t like women. Or when he asks the visitor to smell him to feel if he has a jaguar odor. Or, when he asks: “I’m a jaguar, didn’t I say?” (Rosa, 1976, p.50). The story is told from the point of view of the narrator and sometimes it is difficult to understand what he means, because of the amount of onomatopoeia, regional slang and words invented by Rosa himself from living with the sertanejos⁸ (it became a trademark of his literature), which makes an English translation, in itself, an equivocated exercise, in the terms of Viveiros de Castro.

The end of the story is already placed in the title itself: iauaretê is an indigenous name for jaguar; that is, the uncle is the jaguar. But perhaps what happens most “astonishing” in this exercise is not when we understand this, but the way in which this condition of the narrator is already placed there from the beginning, by the series of onomatopoeia used by Rosa. The tale ends with the visitor taking out a weapon to kill the jaguar (or the jaguar hunter, we don’t know exactly).

Untap that revolver! Do not play this game, turn the revolver to another band... I will not move, I’m quiet, quiet ... Hey: do you want to kill me? Take it out, take out a revolver! You are sick, are varying... Did you come to arrest me? Get out, the ranch is mine, boy! Go out! If you kill me, you will be arrested... Jaguar comes, Maria-Maria [the jaguar] eats you... Jaguar is my relative... Hey, because of that black man? I didn’t kill him, I was kidding... Hey, look at the jaguar! You’re good. Do not do it, do not... [follow onomatopoeia]⁹ (Rosa, 1976, p.56)

6. In a direct translation: jaguar hunter-jaguar.

7. As the semi-arid region is called in Brazil. But this concept goes beyond geographical terms.

8. People that live at Sertão.

9. It is practically impossible to translate the passage because of the amount of regional and onomatopoeia words used by Guimarães Rosa, so I chose to show a very short version, in a poor direct translation, which gives a vague idea of what the

It is not possible to know at what point in history the jaguar hunter turns into a jaguar. In fact, we have the feeling that both are always there: they are one and two at the same time. There are many cosmologies in the constellation of possible worlds in indigenous America, so there is no way to take an experience as valid for all of them. But it is possible to affirm that stories of transubstantiation, of bodily metamorphosis, are relatively common in many peoples. And what matters, in the end, is not the magic (or technology) of transformation, but for what this device serves: a translation between worlds, an transpecific communication, between beings that inhabit different cosmos, without reducing the difference practiced in Western communication, par excellence, an exchange guided by the common repertoire and not by difference.

In the words of Viveiros de Castro, this tale is an “amazing perspective exercise”, “the detailed, clinical, microscopic description of the becoming-animal of an Indian” (Castro, 2007, p.128).

Becoming-animal of an Indian who is before, and also, the becoming-Indian of a mestizo, his ethnic retransfiguration through a metamorphosis, an alteration that promotes both the metaphysical disalienation and the physical abolition of the character - if we can classify the *onceiro-onçado*, the complex enunciator of the tale, of “character”, in any sense of the word. I call this double and somber movement, this divergent change, of *differOnça*, thus making an anthropophagic homage to the famous concept of Jacques Derrida.¹⁰ (Castro, 2007, p.128)

Language is a barrier to the translation of a concept like *differOnça*. Two senses inhabit the same concept, simultaneously. The radical otherness, this *differOnça* marked by a non-reducing translation and the one made by the indigenous peoples who can identify themselves with an animal, as does the *onceiro-onça* in Rosa’s tale. This is a good metaphor for thinking about the turn we want from this point in the article and from this point in our history: it is necessary to take the message of the forest seriously. And we can’t do that without accessing who actually lives in this other world. The path traced so far goes from the north to the south, that is, from Western thought as a reference, understanding the way of existence of the original peoples as contributions. From here, we want to understand how to take the opposite path, understanding the interspecific communication of Amerindian peoples, especially from the figure of the shamans, the mediators-diplomats, as a starting point to think-invent a communication through difference, forged in the translation of worlds.

narrator says. But here I transcript the original version, in portuguese: “Desvira esse revólver! Mecê brinca não, vira o revólver pra outra banda... Mexo não, tou quieto, quieto... Ói: cê quer me matar, ui? Tira, tira revólver pra lá! Mecê tá doente, mecê tá variando... Veio me prender? Ói: tou pondo mão no chão é por nada, não, é à-toa... Ói o frio... Mecê tá doído?! Atiê! Sai pra fora, rancho é meu, xô! Atimbora! Mecê me mata, camarada vem, manda prender mecê... Onça vem, Maria-Maria, come mecê... Onça meu parente... Ei, por causa do preto? Matei preto não, tava contando bobagem... Ói a onça! Ui, ui, mecê é bom, faz isso comigo não, me mata não... Eu – Cacuncozo... Faz isso não, faz não... Nhenhêném... Heeé!... Hé... Aar-rrá... Aaãh... Cê me arrhoðu... Remuaci... Rêiucâanacê... Araaã...Uhm... Ui... Ui... Uh... uh... êeêê... êê... ê...”

10. In his analysis of the concept of the sign in Saussure’s work, Derrida is led to speak of *différance* (with ‘a’ in place of ‘e’), a neologism extracted from the French word ‘différence’. The ‘a’ must not only attribute a polysemic character, but brings the difference to the radicality of its meaning. Viveiros de Castro proposes a pun, making the concept more complex, which only makes sense in the Portuguese language, based on the word *Onça* (jaguar, in English), a central animal in Amerindian cosmologies.

Equivocated translation

A mode to translate one world to another appears in the book “The fall from the sky”, an “image skin” in which, by the writing of anthropologist Bruce Albert, are registered words of the Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa, with whom he has lived for more than three decades. Kopenawa tells of his initiation process, done by his father-in-law, a powerful shaman, including prolonged fasting for many days and systematic inhalation of *yãkoana* powder, a mixture of sacred roots that provoke the states necessary for shamanic operations. It is considered that the dream is rich in revelations, but it is necessary to be initiated and trained to know how to listen to the messages of the forest. The *xapiri*, the spirits of the forest, only arrive after many days of the process, under the guidance of the older shamans.

In the beginning, as I said, spirits are not clearly seen, and it is by drinking *yãkoana* more and more that you can see them clearly. And so I continued to learn, in the same way that whites study, from class to class, so that my thinking is actually right. (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015, p.166)

The *xapiri* only arrive after many days of the process, the help of the older shamans and a lot of guidance to build their spirit houses. Only initiates can hear and after some time see them. These first *xapiri* kill the shaman and tear him apart so that each one can take a part, rebuild it and bring it back to the new body, the shamanic body. Kopenawa explains in detail the step-by-step process of transubstantiation of your own body. Here the example of how his language was reconstructed, with the help of the bird spirits, seems very accurate. That’s how he learned to talk with non-humans of this species.

It was the images of the *yorixiam*¹¹ thrush, the ayokora *japins*, and the *sitipari si* birds, all masters of the songs, that tore my tongue out. They took her to remake her, to make her beautiful and able to speak wise words. They washed it, sanded it and smoothed it, so that they could impregnate it with their melodies. The cicada spirits covered it with white down and annatto designs. The *remoremo moxi* drone spirits licked her to gradually free her of her ghostly words. Finally, the *sabiá* and *japim* spirits put those from their magnificent songs into it. They gave him the vibration of his call: “Arerererere!” They made it another, luminous and bright as if it emitted lightning. That’s how the *xapiri* prepared my tongue. They made her a light and thin tongue. They made it flexible and agile. They turned it into a language of a tree of songs, a true language of the spirit. It was then that I was finally able to imitate their voices and respond to their words with clear, straight chants. (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015, p.156)

The report seems interesting for us to think about the translator’s task (Benjaminian chords are audible here): the process of rebuilding a new body, from the interactions with the *xapiri*, during the initiation process, gives the shaman the ability to act as a diplomat, to negotiate between worlds. The construction of a new body precedes the establishment of a house, in which the new shaman’s *xapiri* will live. The first ones open the clearings and only later do the others bring the house, which has already been built. It is necessary to welcome, care for and please the *xapiri* so that they do not run away. They come from many different places, from different peoples, speaking different languages: who is able to mediate this Tower of Babel is the shaman, who is already prepared for this. The *xapiri* have a relationship of affection, care and defense of the shaman, who in turn needs to take good care of them, please them, otherwise the house is empty, poorly cared for and starts to fall. New residents of the house keep arriving as the owner ages and gains more experience, translating to increasingly different worlds.

11. From here on, the Yanomami words have not been translated and are highlighted in italics by the author of this paper.

It is necessary to reinforce here, once again: this is not a common skill, the shaman is extensively trained for it, in this context, and only exercises the role of translator after he returns to his people, that is, when he is seen as a human again.

Upon seeing their images [of the *xapiri*], [the shamans] evoke the words of the ancestors turned into animals in the first time, those of the people of the sky and the underworld and the words of Omama, who gave the *xapiri* to his son, the first shaman. These speeches by the spirits are similar to the words on the radios, which give to hear reports coming from remote cities, Brazil and other countries. Those who hear them can then think straight and say to themselves: “It’s true! This man has become a real spirit! We really don’t know the words his songs reveal!” (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015, p.168)

We have already stated that shamans are like travelers in time and space, they are diplomats and translators at the same time. It is up to them to recognize the unusual, insert the novelty into the order of things. But that doesn’t happen with many disputes and often negotiations that never come to an end. So this is much more than a simple ordering, it is more of a relocation. The type of shamanic translation is not done by ordinary words, but by “twisted words”, in that the shaman observes everything, from all points of view, but refrains from naming what he sees, so the words of the shaman are words that do not exist in the world where they are being spoken. Here we return to Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, for whom this type of translation is made by “grope”. “As if approaching an unknown domain whose objects are only partially seen, the shaman adopts a language that expresses a partial point of view. Are these pale patches the gills of fish or the collar of a *caitetu*? And the fish ends up being called a *caitetu*.” (Cunha, 1998, p.13)

The excerpt recalls the story of anthropologist Aparecida Villaça, in an account by Too’ , an indigenous Wari’ with whom she has lived for more than 30 years, in ethnographies:

Sometime later, Too’s father, already living in another location, killed many capuchin monkeys in the forest. According to her, the mother acted as if she already knew what the father had hunted and went to the forest to find him. Seeing the fangs, he bit a monkey’s neck, still raw, and drank all the blood. Soon after she spit and Too’ and the other people saw that what came out of her mouth was not blood, but remains of corn *chichia*¹². For the Wari’ , what we see as blood, the jaguar sees as *chichia*. Too’s mother, identified with the jaguars, started to have two simultaneous bodies, one human and another animal, and did a very particular type of translation: instead of replacing one word with another, as our translators do, she transformed, in your body, one thing into another. (Villaça, 2018, p.93)

The way in which this operation is explained here warns us, once again, about the error of generalizing Amazonian shamanic experiences under the same *modus operandi*, since it encompasses an infinity of what we propose to understand here as modes of translation, which perhaps have in common just the fact that it is a way to connect worlds, to make them communicate based on their differences. The example of Aparecida Villaça works as a snapshot of the translation of worlds, made by Too’s mother’s own body. This ability, in her case, is the result of her identification with a jaguar, a type of alliance made when the woman was missing for a few hours and was found in the company of a jaguar who had impersonated a nephew. The jaguar became her double. Consequently, she became the jaguar’s double as well, in a way that resembles the *onçador-onça*, in Guimarães Rosa’s tale.

12. A traditional Wari’s drink.

Among the Wari' with whom Villaça lived, the notion of the human is closely linked to the very notion of the Wari' people. All the others, the different ones, are non-human: both animals and other peoples, including whites. But any non-human person can become Wari' over time, especially after they speak the same language. There are, among them, shamans prepared from childhood to fulfill this role. But this is not a condition for being able to perform a shamanic operation. Even a white person can become a translator. In Too's mother's case, she only realized that her nephew was not a Wari' when she noticed him licking leaves in the forest, typical jaguar behavior, and when she could see a piece of tail. This type of capture is dangerous as the Wari' may not come back and become another and get lost in the translation, without returning, without completing the mediation process: the main difference for a trained shaman is that he has more chances of completing the return and making worlds work.

To be captured by an animal of another species, roughly speaking, is to inhabit this other place, the animal becoming, a cloth that gets dressed, a net in which are all the entities that make it what it is in constant negotiation. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro proposes that the point of view is a perspective adopted by a certain entity, during a relationship, assuming that nothing is essence, everything is construction and relationship, based on the appropriation of Amerindian cosmology governed by multinaturalism, instead of Western multiculturalism. In other words, cultures are not different access to the same nature, but different natures, different worlds, different perspectives that are access to the same culture, to a humanity shared between humans and non-humans.

Understanding how this thought system works helps us to think about our own cosmos. Scientific epistemology based on a post-16th century Western model, assumes itself as the best access to a given, universal nature, through science. The Amerindian view works as another epistemology, in which access to the common cosmos occurs not from the figure of the scientist, but from the shaman, the one capable of transiting between the different perspectives without the risk of not being able to resume their own, that is, the one capable of translating. Here he is not a subject who creates a point of view, from his essential, unchanging place, but just the opposite: a certain perspective is what creates a subject.

In doing so I shall make the claim that perspectivism projects an image as translation as a process of controlled equivocation – “controlled” in the sense that walking may be said to be a controlled way of falling. Indigenous perspectivism is the theory of equivocation, that is, of the referential alterity between homonymic concepts. Equivocation appears here as the mode of communication par excellence between different perspectival positions. (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p.5)

In other words, it is not understanding, consensus and order, but incomprehension that marks the communicative process. It is from this gap that we extend this thought to every communicative act, in an approach that is as dangerous as it is powerful. But not without ballast. Some clues in the concept's very explanation allow us to undertake this broadening of the concept. “The equivocation (...) is the limiting condition of every social relation, a condition that itself becomes super objectified in the extreme case of so-called interethnic or intercultural relation, where the language game diverge maximally” (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p.12).

To communicate would be to translate the equivocation, but not an effective translation, which seeks the common, but another, one that erases the target language, looking for gaps, cracks, possible grooves that leave the inadequacy to this new state on display. In this case, translating would be to make the mistake explicit, showing that we speak of different things, using the same name. Translating would

then go on to become a little bit of the other, to occupy points of view with a good dose of imagination, inventing new possibilities, as shamans do. Therefore, a good translation would be one that betrays the target language, transforming it from this experience.

Raising the sky

Kopenawa relates a passage that he lived, as a young man, and that takes up an ancestral history that helps us understand how shamans act as translator diplomats. He says that he once came back from the forest when he heard a very loud noise, coming from the sky, even without rain and without clouds. He was afraid that the sky would fall on his head after splitting, and that everyone would be sent to the underworld.

At that time, there were still great shamans among us, as many of our elders were still alive. Then, several of them began to work together to secure the celestial vault. In the old days, their parents and grandparents had taught them this work, which was why they were able to prevent this fall. (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015, p.194)

The sky has fallen before, according to the ancients who told him this story. This does not happen again because older shamans work to avoid it. But it doesn't last forever. When there are no more shamans to do this, the sky will fall. Kopenawa recalls that "the center is still firm, but the edges are already quite worn, they are fragile" (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015, p.196). For this reason, the work of the *xapiri*, guided by the shamans, is intense, incessant: they mediate events, make the world work. "If they didn't do this job, it would be pitiful! (...) Then we would start to turn others, the sky would end up falling again" (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015, p.216).

Taking revelations in a trance, under hallucinogenic effect, as guidance for an academic reflection is possible from the Ontological Turn. There is a displacement between different worlds, that's why we call these foreign constructions to Western thought analogous concepts. It takes an exercise of imagination to admit and a care in overflowing from one context to another. Even so, there is no guarantee of success or risk reduction. Kopenawa reminds us that, just as the exercise of study and reflection is difficult for whites, shamanism is also for learning towards a way of accessing and communicating the world.

All of this is as difficult as learning to draw words on paper skin. The hand is stiff at first, the stroke very crooked. It's really hideous! Therefore, it is necessary to sharpen the tongue to the spirits' corners as much as it is necessary to soften the hand to draw letters. (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015, p.172)

In addition to a strong message from the forest to avoid the end of a world, that is, the fall of the sky, Kopenawa's report offers powerful analogues of concepts that can help to think about the modernity, in connection with studies on global warming, the Anthropocene and climate change. The work itself is a shamanic exercise of communication with another humanity, not with the shared, of the forest, but with this one founded on anthropocentric humanism, which Aílton Krenak calls "a select club that does not accept new members" (Krenak, 2020, p.7), As opposed to "a more rustic and organic layer, a subhumanity, which remains attached to the Earth", that of the original peoples. Indigenous activist, professor and former federal deputy, Krenak, who participated in the promulgation of the Brazilian Federal Cons-

titution of 1988, has translated the perspective of this shared humanity in his words spoken and recorded in books, offering possible entries to think the world(s) from this place, or, as he says, to “postpone the end of the world” (Krenak, 2019). Krenak remembered this when, in the face of the authoritarian escalation in Brazil and the victory of the extreme right at the polls, in the 2018 election, he was asked: how are the Indians going to do with all this? “I said: ‘The Indians have been resisting for five hundred years, I am concerned with whites, how are they going to get out of this?’” (Krenak, 2019, p.31).

What we think here is that, in fact, the original peoples have a lot to teach us about how to postpone the end. The Yanomami know how to identify when the sky threatens to fall and what to do to suspend it in time. Kopenawa complains that it is increasingly rare for any young man to want to be a shaman. We still don’t know what to do about it, either: who’s going to learn to hold white people’s skies? Krenak hints that this involves betting on subjectivity. For that, it is necessary to dream.

Not the dream commonly referred to when one is napping or that people trivialize “I am dreaming of my next job, with the next car”, but that is a transcendent experience in which the human’s cocoon implodes, opening up to other visions of life not limited. (Krenak, 2019, p.69)

To dream of other possible worlds, a good dose of imagination is needed, which we cannot easily find out there. For less imaginative people, Krenak updates his proposals, which sounds utopian, remembering that the impossible became feasible, in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the community where he lives, on the banks of the Watu (Rio Doce, for whites, the one mortally wounded by the environmental crime of mining, which occurred in the city of Mariana, at Minas Gerais state, in 2015), he was asked, before the pandemic, about his opinion for a river recovery project.

I replied: “My suggestion is very difficult to put into practice. We would have to stop all activities that affect the body of the river, a hundred kilometers away, on the right and left banks, until it came back to life”. Then one of them said to me: “But that is impossible”. The world cannot stop. And the world stopped. (Krenak, 2020, p.5)

If before it was only the indigenous peoples and the other subhumanities that were under attack, now we are all under threat from the Earth not supporting us.

Our suspicion is that, in some way, to postpone the end may be related to the way shamans act by translating differences, without reducing them to the point of eliminating them. The sophistication of the ecological thinking of the original people is linked to the fact that everything can be human, in the sense that it shares a morality, therefore, an “ethics of care”, a term used by the anthropologist Renzo Taddei, to refer to indigenous communicative ecology. In this logic, for me to take care of myself, it is necessary, first, to take care of others. The pandemic gave us the opportunity to experience something very close to that, according to Taddei, when “intensive care units became the epicenter of the world” (Taddei, 2020). It is in this reality that the use of face masks has become an important strategy to prevent the spread of the virus. However, for it to work, there had to be an alliance: each one wearing the mask would protect everyone else, preventing more people from becoming infected.

There is, in fact, a certain humanity shared in this conception: it is necessary to recognize the other as liable to care, in a complex ecological approach. At the same time, in this same complexity, we recognize a virus, a non-human being, as an agent of experiences that have profoundly transformed our

lives. Nurit Bird-David warned us about the importance of revisiting animism as a way of knowing the non-desubjectivizing world. We, in this paper, point out the possibility of doing this inside out, taking, not as a metaphor, but seriously, the twisted words of the shamans.

Conclusions

The main idea of communication presumes that it operates systematically through the repertoire, considering that there is only one truth and many ways to access it, different epistemologies, a phenomenon that we can call uni-referentiality. That is why communication in the Amerindian context can offer us possible escapes: taking into account a series of actors, in addition to humans, the communication of the forest is hyperconnected, based on the idea of mutual care, on the shamanic model of multi-referential mediation. This is what we called communication by equivocation (Laia, 2019), a proposal for an approach to the field of communication that does not presuppose the common among interlocutors. On the contrary, it makes use of certain non-Western experiences to forge communication in which difference functions as a catalyst for the process, an encounter between radical alterities.

This paper is part of the elaboration of a communication research approach, but at the same time, it is the result of what has been built in our research path and that, certainly, does not stop here. In this text we present a theoretical path that seems fundamental to understand on what the concept of equivocation is based, from Brazilian thinkers, in the light of contemporary anthropology and in relation to communicational studies on mediation. On this route, communication by equivocation appears in this gathering of ideas and references, from the Manifesto Antropófago, in the vision of Oswald de Andrade of the other as the only possible place for the definition of a self, from the inspiration of the worldview of the Tupinambá world. The shamanic character of this exchange appears in the work of João Guimarães Rosa, marked by the profound challenge of taking on the *Sertão*'s point of view, marked, at various times, by the experience of transforming into another, from access to other points of view, the *differença*. They, in fact, saw the world of enchantments refuted by Western scientific epistemology as a possible world, as Viveiros de Castro warns us, in the preface to the Brazilian edition of the book "The fall from the sky": "we have an obligation to take seriously what Indians say" (Kopenawa & Albert, 2015, p.15). Environmental preservation policies, which are deeply linked to policies of respect for indigenous autonomy, were deconstructed by the government of Jair Bolsonaro, but they were no longer a priority of previous governments. The eyes turned to Brazil and put all these questions in equivocation. It is from this path that we proposed a collection of concepts that allow us to understand survival, the resistance of the forest's thought, but also the feasibility of appropriating this thought as a possible operator to think about contemporary issues.

In this sense, there is a way to go, especially with regard to indigenous voices that still do not appear, in this proposal, in the way we believe they are necessary. This is undoubtedly one of the way that research should follow. This approach is being built based on experiences brought from other modes of existence and assumed not as metaphors, but as analogues of concepts. It derives from researches carried out since the observation of the performance of streamers, media activists and journalists in the protests that took over the streets of Brazil and the United States. The production of autonomous narratives with smartphones, which broke through the media blockade, exposed the equivocations, in the sense that we understand this word, around the word journalism. The challenge we're working on now just began with what was presented in this paper and which unfolds in empirical research and field observations in progress. We also believe that the construction of communication by equivocation is built on what is called the Ontological Turn, but that it can and should make use of the accumulation of knowledge produced about translation. It is along this path that we understand mediation studies as

an important contribution, but we also see what we present as a proposal that can bring important discussions to this field. Amerindian translation experience can offer a way to exercise multi-referential communication, with a multiplicity of perspectives. What we refute has the power to refund us.

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