Anthropological essay

Rousseau strikes again: "Indians", anthropologists and the limits of decoloniality

Thiago Pinho[1]

0000-0003-4147-6331

Cimatec University, Brazil

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Abstract

Following an interdisciplinary path, and especially a decolonial approach, the aim of this essay is to investigate some of the developments of poststructuralism in the anthropological field, observing its effects and contradictions. What are the advantages and, above all, the risks of this philosophical approach in the hands of the contemporary anthropologist? Is there perhaps some kind of Westernizing vice being reproduced between the lines of their ethnographies? If the answer is yes, how can we address the problem by adopting a truly decolonial stance, rather than relying on a generic and simplified interpretation? This essay is a product of philosophical anthropology, with the main source of information being secondary data, particularly ethnographies. By analyzing ethnographic texts, from the Ontological Turn to Vitalist and Phenomenological Anthropologies, those and other questions will be addressed, at least as an appetizer, or perhaps an invitation to future investigations.

Keywords: Decoloniality; Post-structuralism; Decolonial Anthropology; Rousseau.

Resumen: *Rousseau golpea de nuevo: "indios", antropólogos y los límites de la descolonialidad*

Siguiendo un camino interdisciplinario, y especialmente un enfoque decolonial, el objetivo de este ensayo es investigar algunos de los desarrollos del

[1] Thiago Pinho - pinho.thiago@hotmail.com

posestructuralismo en el campo antropológico, observando sus efectos y contradicciones. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas y, sobre todo, los riesgos de este enfoque filosófico en manos del antropólogo contemporáneo? ¿Existe quizás algún tipo de sesgo occidentalizante que se reproduzca entre las líneas de sus etnografías? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿cómo puede el problema ser sorteado adoptando una postura verdaderamente decolonial? Este ensayo es un producto de la antropología filosófica, teniendo como principal fuente de información datos secundarios, particularmente etnografías. A través del análisis de textos etnográficos, desde el Giro Ontológico hasta las Antropologías Vitalistas y Fenomenológicas, se abordarán esas y otras cuestiones, al menos como un aperitivo, o quizá como una invitación a futuras investigaciones.

Palabras clave: Decolonialidad; Posestructuralismo; Antropología decolonial; Rousseau.

Introduction

Have you ever read an ethnographic text so beautiful, so poetic, so incredible that it seemed unreal? Have you ever been introduced to an Indigenous people who "coincidentally" fulfilled your political, scientific, or even emotional needs, as if everyone there were an extension of a comforting dream? I don't know about you, but when it comes to ethnographies, I always distrust the prettiest ones, i.e., those that paint a convenient picture of the world. After all, I am very familiar with the flexibility of my field of study, with the entire rhetorical juggling act of non-paradigmatic areas like human and social sciences. In other words, I am not a biologist, a chemist, or even a physicist. My laboratory does not have pipettes, condensers, and test tubes, but words, concepts, and narratives. Don't get me wrong, I love what I do, I could never imagine myself in any other playing field, but I always keep my eyes wide open, because when it comes to the humanities, the sky is the limit. An engineer can easily be criticized for their interpretations, maybe due to a specific mathematical error or the misuse of some random beam, but in our territory the path is a bit more unusual, swampy. We are performative, creative creatures, which means an endless repertoire of rhetorical tools, an endless parade of justifications, comparisons, contrasts, hyperboles, and other aesthetic details.

In a rather Dostoevskian way, we build our "crystal palaces" in the world out there, with bricks made of signifiers, mortar mixed with metaphors, and beams produced by certain transcendentals that ensure the firmness of the entire edifice. That is, when it comes to the humanities, "prudence" is not just a random word thrown into some old dictionary, but a goal, a horizon, perhaps even a virtue. Following an interdisciplinary path, the purpose of this essay is to understand some developments of post-structuralism within the anthropological field, examining its effects and contradictions. What are the advantages and, more importantly, the risks of this philosophical approach in the hands of the contemporary anthropologist? Is there, perhaps, some kind of Westernizing bias being reproduced in the subtext of their fieldwork? If the answer is yes, how can the problem be addressed while adopting a truly decolonial stance? Through analyses of ethnographic texts, from the Ontological Turn to Vitalist and Phenomenological Anthropologies, these and other questions will be addressed in these pages, at least as an appetizer, or perhaps an invitation to future investigations.

Before diving into the details of this essay, one epistemic question should be addressed; otherwise, misunderstandings may appear on the horizon, something we must avoid. "After all, what is post-structuralism?" This term, no doubt, has become uncertain and confusing, just an empty signifier floating around in debates, books, papers and classes. Either it is used as an accusatory label to describe a despicable enemy, or it turns into something vague, a synonym for relativism. These interpretations do not help us grasp the concept, which requires a more reasonable understanding. Even a more refined definition, such as in Žižek[2], is still not enough for our purposes here. Post-structuralism should be understood essentially as any suspicion directed toward what Derrida called *logocentrism*, as well as its epistemic and ontological branches (universals, fixed identities, totalities and essences). Although its own representatives never identified with this label, and although they differ significantly among themselves, it is still possible to see a common ground, at least within the methodological limits of this essay.

[2] "The 'post-structuralist' procedure par excellence consists in reading a theoretical text as literature, in 'bracketing' its claim to truth, or, more precisely, in laying bare the textual mechanisms that produce its 'effect of truth.'" (Žižek, 1988, p. 204).

The Anthropologist and Their Reactionary Progressivism

In the "Western"[3] world, with its liberal democracies accompanied by a very specific package of values, Indigenous peoples end up trapped in an intimidating game. Before they even realize it, when they feel most vulnerable, they become pieces on our political chessboard, whether by the right wing (the "primitive", "lazy", and "incapable" "Indians," unable to generate wealth on their lands, a threat to agribusiness) or by left wing (the "Indians" as pure bodies, mystical, exotic beings, noble creatures opposed to us, sinful Westerners tainted by the marks of colonization). Either way, many decolonial debates feature Indigenous societies in their articles, lectures, and conferences merely as a pretext for criticizing everything that bothers them, an element that reinforces democratic, liberal, and even post-structuralist values. In this game of convenience, the 'Indian' has no skin, no blood, no life, being just a symptom produced by a feverish Western body, a kind of spontaneous, naturalized neurosis. This is "the hour in which illusion reigns despotically" (my translation; Balzac, 2012, p. 389).

In fact, it does not matter what predicate is in play. It does not even matter if the adjective on the table is good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, the "Indigenous" remains the other on my game board, in my air-conditioned conferences, or in a bar with beers scattered across the floor. In these aseptic spaces, so to speak, hundreds of names of traditional peoples flow from our mouths, along with their practices, bodies, languages, food, clothing, in a kind of rhetorical bricolage. In this scenario, I am the enlightened creature, the emancipated subject who has escaped Plato's cave, the only one capable of determining who, how, and when this other should be, all precisely tailored to my expectations. The other never overflows, challenges, or frustrates because it was never real, much less tangible, but a convenient reconstruction within Westernized arrangements. "Exoticist and primitivist by nature, it can only be a perverse theater where the 'other' is always 'represented' or 'invented' according to the sordid interests of the West" (Castro, 2017, p. 40). This disembodied creature is a powerful weapon in our epistemic battlefields, like

[3] According to Edward Said, 'West' means a specific set of values and narratives and not simply a geographical area of the globe.

explosives or bazookas in the hands of sociologists and philosophers. Whole societies become rhetorical punchlines in our liberal democratic games.

Although I am passionate about the British anthropologist Timothy Ingold, some of his analyses are somewhat questionable, suspect. His spontaneous inclination towards philosophical debates, as well as his political "speculations" with a nearly post-structuralist progressivism, raise some doubts, at least for the more experienced reader. Throughout his career, Ingold has gone through three major phases. The first, Marxist, where the main concept was "production"; the second, Heideggerian, with its concept of "dwelling" as a phenomenologically rich verb; and more recently, in a kind of vitalist turn, we have his third Deleuzian phase and the concept of "lines." What is most interesting is that with each new phase, Ingold "coincidentally" found indigenous people connected to his theoretical and political stance, Marxist peoples, then Heideggerian ones, and finally Deleuzian societies. For example, in his most recent phase, Ingold states in his book *Being Alive* that peoples like the Koyukon in Alaska do not have nouns in their languages, but rather verbs, actions. Instead of saying "fish," they say "the animal that swims." According to Ingold, this indicates societies that are contrary to concepts like essence and substance, a dive into a fluid, decentralized world —"coincidentally" rhizomatic, "coincidentally" Deleuzian. Without a doubt, this ethnography (actually borrowed from other anthropologists) is quite interesting, bordering on the poetic, but I tend to distrust the conclusions along the way, especially since with every page, the Koyukon appear as the other, the opposite of the "rigid," "despicable," and "essentializing" practices of Westerners[4].

Many anthropologists, such as Adolf Jensen, Iracema Dulley, and Brian Morris, also share my suspicion. According to them: "[...] the so-called New Melanesian Ethnography (Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner) presents striking similarities to the central theoretical ideas associated with post-structuralist philosophers, including

[4] "In the West, we are accustomed to thinking of animals as 'living things,' as if life were an internal property of a class of objects considered 'animated,' which makes them act in specific ways. In Koyukon ontology, however, each animal is the instantiation of a particular way of being alive—a concentration of potential and a locus of growth within the entire field of relations that is life itself" (Ingold, 2011, p. 170). "[...] The names of animals, therefore, do not refer to classes of objects, because in the Koyukon world, there are no objects per se to classify. Instead, they refer to modes of life." (Ingold, 2011, p. 170)

Derrida and Deleuze" (Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017, p. 182). This "Rousseaunian" matrix, tempered with post-structuralism, has always sparked a certain degree of mistrust in me, confirming one of Derrida's most important theses from *Grammatology*: "Rousseau remains an inescapable shadow over the human sciences[5]." Even Lévi-Strauss slipped into this Rousseaunian territory when he said that "the primary role of writing, as a means of communication, is to allow other human beings to be enslaved" (Lévi-Strauss apud Derrida, p. 130). According to him, oral traditions, seen as reservoirs of creativity and collectivism, were all corrupted by a new system of signifiers, now personified in writing with its rigid, authoritarian, and cold linguistic structure. According to Lévi-Strauss, oral language is dynamic, affective, while writing carries a coldness and distance typical of European pretension. The "noble savage" never seems to go out of style, as it only takes on different contours depending on the historical moment and other specific framings. In other words, the ideological ice cream is the same, of the same brand, although the flavors have different tones: structuralists, post-structuralists, culturalists, decolonials, anarchists, vitalists.

In fact, even before Rousseau himself, Montaigne in the 16th century already revealed symptoms of this Westernized nostalgia, a more subtle form of colonization. One can even see traces of ethnographic writing in his *Essays*, as well as some slips still reproduced by contemporary anthropologists. When speaking of traditional peoples, Montaigne did not spare words, nor compliments, describing them all as superior beings, privileged in their simplicity, while we, on the contrary, were corrupted by science, technology, and politics.

> It is a nation [...] where there is no kind of commerce, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for magistrate or political superior, no practice of subordination, wealth, or poverty, no contracts or successions, no divisions or occupations beyond idleness, no respect for kinship except mutual respect, no clothing, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine or wheat. The very words that signify lying, betrayal, dissimulation, greed, envy, defamation, or forgiveness are unknown to them. (Montaigne, 2010, pp. 222-223)

[5] "It is even possible to speak of an 'era of Rousseau'" (Derrida, 1976, p. 97).

"But how can I know if a certain ethnography has a reasonable degree of reliability?" asks the curious reader, hoping for some answer. There is a test, in case you want to apply it at home: whenever, on page 20, an anthropologist talks about a traditional people with revolutionary enthusiasm and, on page 21, uses phrases like "but in the West it's the opposite," be suspicious, and do not continue reading carelessly. For example: In his book *Being Alive*, Ingold uses terms related to the Western world, such as "West" and "modern," about 150 times, almost one word per page. Are traditional peoples in his chapters merely pretexts to reinforce his fears, frustrations, and complaints as a Westernized man? Is there a trace of guilt for the colonial past that justifies this self-deprecation? Is there some hidden pleasure accompanying this process of rhetorical self-flagellation, a Lacanian *jouissance*, perhaps? Before our very eyes, we have a new type of colonizer, Žižek (2006) might say, different from the classical, oppressive, suffocating one, that is, the traditional superego. Behold now "the guilty colonizer," a new species on the horizon of liberal democracies and their identity circuits, a curious mix of science, politics, and desire. As a way of combating the traditional superego, the repressive one with its inferiorizing predicates, the new colonizer reverses the structure of predication, as if this movement of reversal were a revolutionary implosion.

As pleasant as the adjectives used by anthropologists may be when referring to traditional peoples, this other remains other to me, the Westerner, within my own demands. At its core, the colonizing gesture is not in the predicate in play, but in the very structure of predication, suffocating concrete bodies within convenient expectations, whether good or bad, democratic or authoritarian, selfish or collective. In other words, the simple inversion of the predicate does not take us away from ethnocentrism, it only changes its colours.

> By ethnocentric, I do not refer to an arrogant rejection of the other culture as inferior [...] but—in a way that is both more complex and more disturbing—how positive, respectful, and admiring feelings for the "other" can be rooted in unexamined, culturally coded perspectives (Chow, 1991, p. 4).

The other becomes an extension of myself, almost a symptom of my own experience in a highly Westernized world. It does not matter whether the adjective is "beautiful" or "ugly," "stupid" or "intelligent," "lazy" or "noble," or even the intentions behind them, since all of them are part of a single system of expectations, a single pretext. In the hope of overcoming Western dualisms, such as "nature x culture," "human x animal," "physical x mystical," ironically new dualisms are created in the process, producing two irreconcilable worlds, two insurmountable ontologies: "Western materialism" versus "Amerindian perspectivism," "Western substantialism" versus "Amerindian becoming," "Western anthropocentrism" versus "Amerindian environmentalism," "Western egoism" versus. "Amerindian collectivism," and thousands more that sprout from academic conversations. If used methodologically, as merely provisional resources in specific research, no more than flexible and unpretentious tools, these dualisms would not pose any problems. The obstacle begins when they are taken seriously, completely reified by philosophers and anthropologists.

Rey Chow, a postcolonial philosopher and scholar of Chinese culture, mentions various Western thinkers who romanticized China in their writings, using it as a kind of counterpoint to Western "sins." We see this in Derrida, Sartre, and Kristeva, followed by a certain Maoist fascination in the '60s and '70s. There is a rhetorical game at play here, a contorted strategy to justify the presence of the other as a critique. China, especially its ideographic writing system, is portrayed as the opposite of Western *logocentrism*, meaning it is more open to femininity and progressive practices. According to Chow, this type of interpretation strips away complexity (and even contradictions) from the subject while creating a convenient strawman tailored to Western demands. It is like someone from a big city imagining the countryside after a day of crazy traffic, focusing on birdsong, rivers, and calm animals, while mosquitoes, mud, and snakes are swept under the rug to avoid "cognitive dissonance" (Festinger, 1957). Maybe that is the reason why "'ideology' is precisely such a reduction to the simplified 'essence' that conveniently forgets the 'background noise' which provides the density of its actual meaning. Such an erasure of the "background noise" is the very core of utopian dreaming" (Žižek, 2010, p. 6).

This Rousseaunian way of thinking, often called "light colonialism," strips the other of autonomy, even the autonomy to frustrate or resist. Traditional groups are seen

as innocent children, incapable of harm unless external forces are involved. Instead of being noble, this attitude is downright arrogant, denying others moral responsibility. In general, "they are the peaceful, noble, innocent nature while we are the cursed technological, scientific, and civilizational perversions". This act of self-deprecation is not innocent; it throws the weight of freedom (and all the error and sin that comes with it) onto us. By failing to recognize the crises and internal struggles of indigenous societies, we purify them and take away their autonomy[6]. According to Žižek, the most decolonizing act today is to allow the other the possibility of being evil, of making mistakes on their own, challenging our expectations.

Ontological Democracy, Posthumanism, and Liberals

Thanks to a posthumanist shift in recent decades, a complex field has emerged in academia, incorporating new agencies, bodies, and stories, going beyond the suffocating humanoid model with its colonial traits. So far, this sounds wonderful, right? Freed from the humanist cage, with the human as an inevitable transcendental, we have finally achieved a much-anticipated pluralism, with interesting political, epistemic, and ontological consequences.

These new liberal ontologies, focused on the agency of individuals, whether human or non-human, appear to celebrate a victory. Fukuyama never imagined that the advance of liberal democracies would be so effective, so widespread, and so implicit. Principles like pluralism and diversity, as well as the rejection of vertical, rigid, and universalizing models, have ceased to be merely political branches of a historical and cultural record; they have transformed into ontological principles, a sort of substrate at the core of reality itself[7]. This posthumanism is, in a way, what I call *liberal ontologies*, two sides of the same coin. Even with all the differences between various traditions of thought, and despite the constant conflicts between their premises, they tend to:

[6] "'elevating the exotic other to the position of an indifferent deity is strictly the same as treating them like shit'" (Žižek, 2010, p. 25).
[7] "We can benefit from an ontological pluralism that allows us to populate the cosmos in a slightly richer way, and thus to start comparing worlds, weighing them, in a more equitable way" (latour, 2013, p. 21)

> 1. conceive of a world open to any entity; 2. conceive that there are no degrees of difference between entities—that all are equally what they are. This ontological project welcomes all entities without discrimination. We could, therefore, call it "liberal". (Garcia, 2014, p. 2)

Without a doubt, the advancements of this ontological democracy and ontologized liberalism, with important political consequences, are interesting. However, we observe the same old pattern behind the scenes, the classic attempt to understand the other as an extension of our own territory. Many anthropologists consider the animism of certain indigenous societies to be a supposed testimony to ontological democracy, a space without distinctions between humans, animals, spirits, and objects, a sort of quasi-post-structuralist indistinction. While popular in recent years, especially in English and French anthropological philosophy, this interpretation has some flaws despite its well-meaning intentions. It does not take into account the empirical contours of concrete groups, falling into generic models that are practically useless except as political tools.

In the Cuna society, according to Levi-Strauss (1963), everything contains *purba*, a type of soul or vital energy that runs through every inch of reality. Undoubtedly, the human is decentered in this cosmological model, as is common in animist arrangements; however, this does not mean that all entities share ontological equivalence, let alone occupy a flexible and contingent space. For some reason, many philosophers, especially when venturing into anthropological waters, tend to make this "post-structural" reading of traditional groups, as is the case with Donna Haraway, Brian Massumi, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. According to Viveiros de Castro[8], "we must remember above all that if there's a virtually universal Amerindian notion, it is of an original state of indistinction between humans and animals, described in mythology" (Castro, 1988, p. 471). Apparently, Westernized bodies reproduce dualisms and hierarchies in their ontological circuits, with constant conflicts and domination schemes, while indigenous peoples embrace a

[8] Although he sometimes shares what I have called 'liberal ontologies', i.e., 'finding Deleuzian truth in indigenous universes' (Holbraad; Pedersen, 2017, p. 182), Viveiros de Castro does not deny the existence of differentiated and even hierarchical ontological systems in these societies. Amerindian perspectivism contextualises certain dualisms, imbalances and tensions, rather than completely eliminating their traces.

posthumanist, horizontalized, and cooperative sphere. However, when we dive into ethnographic details, within the borders of Cuna society, this horizontalized scenario seems to slowly dissolve before the philosopher's eyes. In this sense, the *purba* of a plant does not have the same level of importance as the *purba* of a jaguar, just as humans are not equivalent to spirits or gods, meaning there is a very clear ontological hierarchy, as well as a well-established and solid institutions, rather than a decentered model of multiple causalities. In the cosmic battle that unfolds, *Muu*, the goddess of fertility, and the *shaman*, with his magical powers, bear no trace of contingency, much less any post-structuralist openness. The board of forces is clear, as is the legitimacy of the pieces in play. The decentering of the human, in a specific animist register, does not imply some sort of *flat ontology*, much less a rhizomatic scenario of infinite causal vectors.

Are Indigenous Peoples Progressive?

Like other minorities, "Indigenous peoples"[9] are indispensable figures in progressive discourse, frequently appearing in conversations, ads, classrooms, and books. But are their daily practices inherently progressive? Women, Black people, trans individuals, and other activist groups in liberal democracies share certain values, such as the individual as a sovereign institution, the idea of a contingent world open to debate and reform, and technical premises like the separation of politics and religion. However, Indigenous groups do not naturally embrace these expectations unless they engage with Western institutions like universities or political parties.

In decolonial anthropology, Indigenous populations are not only protected by progressive discourse (which is essential given their ongoing massacres), but they are also interpreted through this lens. This leads anthropologists and philosophers into rhetorical contortions in an attempt to fit these groups into such labels. Suddenly, anarchist, Marxist, vitalist, post-structuralist, phenomenological, pragmatic, and various other progressive trends are projected onto Indigenous practices, redefining them within these frames. Terms like *decentering, pluralism, diversity, performance,*

[9] I am using this abstract term as a didactic strategy to clarify my argument, but not in an essentializing way.

body, contingency, fluidity, rhizome, becoming, non-binarism, transgenderism, and countless others seem to be applied seamlessly to groups like the Yanomami in Roraima or the Cuna in Panama. But are things really that simple? Undoubtedly, all these words and values are important, no one would deny that. But that is not the point here. Can they truly be found in traditional societies, or do they carry a degree of external interference that warrants reflection? Is it reasonable to frame Indigenous peoples within our definitions of politics and the world? What is the function of anthropology in such a complex field? Should it return to its Malinowskian origins with a purely descriptive, "neutral" commitment? Should we hide our ethnographic diaries to preserve credibility in what we write and say? In other words, when it comes to the political role of anthropology, how far can we go in interpretation? Where is the line of "too far"?

The Scientist, the Politician, and Methodological Care

When anthropologists acknowledge the political context and research contours in their ethnographic work, there is, in fact, no problem. For example, Viveiros de Castro focuses his energy on the shaman of the *Araweté* people, a figure with magical powers who can implode certain boundaries and dualisms, such as nature and culture, man and woman, sacred and profane. As Lévi-Strauss pointed out in "Structural Anthropology," the shaman's experience does not represent societies as a whole, as they access a semi-unconscious zone that only this "religious leader" can navigate. Viveiros de Castro clearly states his intentions as a decolonial author, making a choice that serves his interests, which renders his ethnography much more sincere. This focus is not a psychological construction of the anthropologist or a delusion of his progressive mind; rather, it is a diplomatic effort between him and the studied people. In short, ethnography is neither subjective nor objective but a blend of both. As long as anthropologists recognize these characteristics within a very specific political and methodological trajectory, there is no issue on the horizon. In his analysis, Viveiros de Castro is transparent about his theoretical affiliations and their impact on his field of study. He argues that his idea of "Amerindian perspectivism" should be developed through a plausible phenomenological interpretation of Amerindian cosmological categories, which determine the

constitutive conditions of the relational contexts we can call 'nature' and 'culture.' (Castro, 1988, p. 470).

This methodological caution is rare, mainly because most decolonial anthropologists still believe they reveal essences suffocated by the West. In this Rousseauesque framework, anthropology's commitment is merely to uncover the truth of these peoples opposed to us, the sin-stained Westerners. While they access the world directly and immediately, as it truly is, we are trapped in theoretical, epistemic, and Westernized practices. But what if things are not so simple? What if, like us, Indigenous peoples are also permeated by contradictions, crises, incoherencies, and failures? What if this is a characteristic of all human societies on this planet and not just a deviation of Westernizing sinners?

> To be frank, while the Ontological Turn encouraged me to privilege the idea that I will never fully understand Melanesian conceptions and to act as if these conceptions are simply determinants of reality, I chose instead to focus on the fact that my Melanesian interlocutors made it clear they also do not understand reality; that no one will ever completely understand the world, and that this gives us something to talk about. This also provides us the opportunity to genuinely destabilize each other's ideas in a truly dialogical manner. (Graeber, 2015, p. 28)

Rituals are powerful institutions in Indigenous cosmologies, essential tools in daily life, ensuring a maximum sense of predictability and coherence. Despite this, the world remains fraught with dangers at every turn. "Rituals recognize the potential for disorder," (Douglas, 1966, p. 95), yet they are constantly threatened by a world that not only implodes Western expectations with its skeptical and bifurcated materialism but also those of the natives themselves. Even with astronomical energy investment over 24 hours of intense dedication, conflicts, crises, and contradictions remain part of the surface of any ontological arrangement, regardless of its origin. Recognizing this complexity is the greatest goal when it comes to ethical debates, not just within academic fortresses. While Rousseau offers efficient political tools by romanticizing his object of protection and granting it an impenetrable aura, these efforts ultimately reveal a softer form of colonialism, a mere change of predicates, but never a rejection of the predicative structure itself.

Conclusion

The Araweté, Cuna, Pueblo, Koyukon, Yanomami, Xavante societies, and thousands of others around the globe are not mere pieces within our liberal democracies, nor are they pretexts that reinforce our argumentative chain. We are talking about concrete bodies, flesh-and-blood individuals with their own trajectories, including attitudes that may frustrate the sensibilities of both conservatives and progressives in our world. What should we do with this concrete, recalcitrant other? When my neighbor disturbs me with their divergent presence, outside my expectations, routine, and schedule, what can I do? Isn't this the great ethical challenge of our times? It involves not dealing with abstractions, which is always easy and comfortable, but with real bodies that scream, cry, lie, laugh, speak, pray, curse, gossip, and fear.

> The more I love humanity in general, the less I love people as individuals. I often dream passionately of serving humanity and would perhaps genuinely have ascended to Calvary for my fellow humans if it had been necessary, even though I cannot live with anyone for two days in the same room. I know this from experience. As long as someone is with me, their personality oppresses my self-love and constrains my freedom. In 24 hours, I can even develop antipathy for the best people—one because they stay at the table too long, another because they have a cold and just keep sneezing. I become the enemy of men, merely by their contact with me. In contrast, invariably, the more I detest people as individuals, the more I burn with love for humanity in general. (Dostoiévski, 1970, p. 54)

In more specific terms, when I discover on my anthropological journey that certain Yanomami societies still practice infanticide, or that the Cuna maintain a well-justified gender dualism in mystical terms, or that the Koyukon do not operate on a democratic basis, or that the Araweté do not defend our social constructivism and our hermeneutics of suspicion, or that the Pueblo refuse to believe in the privatization of faith (I have my god, and you have yours), or that the Maori do not buy into the idea of a relative and multiple truth, how should I proceed? When the other, with its overflowing materiality, appears, what should I do? As mentioned before, this is the true ethical and decolonial challenge, when the other is the other, and not just a disguised I.

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