Epistemic Diversity, Lazy Reason and Ethical Translation in Post-Colonial Contexts: the case of indigenous educational policy in Brazil

Diversidade Epistêmica, a Razão Indolente e a Tradução Ética em contextos pós-coloniais: o caso da política educacional indígena no Brasil.

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> "One has to persist in being white in order to be indigenous"

Abstract: This paper focuses on the theoretical concepts of *lazy reason* and *ethical translation* as relevant for contemporary postcolonial theory and takes as its object of analysis, in order to exemplify the relevance of these concepts, the issue of current indigenous education policy in Brazil.

Keywords: Epistemic diversity, lazy reason, ethical translation, post-colonial, indigenous education, Brazil, Canada.

Resumo: Este artigo enfoca os conceitos teóricos da razão indolente e tradução ética como relevantes para a teoria pós-colonial contemporânea e tem como objeto de análise, a fim de exemplificar a relevância desses conceitos, a questão da política de educação indígena atual no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: diversidade epistêmica, razão indolente, tradução ética, pós-colonialismo, educação indígena, Brasil, Canadá.

Much of post-colonial theory (Spivak 1990, Bhabha 1986, Gandhi, 1998, Mignolo (2000, 2007) has pointed to the *continuity* and not the break implied in the prefix post-, where elements of colonial hegemony persist long after the departure and end of official colonialism.

In the case of Brazil, this is particularly apparent, given the dubious circumstances of its political independence in 1822, when power in practice remained in the hands of a white elite previously empowered by the colonial regime. This lead to the continuing subjugation of local indigenous communities, their languages and cultures, which were subjected to the persisting colonial dilemma of either assimilating or perishing.

Indigenous Education Policy in Brazil

In its latest post-dictatorship Constitution of 1988, Brazil for the first time recognized the existence of indigenous languages and cultures within the nation, granting them rights, protection and the access to democracy. This is clearly reflected in recent public policy such as the Indigenous Education Acts(1996, 2001) which grant full autonomy to indigenous communities to define their own school curricula including indigenous knowledges and indigenous languages. However, when indigenous communities choose instead to follow the national curriculum of the "white" mainstream, this is read as "uninformed naive decisions" and rejected wholesale by government agencies and non-indigenous groups claiming to protect indigenous interests. These apparently pro-indigenous reactions emphatically require, ironically, that the indigenous communities conform to the federal legislation that claims to protect their interests.

This paper proposes to read this context of dissensus[2] as an example of what Sousa Santos (2000) called 'lazy reason' where dominant forms of thinking have difficulty in understanding (and "waste") other, non-eurocentric, and non-hegemonic forms of reason which abound within the Brazilian nation (Santos 2010). These non-hegemonic forms of reason are located within what Mignolo (2007) describes as the *shadow* or *darker side of* Modernity, referring to the inequality of knowledges which coexist in a particular socio-historic context[3].

I suggest that to refer to non-hegemonic knowledges as 'dark' in contrast to the dominant knowledges of the Enlightenment, may result in a homogenization and simplification of the complexity of such non-hegemonic knowledges, casting them further into the shadow of the Enlightenment. Hence in my discussion I raise the issue of how dark is dark? I do this by suggesting that three tropes from non-eurocentric indigenous reasoning may be used to understand this situation: 'indigenous

perspectivism' (Viveiros de Castro 2002), 'the logic of predation' (Fausto 2001) and 'equivocal translation' (Viveiros de Castro 2004).

Brazil has a population of around 200 million. The official census (IBGE) of 2010 established the indigenous population of the country at 817,000, consisting therefore of 0,42% of the total population; this figure represents a growth of 11% in relation to the census of 2000.

Though the percentage of the total indigenous population is small, a large part of it is concentrated in the tropical north of the country, in Amazonia, where it consists of 11% of the local population.

In terms of ethnicity and language, the indigenous population, far from being a homogenous group, is composed of 220 different peoples who speak 180 different languages. These languages in turn belong to 30 different language families.

In terms of education, the Indigenous Education Census of 2005 identified 164,000 students in indigenous schools, a rise from the previous figure of 117,000 only three years earlier. Of these, however, only 4,756 were in secondary education, located in the 72 indigenous secondary schools; this figure represents a dramatic increase from the previous figure of 18 indigenous schools three years earlier.

There is then a clear recent increase not only in the total indigenous population as a whole, but also in the interest this population has in the formal education of the official-school system.

This however has not always been the case. Until the present Constitution of Brazil was drawn up in 1988, for almost five centuries Brazil had considered itself a monolingual and monocultural country, recognizing officially only Portuguese as its national language.

The Constitution of 1988, which came in the aftermath of Brazil's return to liberal democracy after twenty years of a military dictatorship, recognized officially the existence of indigenous languages and cultures within the nation and pledged to protect and preserve them. This brought to an end centuries of previous policies of assimilation and conversion to Christianity of the indigenous minorities, policies set on eradicating indigenous cultures and languages. As such, Article 210 of the Constitution explicitly states "Regular fundamental education will be given in Portuguese, guaranteeing, however, to the indigenous communities, the right to use their own mother tongues and their own learning processes" (my emphasis).

It is clear in this statement that from a previous policy of

assimilation and non-recognition, the nation now recognizes the existence of the indigenous minority and establishes a differentiated, specific, bilingual and intercultural relation with it. The bilingual and intercultural aspect of the relationship is implicit in not only guaranteeing the right to the indigenous mother tongue but also in guaranteeing the access to and use of Portuguese; the intercultural aspect is present in the recognition that indigenous cultures have their own learning processes, different from those identified with the national majority. This indirectly may also be seen as recognition of the existence of different, indigenous epistemologies and constructions of knowledge. The mediation of this intercultural, bilingual relation with the indigenous minority, is established in the Constitution as the indigenous educational system.

Radically different to what is offered to the mainstream school system, official policy permits that in the case of indigenous schools, the local indigenous community has the right to establish not only the language(s) and knowledges to be taught in the school, but also to establish who will be the teacher, and how the space and time of the school will be organized, in keeping with local cultural traditions. Thus, for example, in some communities, it is the headman or a member of his family who may be designated as teacher; in other communities it may the medicine man, a community elder or even a young person sent to the city to be specifically trained as a teacher.

Rather than following the set school times of the mainstream school, indigenous schools may interrupt their class-room activities to accommodate student participation in traditional community activities such as hunting and planting with parents and family members.

This is supported, for example, by the Law of Basic Education (LDB) of 1996, in whose Articles 78/79 the ground rules for indigenous education policy are specified in some detail. These are defined in the following terms:

- The recuperation of historical memory
- The reaffirmation of ethnic identity
- The valorization of indigenous languages.
- The access to information and knowledges of mainstream society and of other indigenous societies.

It is significant for the purpose of this paper to call attention to

the fact that, as we have seen, the present Constitution was the product of the recent democratization of the country, which brought with it the recognition and respect for the indigenous minority of the nation. This respect was then expressed in the later legislation that drew up specific policies of indigenous education, such as the LDB Law of 1996 mentioned above.

Within this framework, federal policy makers envisioned an indigenous school in total contrast to the previous indigenous schools based on policies which continued the colonial practices of conversion and assimilation. The new, post 1988, benevolent indigenous school, respectful of indigenous languages and knowledges would, according to the policies, be radically different from the mainstream school: the indigenous school would not only be bilingual in the indigenous language of the community concerned and in Portuguese, the national language, but would also focus on the reaffirmation of indigenous identity by emphasizing the knowledges produced by the local community and other indigenous communities; the acquisition of these two different knowledges and languages would take place simultaneously.

However, recent research (Cavalcanti 1999, Grupioni 2008) has shown that the reality of many indigenous schools is radically different. Many indigenous communities, given their constitutional and legal right to make their own decisions vis a vis their schools, chose mainstream knowledge and the Portuguese language as preferred content rather than indigenous languages and knowledges.

Grupioni (2008), for example, as a key participant in the formulation of policy for indigenous education, interprets this situation as a lack of understanding, on the part of indigenous communities, of the privileges and emancipatory possibilities offered to them by post-1988 educational policies. Even the Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire (2005) interpreted the indigenous reaction to pro-indigenous educational policies as one indicative of the 'internalization', by the socially excluded, of dominant ways of thinking which in fact exclude them and deny them access to social equity and justice.

It is my position in this paper to problematize these readings of the indigenous rejection of indigenous educational policy, and to problematize the indigenous preference for a school containing mainstream knowledges and the national language – Portuguese.

I read this situation as a complex conflict of interpretations, which

demands a complex ethical and political response in order to maintain the post 1988 spirit of ethical respect for indigenous communities and to avoid repeating the pitfalls and violence of the colonial past.

Elsewhere (de Souza 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2011) I have discussed some of the issues involved in this conflict of interpretations vis a vis indigenous educational policy in Brazil and its purported valorization of indigenous knowledges. For example, I pointed to radically different conceptions of language and writing and their relationships to knowledge on the part of indigenous communities on one hand and the mainstream, benevolent, pro-indigenous policy-makers on the other. I attempted to situate these conflicts of interpretation in terms of the monolingual and monocultural bias of the policy-makers, in spite of their interest in emancipatory education and the promotion of social justice for the indigenous communities. I read the interpretations of the purportedly benevolent policy makers as housed in and impeded by their own categories of culture, language and knowledge. I tried to show how intercultural and bilingual education are not simply policy or linguistic issues, but epistemic issues.

In this paper I focus on the ethical issues of this conflict of interpretations, issues which have serious political implications for the post-colonial 'afterlife' of the nation, where in the name of emancipation and social equity, social practices similar in outcome to previous colonial practices of the elimination of difference may be unwittingly pursued.

Epistemic Diversity, 'Lazy Reason' and the 'waste of experience'

In his groundbreaking thinking from 'other', non-dominant, non-(post-?) western perspectives, Sousa Santos (2002, 2004, 2009) focuses on the epistemological aspect of conflicts arising from the contact between dominant and non-dominant knowledges and social practices. In these, the 'dominant' signifies a Eurocentric perspective that takes for granted and legitimates a particular conception of reason and knowledge, itself deriving from the also Eurocentric concept of science and privileging a particular form of rational, objective and decontextualized analysis. In tracing the history of such a dominant, Eurocentric concept of valid knowledge, Sousa Santos (2002:242) says that the epistemological privilege of modern Science is a product of an epistemicide: it results from the historical destruction of social practices and the disqualification of social agents that

operate according to other forms of knowledge. It eliminated other forms of knowledge by imposing its own single perspective, self-proclaimed as objective, rational and scientific.

A drastic consequence of this epistemicide, according to Sousa Santos, is that contemporary social sciences, following unquestioningly this model, may have been responsible for concealing or discrediting alternative forms of knowledges, generating what he calls an enormous "waste of social experience", whereby non-dominant knowledges not perceived as legitimate, rational or acceptable by the dominant episteme go un-noticed and un-valued.

Apart from the epistemicide that precedes it, this waste of experience is also the result of a perplexing sophism that Sousa Santos (2004) calls 'lazy or indolent reason' as referred to by Leibniz: "if the future is necessary and what must happen happens regardless of what we do, it is preferable to do nothing, to care for nothing, and merely enjoy the pleasure of the instant". Sousa Santos, however, expands the notion of lazy reason into four of its possible manifestations:

1. *impotent reason* – the total refraining from reasoning in the face of the perception that nothing can be done against an external necessity;

2. *arrogant reason* – the refraining from reason resulting from the perception that, because it sees itself as free there is no necessity to reason;

3. *metonymic reason* – where a particular form of reason is perceived as the only form of rationality and therefore refrains from discovering other forms of rationality, or if it does come across these, it appropriates them as its own.

4. *proleptic reason* – the refraining from reason in thinking the future, because the future is seen as always already anticipated and hence, known.

For Sousa Santos, all of these four manifestations of 'lazy reason' have formed the basis of hegemonic western thinking for the past centuries and mark most sociological, philosophical and epistemological debates. The most drastic consequence of this 'lazy reason' is that in its various manifestations it presupposes a *temporal* concept of 'homogeneous, linear, progressive time' that "contracts the present" and "expands the future", and a *spatial* concept of 'totality'.

In terms of the temporal concept, the "expansion of the future" (most

clearly present in the manifestations of 'impotent reason' and 'proleptic reason') focuses on the *future* as the locus of success, development, progress, harmony, resulting in a lack of attention to the complexities, diversities and heterogeneities of the present. It is in this sense that the present is seen as only ephemeral, merely a phase in the passage to the logically necessary and subsequent future, and is thus "contracted" and contained. The result of this contraction of the *present* is the total lack of attention given to the multiple non-dominant heterogeneities and complexities of the *present* –invisible in relation to the promise of the supposedly 'already known' *future*; this in turn results in the 'waste' of alternative knowledges and practices, and produces the 'waste of experience'.

In terms of the spatial concept, Sousa Santos discusses how the dominant concept of 'totality' in rational theoretical Eurocentric thinking contributes to the 'waste of experience' by promoting a homogeneous concept of wholeness and totality which produces the invisibility of the heterogeneities and diversity that co-exist with what is perceived as the 'totality', excluding these. Once again, 'lazy reason' results in the 'waste of experience' by ignoring the alternative knowledges and practices that exist *outside and together with* its own privileged perception of 'totality'.

In opposition to 'lazy reason', Sousa Santos (ibid) calls for new, alternative epistemologies and forms of reason: "to fight against the waste of experience, to render visible the initiatives and the alternative movements and to give them credibility, resorting to social science as we know it is of very little use. After all, social science has been responsible for concealing or discrediting alternatives. To fight against the waste of social experience there is no point in proposing another kind of social science. Rather, a different model of rationality must be proposed".

Sousa Santos calls this different model of rationality *cosmopolitan reason*; it is a reason based on the perception that "the understanding of the world exceeds considerably the western understanding of the world" and its rationality tied to fixed conceptions of temporality and spatiality. This cosmopolitan reason, much unlike recent elitist and universalist concepts of cosmopolitanism, would seek to expand the present and contract the future, re-signifying the concepts of time-space in order to make visible the co-extensive complexities and diversities (*ecology of knowledges*) existent today so that the knowledges and social practices once produced as absent and invisible, - wasted - may emerge, be faced and signified in all their complexity.

Cosmopolitan reason thus works against a "mono" (mono-cultural, mono-logical, mono-lingual) perspective and is based on the principle of incompleteness of all knowledges: "The central idea […] is that there is no ignorance or knowledge in general. All ignorance is ignorant of a certain knowledge and all knowledge is the overcoming of a particular ignorance […] This principle of incompleteness of all knowledges is the condition of the possibility of epistemological dialogue and debate among the different knowledges" (ibid).

This is not a flippant form of deconstructive relativism where anything goes as knowledge. Sousa Santos affirms the necessary condition of *contextual credibility* of each knowledge in order to be considered legitimate and to participate in debates and dialogues with other knowledges, including scientific knowledge. This is the proposed antidote to scientific reason's hegemony grounded in its self-proclaimed legitimacy of abstract, uncontextualized, universalistic reason.

Given his critique of the exclusionary limits of concepts of totality in western thinking, Sousa Santos is careful not to propose another general, totalising theory that, in the name of 'including' the heterogeneities of the present, would end up like its predecessors doing exactly the opposite. In place of a totalising theory, and as a corollary of cosmopolitan reason, Sousa Santos (ibid) proposes "a theory or procedure of translation capable of creating mutual intelligibility among possible and available experiences". Given this importance of 'translation' as a means of establishing relations of equality among differences, without reducing any to the category of "mono", Sousa Santos's 'cosmopolitan reason' and 'work of translation' may be seen as an ethical imperative and not a mere pluralistic theory of epistemologies. It is in this sense that Sousa Santos can contribute to an understanding of our problem of the conflicting interpretations of indigenous education in Brazil as constituting an ecology of knowledges in dire need of the work of translation so that mutual intelligibility may proliferate among co-existing varying knowledges and experiences. But first more on ethical imperatives in the midst of a perceived ecology of knowledges

Ethics and Translation: undoing the waste of experience

Arguing for a non-hegemonic and non-universalistic concept of ethics in a world of complex diversity, inequalities, injustice and social exclusion, Caputo (1993:4) denounces the fact that ethics is often defined in

universalistic terms as an 'obligation or responsibility to an other', commonly justified as seeking to protect this other. However, Caputo reminds, us, by claiming to do this throughout history, those in hegemonic positions have often used ethics as a means of excluding a powerless other and making safe the actions of the powerful. Warning against this unethical use of ethics, Caputo (ibid) states: "It [ethics] claims to lay foundations for principles and clarify concepts; it throws a safety net under the judgements we are forced to make. But obligation is not safe; ethics cannot make it safe". Like Sousa Santos' 'waste of experience' Caputo calls for a consideration of the complexities and heterogeneities ignored by "the powerful": "Life is more risky and difficult". Given this messy complexity of life (uncontained by lazy reason), Caputo demands that the concept of the 'other' be constantly questioned and de-essentialized; he calls for a process not unlike Sousa Santos' work of translation whereby mutual intelligibility can be established in constant dialogue. The concept of the other should be opened, he says, to include more than what the categories of the powerful permit in order to avoid the (less powerful) other being reduced to the sameness of the (powerful) self. In order for this to occur, ethics needs to be seen, according to Caputo, in local terms as "culturally and historically embedded".

In a similar vein, in a move against what we have called 'lazy reason' and referring to the complex, diverse and conflict-bound contemporary world, Butler (2004) emphasizes the urgent ethical need to *listen* to the other. Like Sousa Santos and his need for translation in the midst of an ecology of knowledges, Butler reminds us that though we have the ethical need to listen to the other, we have to be aware however of the difficulties of *hearing* the other. These difficulties of *hearing* the other are the result of the fact that one can only hear the voice of the other and give it meaning in terms of *one's own experience*. If one is not aware of one's location within what Sousa Santos called an ecology of knowledges, and the resulting need for translation to promote mutual intelligibility, lazy reason may set in, manifested in the strategy of metonymic reason whereby one assumes that what one understands is exactly what the other means to say. In such contacts with an other, proleptic reason may also manifest itself as a belief that one already knows what the other wants to say, even before he/she says it.

Aware of these traps of lazy reason in cross cultural encounters in situations of complex diversity, Butler (2004:17-18) like Sousa Santos and Caputo, calls for what may be also understood as translation, understood

here as *hearing beyond what we are able to hear*: "[We need to] endeavour to recreate social and political conditions on more sustaining grounds. This means, in part hearing beyond what we are able to hear. And it means, as well, being open to narration that decentres us from our supremacy in both its right- and left- wing forms".

This being open to the decentring of one's narratives and one's supremacy, be it on the left or on the right, politically, is a key concept in Butler's call for *ethical* awareness of the difficulty of mutual intelligibility whatever one's political preference may be. One needs to abandon one's "mono"-lingual, mono-cultural, mono-political postures in order to appreciate the difficulty in hearing the voice of one's other, and in order to then proceed to 'translate' or seek mutual intelligibility.

Also interested in an ethical stance in unequal hegemonic relations with an other, Gramsci (1975) also calls attention to the importance of translation. For Gramsci, ethics, like every other cultural phenomenon, asks for 'translation', seen as a negotiation across differences in an effort to establish mutual intelligibility. In this sense, for Gramsci, even political and humanitarian values have to be 'translated', in order to be understood and negotiated.

Like Butler's call for the need to be aware of the impediments in hearing the other when one seeks to listen, Gramsci (ibid) calls for an ethic of empathy (*con-passionalità*) in the translational process of seeking mutual intelligibility. This empathy or *con-passionalità* does not only imply a caring attitude, but more significantly, according to Gramsci, the empathy to *feel the other's* passions even if they are other passions, such that you would not like to share: "*not in order to share them* at all *costs, but to be able to talk to the other, to reach the other.*"

Like Sousa Santos' critique of totality in lazy reasoning, Gramsci does not seek the possibility of total translation (the possibility of "sharing at all costs"), but values the ethical stance of, once having recognized the impossibility of total translation and total mutual intelligibility, seeking nevertheless what Sousa Santos defines as 'isomorphic concerns' (2004); this term refers to the possibility of identifying corresponding similarities across differences, based on the previously mentioned concept of contextual validity. Thus mutual intelligibility indicates the possibility of recognizing a certain equality among differences.

For Sousa Santos, the importance of isomorphic concerns and contextual validity is that they permit conjoined counter-hegemonic actions

among different non-hegemonic groups, without these groups having to erase their differences. This possibility of conjoint counter-hegemonic action among otherwise disparate social groups in relation to specific mutual interests may be foreseen in Gramsci's ethical concept of empathy or con-passionalitá.

Also bringing together concerns with ethics, empathy and translation *vis a vis* cross-cultural contacts between hegemonic and non-hegemonic groups in contexts of complex diversity, Spivak (2007:276) portrays translation as an ethics of listening with empathy, and like Butler, calls attention to the problematic of listening but not hearing; like Gramsci, she speaks of ethical empathy in translation "[n]o speech is speech if it is not heard. It is this act of *hearing-to-respond* that may be called the imperative to translate…The founding translation between people is a listening with care and patience".

This listening with care and patience, for Spivak, implies perceiving the location of one's ethical relationship with an Other within a dynamic of unequal power-relations. Once again, we see in Spivak's words, the possibility signalled by Sousa Santos of mutual intelligibility across difference, the possibility of establishing isomorphic concerns.

Another important connection between Spivak's work and Sousa Santos' concept of 'lazy reason', especially in its manifestations as metonymic and proleptic reason, is perceivable in Spivak's (2002) ethical concept of "unlearning privilege" whereby having perceived one's hegemonic superiority in relation to an other, one then perceives how this may hinder the process of mutual intelligibility and the understanding of the other, *not in one's own terms*, but in a process of difficult translation. One's hegemonic superiority in relation to the other (one's privilege) may impede one from hearing the other, even though one makes an effort to listen, as Butler has already pointed out above.

However, for Spivak, it is not sufficient to unlearn one's privilege; she also calls for the ethical recognition of the need of "learning from below". This involves: "… a suspension of belief that one is indispensible, better or culturally superior; it is refraining from thinking that the Third World is in trouble and that one has the solutions; it is resisting the temptation of projecting oneself or one's world onto the Other".

The conflict of interpretations and the waste of experience: the epistemic issue

After this excursion into theory, we now return to the problem which is the focus of this paper - the issue of the conflict of interpretations in relation to the preference of indigenous communities for apparently mainstream models of education when legislation permits them the emancipatory possibility of a bilingual indigenous school in an indigenous language with an indigenous curriculum; all this in order to undo five centuries of disrespect, exclusion and assimilation. As we have seen, this preference of some indigenous communities for the mainstream curriculum in Portuguese is read by non-indigenous specialists as mis-informed and as being the result of the introjection of dominant values by a non-dominant community, against its own interests.

However, the reason for our excursion above into the theories of ethical translation and the against the waste of experience was to permit, in the face of epistemic diversity and conflict, an 'other', indigenous, reading of the problem.

Is it really just another example of the internalization by the powerless of the cultural logic and ideology of the powerful? I propose that there is an urgent ethical need to seek other interpretations of this indigenous preference. In light of this, I suggest that this rather facile reading of a complex situation may be seen as the product of manifestations of lazy reason on the part of non-indigenous specialists and the propounders of indigenous education policies in Brazil.

These specialists, even though they are emphatically and declaredly against the previous colonial policies of assimilation and eradication of indigenous languages and cultures, may nonetheless, and tragically, be prone to lazy reason and its preference for singular, monocultural, monolinguistic and mono-epistemic practices and knowledge. I suggest that what needs to be considered in order to come to terms with the complexity of the situation, is on the one hand, an *epistemic* issue, and on the other hand, an *ethical* issue.

Sousa Santos' denouncing of western social science's complicity in lazy reason and its urgent need for a change to cosmopolitan reason is especially relevant to this situation, given that most if not all indigenous education policy in Brazil is the product of conscientious, anti-colonial social scientists: anthropologists, sociologists and linguists. What then

could possibly impede them from appreciating the full complexity of the various indigenous communities' relationship with the openness of the policies of indigenous education and the preference for what seems to be a monolingual indigenous school based on the mainstream school.

The anthropologist Roy Wagner (1981:35) offers an answer; "anthropologists", he says, "study culture through culture [...then] whatever operations characterize our investigations must also be general properties of culture".

The corollary of this inescapable cultural embedding of any social scientist is the impossibility of de-contextualised objectivity even when applying what may considered to be a scientific procedure grounded on tested and age-old methods and procedures. As Sousa Santos has shown and as discussed above, the very episteme of scientific knowledge is itself culturally and historically embedded and worse still, the result of epistemicidal tendencies that destroy any alternative knowledges. The irony here is that social scientists who are not critically aware of their embedding in this episteme of lazy reason may in fact not be unlike kettles calling the pot black when they accuse indigenous communities of internalizing the dominant ideologies that exclude them, apparently to their own detriment.

If these social scientist specialists are disappointed with how many indigenous communities make their varying and heterogeneous choices permitted by the openness of indigenous education legislation, they may be expecting indigenous communities in general to make the same choices – those preferred by the non-indigenous specialists (ie. In favour of a bilingual indigenous school with indigenous knowledges in its curriculum). That is, when faced with the possibility of diverse and heterogeneous options (see table below for various possibilities of implementation of indigenous school) these specialists seem to expect diverse and heterogeneous indigenous communities to behave in a homogeneous, foreseeable manner, much as mainstream non-indigenous schools behave in generally standard fashion.

Indigenous language as medium	Indigenous language as subject	Portuguese as medium	Portuguese as subject	Indigenous knowledge	Mainstream knowledge
X	X	X	X	X	X
X			X		X
	X	X	X	X	X
X			X		X
X	X		X		X

Table 1. Various Possibilities for Configuring Implementations of Indigenous Schools in Brazil

The mainstream non-indigenous school, however, it is important to remember, unlike the indigenous school, cannot make the innumerable choices that indigenous schools can make. It is important to remember here that all the possible choices have to be made, and *are* made, collectively, by the indigenous community that harbours the indigenous school; this is not at all possible for a non-indigenous school which follows curricular and methodological orientations which are homogeneous throughout the nation.

Before making the connection between these postures and expectations of non-indigenous specialists and lazy reason and its attending waste of experience, it is worthwhile recalling some of the facts we encountered at the beginning of this analysis; in spite of the reduced size of the indigenous population in Brazil, in complete un-homogeneous fashion, it consists of:

a. 220 different peoples.
b. They speak180 different languages.
c. These languages belong to 30 different language families.

Beyond this *quantitative* diversity and heterogeneity, one may add a *qualitative* dimension to this; this relates to the fact that some communities have totally lost their *languages* where others have not and yet others face the threat of the future extinction of their languages. A second dimension that adds to the complexity of the heterogeneity of indigenous communities in Brazil, is that which refers to culture. Though some communities may have lost their languages they may have maintained their culture in the form of oral traditions and knowledges. Others may have maintained their cultures together with their languages, whilst yet others may have lost both.

The bottom line here is that if it is expected that because indigenous education has its own specific legislation, then indigenous communities across the country are expected to homogeneously make the same decisions to teach and learn in a uniform manner their indigenous languages and knowledges (albeit in the name of a respect for otherness), then these communities would be benefiting very little from the openness of the legislation, and would ironically be behaving as they did under the pre-1988 standardized assimilationist policies, residually left over from colonization. Who would be the real beneficiary of this situation? The state, whose expenses in producing materials and preparing teachers would be reduced given the possibility of implementing and economy of scale for homogenized indigenous schools. Or would the beneficiary be the community, who would apparently see its language and culture finally preserved and its knowledges occupying pride of place in the school curriculum. It is this latter possibility that seems to underlie the expectations of non-indigenous specialists.

But what of the waste of experience and the various manifestations of lazy reason that much time and many words have been spent on in this analysis. Where does this fit into the picture.

Part of the answer to this question has already been given above, where the extreme heterogeneity of indigenous communities has been alluded to, together with the fact that this seems not to have been critically absorbed by the specialists. This may now be read critically as evidence of metonymic and proleptic reasoning on the part of the specialists. The metonymic reasoning relates to the possibility that the non-indigenous specialists may be presupposing that their own logic and rationality, that of the "cultural and linguistic preservation" should be prioritized and implemented at all costs. The proleptic reasoning here relates to the expectation that the mere implementation of indigenous educational legislation *will* guarantee the survival and preservation of indigenous languages and communities. Both of these (proleptic and metonymic) reasonings, in spite of the fact that they are carried out by well-meaning pro-indigenous (but non-indigenous) thinkers, activists and policy makers, unfortunately exemplify lazy reason and bring in their wake the waste of experience.

This occurs through what Sousa Santos called the temporal and spatial concepts that accompany lazy reason: the *constriction of the present* and *totality*. First, the constriction of the present and resulting

expansion of the future; these appear in the form of the non-indigenous belief that the homogeneous widespread application of an indigenous bilingual curriculum containing indigenous knowledges and teaching the indigenous language and Portuguese, will guarantee an expanded and bright future of greater self-esteem and survival and thus emancipate indigenous communities from centuries of marginalization. The attendant constriction of the present consists of the lack of awareness, on the part of the non-indigenous specialists, of alternative forms of knowledge, existent in the present, which can also boost the chances of survival of indigenous communities and emancipate them here and now from the dominance of non-indigenous epistemologies.

In second place, the spatial conception of lazy reason, which manifests itself through the notion of totality, takes the form of presupposing that policy, legislation, curriculum and pedagogies have to be applied *in totum*, and in a generally homogeneous fashion. As discussed above, Sousa Santos already pointed out that the privileging of totality helps lazy reason solve the problem of what is perceived as the atomization of social reality (and hence a threat to desired and controllable homogeneity) and impose homogeneity. The social, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity that characterizes indigenous communities in Brazil vanishes in the face of this desire for totality. Ironically, as Sousa Santos (2002) also pointed out, this dominant desire for totality, wholeness and homogeneity brings in its wake an impossibility of social transformation; this impossibility arises from the idea of self-sufficient organization and "self-explanitoriness" that a totality proffers, there being no space for difference or alternatives from which change and transformation may surge.

The real waste of experience in this consideration of the epistemic issues involves the concepts of 'language and cultural preservation' that permeates much of the official policies of indigenous education. Here the waste of experience, in the sense of ignoring alternative non-dominant knowledges, lies in the conflict of interpretations around the notion of *preservation* and its profound cultural embeddedness.

To begin with, the concept of cultural and language *preservation* presume that both culture (in the form of knowledge) and language are substances which have some kind of material existence which can and should be preserved. This concept of substantivity then grounds the desire for a general homogeneity in the application of policies of indigenous education as discussed above.

Non-indigenous specialists, as we have also seen, strive for a bilingual indigenous school that would teach and hence *preserve* the indigenous language and culture of the community concerned. The beneficiary of such a desired (on the part of the non-indigenous specialists) outcome is seen to be each indigenous community that successfully implements and sustains the corresponding policy.

We have also seen, however, that the reality of the situation is very different. The ideal indigenous school as envisaged by policy foresees a school similar to that described in the first row of Table 1 above, and such a school is difficult to find. It is my contention that what is at stake is a conflict of interpretations of not only the concepts of *preservation, culture as knowledge, language*, but also of the very concept of *education* and *school*. Once again, the waste of experience lies in the difficulty in perceiving the differences in these concepts between the dominant Eurocentric culture and the indigenous cultures. This becomes a serious issue as a manifestation of the waste of experience when one remembers that the specialists involved in this conflict are social scientists themselves and therefore presumably critical thinkers aware of the embeddedness of these socio-cultural concepts.

In order to clarify this situation further, one needs to pursue another excursion, this time into Amazonian indigenous philosophies in order to reverse the process of wasted experience.

Translating amidst an ecology of knowledges: the case for equivocal translation and the ethical issue

As is well known among social scientists, and more specifically, among anthropologists in Brazil, a large part of the indigenous cultures of the Amazon region (where the indigenous population is concentrated) construct their epistemologies on the cultural precept of what Castro (2009) has called 'indigenous perspectivism'. This in turn is the product of an ontology that sees all living beings (human, animal, mineral, vegetal and spiritual) as interconnected manifestations of the same life force that permeates, in an undifferentiated manner, all forms of life. What all living beings are seen to share is *culture* (and not nature, as in Eurocentric humanism). This concept of culture refers to the cognitive capacity to think, make meaning and produce knowledge. Thus what distinguishes one species from another is a difference in knowledge where each form

of *knowledge* is seen as that species' specific response to its needs for survival. Thus, similar to Sousa Santos's concept the indigenous philosophy of perspectivism sees the world as being constituted by an ecology of heterogeneous knowledges.

As all living beings are seen as interconnected, relationships between them are seen to be essential for survival. However, this interconnectedness or phenomenological unity is purely *pronominal* and not substantive. This means that any species of subject perceives itself and its world in the same way that *we perceive our world and ourselves*. Given the diversity of such perceptions, the issue involved in relating across-species is not of *discovering the common referent to differing representations*, but on the contrary, of *making explicit the equivocation* in believing that the differences may *relate to the same*. (Castro ibid).

Once again, in a similar fashion to that proposed by Sousa Santos, who postulated the "work of translation" as an important means for relating within an ecology of knowledges, Castro identifies in indigenous philosophy the process of *equivocal translation*.

The objective of equivocal translation, as a tool for cross-species relationships, is not to *find a synonym* (a co-referential translation) for the representations of others, as if to speak of the "same thing"; the aim, Castro says, is *not to lose sight of the difference concealed within equivocal, apparently "synonomous" representations*, between *our* language and the language of the *other species*, "since we and they are never talking about the same things". Thus, even though a jaguar and a human may each see itself as consuming "beer", the beer of the jaguar (the blood of its prey, for example) is not the same as the beer of the human.

This process of e*quivocal translation* more than a means of simple epistemic translation, consists of an ethical dimension in the relationship with an other, much like that suggested by Caputo, Spivak, Gramsci and Butler above. Thus, despite sharing an *equal ignorance* about the Other, with the subject one is relating to, it is important to be aware that the *Other of the Other* is never exactly the same as the *Other of the Same* ie, there is *no point of convergence*, *no external referent*, no way of saying whose perspective is the true *perspective*.

The necessary contact with Otherness in a world perceived as inescapably interconnected requires a perception of the ethical need for translation as inescapable equivocation (Castro ibid):

> a good translation is one which allows the alien concept to deform and subvert the translator's conceptual toolbox, so that the intention of the source language can be expressed within the new one.

Thus the referent is not fixed and external (as in Eurocentric universalism) – it is the referent that changes. This may be exemplified by the traditional perspectivist indigenous saying:

> The jaguar sees itself as human and sees the human as a jaguar; I don't.

The perspectivism emphasizes the fact that in a human-jaguar confrontation, both the jaguar and I *know* that we see ourselves as human and the other as jaguar, but we have no way of ascertaining whose perspective is the real perspective.

This is not a case of traditional Eurocentric relativism, since what *I* know can only be the product of my species' capacity to produce knowledge; the only way that I can *know* what the jaguar *knows* is by becoming the jaguar. This however would mean acceding to the perspective and thus the knowledge of the jaguar and would result in my ceasing to exist as myself, and becoming the jaguar.

The ethical relationship suggested by this indigenous perspectivism is that one should be aware of the *equality in difference* between one's own knowledge and that of the other at *the same time* as one is fully aware that one *is not the other, and is therefore different.* This is not unlike Sousa Santos concept of translation as a means of acceding to mutual intelligibility, through *isomorphic concerns,* attentive always to the fact that total intelligibility is impossible.

This concept of equivocal translation then establishes the eminently ethical relationship necessary in relating to epistemic difference, even when total mutual illegibility is not possible. This is also not unlike Butler's, Spivak's and Gramsci's metaphors of the ethical need to listen to the other at the same time as perceiving the difficulty in hearing or understanding the other given the insuperable differences between oneself and the other. Nonetheless, translation, empathic or equivocal, as the need for engagement and mutual intelligibility among non-hegemonic practices and knowledges facilitates aggregation for counter-hegemonic action.

Changing the course of this excursion into indigenous philosophy back

to the issue of the conflicts of interpretation *vis a vis* the preference of many indigenous communities for a non-indigenous school within the domain of indigenous educational policies, one may now risk more empathic translations of this preference, away from the accusations of uninformed actions or the internalization of dominant ideologies. To begin with, it is essential to remember that these preferences and practices of indigenous communities occur within their cultural epistemologies and ontologies of indigenous perspectivism and its ensuing ethic of equivocal translation. As such, given their cultural awareness of the "isomorphic" *sameness in difference* of knowledges between their own indigenous knowledges and those of the mainstream school, the much-maligned preference for a mainstream curriculum in Portuguese occurs, one must remember, in *their own* indigenous community school and not on the territory of an other.

Being a community school, the teacher together with the students, belongs to the very same community. Moreover, as permitted by indigenous educational legislation, it is the community that controls the time and space of the community school. Thus, in spite of the fact that it is a mainstream curriculum teaching mainstream and not indigenous knowledge in Portuguese that is preferred in the community school, the process of construction of knowledge *within* the school (call it *schooling*) *coexists with* indigenous knowledges in the local indigenous language *outside* the school; hence, students continue to interact with traditional practices and knowledges - such as planting and hunting with their parents (call it *education*) – while at the same time learning the dominant knowledge and the dominant language . Seen from the philosophical stance of indigenous perspectivism, this schooling-education practice may be understood as the need to relate to different others (and their knowledges) with whom one is interconnected (in this case the dominant non-indigenous, national community); it may also be seen as the ethical and epistemological need, intrinsic to indigenous philosophy, to have access to the perspective and knowledge of the dominant other whilst at the same time being aware of (and hence avoiding) the danger of *becoming the other*. All this within the same indigenous philosophical framework that considers that knowledge is produced in response to each species need for survival.

The human talent for antagonism

In conclusion, far from a facile and apparently *dark* (as opposed to the *enlightened* reasoning of modernity) abandoning of one's own language,

culture and knowledge supposedly in favor of *equally darkly* adopting the hegemonic language, culture and knowledge of the nation, and far from a mechanical uncritical *dark* internalization of the dominant ideology, the apparently simple practice of preferring a mainstream curriculum in the mainstream language reveals itself as a complex philosophical process of equivocal translation, cultural survival and cosmopolitan reason, attesting to the strength, resilience and complexity of indigenous epistemologies in the face of epistemic diversity, bringing to the fore that what may have been simply perceived as dark and non-hegemonic, implies in fact, in its complexity what may be perceived as *various shades of darkness* where indigenous epistemologies are imbricated and interacting with non-indigenous epistemologies in a current political, linguistic and cultural context.

The same sophistication and resilience unfortunately cannot be perceived in the posture of some mainstream social scientists who claim to be pro-indigenous, and in favor of the preservation of indigenous languages and epistemologies. These specialists often seem to be trapped within the bounds of their own Enlightenment epistemologies, apparently with great difficulty for engendering translation and the search for mutual intelligibility in the midst of epistemic diversity and dissensus.

When they claim to listen to the indigenous other, they apparently only hear their own voices and values, seemingly overtaken with difficulty for escaping from the bounds of lazy thinking, and thus liable to waste the wealth of experience of the ecology of knowledges that surrounds them but remains invisible to their eyes. The lingering inheritance of coloniality and its unequal distribution of knowledges, bodies and languages seems to persist. This may be something that Applied Linguistics, in its focus on education, needs to be aware of in order to avoid, albeit unwittingly, continuing the legacy of coloniality. And here I end with a timely warning expressed by Todd (2009:9): "The idea that education can ameliorate certain global conditions under the sign of humanity is a worrying proposition... it fails to recognise that the very injustices and antagonisms which are the targets of such education are created and sustained precisely through our human talent for producing them".

Endnotes

1. Professor titular, Departamento de Letras Modernas da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. lynnmario@uol.com.br.
2. Ranciére (2011) defines dissensus as a "difference within the same", or "a sameness of the opposite", referring to the diversity that constitutes and not separates communities. For Ranciére, dissensus in this sense is the "actual reality of politics".
3. Grosfoguel (2008) and Quijano (1997), among others, refer also to the fact that within coloniality, besides knowledges, bodies (races and genders) and languages are also distributed unequally within unequal power relations. For the purposes of brevity, our discussion iun this paper will not focus on this aspect.

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