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Ethnographies within the Anthropocene

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We currently live in a world where microplastics exist in practically every human and non-human body without knowing the long-term consequences of this. Garbage patches have been forming in the Pacific Ocean, and everyday objects, such as water bottles and shampoo, travel thousands of kilometres across the seas, connecting continents while also polluting them. Many rivers, such as some in the Amazon region, have mercury concentrations 8.600% above the amount acceptable for human consumption. Ethnographies carried out among peoples far from urban centres until very recently tended to trigger an imaginary landscape composed of idyllic and fruitful forests, vigorous rivers and abundant flora and fauna. Although supported by distinct gradients and scales, considering social inequalities, all humans and other than humans are being affected by the Anthropocene. Whether in urban centres, tropical forests or the Arctic. In this work, I propose to address ethnographies carried out in the context of environmental devastation, especially among Indigenous peoples. I am interested in how contemporary anthropologists embody the Anthropocene, whether through new ethics committee guidelines on risk or through what is co-experienced with interlocutors in long-term fieldwork. What relationships emerge in research contexts such as those in which there is water scarcity due to rivers contaminated by pesticides? What ethical boundaries are redrawn as the Anthropocene advances over territories and bodies of people with whom we have worked for decades? Are anthropologists of a new generation doomed to no longer have the opportunity and/or interest in conducting their ethnographies among peoples strongly impacted by the events of the Anthropocene?

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In addition to ethical issues, what political alliances are configured from ethnographies that unite the lives of anthropologists with those of the people they interact with during fieldwork? Among such alliances are those established between female anthropologists, Indigenous women and their children. How can we take our children to environments that we know not even the children of our interlocutors should have to live in due to the imposed health conditions? In order to answer these questions, I bring examples from my trajectory of more than twenty years of work with Guarani-Mbyá indigenous peoples, inhabitants of Brazil and Argentina.