

MIRIAM PILLAR GROSSI
SIMONE LIRA DA SILVA
IVI PORFIRIO
CAROLINE AMÁBILE VALE DOS SANTOS
GABRIEL DARÍO LÓPEZ ZAMORA
GABRIELA ALANO TERTULIANO
MARIA LUIZA SCHEREN
FILIPE TCHINENE CALUEIO
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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS ANAIS

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WORLD (OF) ENCOUNTERS:
the Past, Present and Future of Anthropological Knowledge

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WEDE'RÃ LAB: AUDIOVISUAL PRACTICES AS BOUNDARY SPACES AND INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS MEDIATION

Samuel Leal

PhD in Communication at Universidade Federal Fluminense

Francisco Caminati

Professor in Sociology and Anthropology
at Universidade Estadual Paulista

Abstract

Since first contacts with Brazilian State in 1946, the Xavante learned to take into account the non-indigenous as relevant political element. During the second half of 20th century they mastered the ways of dealing with the agencies responsible for indigenous issues, which became way of resources and source of political power and dispute between leaderships.

More recently, anthropologist and artists interested in working with indigenous people also became part of the Xavante political landscape. The most noticeable form of these new ways of dealing with the waradzú is the almost mandatory need of a “project” that implies some benefit for the community, in exchange for developing research among them.

This proposal will present with one of these “projects”, named Wederã Lab. It is a laboratory for audiovisual production located in the Wederã village, at the Pimentel Barbosa Reserve. Its existence is due to a network established during the creation of a “Ponto de Cultura” (a community state funded cultural center) in the village. We propose to think how the laboratory works as a place for modulating local contact with foreign practices and techniques such as anthropology and cinema, in order to minimize its danger and undesirable impact, namely among younger generations. We argue that places such as indigenous cultural centers and schools work as “boundary spaces” that favor local controlled inter-ethnic relations through circulation of people, techniques and knowledge.

Keywords: video; boundaries; inter-ethnic relations; xavante

INTRODUCTION

Since the definitive and irreversible contacts with Brazilian State in 1946, the Xavante learned to take into account non-indigenous people as relevant agents in their political system. During the second half of 20th century they mastered the ways of dealing with the

agencies responsible for indigenous issues, which became way of resources and, at the same time, source of political power and dispute between local leaderships (GARFIELD 2011).

More recently, anthropologist and artists interested in working with indigenous people also became part of the Xavante political landscape. The more noticeable form of this new ways of dealing with the *warazú* is the almost mandatory need of a “project” (CAMINATI 2016) that implies some benefit for the community, in exchange for developing research among them.

In this presentation we’ll talk about one of these “projects”, named Wede’rã Lab. It is a laboratory for audiovisual production with free software located in the Wede’rã village, at the Pimentel Barbosa Reserve¹. Its existence is due to a network established during the installation of a “Ponto de Cultura”, a community state-funded cultural center, in the village. We propose to think how the laboratory works as a place for modulating local contact with foreign practices and techniques such as anthropology, free software and cinema, in order to maximize cultural autonomy and political agency, at same time that minimizes the dangers and undesirable impacts of contemporary unfolding of colonial contact, namely among younger generations.

THE NETWORK AND THE CENTER

Wede’rã village, located at the Pimentel Barbosa Indigenous Land, was created in 1997 from the departure of some families from the Reserve’s oldest village, also called Pimentel Barbosa. There are currently around 70 people living there, a small size considered other communities average. Some years after its creation, Wede’rã obtained a School of Basic Education, still today the only brick masonry house in the village. It is also the headquarters of a local indigenous civil association and the Ponto de Cultura, which are the legal structures that function as way of access to funding projects.

¹ Cf.: <https://terrasindigenas.org.br/pt-br/terras-indigenas/3821>

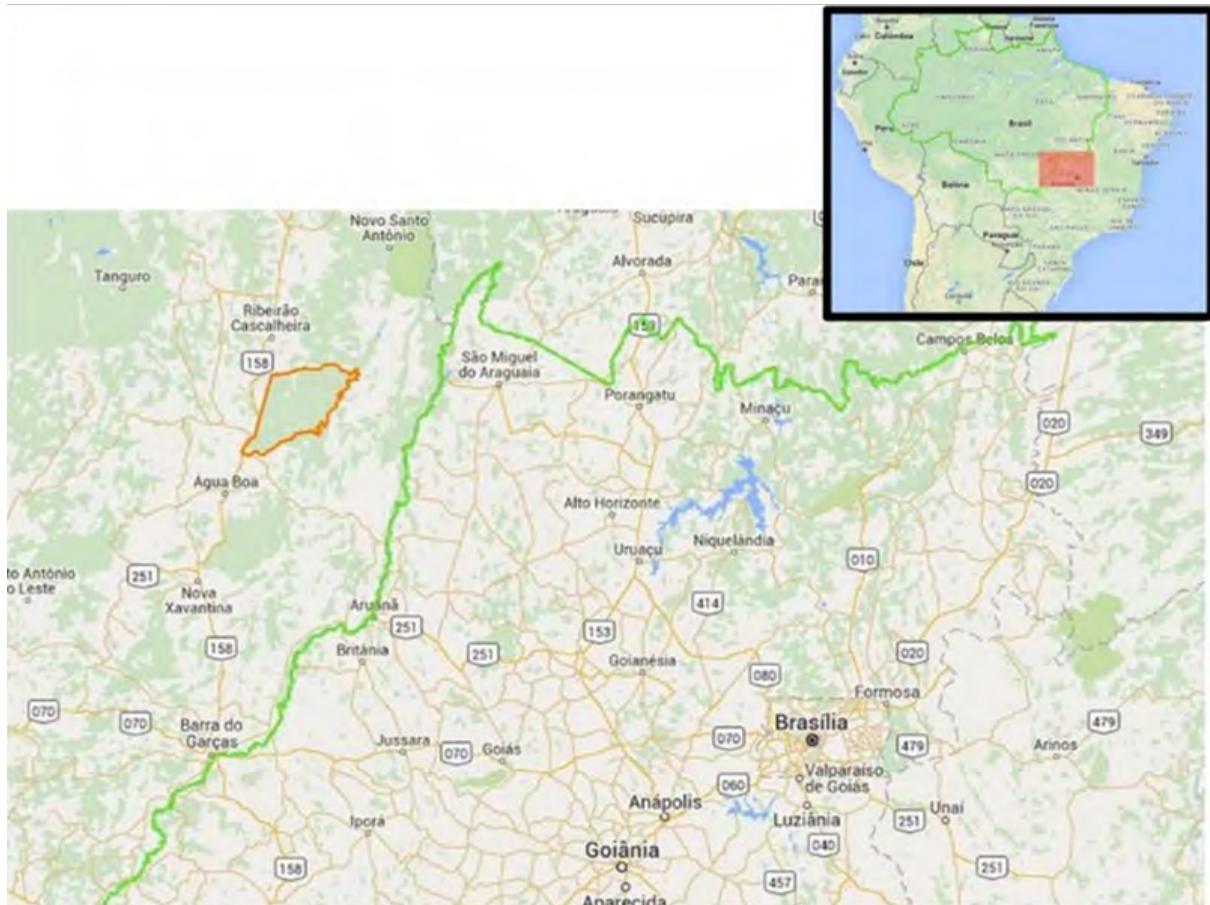


Figure 1 – General and detailed map of Pimentel Barbosa Indigenous Land area.

It was through this small legal-institutional complex that the Wede’rã Lab network was born. In 2005 the village was contemplated by an agreement with Federal Government’s Culture Department that destined to the community funding for the installation of this “Ponto de Cultura”. For the agreement implementation in 2008, Wede’rã residents invited a *warazú* group, as they call the non-indigenous, to compose an “external council” that would provide technical and consultative support for proposing and organizing activities (CAMINATI 2013:275-279).

Community main objective for this funding at that time was the installation of an audiovisual production laboratory, based on the usage of free software, in a room of the School’s new building, which had been recently constructed. Therefore, it was agreed at this first meeting that a group of residents would go to the city of Campinas a few months later to buy the necessary equipment and engage in training workshops (*ibid.*, 284). This trip, which foresaw only a week of activities, ended up being extended for more than a month, for different reasons. This period ended up bonding the *auw* who participated in the activities and the *warazú* team formed to offer the workshops and facilitate equipment’s purchase.



Figure 2 –Wede'rã's audiovisual reception habits.

From that moment, several other activities were organized over the following years, which consolidated the operation of this network that ended up being called Wede'rã Lab. With the “Ponto de Cultura” resources was possible to buy an editing station, cameras and accessories for audiovisual production, to set up a computer room with internet access, acquire TVs, DVD players, projection screens and projectors. This set was for a long time the only stable infrastructure of audiovisual reception and local exhibition in Wede'rã. In addition, since the arrival of the electricity grid to Pimentel Barbosa Indigenous Land in 2011 through a federal program, many families have bought their own TV sets, as well as laptops and DVD players.

In the following years, the “Ponto de Cultura” ended up constituting a space of articulation and audiovisual experimentation around issues that are dear to the community. The activities developed were consolidated beyond the workshops offered by non-indigenous researchers, establishing the “Ponto de Cultura” as a reference in audiovisual production for the nearby xavante communities.

THE SCHOOL

At Wede'rã, cinema experience is intrinsically linked to the “Ponto de Cultura” and the School. We understand that such closeness between cinematographic and pedagogical practices comes from an affinity derived from the alterity mediation device that both integrate.

We here look at the indigenous school as it has been thought in Brazil since late 1970s, as a place of continuous community production. The demands of civil society that emerged at that time were consolidated in the Constitution of 1988 and “paved the way for the establishment of ‘differentiated indigenous schools’ and for the formulation of public policies that respond to the educational rights of Indigenous persons to an intercultural, bi or multilingual education, community and self-determination driven” (LOPES DA

SILVA; FERREIRA 2001:10). This new conception of indigenous school, which completes three decades in 2018, guaranteed, in both practical and institutional terms, pedagogical projects based on native processes of knowledge production and transmission and open to the possibilities of intercultural context in which they are developed.



Figure 3 – Wede'rã's Etenhiritipá School – former and current buildings.

Wede'rã's School is part of this process. Having been thought to operate with a local team only, school's creation was oriented by the same project that led families, then residents of Pimentel Barbosa, to leave it and found a new village: both the pragmatic strategy of being closer to natural resources, that are more abundant into the territory, and a better way to elaborate local ethnicity towards an increasing necessity to deal with the non-indigenous to achieve local objectives. The claim of a faculty and administrative school's staff formed exclusively by local residents was based on this assumption, so that it could be means to favor a positive and productive relationship with the extra-village world and functioning as a way of accessing useful knowledge and techniques of community interest.

It is important, also, to notice that the school was preceded by the existence of the local civil association. It was the first form of civil organization in that community. This possibility, guaranteed by the 1988 Constitution, was a politicization factor of Brazilian indigenous people and contributed to shape educational policies (LOPES DA SILVA; FERREIRA 2001). But more than that, the Association was the first gesture of political articulation of Wede'rã families, guided by a community project that sought to value at the same time a traditional *a'uwẽ* way of life and the new possibilities given by inter-ethnic contact.

The legal and technical apparatus formed by the School, the "Ponto de Cultura" and the Association is the current manifestation of this founding project. It is not accidental, therefore, the integration that exists in the functioning of the School and the "Ponto de Cultura". Thus, Wede'rã's School functions as a community interface with the outside world. In this context, its role is to allow the community to reframe and transform itself so that, in changing, can maintain it's core values.

CINEMA, EDUCATION AND IDENTITY

The relations between School and “Ponto de Cultura” in Wede’rã goes beyond the formal aspect and connect them as places of community production in a broad sense. We understand this community as “a belonging and an openness” (MIGLIORIN 2015:194), in order to think cinema and education “as a strong operator in the constitution and the opening of communities” (*id.*).

We are interested in such an approach for the active dimension given to such practices and their power to mobilize group relations. Notably with regard to the school, this is an inversion of the state pedagogical hierarchy, also presupposed in the local pedagogical project. This change of perspective helps us to discuss the entrance of both pedagogy and cinema in these communities: cinema and school are foreign technical and theoretical apparatuses, formed on political, social and philosophical bases fundamentally different from the Xavante ontology. The presence of legal, financial and technical structures in the village that give shape to these foreign knowledge is therefore problematic in itself.

Both cinema and pedagogy played a decisive role in the processes of cultural colonial domination, notably in Latin America from the first decades of the twentieth century. This proximity, however, points to a central power of these practices. Cinema and education operate, especially in intercultural contexts, as devices for world mediation. In Wede’rã, we would say that these two institutions modulate experiences of interethnic contact, articulating points of view.

This calls attention to a fundamental problem: the relation between cinema, school and ethnicity implies processes of articulation, displacement and multiplication of points of view from the adoption of foreign practices. The question here therefore involves three terms: the Ponto de Cultura, the School and the Village itself. In this sense, school and cinema appears as new places in which ethnicity is configured as an active practice of cultural affirmation.

With this, we can better define the place of cinema in this community. It is a matter of thinking about audiovisual practice in an interethnic context of heterogeneous agents, a field of alterity and identity elaboration, a space in which forms of difference presentation mutually articulate and resonate.

FRONTIER, CINEMA AND INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIP

We then propose that spaces such as Indigenous schools and “pontos de cultura” operate as “frontier spaces” that favor local control of interethnic relations, through the

regulated circulation of people, techniques and knowledge. The idea of frontiers must be understood here as an openness, a place of mediation, exchange and circulation rather than as a limit. Thus, they are spaces of interaction in which social difference is elaborated and identities are produced differently (LOPES DA SILVA; FERREIRA 2001:64). From the work of Fredrik Barth, we understand that

“ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence”. (1969:10)

Such argument helps us because it does not take cultural difference as a presupposition of ethnic identity, but the opposite: identity affirmation produces difference. In other words, difference perception in relation to other with whom a group relates is stronger than the perception of characteristics and symbolic processes shared internally when it refers to the constitution and affirmation of an ethnic identity.

Central to this process is a game between group's self-image and the way it is performed to other. The Xavante have a word for this perception of themselves: *auw höïmanazé*, which can be roughly translated as “xavante culture”. The expression refers to what determines individual's group belonging, which gives him a collective identity (GRAHAM 2005). So, we can say that the “projects” we mention before currently consolidate this intercultural dynamic of identity constitution from difference perception, of which Wede'rã Lab is an example.

WORKSHOPS

In order to better illustrate our argument, we bring a practical example of an activity carried out in the context of this interethnic network that forms the laboratory. It was an editing workshop that took place in September 2010, that should work from a footage of a school's activity. This footage came from the register on an event carried out a few months earlier, part of an exchange program with other indigenous people called “Exchange of Knowledge”. It was an one-week visit that guarani students and teachers from São Paulo made to the Wede'rã school. During that week, Xavante teachers planned a series of rituals and activities to introduce local culture to visitors. In the workshop, the editing orientation was to emphasize the exchange of traditional knowledge.

If we understand the “Ponto de Cultura” and the School as spaces of exchange and production of identity, this activity mobilizes the questions raised here in a very sophisticated way. That is because not only there was a relation between *a'uw* and *warazú*

being mediated through the activity. In the workshop there was another mediation going on, carried out within the school: an interethnic relationship between two indigenous people, through an apparatus initially foreign to both. The “exchange of knowledge” that xavante and guarani teachers and students performed went beyond the exchange of content through the presentation of traditions. In that meeting it operated the transformation of one group by the other through self-positioning in face of difference. At the same time, there was an alignment of strategies against a common threat posed by the non-indigenous society in which both are comprehended.



Figure 4 – Frames of “Exchange of Knowledge” video.

As for the entry of network’s non-indigenous members into the process, it happened in the articulation that exists between School and “Ponto de Cultura”. There, our role was to help a group of adolescents from Wede’rã to think about the experience with the Guarani students. These young boys and girls who participated in this project were instigated to position themselves as Xavante in two levels: before the Guarani “kins”, with whom there is a solidarity on the level of ethnic identity; and before the *warazú* and the practice of cinema, that demands an effort of elaboration of another order, that takes place in the terms of technological appropriation. In a way, the gesture of producing and editing these images was the community process of elaborating the double encounter in question.

This proximity is, in no way, contextual and goes beyond the practical and institutional aspect. It is the production, invention and circulation of knowledge from the aesthetic experience in school and village, from the encounter of traditional, pedagogical and artistic practices that takes place in a sociocultural context that decisively modifies the techniques involved.

Thus, cinema and education operate less as a place of knowledge and difference colonization and more as a hybrid place, space for presence of the *warazú* world in the village, where these foreign elements may be subject to circulation and contact rules through which external differentiation and internal transformations can be modulated and controlled.

In other words, there is a machination between cinema, school and identity that intensifies a reflexive dimension of culture, a continuous process of reinventing something that binds individual, group and collective memory from the gaze of the other and to the other. The *warazú* partners are captured precisely in this dynamic of constituting the gaze of the other about themselves, while at the same time constituting a group's self-image from other's gaze.

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[VOLTA AO SUMÁRIO]