

Reply

Resposta

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I have collaborated academically with Professor Bruce Miller for nearly thirty years, a period over which I have made several visits to British Columbia, Canada, and he has made several visits to Brazil. During a five months postdoctoral leave in 2009, and in later visits, Miller introduced me to his work with indigenous people in Western Canada and the Northwest of the USA.

In September 2009, I was invited to participate with him in the Gathering at Hozomeen. The Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission invited Washington and BC First Nations, archaeologists, anthropologists and other interested people to gather at International Point in the Upper Skagit Valley, on the Canada-USA border, for two days. This two-day 'Gathering at Hozomeen' focused on understanding and celebrating the long history of Indigenous Nation involvement in the Upper Skagit River Watershed, cultural activities, and the presentation of a new proposal of Seattle City Light to raise the level of the Ross dam, part of the Skagit River Hydroelectric Project. If implemented, this proposal would result in further flooding of indigenous lands on both sides of the international border. I also visited the X̱m̱̓ytem Interpretive Centre in the Fraser River valley, an Indigenous tourism project. During this time, I was also introduced to the Musqueam community near the University of British Columbia (UBC) campus, among many other opportunities in which I could accompany anthropologists in their work.

In 2013, Bruce Miller invited me to accompany a repatriation ceremony for ancestral remains. These remains were returned from the Museum of Vancouver to the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre at Stó:lō Nation in Chilliwack.

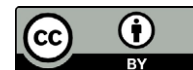
As mentioned by Professor Miller, his research on indigenous peoples along the Canada-US border has some parallels with my own research with indigenous peoples along the Brazil-Guyana border. His book, *Invisible Indigenes: The politics of nonrecognition* (2003) examines how national governments classify, govern, and control the indigenous populations within their boundaries through administrative, judicial, and economic means. This framework has been valuable for comparing the non-recognition of some indigenous peoples in Brazil and other national states. Miller's research on legal issues and indigenous peoples also has parallels with my research on the writing down of indigenous customary laws in Roraima, by indigenous people, in an effort to gain recognition by the Brazilian State and open a path towards the recognition of legal pluralism. Miller's book *The Problem of Justice: Tradition and Law in the Coast Salish World* (2001) shows how, after a long colonial history, different Coast Salish communities along the northwest coast of North America have taken different directions in understanding and establishing systems of indigenous justice. Miller's work also has parallels with my own work on the criminalization of indigenous persons and their imprisonment by the national justice system. We have participated in symposiums at UBC, at the CASCA meeting at the University of Victoria in 2013, at the joint CASCA/AAA meeting at Vancouver in 2019, and the meeting at Guelph, Ontario in 2021. Professor Miller's work has been an important influence on my own comparative work since my first research visit to Canada in 1995.

Professor Francesca Merlan starts her comments with a reflection on anthropology in Brazil, selecting two widely read anthropologists, Alcida Ramos (1990) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1999), who publish in English and do research with indigenous societies in Brazil, and examining articles of these anthropologists published in the 1990s. However, evaluating Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's well-known article requires considering the works of João Pacheco de Oliveira (1998, 1999a) from the same period, as Viveiros de Castro's article can be seen primarily as a reply to Pacheco de Oliveira.

In her comments, Merlan focuses especially on my PhD fieldwork with the Waimiri-Atroari (Kinja), which was carried out between January 1982 and August 1985 in five distinct periods, making up eighteen months of fieldwork within the indigenous territory. Merlan characterizes my work with the Waimiri-Atroari as being from a "political viewpoint", in contrast to a "reflective stance". Referring to anthropological research with indigenous peoples in Brazil, Mariza Peirano emphasizes the highly political milieu: "In Brazil theory is not only an approach, but a political declaration" (2005, 63).

The situation of the Waimiri-Atroari people in the first half of the 1980s, can be described as extreme, having suffered an enormous depopulation to only 332 persons in 1983 (Baines 1991) as a consequence of epidemics and massacres. The survivors surrendered at the FUNAI (the National Indigenous Peoples Foundation) Posts and the Waimiri-Atroari "captains" were recruited as spokespersons for the FUNAI's "Attraction Front" administration. Their role was enhanced after the indigenist administration was taken over by the Waimiri-Atroari Programme, a non-governmental organization within the Eletronorte company, the company responsible for constructing the Balbina Hydroelectric Scheme. This project flooded a vast area of this indigenous people's traditional territory. The captains were promoted as spokespersons for Eletronorte's indigenist administration and appeared in propaganda videos together with the Programme's coordinator. The period of my field research coincided with a crucial historical moment in their history. Since 1987, they have been no longer under the FUNAI's indigenist administration, but under the administration of the Waimiri-Atroari Programme of the Eletronorte company, through an agreement with the FUNAI.

Merlan points to the fact that, despite the accentuated domination, I affirm that the Waimiri-Atroari remain alive and active, searching for a pathway to the future that they are prescribing. Even under extreme domination of a "corporate indigenist Programme", the captains assumed the role attributed to them as spokespersons for the administration. By "corporate indigenism" (Baines 1993) I refer to a new form of indigenism directly subordinated to the lucrative interests of large corporations within territories traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples. Despite the fact that I never try to present the Waimiri-Atroari as "passive victims of the invading society", a criticism that was directed at my PhD dissertation by some indigenists at the time, and, despite the domination, at the time backed by a direct military presence (in 1982, after some Waimiri-Atroari left a FUNAI Post angrily, after a misunderstanding, the coordinator of the Attraction Front called in



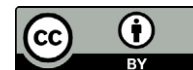
soldiers from the military battalion at Abonari on the margins of the Indigenous Land to make a show of military force), they continue to seek a future within the constraints imposed on them by the indigenist Programme, and as spokespersons for it. To explain my own fieldwork position turned out to be the easiest way to explain the extreme situation in which the Waimiri-Atroari were encapsulated.

The control that the indigenist Programme imposes over the Waimiri-Atroari is intense and continues to be so, more than thirty seven years later. Currently, the Waimiri-Atroari are monitoring the installation of power line towers that link the national electricity power-line grid on the section between Manaus and Boa Vista, which traverses their territory. The agreement signed by the leaders was extremely asymmetrical, imposed by the Eletronorte company, that controls their indigenist Programme. Around one hundred and ten Waimiri-Atroari are accompanying the installation of the electricity power-line towers within their territory, in groups of thirty to forty at a time, dressed in uniforms and reporting daily to their communities. This indigenous surveillance, while presented in rhetoric of autonomy, is still framed within the constraints of the Programme's administration.

The spreading of distorted and false information by the Eletronorte Waimiri-Atroari Programme, since its establishment in 1987, has been impressive. After so many years of manipulation of company-controlled information, the positions taken by the Waimiri-Atroari leaders can be understood as attitudes imposed on them to be adopted, rather than any questioning about what is reliable information and what is not. It is an attitude of unconditional obedience to the coordination of the Programme which, since the times of the FUNAI's Attraction Front, was a primary condition for being promoted as captain.

The silencing of people who were seen as a possible threat to the Programme's authoritarian indigenism echoes the old ideology of national security imposed by the military during the dictatorship. One can hope that the Waimiri-Atroari may have opportunities to develop critical views on the Programme and the police-like control that it exercises over them through the use of distorted dogmas. The Programme, following many of the practices of the Attraction Front that preceded it, has trained some captains as security agents for its own administration. When I started fieldwork in 1982, any mention I made of the Balbina Dam construction or the mining company that had occupied part of their territory was immediately reported by the captains to the heads of the FUNAI posts, the coordinator, and the FUNAI Regional Delegation in Manaus, where I was summoned and warned not to ask questions about such sensitive issues.

Since April 1987, the Programme has maintained this role and has prohibited independent anthropologists from doing fieldwork within the territory. In my case, a campaign of calumny was set up by the Programme in 1989, to deceive the Waimiri-Atroari leaders, framing me through stereotypes as a supposed foreign agent working for international mining companies, who was supposedly using indigenous people to try to stop them from making direct agreements with Brazilian mining companies. I was falsely depicted as working against indigenous peoples' interests and against Brazilian sovereignty in the Amazon.



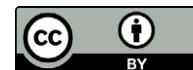
Some anthropologists and many professional indigenists view the then co-ordinator of the Eletronorte Programme (from 1987 until his death in 2017) as a pioneer indigenist activist who has revolutionized Brazilian indigenism, and defend the Programme on the grounds that the Waimiri-Atroari population has increased rapidly since the early 1980s. This was due primarily to vaccination campaigns carried out by the FUNAI since the 1970s. The main argument used by the Programme itself is that this indigenous people has survived and recovered biologically, covering up the violence in declarations of captains who praise the programme in a rhetoric of indigenous autonomy.

Years ago, I heard a prominent public prosecutor, famous for her highly commendable role in the defence of indigenous rights, at a seminar held by the Eletro-norte, at the company headquarters in Brasília, sitting at the conference table beside the then coordinator of the Programme and praising him as a great indigenist activist for his work with the Waimiri-Atroari, which “saved the Waimiri-Atroari from extinction”. It is a huge challenge to confront such deep-rooted corruption that deceives indigenous leaders and also many other well-intentioned and honest people through intensive company propaganda campaigns.

Looking at more recent events, Merlan mentions the 2023 “Voice” Referendum in Australia, which proposed altering the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. This proposal was defeated since some people thought it might erode the principle of the equality of citizenship, as well as being racially divisive. These apprehensions disregard the long colonial history of enormous inequalities and asymmetrical social relations between the national societies and indigenous peoples. This mirrors the common-sense attitude I encounter in Roraima, Brazil, when working with indigenous people in prison, where many law operators refuse to accept differentiated rights of indigenous people that are consecrated in the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution and in international legislation, on the grounds that “everyone is equal before the law”.

In the case of the Waimiri-Atroari, both government and company policies have changed since the 1988 Constitution. Previously, government policies for mining and hydroelectric projects in indigenous territories were imposed and then “legalised”. The 1988 Constitution, however, requires Congress approval and the “consent” of indigenous people affected. While Congress approval is easy in a Congress dominated by ruralist caucuses and large company interests, one way of getting indigenous consent is to impose a tight control over indigenous leaders and prepare indigenous spokespersons to defend these interests.

In answer to Merlan’s question – “What do the Waimiri-Atroari think and do, for example, when depicted nowadays (and lauded) by FUNAI (or company) administrations as ‘resistant’” – and other questions, all independent anthropological research has been banned by the Eletronorte Programme since it took over the administration in April 1987. However, the captains have been prepared as spokesmen for the administration, while the broader Waimiri-Atroari community has

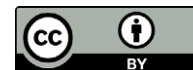


been prepared to show complete subordination to these leaders, who embody the Programme's corporate indigenist policy. The Programme recognises and promotes Waimiri-Atroari (Kinja) indigenous culture, however, as noted by Povinelli (2002) and mentioned by Merlan, at the same time engrains new forms of subordination. Merlan demands more understanding about how the Waimiri-Atroari construe the situation. Merlan's questions are challenging to answer given the thirty-seven-year ban on independent anthropological research. Nevertheless, it can be conjectured that, after a long history of violence and extreme domination, the Waimiri-Atroari see accommodation as a strategy for survival.

Needless to say, the Waimiri-Atroari do not see the world through the eyes of their dominators but construct their own interpretations. They are acutely aware of the historical situations in which they are encompassed.

As Merlan affirms, theorization is never exhausted. Viveiros de Castro's critique of Pacheco de Oliveira's work, briefly mentioned by Merlan, is equally open to critique, since Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1996) is based on a construction of indigenous societies within its own generalizing theory that refers primarily to a debate between the anthropologists who adopt this approach. João Pacheco de Oliveira and his followers are engaged in a historical anthropology, examining indigenous societies in the context of national society as contemporaries of anthropologists and other agents of the national society. On the other hand, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1996), Tânia Stolze Lima, and other followers, developed the Amerindian perspectivism, influenced by the structuralist approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss and his followers.

The main difference lies between the approach of historical anthropology practiced by Pacheco de Oliveira (1999b), which focuses on the study of indigenous peoples in the context of national society, and, on the other hand, a neo-structuralist approach focusing on the study of internal aspects of each indigenous society based on their cosmology, social organization, forms of kinship, and mythology. This polarization represents only one characteristic of the vast diversity of anthropology with indigenous peoples carried out in Brazil over recent decades.



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Author's contribution

Stephen Baines is responsible for the integral conception, analysis, methodology and writing of this article, as well as for raising the funds that enabled the research reported on to be carried out.

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