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Cultural humility and Cultural competence

For a better psychology



Picture 1: Statue of a Kankourang in Saint-Louis du Senegal, a mythical figure of authority in the Mandingo oral tradition. Credits: I S. Diop

Introduction

THE SOCIO-GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Indigenous Psychology (IP) is a field of the discipline, that emerged in the last 50 years. It was developed simultaneously to the reconstruction of many countries after colonization as scholars were reaching out to cultural heritage to solve local challenges. Western psychology (WP) and social science have not been instrumental to integrate cultures of the colonised peoples. Conversely, experimentations and theories have actively excluded and discredited the indigenous knowledge. The emergence of cultural relativism in social sciences, has allowed the opening of another methodology in anthropology (Lévi-Strauss, 1967), ethnography (M. Mauss, 1950), philosophy (see Kim et al (2006) about integration of Confucianism in human and social sciences) and so forth. The wave of decolonisation in social sciences has empowered researchers to integrate a humanistic view of psychology, that can integrate indigenous knowledge and work with indigenous people at another position than that of the distant observer experimenting for their own benefit. Hence, the development of indigenous was preceded by the construction of cultural humility and competence simultaneously to the deconstruction of the researcher as a representative figure of colonialism. In this lesson, three researchers working in different parts of the colonised world, will dive into concepts of cultural symbolism, coloniality and indigenous psychology, to define a step toward a decolonized training and methodology in psychology and social sciences at large.

An example of cultural humility in applied anthropology

---------- IN THE MIDDLE EAST

"*My research conducted on traditional medicine among different communities in Palestine, unstructured interviews and observations of participants were carried out in the homes of the informants and the traditional healers.*
The healers were men and women. The material was recorded in field logs, and some was tape recorded. Samples from all the plants and other substances used in healing were collected and identified by healers, patients, and university botanists. Furthermore, these plants may be picked in the wild or bought in specialty shops as well as from indigenous herbalists. In traditional and folk medicine, the Bedouin appeal not only to the herbalist, but also to the dervish, amulet writer, the cauterizer; the mujabbir (for setting broken limbs); midwives; the 'Attar or local vendor of medicinal spices; holy tombs; the sea, rivers, springs; and so on. In addition, Bedouin healers use techniques that stimulate physiological processes, including bathing, sweat-bathing, massage, cupping, emetics, burning/cauterizing, incision, and bloodletting (Abu-Rabia, 2023: 1-5 ; 2020: 9)"



Picture 2: An old mother selling herbs

When did we start talking about…

…Cultural humility?

Psychology as a human experimental science, originated in western societies. Many researchers have pointed out its ties to European parochial and nationalist cultures (Allwood & Berry, 2006). Indeed, since its beginnings, the discipline was rooted in the European philosophical tradition, and most of the clinical concepts are themselves imprinted in this mythology. According to Allwood and Berry (2006), It has been generally admitted that human behavior is highly influenced by the cultural and social environment where it developed.

The concept of cultural humility can be associated to the idea of cultural relativism, which itself was brought by Claude Levy-Strauss (later published in 1967), and developed by Marcel Mauss (1950), long before the emergence of Indigenous Psychology as a field of Psychology. This concept seems to be reactional to a certain form of coloniality that remained after colonisation, using science as a tool for human domination. The dehumanisation of colonised peoples was an important argument to justify their subordination and psychology has been a strong advocate for this purpose. Bulhan (1980) has inventoried a number of studies that were conducted in Subsaharan Africa and funded by western companies, by psychologists willing to enhance the capacities of workers, to perform under inhumane conditions. Indeed, those psychological studies were based on psychometric testing, aiming to prove their intellectual inferiority and justify the management techniques in place. Bulhan has also noted how these examples were representative of how western psychological theories did not comprehend the context of oppression, that is an inherent part of the result they created, observed and analyzed. The strong neutral and objective position of the researcher seems to have originally been tailored for the objects of the experimentation (and not to advance the researcher), since these researchers clearly had the purpose to advance their funders' benefits.

The concept of cultural humility since the beginning of its dissemination, carries a humanistic voice, toward a comprehensive corpus of knowledge within human sciences, one that would be mindful of diversity. When it emerged, researchers were opposing this previous dominant narrative, of an innate western cultural hierarchy. Indeed, this narrative was solidly ingrained to compensate for the human cost of the horrors of colonisation and enslavement. Cultural humility, in this context, appeared as a corrective measure to not reproduce the errors of the past, and train researchers to another frame of thinking.

Barriers and challenges of WP in non-western settings

Accepting the existence of paradigms to understand time and space is an important aspect of cultural humility. And when WP is bound on the core principles of linearity and European definition of the family, there may be a challenge when it comes to providing a solution in a non-western sociocultural environment, as for the emotional states, and their ramifications in different cultures.

Indeed, all the research conducted to retrace the historiography of psychology and cultural humility, has defined the western world as a place of science and civilisation, and the rest of the world as a fuel for this knowledge production fabric. A part of this fuel was meant to enrich it with resources, but the other part was closer to a space of experimentation. Therefore, observing non-western societies was not meant to be instructive but merely strategic.

When this perspective of cultural humility aroused, it contained the implied statement that non-western « primitive » cultures were as respectable and « sophisticated » as western cultures. This denied the researchers' « right » to perform unethical studies, and enforced the respect of people's dignity. However, this representation carries the consequence to suscite guilt and defensiveness, triggering a movement of rejection toward cultural models of human sciences. Henceforth, WP has not really benefitted from this opening, to integrate a nuanced positioning toward certain theories, but rather strengthened its ties with medicine and biology, to escape this confrontation even though the latters were equally spaces of violence and racism (Peiretti-Courtis, 2018).

The process of colonisation and flux of migration, have had the consequence to diversify the number of people exposed to western knowledge and tools. Hence,

What is Cultural Competence?

---- DEFINING THE CONCEPT

We understand cultural competence as the ability of a person to shape the exchange of experiences between different cultural communities in concrete situations without homogenizing their differences. To achieve this, it is necessary to establish relationships of alterity amid the multi-diversity of indigenous peoples and communities.

Establishing relations of alterity means considering that indigenous peoples and communities precede and transcend the knowledge that psychology or any other scientific field has temporarily built up about them. - They precede, because the peoples and communities were constituted before the arrival of the psychologist and researcher.

They transcend, because the psychologist or researcher has access to only part of the community's experience.

It is also important to remember that each indigenous people and community is internally heterogeneous. We therefore consider the heterogeneity of peoples, the heterogeneity of communities belonging to a people, the heterogeneity of people within each indigenous community, and intrapersonal heterogeneity, as people and societies change dynamically over time. Each community and all peoples establish a place to see/feel/live from their "process of territorialization of space/time in which they finally establish themselves as a culture" (Quintero Weir, 2021).

The place to see/feel/live enables a perspective where the Self is positioned in a landscape of a constructed world with the others. Cultural competence demands recognizing that before us there is a world formed by people and interactions, in relation to it we only access fragmented vestiges. Dealing with the limit of what we can access or understand from others and their worlds is essential to configure a dialogical ethics, of respect for the surplus that exists beyond the traces of something or someone.

The path to building an indigenous psychology is not straightforward or transparent. The indigenous person cannot be crystallised into a preconceived, stereotyped or homogenizing idea, as opposed to the dominant patterns of the colonialist society. Each people, community and person must be

they were placed in a position to reproduce this somewhat « epistemic violence » and develop this perspective that Bulhan (2015) calls metacolonialism. Some of them were in a position to underline the global oppression and human domination at the grassroots of psychological problems in colonised countries, Frantz Fanon (1952) was the most prominent of them. Moreover, the discussion on the perception of ethnic, cultural and social exposure to trauma, is an evolution of his studies. Although WP has identified these issues related to ethnocentrism, androcentrism and intersectionality, it still cannot embrace its responsibility in contributing to shape this dogmatic geography of power.

considered in their specific uniqueness.

History of indigenous psychology as a discipline

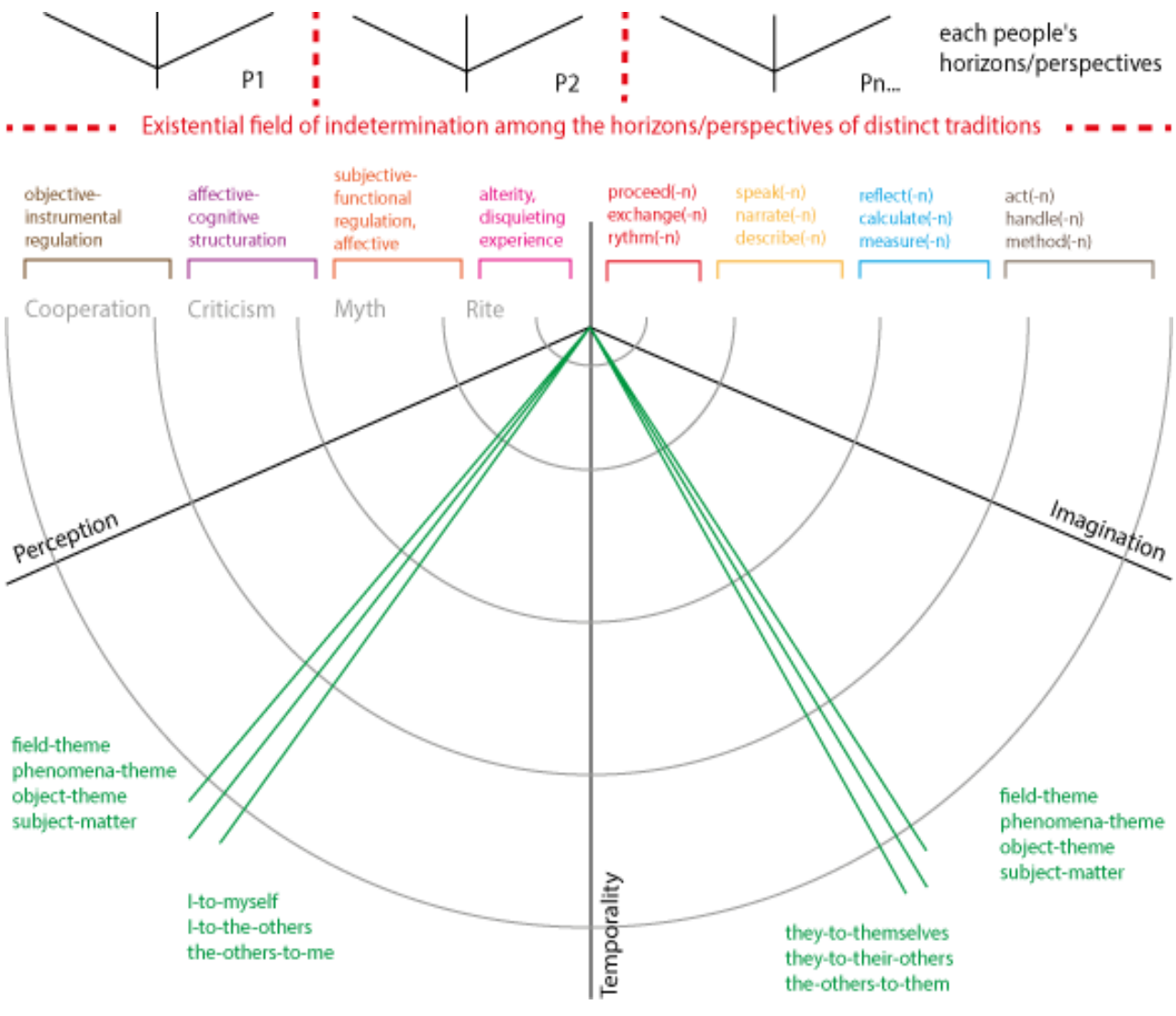
Some researchers, mainly Kim and Berry (1970), have conducted studies to find out how IP has emerged in the non-western world. Several interviewed psychologists, from many parts of the world, have given their representation of WP as an indigenous European psychology, not necessary mindful of other individual and social functioning, and therefore, not adapted to solve their issues.

According to Allwood and Berry (2006), most of the indigenous psychologists they interviewed, were educated to WP and have found it somewhat irrelevant to apply the theories they learnt, to their people in their home countries. For some of them, the concepts of emotions and conflicts were not applicable in the same ways, and the western psychology did not offer adequate tools to address people's experiences. The example of the family structure is highly representative of this matter in subsaharan Africa, as the classic psychotherapy tools do not necessarily integrate other family members as beneficiaries or relays for the treatment (Diop, 2023). Furthermore, the rhythm of the conversation in the western classic psychotherapy does not always comply with that in other cultures, and silences have a symbolic meaning in some of them. The consideration to mythology and religion has long been a topic of misunderstanding between WP and non-western cultures. Indeed, the process of dehumanisation and infantilisation of colonised people, has had the component to discredit their beliefs. From medicinal food and herbs, to mysticism, WP has had a hard time analysing the symbolism of these cultural healing techniques, oscillating from culturalism to ostracism. Additionally, there is a distinction between indigenised psychology and indigenous psychology (Allwood & Berry, 2006). The first is defined as how psychologists developed a frame of understanding the symbolism of one's culture and developed a theoretical model based on this structure, to provide adequate responses. The second refers to theories and techniques about the self and psychological functioning that are preexistent to classic psychology, and applied in the form of traditional healing. In this paper, we will use the term Indigenous psychology (IP) to refer to the first concept, as a dialectical understanding of a cultural symbolism, to develop comprehensive culturally adequate spaces of research, conversation and support.

This lesson on cultural humility and cultural competence addresses the dysfunction in the WP methods, and offers opportunities for an ethical, integrative and constructive application of psychology.

Some steps to cultivate the necessary cultural competences

Figure 1: Horizons of dialogical multiplication. Source: Silva Guimarães, 2022b.



1. The professionals need to face the existential field of indetermination between the horizons/perspectives (P) of distinct traditions:
   A. Each people, belonging to and creating different traditions, see/feel/live in a proper meaningful world. There is a zone of unknown among them.
   B. The routes for mutual understanding are not direct or transparent.

2. P1, P2 and Pn onwards, are grounded in the temporality of fluid perceptions and imaginations:
   A. Temporality as the sense of the passing of time, of experiences lived in reciprocal activity.
   B. Perception as the act by which the perceiver places itself before something or someone, in a situation and moment.
   C. Imagination as an act through which the person presentifies an absence, i.e. summons something or someone, the desired being conceived in thought.

3. The horizons/perspectives are cultivated through rites, myths, criticism and movement:
   A. The rites as regular ways the beings affect each other in the environment. The procedure of exchange, gains a rhythm and the disquieting experiences of alterity gains some intelligibility through detachment from the regular events.
   B. The myths as the linguistic-ground of the experience, which presuppose regularities and some break of regularities, allowing the narrated description of events and its subjective-affective evaluation as examples that guide a persons' life.
   C. The criticism of the experiences, lived and learned from someone's speech, as the reflection, calculation measure that enable the affective-cognitive structuration of the horizon/perspective.
   D. The movement as the coordination of means, ends, things and people in the environment to an effective action.

4. Interobjective realities places a subject-matter in a situated field-theme of discussion, which can become more abstract as a phenomena-theme for study or usable as an object-theme, device etc. Here is relevant to see the person as a singular position among others:
   A. I-to-myself: Concerns how a person perceive and imagine herself, it changes in the duration of experiences;
   B. I-to-the-others: How a person perform herself to the other;
   C. The-others-to-me: How a person perceives and imagine the others see and act on them.
   D. They-to-themselves: A refraction on how a person imagines a community, understands their social relations from their internal perspective.
   E. They-to-their-others: How a person observes and imagines the meaning of the community's action in relation to their others.
   F. The-others-to-them: How a person observes and imagines the meaning of the others' action in relation to a particular member a community in a particular situation.

In addition to maintaining a distance between the temporary knowledge that has been produced in the field of psychology and the indigenous ways of looking at the same processes, clinical and scholarly work also requires that we deal with established knowledge, whether in the technical sphere of psychological treatment of the individuals we serve, or in the methodological sphere of analysis of the spatial and temporal series of phenomena that the indigenous psychologists are examining. Indigenous psychology has a number of tasks:
a) to assess the limits of universality and generality of the dominant discourses and practices of psychology;
b) to make the necessary conceptual and technical adjustments in relation to these discourses and practices; and `
c) to review the history of psychological knowledge, making explicit the contribution of indigenous knowledge to the ways of life and reflections present in the constitution of contemporary psychologies.

> *The space of sharing, as an opportunity for respectful exchange and learning in the reciprocity of the contributions that each tradition has to offer to the field of psychology, can take place: a) to the extent that we refine our analytical-interpretive resources of the epistemic violence that persists in psychological discourses and practices and ends up being reproduced in concrete interventions, and b) in the process of cultivating and strengthening reflective and experiential alternatives, for example by learning indigenous strategies and conceptions of coexistence and production of diversity in all territories. (Silva Guimarães, 2022a)*

The indigenous psychologist is thus someone who critically reflects on the discourses, conceptions and practices of psychology in terms of what they reproduce of coloniality, while at the same time establishing a relationship of alliance with indigenous people and communities insofar as they reflect alternative, unique paths anchored in indigenous traditions. Critical reflexivity must be nourished by dialogue with all knowledge belonging to the territory of psychology. Relationships of alliance must address issues of knowledge and situations of care that are necessary for the resistance of indigenous peoples, communities and people who today are survivors of recurring events that have led to their almost total extermination at the hands of a foreign coloniser.

Some clarifications on colonisation and coloniality?

As explained above, the process of colonisation was multidimensional and has transformed the geography of the world at an immeasurable cost for the colonised peoples. Quijano (2000) speaks of « coloniality of power » to define the hierarchy of domination, that left a mark on every part of the world in the process of colonisation. This has provoked a homogenisation of colonised peoples in categories. He recalls the aggregation of all indigenous American peoples as Indians, and all indigenous African peoples as blacks, despite their infinite internal heterogeneity.

This process of homogenisation has incurred an abstraction of their knowledge, and the implantation of western intellect as the only valid science. Bulhan's work (1980) shows how psychological theories and tools have supported this ideology. In the context of medical, and socio-cultural intervention, Quijano has explained how the economic purpose of global capitalism prioritised the development of a solid workforce in colonised places at the detriment of their balance and culture. The orientation of health treatments was also agreeable to the interests of this capitalist universal machine.

WP as it is classically disseminated to people in non-western countries, has its own interpretation of myths, folktales and symbolism, reporting its indigenous mythology (ancient Greek mythological figures), regardless of the context. The expansion of the western cultures and influence on the rest of the world has given it a dimension of universality, marginalizing and subordinating other ways of thinking and being.

Although some myths transcend cultures (Ròheim, 1950), the interpretation, and the importance of people's history and anchoring to their land is of major importance, for the design of solutions to mental health issues. Therefore, the development of IP took place, when people from their communities were willing to provide solutions and theories that made sense in their cultural context. As mentioned above, they did not mean to appropriate indigenous concepts, but read through those, to conceptualize in the psychological literature a theoretical frame of analysis, embracing this rhythm and knowledge.

Following the development of an intelligencia outside of the borders of the western world, scholars have gained positions to question their theories, and methods. This has consolidated the movement of decoloniality in humanities. Indeed, this movement has transcended cultural concepts, and extended to gender, as in Maria Lugones' « decolonial feminism » (Lugones, 2010), aiming to break this systematic reproduction of coloniality in science. Indeed, science and research have the perk to translate the vision of the researcher. Therefore, the multiplication of resources and providers is the sole way to ensure representativeness, validity and relevance of theories, no matter how evidence-based they could be.

As an example, we can see how researchers in different fields, can explore the knowledge of their people, and learn from it, just as classic western medicine was, before the development of the global capitalist pharmaceutical industry. Indeed, traditional therapeutic methods are part of peoples' heritage and folklore. They transcribe the anchoring to the motherland and the relation of mutual dependency that ties humans to their history. Totemism as evoked in Freud's work (Freud, 1913), was written as alienating to indigenous peoples. However, it showed how the author chose to ground psychoanalytic concepts into a mythology and meaning that symbolism was key to understand psychism.

Decolonizing the training in psychology means bringing a critical approach to the theories and methods. When indigenous concepts are enlightened and analyzed in psychology, by researchers in IP, they often use a critical lens, observing the historical and natural causes of the phenomenon, to contextualize and evaluate its symbolism. The same critical lens should be used for WP, to understand its hegemonic construction, prioritizing the economic and politic interests, over humanization and tolerance. Devereux (1967) made an interesting statement to explain the western research methods and what they translate of fear on researchers' side, facing the participant, armed with their tools and theories, to avoid the confrontation with their inner strangeness, and absence of control. Indeed, decolonising the training in psychology also means to recognize several places of knowledge, transcending and preceding the classic literature, to understand the actual human dynamic and cosmic balance, as theorized and described in the indigenous knowledge. Although the tools of research are being developed to be mindful of people's contribution to science, the decolonised psychologist aims not only to observe and learn from humanity, but also analyze and connect symbolism to history to design theories and promote relevant research and methods (Diop, 2019), that make sense and are beneficial to people.

An example of the triangle Human-Nature-Science

Traditional therapies are not only a means for curing sickness; they are a means by which specific types of illness are defined and given culturally recognizable forms. While in Western medicine criteria of proof demand more than plausibility, in traditional Arab-Bedouin medicine the condition of plausibility seems to be sufficient (Abu-Rabia 2020: 182). Treatment by traditional healers has established a relationship of psychological-therapeutic dependence on the part of the Arab-Bedouin with regard to the healers. This dependence is deeply rooted in their psyches and reinforced and legitimized by Arab-Bedouin culture (Abu- Rabia 2020: 10). Researchers in this field do not intend to claim that traditional medicine should replace modern medicine, yet they would like to contribute to renewed thinking about a synthesis between the two and their reciprocal enrichment.

As Indigenous academics, colonial politics and bureaucracies encompass their life, particularly concerning their identity and the land, moreover these cannot be separated from thir work. Most of the medicinal herbs and other natural healing resources are found on the land (Abu- Rabia 2005: 404-407; 2023).

Western scholars fail to appreciate how Indigenous people are connected to their lands, by their umbilical cord. As nutrients from the mother's blood are transferred through the placenta to the fetus through the umbilical cord, they are fed from these lands, cultivating barley, wheat, sorghum, lentils, broad beans, citrus, grapes, apples, apricots, almonds, figs, olives,

pomegranates, tomatoes, onions, pumpkins, summer squash, and watermelon (Abu-Rabia 1994: 7–9; 2001: 15–16). Their connections to the land, cannot be separated from their worldviews, being, sovereignty, mental and physiological health. Unfortunately, indigenous peoples claim they rights on these lands, (Amara et al. 2012; Kedar et al. 2018) presenting historical and religious (Matani 2020), as well as agricultural and archeological (Rosen 2017 ; Meraiot 2011) documents and evidences, they are accused by the authorities and some of their academic counterparts, of fabricating their indigenous history (Yahel, Kark and Frantzman 2012: 3-14). They were born from the earth/land; receive most of their livelihood from it; when they are ill, its produce heals them, and when they die they offer their body for the earth to feed on. This is a mutual relationship, which cannot be separated.

Cultural humility in Brazil

----- WITH TENONDÉ PORÃ AND JARAGUÁ PEOPLES

Psychology is a socio-historical field of knowledge that emerged in colonial societies and that includes the answers that the colonial tradition has developed to questions related to the encounter with the diversity of ways of being human. We then propose to include the perspective of indigenous traditions in this debate. Since indigenous knowledge is mainly constructed outside the universities, it is necessary to experience how it is constructed in indigenous communities and in dialogue with indigenous people. However, we are not interested in appropriating indigenous knowledge, but in experiencing the transformation of psychology through the inclusion of indigenous traditions and critique. Therefore, no data is collected in the communities, the dialogues are constructed as a forum to discuss ideas when it is in the interest of the community. When the topics of the dialogue reach the interest of mutual collaboration, the knowledge generated in the encounter with the communities can be applied to verify its consistency, in cultural and extension academic projects. The nature of these projects is different from research, they are part of the professional training of our students, who learn how to transform academic knowledge to become useful in solving the needs of the communities. When these activities leave public traces (such as documents and video recordings of indigenous speeches at the university), indigenous knowledge can be selected, cited, discussed and analysed. The indigenous authorship of the knowledge is then preserved. This is where the real research begins. From a methodology to the construction of historical-philosophical knowledge of psychology, the traditions that grounds the indigenous and the psychological are distinguished.

Resonances and convergences are sought to evaluate the continuity of the collaboration between the communities and the students.

For example, at the Institute of Psychology, University of São Paulo, Brazil, we created the Indigenous Support Network (ISN) as part of the indigenous peoples' movement to indigenize scientific academic knowledge and universities. The ISN was formally attached to the university as a service to provide interdisciplinary psychological care to indigenous people.

With the arrival of psychology student Melina Bertholdo, we listened to the stories expressed in conversations in the communities, accompanied traditional practices of health interventions and pedagogical practices in schools where indigenous students study. We developed activities aimed at promoting reflective dialogue on the health situation, guaranteeing rights, demarcating land, strengthening traditional culture and differentiated education, with a view to improving the living conditions of the people belonging to the communities. In the first year of the network, we visited communities in the Tenondé Porã and Jaraguá indigenous territories in São Paulo/SP.

We also organized an event at the Institute of Psychology called "Psychology and Indigenous Peoples: Knowledge and Practices in Dialogue", which was attended by people from the communities mentioned above, as well as participants from different areas of Brazil related to work with indigenous peoples: educators, health professionals, indigenous students, etc. (cf. Bertholdo and Silva Guimarães, 2018).

Following this event, we received an invitation from indigenous leaders from Tekoa Pyau (Jaraguá/SP) to help organise a meeting with leaders from different communities in the state of São Paulo (South Coast, Ribeira Valley and the capital) to discuss issues related to indigenous rights in terms of differentiated health care, differentiated education and land demarcation.

The meeting, sponsored by PrCEU-USP and supported by CRPSP, took place in September 2013. Some of what was discussed is documented in Huvixa Kuery Nhembo'a Ty (2013).

In 2014, we produced a set of reference materials for thematic roundtables requested by an Indigenous community served by the network. In the second half of the year, we prioritized the organization of forums on the indigenous presence in São Paulo, which were held at the Institute of Psychology (IP-USP), except for the first, which was held at CECI Jaraguá. The forums were linked to the needs expressed by the indigenous teachers who welcomed us in the villages, to promote a dialogue with the university community on indigenous existence and resistance in the largest city in the southern hemisphere.

In 2015, the Rede Indígena team continued to expand with projects related to audiovisual production strategies, music, theatre, permaculture and text production, of interest to and proposed by the communities of Terra Indígena do Jaraguá. At the request of the Tekoa Tangará indigenous community in the municipality of Itanhaém/SP, we began supporting the community-based tourism project being implemented by the community, Mbyareko Jaexauka. In October 2015, the community was visited by students from USP and researchers from our international research network, who participated in the international workshop on semiotic-cultural constructivism that we organised at IPUSP.

As activities continued in 2016, indigenous leaders emphasized the need for appropriate spaces at the university to deepen dialogical exchanges, respecting each indigenous people's specific ways of engaging in dialogue, building knowledge, health and well-being. The request and proposal to build the house was also about care, so that indigenous people could have a place to support their increasingly numerous activities in the university environment.

Useful tips

1

The first step to developing cutural humility and cultural competence is to promote observation and open-mindedness.

2

The best way to decolonize the training is to export it from the classroom to the actual places where students can be exposed to the diversity.

3

A significant part of the training should be focused on deconstructing the stigma and social representations that students have integrated from their education and social stereotypes, to develop critical thinking.

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