Can Anthropology Make Valid Generalizations?

Feelings of Belonging in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest

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Abstract: This article deals with connections between phenomenological approaches and the production of valid generalizations in the making of ethnography. The argument is constructed through the presentation of valid generalizations that have a bearing on the intersubjective feelings of belonging among the Tupinambá Indians (south of Bahia). These feelings arise both from living in a small kinship compound, with its sense of immediacy and personalized attachments to space, and from becoming part of the larger category of Tupinambá people and territory. The intertwining of lived experience and a broader comparative perspective on sociality, raised both by Americanist and more general theoretical debates in anthropology, is considered. From this perspective, the article presents different processes of connection making as epistemological tools for ethnographic generalizations, constructed in a constant overlapping of scales.

Keywords: contextualization, comparison, feelings of belonging, generalizations, lived experience, Tupinambá

> When we read Malinowski we get the impression that he is stating something which is of general importance. Yet how can this be? He is simply writing about Trobriand Islanders. Somehow he has so assimilated himself into the Trobriand situation that he is able to make the Trobriands a microcosm of the whole primitive world.
>
> — Edward Leach, "Rethinking Anthropology"

One of the defining features of anthropological knowledge is its capacity to challenge and renew through the experience of living among people with

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whom anthropologists form ongoing relationships. The transformation of these relationships into ethnographic descriptions with general validity is thus a fundamental starting point for anthropology's epistemological procedures and is the main subject of this article. Among the many definitions of the word 'general' (from the Latin word *generalis*), a particularly useful meaning for the approach proposed here is that "general" is what is "true in most instances but not without exceptions"; it can thus be seen as the "opposite of universal"[1] and as a procedure that aims to evaluate "the extension of a concept whose content or understanding is determined by abstraction."[2] Adopting this specific meaning of generalization, the principal goal of this article is to depict the epistemological procedures of generalization, specifically concerning ethnographic descriptions in anthropology, which are influenced by phenomenological perspectives. It begins by recognizing the centrality of experience and relation in the constitution of ethnographic knowledge in anthropology. Certainly, one of the singularities of this knowledge is its immersion in the world (cf. Engelke 2008: 3; Hastrup 2004: 456; Pina-Cabral 1992: 7; 2003). Fieldwork experience constitutes a complex web of engaged knowledge, in which the subject of experience is both the 'trained researcher' and the 'character in the local drama' (Hastrup 2004: 464; Pina-Cabral 1992). As is largely accepted, it is due to this engaged knowledge that anthropological ethnographies are in a privileged position to overcome any type of formal division between objectivity and subjectivity (Wilson 2004: 15). Moreover, as already noted by Wilhelm Dilthey, experience incorporates not only what is 'habitual, typical, and customary' (*Erfharung*), but also what is 'idiosyncratic, exceptional, and singular' (*Erlebnis*) (see Dilthey [1924] 1945; Jackson 1996: 27; Rickman [1976] 1986; Viegas and Gomes 2007: 12). Thus, when we make meaning of a face-to-face relationship, we are already making connections to a multiplicity of platforms of knowledge. The concept of intertextuality attempts to broaden this dimension, but it does so in a manner so foreign to the centrality of experience that it results in focusing exclusively on linguistic and textualist references, thereby depriving it of those connections.

Starting by conceiving ethnography as engaged and experience-like knowledge, this article will therefore depict how we achieve generalization in ethnographic descriptions. This will be explored through an ethnographic analysis of 'feelings of belonging' to territory as experienced by the Tupinambá of Olivença—an indigenous people who live in the Atlantic forest region of the south of Bahia (Brazil). For this study, I will use anthropological fieldwork carried out since 2003 in support of an indigenous land claim made to the Brazilian federal government, at the request of the Tupinambá, with whom I had worked several years ago (1997–1998).

In contrast to current procedures for land claims elsewhere, in Brazil the validation of anthropological knowledge in these processes is mainly an anthropological ethnographic study. This study has to represent a certain scale, because it is aimed at understanding the Tupinambá people and territory claimed as indigenous land (*terra indígena*) (cf. Viegas 2007b). The land claimed by the Tupinambá covers an area of approximately 50,000 hectares between a strip

of coastline and a mountainous region connected by several rivers. Nowadays, this 50,000-hectare territory is inhabited by roughly 3,000 Tupinambá; 50 tradesmen, landowners, and tourist-resort owners; and about 10,000 peasants. The Tupinambá live scattered across the whole region, and their manner of inhabiting the territory presents significant differences at a social, economic, and even symbolic level.

In order to go from an ethnography centered in one area (the locality of Sapucaeira), where my former fieldwork was conducted, to the totality of the Tupinambá people and territory, a reflection over the scales of analysis becomes unavoidable. This is what this article explores, by showing how ethnography based in intersubjective analysis produces anthropological generalizations. This approach is in line with theoretical proposals and ways of doing ethnography in anthropology that consider experience and communication in its immersion in the world of relationships (e.g., Gow 2001; Pina-Cabral 2002; Toren 1999a, 1999b). In this way, it differentiates from existential anthropological perspectives that regard experience closer to cultural meanings and existential dilemmas (e.g., Jackson 2002, 2005), contributing to epistemological perspectives that need further consolidation. The main contribution of this article to ways of thinking about epistemological procedures in anthropology is to show that valid ethnographic generalizations can be achieved through the analysis of how people become beings in the world.

The article discusses how, for the Tupinambá, in the process of becoming a being-in-the-world, living in a 'residential compound' is at the heart of feelings of belonging to the territory. A residential compound is constituted by an extended family, and in this rural region of Olivença, people call these residential compounds *lugares* (lit., places). In 1998, I lived for a period of time in one of these kinship compounds in Sapucaeira. The 2003 fieldwork was, of course, very different from what is usually practiced in anthropology. Two particular distinctions should be highlighted as relevant to the aim of this article. The first is that the fieldwork carried out in 2003 was 'official', which meant that (1) a government decree had to be published, giving the exact time that the anthropologist would arrive and leave the region of fieldwork, and (2) until the research was handed in, the anthropologist was not to visit the area or carry out fieldwork without the knowledge and permission of FUNAI,[3] who would send a person to accompany the anthropologist during any visit he or she might choose to make. Under these conditions, increasing the time of fieldwork for a period longer than one or two months becomes unfeasible because, among other reasons, it is an expensive way of doing fieldwork and places limits on the availability of funds budgeted by FUNAI.

In Brazil, the fieldwork required by the anthropologist in indigenous land claims is intended to be carried out, in principle, by a researcher who has already done fieldwork in the region. Validation of the anthropological ethnographic argument developed by previous ethnographic descriptions and the capacity to make valid concepts are thus unavoidably put at stake. I will use the research requirements for the validation of ethnography to expose

the epistemological issue that was particularly incisive in this case, and which gives this article its title, that is, "Can Anthropology Make Valid Generalizations?" And if so, then how?

Is Generalization Important to Anthropology?

The issue of generalization was highly contested by the literary and reflexive turn in cultural anthropology and postmodern perspectives. Let us take just one emblematic example: the argument by Lila Abu-Lughod ([1991] 2006), in which the author holds against the use of the concept of culture and considers generalization as part of the problem in the use of this idea in anthropology. Alternatively, she proposes that anthropology should do "ethnographies of the particular" (ibid.: 475). Among other reasons, she maintains that the problem with generalization is that "anthropologists commonly generalize about communities by saying that they are characterized by certain institutions, rules, or ways of doing things," for instance, saying things such as "the Bongo-Bongo are polygynous" (ibid.). We agree with this statement, of course, and she is also right to say that anthropologists should ask, instead, "how a particular set of individuals—for instance, a man and his three wives in a Bedouin community in Egypt … —live the institution that we call polygyny" (ibid.). What is apparent in this otherwise interesting point of view is that, for Abu-Lughod, there appears to be no alternative except to refuse all generalization, full stop.

A further problem arises when the author connects the issue of generalization to the critique and rejection of the concept of culture. Culture is not useful, follows Abu-Lughod's argument, because it implies a generalization of meanings among a group of individuals, which therefore could be defined as shared meanings ([1991] 2006: 475):

> When one generalizes from experiences and conversations with a number of specific people in a community, one tends to flatten out differences among them and to homogenize them. The appearance of an absence of internal differentiation makes it easier to conceive of a group of people as a discrete, bounded entity, like 'the Nuer', 'the Balinese' and the 'Awlad 'Ali Bedouin' who do this or that and believe such and such. The effort to produce general ethnographic descriptions of people's beliefs or actions tends to smooth over contradictions, conflicts of interest, and doubts and arguments.

In sum, Abu-Lughod asserts that anthropology should refuse to make generalizations in order to write ethnographies of the particular, wherein people's power of negotiation and agency in social life would be highlighted. However, there is a problem in identifying generalization with the opposite of particular, with the representation of the parts by the whole, with the substitution of feelings by the norm.[4] In this view, only the parts can be multi-vocal—only the parts live in tension, in dissonance, and even in inequality.

If we assume, however, as suggested above, that what is general can be opposed to the universal and that the experience in which ethnography is based incorporates the particular as much as the general, the ordinary as much as the exceptional, tensions as much as consensus, feelings as well as norms, then there is no need to identify generalization with uniformity, univocality, and normativity, and thus to reject it out of hand. If we assume that experience is the starting point of ethnographic analysis and that "the agents always relate to one another in a field historically marked by domination and power" (Pina-Cabral 2008: 77), it does not make sense to identify culture with more consensual or even more *groupal* entities. Recognizing this centrality of experience in the construction of ethnographic knowledge in anthropology, Hastrup (2004) proposes that we move on from a "horizontal generalization," whose objective would be to proceed to the identification of shared systems (such as those rejected by Abu-Lughod), to a "vertical generalization," "the processes by which meanings are established, challenged and altered" (ibid.: 466).

While Abu-Lughod identifies generalization with uniform, normative, and reified knowledge, arguing for ethnographies of the particular, Edmund Leach's ([1961] 1982: 1) famous argument accuses anthropology of doing "impeccably detailed historical ethnographies of particular peoples" that refuse to make generalizations. In a way, the preoccupations of Abu-Lughod in the 1990s and those of Leach in the 1960s seem absolutely antithetical. Leach is concerned that by doing such detailed historical ethnographies, anthropology stops making "comparative generalisations" (ibid.). He raises an idea that is of the utmost importance for the present discussion. He argues that by refusing to make generalizations, anthropology can very easily turn to generalized abstractions, such as the fictitious category of 'the primitive man'. This appears in functionalist ethnographies, as Leach explains in the quotation from the epigraph of this article, when they describe a located place like the Trobriands as "a microcosm of the whole primitive world" (ibid.).

The refusal of generalization, therefore, does not appear to be a viable option for anthropology. To recognize and identify the epistemological tools that make of ethnography general knowledge, and at the same time to understand how we effectively evaluate the extension of the phenomena that we describe, is fundamental for our ability to acknowledge the types of categories that we use and to avoid abrupt epistemological leaps. The question of the scale of analysis we are using is therefore inevitable to consider, and of course we know that ethnographic descriptions of details of daily life are not an anthropological scale of analysis. As Charles Stafford (2008: S128, S133) has put it, anthropology looks at the human experience with microscopic eyes, but as it speaks of human experience and considers its vast (at times holistic) connections, its scale of analysis is far from being small—even when compared with the scales of other social and human sciences.

Another important issue, which is sometimes forgotten in contemporary reflections about generalization and scale, is anthropology's disciplinary legacy and its epistemological consequences. As the post-structural and postmodern turns were taking place, anthropology was also reaching a point of sophisticated theoretical reflection that was fueled by comparative analysis. Examples

include Strathern's (1988) theory of personhood, which interlinks Melanesia, Marxist theory, and feminism; João de Pina-Cabral's (1986, 1991a, 1991b) discussion of the primary social units in southern Europe, which covers debates on kinship theory, the Mediterranean, and social theory; and Viveiros de Castro's (1998) Amerindian perspectivism thesis, which is fueled by ethnographic Americanist debates of the last two or three decades and theoretical reflection on the nature-culture debate. I would argue that, at this level, comparison does not constitute a method of analysis but rather a generalizing epistemology of particular phenomena in anthropology.

This perspective on comparison and scale allows us to consider that what is at issue is "comparing the incommensurable." Formulated by Marcel Detienne, this expression was adopted by Goldman and Viveiros de Castro (2006) to suspend the idea of sustaining comparisons in the obsessive evaluation of similarities of scale, type, theme, or even the nature of objects being compared: "The notion of commensurability supposes that what commensurates two things is external to them. Two things are commensurate as a function of a third, supposedly nature in itself … We believe that one of the things that anthropology demonstrates is that commensurability is an internal, not an external, process" (ibid.: 186).

The ethnographic analysis by Tânia Stolze Lima (1999), which illustrates and is at the base of the theoretical proposals of Amerindian perspectivism, helps us to understand this idea of comparing the incommensurable, as well as to apprehend that certain ethnographic concepts have a general validity. Lima (1999, 2005) describes the daily life of the Juruna, along with their greatest desires and ideals (e.g., hunting pigs in the river), which are sometimes expressed in their dream life and are regularly brought into conversation. These (almost) holistic articulations contribute toward the understanding of certain general principles. These include, for example, how for the Juruna certain animals, and principally wild pigs, have a 'point of view' and thus occupy the position of subject. They have the same habits as the Juruna: they drink a lot of fermented drinks, for example; return to the abandoned locations where the dead are buried; live in communities divided by family relations and led by a chief with shamanic powers, and so on (Lima 1999: 109). The ethnographic texture of Lima's analysis allows the conceptual understanding of a point of view as being a simultaneously ontological and epistemological position (ibid.: 113): "A proposition such as 'the Juruna think that animals are humans,' besides deviating appreciably from their discursive style, is a false one, ethnographically speaking. They say that 'the animals, to themselves, are human.' I could, then, rephrase this as 'the Juruna think that the animals think they are humans.' Clearly, the verb 'to think' undergoes an enormous semantic slippage as it passes from one segment of the phrase to the other."

The identification of the point of view with a subject is also expressed in language. It is in translation to Portuguese that the Juruna epistemic subjectivism gains grammatical expression. Lima (1999: 116) describes how even she had difficulties in admitting this radical subjectivism, when it reached the point of saying "to me, it rained":

> Certain phrases spoken to me in Portuguese, such as 'this is beautiful to me', 'for him the animal turned into a jaguar,' 'to us, there appeared prey while we were making the canoe', seemed to refer exclusively to the grammatical structure of a language which I did not master but which nonetheless became transparent through the Juruna's Portuguese. Even after I began to put together one or two phrases, the constructions which invited these types of translation never ceased to sound strange; without doubt, I would classify them as the most difficult Juruna practice to assimilate. *Amdna uhe w'I*—it is not easy to utter these words without becoming disconcerted, unpleasantly or otherwise. I felt I was saying 'to me, it rained' and not 'it was raining there, where I was.' This way of relating even the most independent and alien phenomena to the self leaves its mark on Juruna cosmology.

This description and understanding of the concept of point of view becomes clear in a range of epistemological procedures. It is worth noting the following three, due to their relevance on the issue of scales and generalization. First, stemming from the long-term fieldwork experience of the anthropologist with the Juruna is Lima's ability to contrast her first impressions in the field with those resulting from the maturation of her knowledge over time.

A second procedure, which signals the general and generalizing character of the concept of point of view, results from the holistic articulation between the diverse dimensions of Juruna life, for instance, between daily life and cosmological understandings of the world. We could call this 'the procedure of contextualizing through partial connection', which would thus be part of the evaluation of the expansive scale of ethnographic knowledge by showing that "everything is embedded in, and connected to, everything else" (Stafford 2008: S133). Contextualization would also be "constituted by the world of things as it is presented to human experience" (Jackson 1996: 11; see also Dilley 1999a: 31). From the point of view of the most incisive debates on the question of context in anthropology, we could also recognize other types of contextualizations, closer to Strathern's notion, of "partial contexts in the form of partial connections wherein different frames or 'scales' … are adopted to generate competing orders of knowledge that each make sense of social life" (Dilley 1999a: 32). Contextualization constitutes, at this level, diffuse referential worlds (cf. Pina-Cabral 2003), at the same time referring to the specific type of holistic or internal connection that implies our recognition of "the idea that knowledge/understanding is achieved via interaction and concrete situated practice" (Harvey 1999: 217).

Finally, the third procedure highlighted here illuminates not only the life of the Juruna but also that of many other Amerindians. We could refer to this last epistemological procedure as multiple strategies of comparison. They appeal to the overlap of levels that weave the value of anthropological generalizations. The concept of the point of view directs us to many other Tupi and other Amerindian ethnographies, thus allowing for broader levels of abstraction implied in the Amerindian perspectivism (see Viveiros de Castro 1998).

From the perspective debated and examined here, we must of course state clearly that important achievements based on generalizations are reached by means of the history of anthropology. In refusing to think seriously about the

specifically generalizing character of producing ethnography in anthropology, the discipline may end up making abstractions related to more normative and reified categories, such as (after 'the primitive world') 'the globalized world', 'the capitalist world', or 'the Arab world'. Thus, a first answer to the question mark in this article is that generalization must undoubtedly be taken seriously in contemporary methods of producing ethnographic knowledge in anthropology.

The World in *Lugares*

I will now explore the construction of generalized ethnographic concepts from a phenomenological perspective about feelings of belonging among the Tupinambá. This will be based on the idea that living in a residential compound, as observed in a universe of 300 people (in the locality of Sapucaeira), may be extrapolated to apply to 3,000 people who inhabit a 50,000-hectare territory. The apparently obvious solution to this issue would be to use quantitative data, which was in fact a requirement for the indigenous land claim study and was thus effectively done. We organized and carried out a survey, as extensive as possible, into how the Tupinambá whom we visited were making their residential arrangements. We made use of GPS and genealogical diagrams to quantify the distribution of indigenous people into types of residence: (1) residential compounds, (2) separate houses, and (3) houses located in large farms, as shown in the following table. This information clearly shows that (1) a far greater number of Tupinambá live in residential compounds (965) than in separate houses (418), and (2) a far greater number of houses exist in residential compounds or *lugares* (227) than in separate areas (93).

This quantitative approach, which is nothing but the 'elementary statistics' so often present in anthropological studies (cf. Pina-Cabral 2008: 71), allows

Table 1 The Number of Houses and People in Extended Family Residential Compounds and in Separate Houses by Locality, 2003–2004

Localities	Residential compounds	Separate houses	People in residential compounds	People in separate houses
Sapucaeira Cima, S. de Baixo, Gravatá	61	25	260	103
Acuípe de Cima, A.do Meio	29	18	123	82
Curupitanga, Pixix, S. Negra, C. Sº Pedro	39	10	146	55
A. Baixo, A. Olivença (Atlantic coast)	34	11	166	61
Santana, Santanha and Sierras	64	29	270	117
Total	**227**	**93**	**965**	**418**

Source: Genealogical survey (2003–2004 fieldwork).

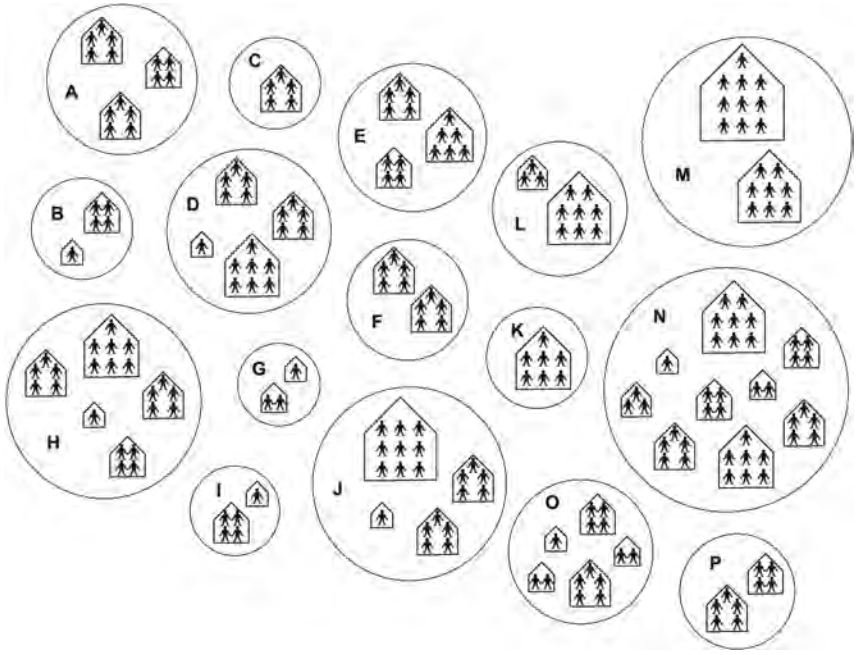

Figure 1 Diagram Chart Representing the Information in Table 1. Created by Vivóeusébio Graphic Design Studio.

us to translate an ethnographic argument into numbers. The GPS survey created a map showing the location of all the residential areas visited. However, the data fail to provide effective generalizations based on ethnographic-like thinking (i.e., based on experience and relatedness). The precise reasons why quantitative data help ethnography gain an empirical reference but fail to confer elements that could assist in the making of abstractions should then be further considered.

In order to develop generalized ethnographic concepts from a phenomenological perspective, the point of departure is the idea that "as humans, we cannot help making meaning of the world—but we never do this in isolation. Rather, we make meaning intersubjectively" (Toren 2002: 107). From my observation of everyday life in Sapucaeira, the dynamics of affects and belonging are constituted in the *lugares*. Take the daily life of children who live in the same residential compound: they move freely between houses as they play together, bathe together, prepare manioc roots, fight to get an adult's attention, and experience the affective dynamics between relatives, especially between women who may become their mothers. As soon as they learn to walk, they move about between houses to play. This freedom of movement, however, does not come about as a result of shared parental roles, as often happens in other contexts where these

kinds of residential compounds are crucial for the making of sociality. The child grows up in the world of kinship residential compound relations, but at every instance of its life it belongs to only one mother and one house.

In the first months of life and until it can walk, a baby is carried in its mother's arms and then perched on its mother's hip. It is very rare that someone thinks of holding another person's baby and does so only if the mother is present. Thus, growing up from the baby's point of view would be letting go of its mother's arms and then joining other children to play: first, siblings, who live in the same house, and then cousins, who live in other houses in the same residential compound. It is rare to see small children visiting other *lugares*; this usually takes place only on special occasions. Their lives are confined to the space in the *lugares*—the ravine, houses, trails, forest, and gardens. Children begin to move about more and go farther afield when they are between the ages of nine and eleven (cf. Viegas 2003).

When they marry, the movement between these residential compounds is of the utmost importance. Regardless of how a husband and wife began their courtship, whenever the start of a relationship is described, it is frequently said that the boy 'fetched' a woman. The expression has various meanings that I will not go into now, but it also describes very objectively the idea of going forth to fetch a wife outside the kinship residential compound where one lives and bringing her back (cf. Viegas 2008a). Daily life in a house built by and for the couple will eventually produce the conjugal relationship.

From the first years of marriage, since mothers-in-law live in the same residential compound, they tend to assist their daughters-in-law after childbirth. This starts off a process of mutual support but also one of affective dynamics, at various levels. Among the Tupinambá of Sapucaeira, I observed that the integration of wives into the life of the residential compound is comparatively easy compared to what has been observed in other virilocal Amerindian contexts. This happens, at least in part, because they often come to the compound early in their lives (sometimes when they are just 12 years old) and may become peers of their sisters-in-law, who live in the same compound. As the years go by, girls of the same age may have interests in common. This is sometimes connected to the solidarities that arise out of gender dynamics. There are also events in life that may pit sisters-in-law against each other. This happens, for instance, if the couple separate and their offspring become the children of the sister-in-law (cf. Viegas 2007a: 143–180). As a result, young married women maintain links with their parents in the residential compound where they were born. Even when their parents live in other localities in the Olivença region (some of them far away), the young girls try not to lose touch with their relatives and visit them regularly. If a couple separate, the wife may have to leave her children and return to her parents' house, which also explains hegemonic gender values that identify women with a tendency to change place (cf. Viegas 2008a).

The consequences of the changes that occurred in the lives of the Tupinambá since 2002–2003, when they formalized their indigenous identity and land claim to the federal state of Brazil, were immediate and involved a range of

aspects. For instance, the Tupinambá who inhabited different parts of the territory and who, in many cases, had never met each other face to face were now engaged in political meetings and exchanging life experiences. They also elected one sole political leader to represent them at the federal state level and with NGOs. The government health services for indigenous people began to provide the Tupinambá with medical assistance. Public ceremonies, during which the Tupinambá dressed in 'indigenous clothes', were performed in order to change the public image of them as being rootless, scattered, and assimilated among the rural population. And, of course, conflicts between landowners and indigenous people in the region erupted immediately—mainly, because if the land is returned to the Tupinambá, these landowners will have to sell their investments to the federal state and leave the region.

The change in the life of the Tupinambá was felt at once in the kinship residential compounds that I had got to know well during my stay in 1997–1998. In March 2002, my hosts sent me a letter describing this change: "Dear friend Susana: First, I want to tell you that after you left *many new things have happened in this community*" (emphasis added). They then mention new types of 'indigenous' activities: "We have a woman *cacique* [main leader], other leader, a health team and indigenous schools … our indigenous community has projects for an individual *roça* (land clearing), a collective *roça*, medicine, handicraft, and ceramics. Jupará and Care of São Paulo [two NGOs] are providing support. Alice and Mauro [a young couple who were also part of the residential compound where I lived] are well and are working in handicrafts and make necklaces and rings from *dende* coconuts and *buri*."

Mauro, the man referred to in this letter, was only in his forties when he became unable to earn a living as a rural laborer due to health problems. This is why they mentioned to me that in 2002 he was able to work again. Doing indigenous 'handicraft'—an activity I never saw in the Sapucaeira region in 1998—was more suitable to his physical condition than rural activities and could be carried out in the residential compound where he lived. Even if the handicrafts that the Tupinambá are producing are not very successful in the Brazilian market, they would never have entered the market in the first place if they did not have the 'indigenous' trademark.

When I returned to the Olivença region in 2003, the relevance of the *lugares* as places of belonging became even more apparent to the understanding of processes of change that had occurred since 1998. Changes were shaped most intensively in the experience of living in *lugares:* new networks between *lugares* became possible, new ways of belonging to the territory and landscape were achieved—namely, by having a *cacique*, or main leader, and through webs between residential compounds that were now spread throughout the landscape. Statistical or numerical data did not help in the effective understanding of these changes. The epistemological procedures mentioned in the previous section—long-term fieldwork experience, contextualizing through partial connection, and multiple strategies of comparison—were more helpful to the understanding of lived experience and historicity among the Tupinambá, even in these changing times.

Generalization

A first point to make is that the ethnographic descriptions in the previous section are in themselves filled with knowledge about other ethnographies on the subject. In terms of kinship dynamics among the Tupinambá, for instance, they are strongly inscribed in comparisons of ethnographies on Amerindian contexts (see, e.g., Gow 1991, 1997, 2000), especially the Tupi in Amazonia (cf. Fausto 2001; Viveiros de Castro 1992), as well as ethnographies on raising children in lower-class urban areas of Brazil (Fonseca 2004), on matrilateral Afro-Bahian family dynamics (Marcelin 1999; Pina-Cabral 2007), and on the extended patriarchal family in northeastern rural areas in Brazil (Woortman 1995).

To understand how the Tupinambá developed a sense of belonging to their territory, a second layer of abstraction is necessary to account for the experience of inhabiting a territory during a constant processes of land expropriation between the Tupinambá and different social actors. The story of each kinship residential compound and the memories of where people lived and how they moved between localities are crucial to the Tupinambá, because they also explain how memory of the territory is connected to the historical experience of living in this territory. In fact, areas of cultivation that have been abandoned and fruit trees that were part of residential areas where people used to live are the memory markers of the lived territory for the Tupinambá (Viegas 2006; 2007a: 85–88, 207–224, 288–295; 2008b).

Another layer of abstraction arises from comparison in anthropology. Sociality produced in the *lugares* begins to gain a generalizing value in relation to, for instance, Americanist and Melanesian debates on sociality, with the latter emphasizing relation as the core of sociality, and the former focusing on the idea of investment in small solidarities, as described in various contexts for Amazonia (Rivière 1984; Strathern 1988; Viveiros de Castro 1992). A further comparative approach, which helps to explain the centrality of life in *lugares*, arises from the concept of producing sociality through 'immediacy'. This idea has been developed by Nurit Bird-Davis (1994: 590, 593) in relation to the Nakaya, who live in a bamboo forest region in South India that was partially destroyed in the early twentieth century for the cultivation of rubber and coffee. The notion of immediacy focuses on relatives with whom personal, intense contact is maintained in daily face-to-face relations, instead of those of more distant generations, for instance. In this explanation, Bird-David draws our attention to the type of relations that compare to the value given to direct personal experience among the Tupinambá of Olivença in the *lugares*—that is to say, to the importance of the ties of immediacy in the daily production of social life.

More abstract ideas may then arise from these debates. It allows us, for example, to refute theories on acculturation and assimilation that have in the past accounted for the disappearance of the Tupi people inhabiting the Atlantic coast of Brazil. These theories state that the Tupi were quickly assimilated into the regional way of life because their social organization was based on 'dispersed family models' whereby solidarity was restricted to local groups scattered in the territory (Darcy Ribeiro in Turner 1993: 44). An ethnography

of the Tupinambá's lived experience in *lugares* provides us, however, with a different picture of that history of solidarity. In fact, if the Tupinambá have survived in the region of Olivença and maintained relations of belonging to that territory, it has been at least partially because, in the course of their lived experience in the area, sociality has not depended on aggregative processes of solidarity, based on large social units, but rather has encompassed investment in immediacy, mainly through the constitution of meaningful relationships in the residential compound.

Conclusion

The argument developed in this article allows us to recognize the importance of generalization and comparison in the organization of levels of knowledge in anthropology. If anthropology produces a body of knowledge that distinguishes itself from other forms of knowing the world, it is inevitable that the validity of concepts in anthropology arises, first of all, from experience and relation, which then constitute and are constituted by different layers of contextualization and comparison. It becomes important, thus, to find a combination of "comparative strategies" that "illuminate, at the same time, the phenomenon that we observe and the epistemological profile of our questions" (Gregor and Tuzin 2001: 15). In a similar sense, it is necessary to recognize the plurality of qualitative comparative methodologies (Gingrich and Fox 2002b: 2, 9, 12, 19; Strathern 2002: xvii).

This is why the equivalence between the 'worlds' that we compare should not be considered commensurable. Comparison is more of an epistemic kind, a relation de jure. Finally, in this article the multiple commitments between theoretical tradition, in which comparison has a prominent position, and the broad field of ethnographic knowledge, as a central part of the anthropological project, have been reaffirmed. This allows us to evaluate the importance of successive generalizations, which are always constituted in and through ethnographic descriptions (cf. Pina-Cabral 1991a; Sanjek 1996; Toren 2002; Viveiros de Castro 1999: 154).[5]

As a final conclusion, we can thus argue that generalization, as an operation that aims to fix the extension of a concept, is carried out in anthropology by means of experience, contextualization, and multiple strategies of comparison. In a way, the epistemological tools that allow us to reach valid generalizations correspond simply to the axis of anthropological training. Through the case discussed in this article, I have argued that valid generalizations, which do not necessarily mean uniformity, will always need to be sustained in processes that combine intersubjectivity with the analysis of data and the abstractions that arise from comparative thinking. From this point of view, we can say that anthropology is now better equipped to make valid generalizations than it was decades ago. We should not waste this moment.

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Notes

1. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939): 783.
2. *Enciclopédia Verbo Luso Brasileira da Cultura* (Lisbon: Editorial Verbo, 1963): 317.
3. FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Índio, or the National Indian Foundation) is the department of the Brazilian Ministry of Justice that deals with indigenous affairs.
4. This problem has been largely identified as a type of sociocentrism from which cultural constructionism could not detach itself (cf. Pina-Cabral 2008: 78–81).
5. In the ethnography of the Tupinambá de Olivença, I systematically develop this rehabilitation of an open and comparative vision of regionalism through plural strategies of comparison, which say as much about the socio-structural aspects of cultural experiences (cf. Viegas 2007a).

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