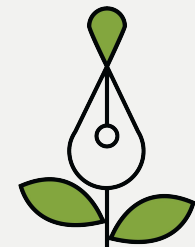


ONTOLOGY: CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

24-10-2024

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GEOS

1. Introduction
2. Philosophy and anthropology
3. Philosophical anthropology and the ontological turn
4. ontology and epistemology
5. politics
6. How does my work look like in practice
7. Discussion



**HOW DID YOU GET
INTERESTED IN
ANTHROPOLOGY?**





**HOW ABOUT
PHILOSOPHY? WHAT
COMES TO MIND WHEN
YOU HEAR THIS WORD?**

my answers

cross-cultural dialogue

radical translation (Quine, 1960)

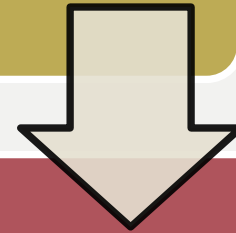
is cross-cultural understanding possible?

thought experiment versus reality on the ground

Philosophy

method: conceptual analysis

- e.g. truth



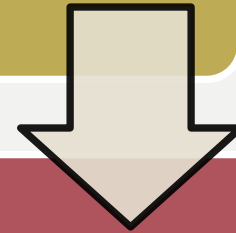
universality

Philosophy

method: conceptual analysis

- e.g. truth

the themes
addressed are often
very similar



universality

Philosophical anthropology

interpretation of ethnographic data

power relations in anthropological research

Tim Ingold, Marisol de la Cadena, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

Philosophy on Fieldwork. Case Studies in Anthropological Analysis Edited By Nils Bubandt, Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, 2022

Ontological Turn

Two philosophical terms which anthropologists use often

Ontology

- what is there in the world
- fundamental questions, categories, objects
- the thing in itself

Epistemology

- what/how I know, believe, about the world
- perception, belief system
- “one step removed”

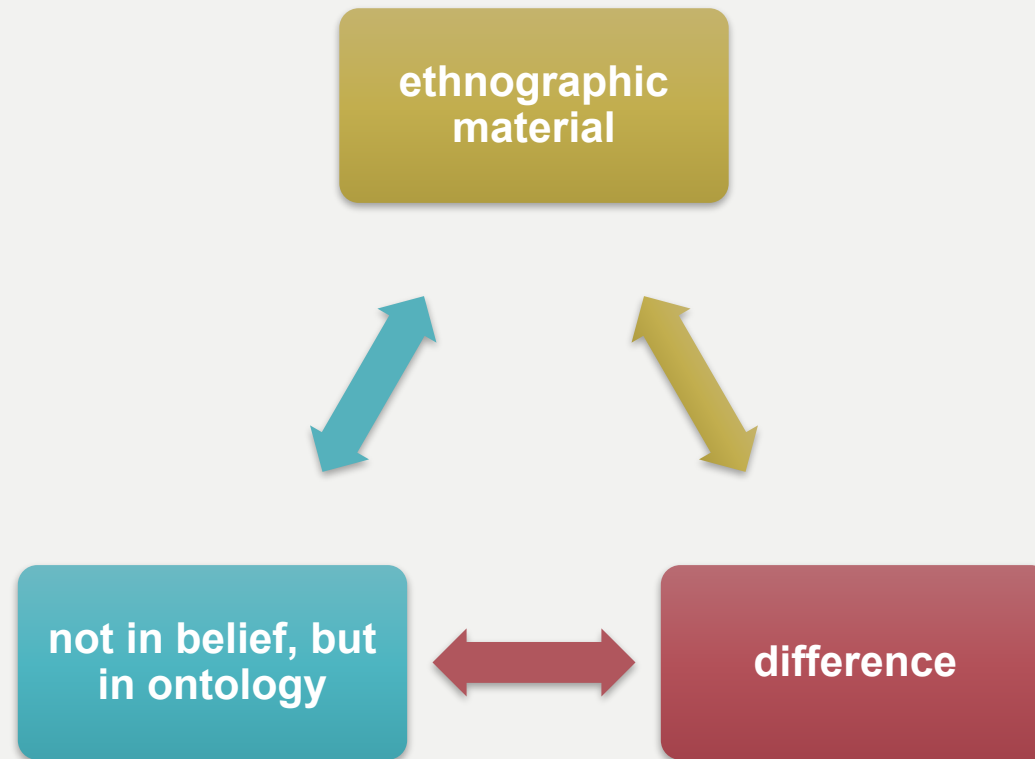
Ontological Turn

“The **epistemological** problem of how one sees things is turned into the **ontological** question of what there is to be seen in the first place.

Accordingly, what ultimately tints the anthropologist’s glasses are not social, cultural, political or other presuppositions, but ontological ones, by which we mean basic commitments and assumptions about what things are, and what they could be (including things like society, culture, politics and power). ... **The ontological turn is not so much a matter of ‘seeing differently’, in other words. It is above all a matter of seeing different things.”**

Holbraad and Pedersen 2017:5-6

Novelty: interpretation of ethnographic data





Example: River as person (Kramm, 2021)

- In Maori philosophy, the river is an ancestor, i.e. a person
- Interpret as: **what it means to be a person is defined differently in Maori philosophy**, not that the Maori believe that the river is a person



Example: River as person (Kramm, 2021)

- In Maori philosophy, the river is an ancestor, i.e. a person
- Interpret as: **what it means to be a person is defined differently in Maori philosophy**, not that the Maori believe that the river is a person
- **Double importance**
 - *accuracy of description*
 - *political consequences*

Political dimension

- decolonial paradigms
 - *reflexivity*
- difference as difference in belief:
assumption that someone is wrong
- example: interconnectivity of
nature
- self determination
- democratic dialogue

The GEOS Project

Our work brings together **philosophical** and **empirical** research on **global negotiations of knowledge** and **social-environmental challenges**.

We aim to understand **heterogeneous knowledge about socio-environmental systems** by **equally heterogeneous actors** from Indigenous farmers to laboratory scientists.

<https://www.geos-project.org/>



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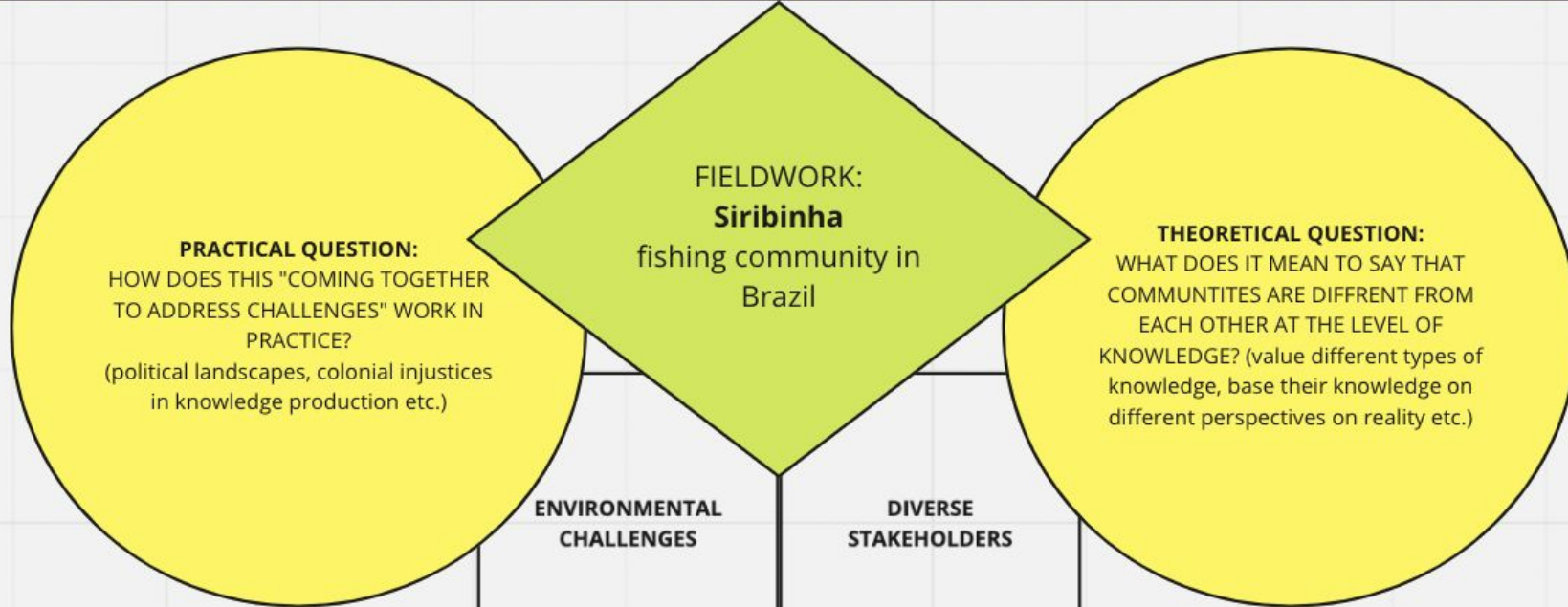
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MAIN CHALLENGE: TO SHOW THAT THE THEORETICAL AND THE PRACTICAL ISSUES IN CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ARE DEEPLY INTERRELATED



PRACTICAL QUESTION:
HOW DOES THIS "COMING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES" WORK IN PRACTICE?
(political landscapes, colonial injustices in knowledge production etc.)

FIELDWORK:
Siribinha
fishing community in Brazil

THEORETICAL QUESTION:
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT COMMUNITIES ARE DIFFERENT FROM EACH OTHER AT THE LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE? (value different types of knowledge, base their knowledge on different perspectives on reality etc.)

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

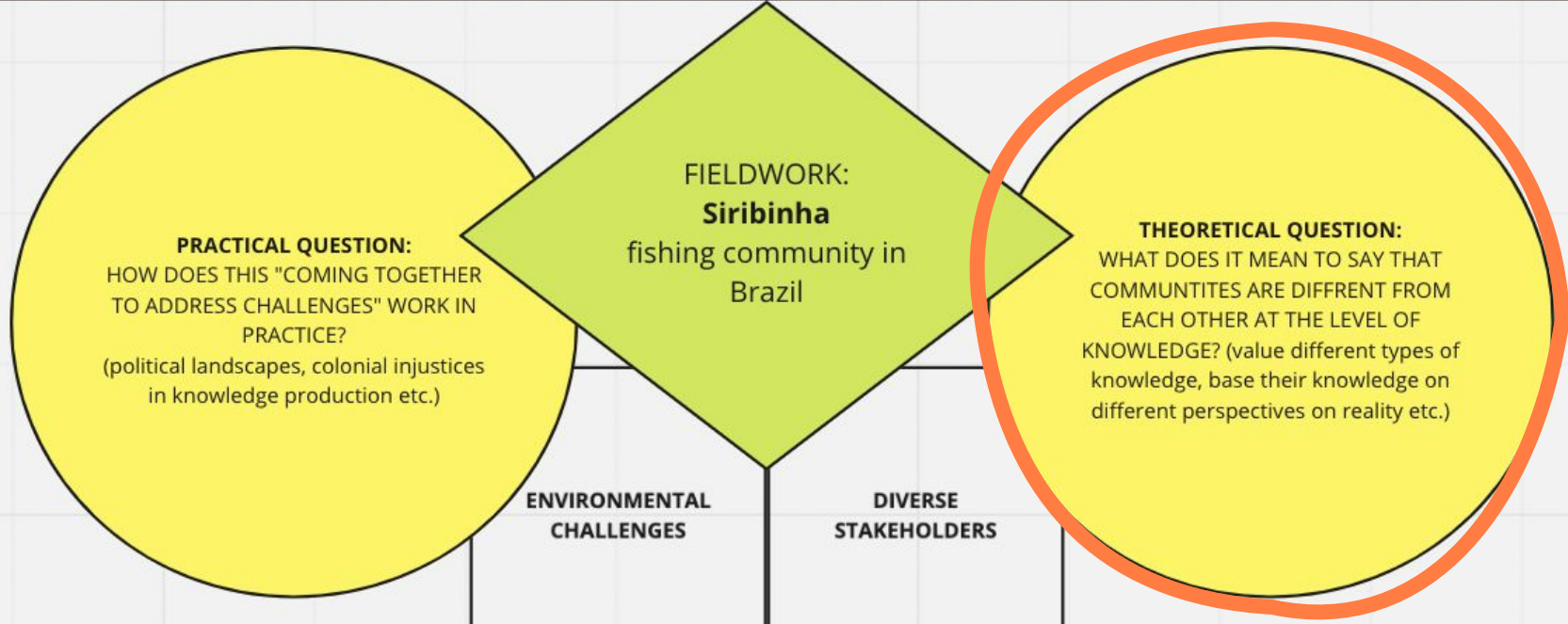
DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS

CO-PRODUCTION OF SOLUTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

Political ecology, practical and empirical philosophy

Philosophy, Anthropology (theoretical)

MAIN CHALLENGE: TO SHOW THAT THE THEORETICAL AND THE PRACTICAL ISSUES IN CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ARE DEEPLY INTERRELATED



Political ecology, practical and empirical philosophy

CO-PRODUCTION OF SOLUTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

Philosophy, Anthropology (theoretical)

My PhD project

Philosophy:
theoretical interest in
deep difference and
dialogues between
knowledges

Anthropology:
empirically study an
example of deep
difference, the case
study of the Caipora
forest being

The nature of togetherness and togetherness in nature: ontology, representation and collaboration

Julia J. Turska (KTI)

Background

Environmental challenges are in need of collective action. How can the goals of coming together to address environmental issues be achieved in a world characterized by the diversity of its environments, languages, practices, ethical frameworks and socio-economic power? This inquiry addresses these issues using methods of analytical, participatory, decolonial and experimental philosophy.

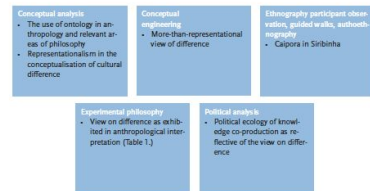
Objective

The objective of this project is to better understand the conditions for knowledge co-production in a cross-cultural setting. A philosophical theory of difference which contributes to navigating negotiations between divergent viewpoints on pressing problems of ecological well-being will be developed.

Introduction

Let us consider a negotiation between communities A and B on an environmental issue X. Ludwig and El-Hani (2020) argue that a model of such interaction cannot be a simple exchange of propositional knowledge but that a broad spectrum of epistemological, ontological, ethical and political factors are in play. There is no easy way to discern between issues related to knowledges on one hand, and systems of concepts and matters of existence on the other. Knowledge and communication presuppose an ontology. This thesis will thus be concerned with ontological considerations and their impact on epistemology, hermeneutics, ethics and political ecology. A novel account of difference is proposed and its empirical validity for debates on radical alterity, along with other views on difference (critical realism and ontological turn) is considered in a case study of Caipora, a forest being and protector of wild animals. Finally, its relevance for the issues of the politics of co-production of knowledge about the natural world is explored.

Method



Research questions

1. How to understand ontology in ontological turn literature? How can its commitment to self-determination for marginalised communities be strengthened through an analytically-driven philosophical analysis?

2. What is the relevance of representationalism for debates on the nature of cultural difference in anthropology and philosophy?
3. How does Caipora influence the relationship between humans and nature in the fishing community of Siribinha, Brazil? How do different interpretations of Caipora reflect various outlooks on difference (Table 1)?
4. What is the relevance of the concept of difference for questions regarding commensurability and political goals of self-determination? How does the more-than-representational account of difference model the politics of co-production of knowledge in the context of environmental issues?

Theoretical Stance	Mapping of Caipora	View on Difference
critical realism	sustainability	epistemic (conceptual frameworks)
ontological turn	alterity at the level of entities	ontological (worlds)
more-than-representational	divergent practice and embodied experience	more-than-representational (practices)

Table 1. The experiment with theoretical stances and their view on difference with respect to an instance of radical alterity in the Caipora case study

Fieldwork

- Location: Siribinha, Bahia, Brazil.
- Duration: 7 months of fieldwork (2022, 2023).
- Case study: Caipora, a forest being.
- Participatory philosophy, reflexive ethnographic methodologies, co-participation, transdisciplinarity.
- Empirical context for the philosophical experiment with three theories of difference (Table 1).



Figure 1. Caipora Master of animals and protector of the forest.



Figure 2. Siribinha, Brazil.



Figure 3. A fisherman in Siribinha.

References

Ludwig, D., & El-Hani, C. N. (2020). Philosophy of ethnobiology: understanding knowledge integration and its limitations. *Journal of Ethnobiology*, 40(1), 3-20.



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ORIGINAL RESEARCH



Back by popular demand, ontology

Productive tensions between anthropological and philosophical approaches to ontology

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Southern Ontologies. Reorienting Agendas in Social Ontology

David Ludwig, Daniel Faabelangne Banuoku, Birgit Boogaard, Charbel El-Hani, Bernard Yangmaadome Guri, Matthias Kramm, Vitor Renck, Adriana Ressorio C., Jairo Robles-Pineros & Julia J. Turska

Journal of Social Ontology (2023) Copy BIPTEX

Abstract

This article addresses ontological negotiations in the Global South through three case studies of community-based research in Brazil and Ghana. We argue that ontological perspectives of Indigenous and other subjugated communities require an ontological pluralism that recognizes the plurality of both representational tools and ways of being in the world. Locating these two readings of ontological pluralism in the politics of the Global South, the article highlights a wider dynamic from ontological paternalism to ontological diversity to ontological decolonization. We conclude by arguing that this dynamic provides important lessons for reorienting agendas in social ontology through Southern Ontologies.

Transdisciplinary Philosophy of Science: Meeting the Challenge of Indigenous Expertise

Ludwig, David and El-Hani, Charbel and Gatti, Fabio and Kendig, Catherine and Kramm, Matthias and Neco, Lucia and Nieves Delgado, Abigail and Polisel, Luana and Renck, Vitor and Ressorio C, Adriana and Reyes-Galindo, Luis and Rickard, Thomas Loyd and De La Rosa, Gabriela and Turska, Julia J. and Vergara-Silva, Francisco and Wilson, Rob (2023) *Transdisciplinary Philosophy of Science: Meeting the Challenge of Indigenous Expertise*. [Preprint]



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Caipora

Photograph by Maciej Niemojewski

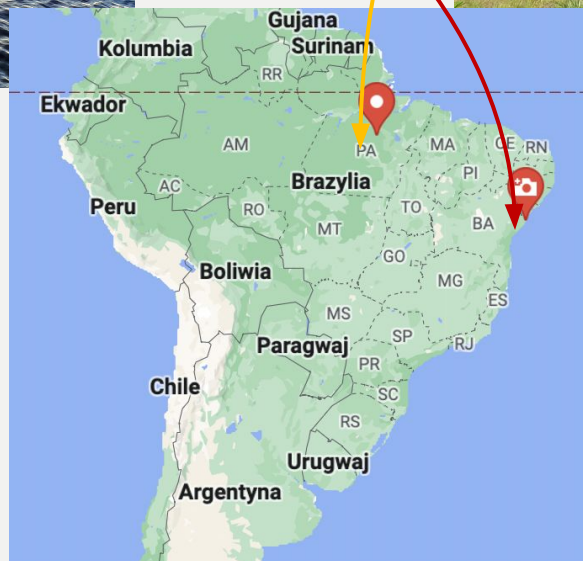


Fieldwork

Siribinha, BA



Mrôtjdam, PA



Questions



What is Caipora?



How does it matter for the everyday practices?



Participatory research: all about empowering the community



Can we understand each other? Can we learn from each other despite, or exactly because of, our differences?

Participatory Action Research

- long-standing relationship with communities
- taking responsibilities towards research partners seriously: ethics, assistance, co-publishing etc
- empowerment, engagement, shaping research objectives together



Doing fieldwork





key messages

interdisciplinarity

philosophical
reflection for
anthropological
research

ontologies

self-determination

relationship with
communities

research journey
and practice



THANK YOU

Let's discuss

