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Farewell Sounds: journey through Médio Jequitinhonha (MG) on the tracks of the Sensibilidades Antropológicas *podcast*¹

Valéria de Paula Martins

When I left the Jequitinhonha river valley, in Minas Gerais, after years of working and researching in the region, I felt that I could write my doctoral thesis

1 The *Sensibilidades Antropológicas* podcast can be accessed from different aggregators such as Spotify, Breaker and Pocket Casts. It is also possible to listen to the episodes and learn more about the project on the website *Poéticas da Terra* <https://poeticasdaterra.org/projetos/sensibilidades-antropologicas/>, on our Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/sensibilidadesantropologicas/?ref=py_c or Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/sensibilidades.antropologicas/>

there, at that moment. I was completely wrapped up in that world, those people and their lives.

I know it was very unlikely that this would happen as easily as I imagined. But I couldn't prove it: in a month I would be living in another country, to continue my studies, and I needed to organize a series of papers, in addition to finding out at what address, exactly, I would live.

At that moment when I left Jequitinhonha – more specifically the region of the middle channel of the river, called Médio Jequitinhonha – I imagined that the cover of the text I would write should be covered with earth. Because that's how I felt: covered in earth. And not only my skin, but my thoughts, feelings, were affected by ways of life in which the earth – its types and uses, its sharing, what was born or not born from it... – was a central element.

I spent six months away in France, having very different experiences from those I had in the field – as we usually say in Anthropology when naming, generically, the places where we carried out our research. And the earth was slowly detaching itself from me. When I returned to Brazil, with the task of writing the text that would proclaim the end of that period of studies – the doctoral thesis – I had difficulty finding signs of it on my skin, thoughts and feelings.

It was necessary to find them, in any case, at least to a sufficient extent for the presentation of the work to a group of professors at the end of the doctorate. But the research experience was also very sensorial, full of colors, smells, sounds... and, with writing, I could not mobilize and share these sensibilities as I would have liked.

In this text, I share a little bit of the process of finally returning to that kind of atmosphere that permeated my field. A process that has taken place especially—from the realization of the *Sensibilidades Antropológicas* podcast, whose first episode was aired in March 2021, in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This return process, as we will see later, is also configured as a farewell. And it is not by chance that this journey back, and at the same time departing, takes place through a podcast, therefore based on sound waves, and in a way associated with some images that I share with each episode. That's what I'll tell you here.

If you want to accompany me on these paths, don't worry about taking heavy luggage: a small suitcase, supported by attentive bodies and senses, and which can carry some light and multicolored clothes, will be enough.



Portrait of feet in the field. Author: Valéria Martins.

The station from which we depart

Once, talking to a friend about the work and research experience I had in the Jequitinhonha river valley region, she told me a phrase that I have never forgotten: “You cannot die with it”²

2 In 2002, 2003 and 2004 I worked in a non-governmental organization in the entire river basin – Upper, Middle and Lower Jequitinhonha –, acting as an advisor in a program that sought to know and value the so-called local traditions focused on toys and various games and jokes, such as parties and dances. In 2007, I joined the master's course in Anthropology at the University of Brasília and, in early 2008, I would be back in the region – in a location I had not yet known – to start the research to which I would dedicate myself in the following years. To learn about the works produced in the master's and doctoral courses in the vicinity of the Machado stream, see, respectively, Martins 2009 and Martins 2013. The friend who said the sentence I quote, and whom I thank, is Alice Sosnowski.

I had already written the dissertation and thesis, all interlocutors I worked with directly had received their copies, the texts had been read by some teachers – and who knows, other people – so somehow “I wouldn’t die with it”, but my friend’s phrase continued to echo.

Years before, at the end of the research, I remember having one of the last conversations in the field with Mr. Deca, the dear singer José Maria Rodrigues, such an important interlocutor for the research. I had recorded, for many, many hours, a huge number of songs that he sang, with the guitar in his arms, in the living room of his house in the city of Araçuaí. And I wasn’t quite sure about what to do with those records — or even if I should do anything other than consider them in the research and writing process.

I told him something like this: “Would you like me to do something with these recordings? Produce a CD, for example? What would you like me to do with this material?”.

The “material” I was referring to, the songs and associated cases that he told me, were related to *Nove*, a rite permeated by collective musical dances and marked by sung poetry. This ritual has been performed for countless generations in that region and brings together people old and young in nightly gatherings over food and drink. It is usually preceded by prayers, commonly Rosaries³.

Nove is the name of one of the dances, also called *brinquedos* or *brincadeiras de viola*, but as this is usually the dance that occupies most of the night, it ends up naming the festive meeting. “Shall we play?” people say, or “Shall we make a *Nove*?”.

In the composition of the *brincadeiras de viola*, those who want to participate, but the singing is led by specialists: the singers. These are the people who know the *brinquedos* and their repertoires outstandingly. Most are already retired as rural workers, and a few younger work as bricklayers and cleaners. The singers

3 The Rosary is composed of a sequence of prayers: “Our Father” and “Hail Mary”, interspersed with the so-called Mysteries and another small prayer, “Glory to the Father”. At the beginning, the “*Credo*” is said and, at the end, the “*Salve Rainha*”, when the Rosary is *offered* to one or more saints, saying their name. This prayer can be done with the handling of a rosary of beads, a kind of necklace that displays a crucifix at the end and whose pieces, usually small spheres – the beads –, indicate, each one, the prayer to be said at the moment.

were the people I lived with the most during my stay at Jequitinhonha, and many are present in my life to this day, with frequent contact.

Well, that day at Mr. Deca, when asking him those questions – “What would you like me to do?” –, he stopped for a while, thought, and said to me: “Do you know what I wanted, Valéria?”. I was excited, thinking “great, I’ll be able to do something specific for him and the people linked to *Nove*...”. And then he said to me something like: “I wanted to make a *Nove* for you to see, but the ones I had in my house when I was a boy”.

In this *Nove*, according to him, great local names would be present as singers, most of them already deceased, of whom I had already heard a lot... And Mr. Deca was then saying the name of each singer, men and women, that would be present in the *Nove*, one by one. And he continued: “Then we were going to sing along all those *noves* that I sang for you”.

I, still a little startled, said, trying somehow to pick up the point from the records I had in my hand: “But I’ve recorded far more than you could ever sing in a *Nove*, Mr. Deca”. And he promptly said: “then we would do another *Nove*, and another *Nove*, until we sang it all”.

I had nothing more to say.

Faced with my question about the recordings of his songs, what he wanted was for me to meet the *Noves* that he knew long before my arrival in the region and my admiration for the beauty of those brincadeiras. “You were going to see what *Nove* was...”, he told me.

Thinking about Mr. Deca’s wish, I think what he wanted was for me to be able to experience those old *Noves* as he had lived them in his childhood and youth... In a way, then, he evoked an issue we usually debate in Anthropology: the limits or the (im)possibilities of affectation and translation from a research. Supposedly, the challenge is greater when we cannot, as researchers, live a certain experience for ourselves, like the *Noves* from Mr. Deca’s childhood, in this case. But the question also arises even when we are all – researchers and interlocutors – in the same context, experiencing, at least apparently, the same situations.

In Anthropology, we have generally sought to deal with these delicate issues in order to assume the limitations of our task. At the same time, seeking to explain how this task is multifaceted, formed by different perceptions of some people on multiple perceptions of other people...

Thinking this way, I can consider that, in a way, I had already experienced those old *Noves* that Mr. Deca talked about: through contact with himself, his memories, cases and the perceptions he shared with me, in addition to the narratives of other singers. And I already had, in my small suitcase and in my own body, countless other experiences related to the *Noves* in which I had been physically present and to the other experiences in the field.

I had been affected (FAVRET-SAADA, 1990) by those people and what I had experienced there. I occupied the ranks in the *brincadeira* of *Nove*, I turned and stamped on the *brinquedo* of *Batuque*, I enjoyed smiles and greetings in the meeting of eyes in the dances. I silenced in moments of prayer, I found the repertoire of songs in everyday life: plants, kinship relationships, work, disagreements, lack of love and love. I was received in the houses, I drank coffee, ate cookies coming out hot from the clay oven... I heard and saw people get emotional and rejoice, I got emotional and rejoiced.

Recalling my friend's phrase, it seems to me that it was this experience she was talking about when she told me that I could not "die with it".

And in this retrospective look that I have now, I realize that despite having made public two long texts about the research, the dissertation and the thesis, I could still tell more things or, perhaps, I could tell things in other ways. In ways closer to the multiple experiences I had, which I remember and reconstruct, and to the sensitive ways of being there, through attention to sounds, smells, colors, flavors...

Following our journey, I will tell you in more detail, next station, how I have revisited and recreated field experiences from the realization of the *Sensibilidades Antropológicas* podcast. With my face resting on the train window, I watch the landscape go by and I find myself thinking that maybe the podcast is a slightly unexpected way of "doing something" with the "material" and immaterial that I

received so much from Mr. Deca and all the people who welcomed me in the bands of Médio Jequitinhonha.

Anthropological Sensibilities

With the pandemic that has been plaguing the world since the beginning of 2020, and the sudden pause we had in the daily rhythm, at least at that initial moment, I found myself with some projects interrupted. This, in a way, opened space for others, more compatible with the conditions imposed by the virus, to be able to outline themselves.

It was in this context that, unpretentiously, I recorded a literary text that I had long wanted to share with some people, and then I sent it to some friends. I enjoyed the experience of recording and sharing, I received very delicate and beautiful comments, and I decided to continue with those recordings.

Despite having a degree in Social Communication and, therefore, having some familiarity with audio recordings and montages, it had been a long time since I had dealt with these processes. In any case, the confinement in houses, the physical distance and a certain atmosphere of loneliness and fear seemed to me compatible with the audio recordings and the sharing and diffusion, through them, of poetic texts that dealt with themes evoked by the pandemic. It would be a way, perhaps, to better deal with the loneliness that visited us, and who knows to nourish or even strengthen affective bonds.

I didn't know very well the podcast format, but it seemed to me that it suited the context and the possibilities that the moment established. Podcasts allow reasonably easy access and sharing between people, as they tend to be lighter in terms of connectivity demand. Also, as Fleischer and Manica (2020) remind us, they generally involve low production and diffusion costs, are more accessible to visually impaired and illiterate people, in addition to resting the eyes in these times of excess screens. So I imagined creating a podcast.

Social Poetics/Poética Social, prior to *Sensibilidades Antropológicas*, aired between May and December 2020. The monthly episodes, built in partnership with friend and co-worker Márcio Ferreira de Souza, brought literary texts that dealt

with topics such as isolation/withdrawal, time, modes of perception and presence, affections, longing and silence ⁴.

I tell you about social poetics because, in fact, it appeared as a kind of cradle of waters that, when navigated, made me find, in a bend in the river, the anthropological sensibilities. For in addition to the experience having enabled me to have a renewed and pleasurable contact with sound production, the themes addressed, and the entire context of that moment showed me my own affections. In the midst of so many goodbyes, I realized that it was important to say mine too. And I realized that I could now talk about field experiences freer from the constraints associated with academic work. Also, in order to emphasize the sensitive ways of experiencing a research and the relationships we establish in its construction.

As I said at the beginning of the text, it is not by chance that this kind of return and farewell to the ethnographic field is taking place from the sound waves and images that I share in each episode. In my opinion, the possibility of activating my voice and those of interlocutors, their timbres and tones, also recordings of soundscapes of the region, reconnecting with different images, in their colors and shapes, in addition to recreating many memories, this is all a lively way to visit again the surroundings of the Machado stream, where I carried out the research. And then, being able to get out of there in my own time, from the farewell I was willing to make.

In order to be a podcast, that is, to have a public character, I considered it important that, in this process, the issues I deal with do not boil down to a personal experience, even if they start from it. Thus, I weave considerations on certain themes or events in order to seek broader resonances and closer to the lives of other people. This attention is given especially when dealing with the processes of carrying out an ethnographic research, the relationships with interlocutors, the choice of themes... the intention is to try to contribute to the work of other people in their own research or studies, considering the audience of area students, or others, interested in field research, anthropology, ethnography.

4 The podcast was part of the extension project "In quarantine with Incis", from the Institute of Social Sciences of the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU), created in mid-2020. To learn about the podcast, visit: <https://poeticasdaterra.org/projetos/poeticas-sociais/> or Social Poetics .



Images recorded in the house of D. Antônia Alves, an old singer and dear interlocutor of the research. Author: Valéria Martins.

Well then, *Sensibilidades Antropológicas* is a podcast focused on the intricacies of ethnographic research in its multiple sensorialities. The first season, which I am currently directing and is like the farewell I mentioned, started in March 2021 and I still don't know when it will end.

Regarding the format and frequency of the episodes, they are monthly and have a short duration: around ten minutes. They begin with a presentation of the theme of that edition and a brief contextualization regarding other episodes. This opening speech, which sometimes occupies a reasonable part of the episode, has a more informative character. The idea is precisely that it concentrates a factual character so that in the second and last part of the episode I can bring the theme in a more playful, free and poetic way.

The second part has a soundtrack, which can simply be the sound of birds or a river, depending on the theme. Sometimes, it constitutes itself in a track, as in the case of episode 5, of July 2021, which brought a series of excerpts of songs re-

corded during the research to compose a kind of musical landscape of the region: the music that played on the radio, another sung around a bonfire, the sound of the accordion and other instruments on the occasion of the *Queima do Judas* in the village of Machado ⁵...

In this poetic part, so to speak, I have also brought, for example, a sound letter to a dear and already deceased interlocutor of the research, the singer and storyteller Manoel Maceda (episode 3 ⁶), beautiful speeches by interlocutors (episode 4 ⁷), and in episode 6, of August 2021, four short texts, related to each other and situated at different times in relation to a night of *Nove*, the rite of music and dance that I studied ⁸. These texts were constructed from events that took place during the research, and I created, for the podcast, the sequence in which they appear: one of them takes place before the rite, two during the *Nove* and the last, the following day.

As I mentioned, when we were at the first station of this path that we are now walking, this rite is also called *brinquedo* or *brincadeira*, toy, play. Maybe with this inspiration I want to play a little with the way I present the themes. The “joke” here consists of experimenting with words, tones of voice, soundtracks, times of silence in the editing or even repetitions, followed by excerpts of speeches, as in episode 4, in which I brought phrases that I heard in the field. It is thus an experimentation: a toy experiment.

Regarding the choice and sequence of themes in the season, I did a survey of possible themes, but not a planning of all the episodes, subsequently. Often, it is from one episode that the inspiration for the next comes. It can also come from pressing events or issues: the discussion about the absurd idea of a “time frame” in relation to the demarcation of indigenous lands inspired me to create one of the

5 The episode “*Cantos dos lugares: paisagens musicais*” / “Songs from places: musical landscapes” can be accessed here: <https://poeticasdaterra.org/cantos-dos-lugares-paisagens-musicais/>

6 “*Carta sonora ao Sr. Manoel Maceda* / Sound letter to Mr. Manoel Maceda”, accessible at <https://poeticasdaterra.org/carta-sonora-ao-sr-manoel-maceda/>

7 “*Breves anotações de um falar poético: o que ouvi em campo* / Brief notes of poetic speech: what I heard in the field”, accessible at <https://poeticasdaterra.org/breves-anotacoes-de-um-falar-poetico/>

8 Titled “*O brinquedo do princípio do mundo* / The toy of the beginning of the world”, the episode can be accessed here: <https://poeticasdaterra.org/o-brinquedo-do-principio-do-mundo/>

episodes, focused especially on the theme of land and its presence in cosmology and ontology in those surroundings⁹.

Regarding the process of elaboration and production of the episodes, despite being somewhat lonely, I count on the important presence and partnership of my friend and former undergraduate colleague Leobaldo Prado, a professional in audio production who masters the episodes, and also of a graduate student, who assembles the files with the written version of the episode.¹⁰ With these text files, we want to facilitate or even make it possible for people with hearing impairments to access the podcast. Both they and the images selected for each episode are available on the website *Poéticas da Terra*¹¹.

In terms of the sequence of steps in the realization of each episode, we generally follow this way: writing the text; recording¹²; choice of soundtrack; editing¹³; sending the text and edited episode for the production of the written version; submission of the edited episode for mastering; and then the stage of choosing images that will accompany the publication of the episode on the website *Poéticas da Terra*, in addition to the image associated with the episode in podcasts aggregators. Finally, publication and dissemination. As steps in a process, they have an impact on each other, which can change the flow cited: with recording, for example, I can modify some part of the text I had written because I believe that, in speech, it would be better otherwise.

9 The so-called “time frame”, which has been discussed within the scope of the Federal Superior Court, wants to establish the demarcation of indigenous lands only for territories occupied by these peoples when the Federal Constitution was promulgated in 1988. Thus, insofar as it disregards that a large part of these territories were not occupied due to the fact that indigenous peoples had been violently expelled from them, the time frame serves as another instrument of historical massacre of indigenous populations since, in addition to interrupting ongoing demarcation processes, it nullifies those that have already been established and are judicialized.

10 Between March and October 2021, the work was done by Vitória Brasileira, a Visual Arts student, and from then on it has been carried out by Marcela Lima, a graduate student in Social Sciences.

11 The website *Poéticas da Terra* includes a series of references and materials related to projects and research in Anthropology that prioritize awareness of difference through the activation of devices such as photographs, films, drawings, music, sound elaborations, writings, etc. I created it from the impossibility, due to the covid-19 pandemic, of continuing with the Anthropology with Children extension project. To learn more, visit <https://poeticasdaterra.org/>

12 Made from a digital audio recorder that I had acquired a few years ago (H2n-Zoom).

13 Editing is done using the free software Audacity.

Well, these are the elements that have composed landscapes of the paths of this new and at the same time old journey through Jequitinhonha. And so I follow the trails, also sonorous, of *Sensibilidades Antropológicas*.

Farewell Sounds: the last station?

I'm still not sure if the podcast will continue after the first season ends. Perhaps it was created for this, I cannot say.

What I can say is that *Sensibilidades Antropológicas* has been a great opportunity both to relive and re-elaborate experiences and to talk to these interlocutors and even other people who knew very little about the region and are becoming interested in it. Or who are especially touched by questions related to research and Anthropology. Sometimes, the feeling I have is that I receive them all in a large backyard full of trees, affections and memories that we rebuild together, and redo, like new fruits.

Perhaps, behind the facade of the stations, what exists is this large backyard in its multiple relationships, always renewed: the station, in fact, from where we started and where we arrived.

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