



LISTENING TO EXIST: TRADITIONAL PEOPLES, ETHNODEVELOPMENT, AND AGRARIAN LAW

OUVIR PARA EXISTIR: POVOS TRADICIONAIS, ETNODESENVOLVIMENTO E O DIREITO AGRÁRIO

ESCUCHAR PARA EXISTIR: PUEBLOS TRADICIONALES, ETNODESARROLLO Y DERECHO AGRARIO

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Brief Biography:

The trajectory of Professor Maria Cristina Vidotte Blanco Tárrega is a portrait of her gaze dedicated to the Brazilian social reality. A Full Professor at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG) and a productivity scholarship researcher of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), she dedicates her career to understanding economic relations, ethnodevelopment, and sustainability, from the perspective of traditional peoples and

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communities, collective rights, legal pluralism, and participatory democracy. Her studies in Agrarian Law place her among the most respected Brazilian researchers discussing issues involving the right to land and citizenship in the countryside.

Professor Maria Cristina holds a degree in Law from the University of Ribeirão Preto (UNAERP) and developed her master's and doctoral research at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP). She conducted post-doctoral research in the area of Philosophy of Law at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, and was a Research Professor at the Université Paris X Nanterre, France.

She is a member of several international networks for the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge, including the Red para el Constitucionalismo Democrático, Red Latinoamericana de Antropología Jurídica, Red para la reconfiguración del capital, the Network for the New Latin American Democratic Constitutionalism, and the Rural Sociology Network.

In addition to having served as a representative of the UFG Law School for internationalization affairs, she has collaborated with the graduate programs of several Brazilian institutions, such as the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD), the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCAR), and the University of Brasília (UnB).

Furthermore, Professor Maria Cristina is a member of several editorial boards of scientific journals and is the editor-in-chief of the UFG Law School journal. Currently, she is dedicating her energies to the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) at the São Paulo Regional Office. It is a pleasure to welcome you, to have you here with us.

Luciana Jordão e Thiago Silva: Professor, we welcome you with great satisfaction. It is a joy to inaugurate the channel of the Journal of Socio-environmental Law with the interview of a great researcher⁴, whom we had the honor of having in our trajectory as a teacher and as a friend as well. We are very happy for your participation.

1 ON THE HORIZON: ETHNODEVELOPMENT

⁴ Following the publication of this interview, the full video will be made available on the YouTube channel, which can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/@RevistadeDireitoSocioambiental>. The written version of the interview was prepared from the transcript, then reviewed and edited for publication in this journal.

Luciana Jordão: Your research was developed with the Kalunga people, here in the state of Goiás, and is marked by this discussion of the concepts of ethnodevelopment and ethno-economy. So, I would like to know where this idea comes from, where these discussions originate? Could you provide a general overview?

Maria Cristina Vidotte: Good morning to everyone. First, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be here with you and for the generosity of the words addressed to me. Thank you very much. I don't know if I am worth that much, but I am very honored by what you said. It is also a joy to start this very important activity with you. Congratulations on this initiative, which I consider very interesting. I wish for it to be very successful, to continue for a long time, and that I may always continue to participate and contribute in whatever way I can.

The idea of ethnodevelopment and ethno-economy dates back to the early policies of the 1970s, when Mexican anthropologists, notably Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1995), identified an issue related to Mexican indigenous people: an ethnocide was occurring there due to labor relations. He then began to reflect on this, starting to think about a possibility of development that would not decimate the communities. He drafted a document in which he denounced this problem to the World Bank and, after that, this discussion reached the United Nations (UN) and also the International Labour Organization (ILO).

But it is from this idea that the understanding emerges that the traditional, Western, or liberal development model, whatever we want to call it, has a destructive potential toward traditional communities and peoples. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1995) developed a methodology of cultural appropriation that is not destructive, so that these communities can have their development in their own way, incorporating what is necessary for there to be an intersectoral dialogue with Western culture.

From this point on, I began to work with the Kalunga community and started to perceive the need for this dialogue.

At that moment, there was already the work of Professor Clorinda⁵ with cattle... And there was also the work of Professor Maria Geralda⁶... It was the work of Professor Clorinda with the

⁵ Dr. Maria Clorinda Soares Fioravanti is a Full Professor at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG), working in the field of Veterinary Medicine, developing research on the conservation and characterization of local cattle breeds (Curraleiro and Pantaneiro), in addition to other topics under her care in the Graduate Program in Animal Science at the UFG School of Veterinary and Animal Science.

⁶ Dr. Maria Geralda de Almeida was a Full Professor at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG) and developed her research regarding cultural manifestations and traditional quilombola communities and indigenous peoples within the Graduate Program in Geography at the Institute of Socio-Environmental Studies (IESA) until the year 2022.

Curraleiro cattle, which is cattle from the local culture, and the work of Professor Maria Geralda at the Instituto do Liceu Nacional, focused on the development of local culture, tourism, etc.

So, I joined them and shared with them this moment of learning and construction. It was from there that we started to work with the Kalunga community.

2 LEGISLATION IN PRACTICE

Thiago Silva: Very well, Professor. And, bridging with this work with the Kalungas, currently, in São Paulo, you are also developing an approach with the *Caiçaras*, who also experience this dynamic of fighting for rights.

I would like you to talk a little about these two moments in your trajectory: the accompaniment of the Kalunga people's struggle for the recognition of their rights, from the perspective of ethnodevelopment, and, now, the work developed with the *Caiçaras*.

Maria Cristina Vidotte: Perhaps the Kalunga *quilombo* is one of the *quilombos* that has advanced the most in terms of organization in Brazil. It is a *quilombo* that has had recognition for a very long time. It even had recognition prior to the Federal Constitution. Furthermore, there are great researchers dedicated to the study and support of this community.

The same occurs with the *Caiçaras*... The *Caiçaras* are a little different.

We know that *quilombolas* have more direct constitutional protection. The *Caiçaras* are traditional peoples, included in Decree no. 6.040/2007. But they constitute a group that is on the coast of São Paulo, Paraná, and Rio de Janeiro... They are a specific group that does not have protection as strong as that of the *quilombolas*. However, the *Caiçaras* are very organized in the management of their development and have the support of a group from the University of São Paulo (USP), which is very important. It is the group with which I have been relating: Manuela Carneiro da Cunha⁷, Cristina

⁷ Dr. Maria Manuela Ligeti Carneiro da Cunha is an anthropologist and retired Full Professor at the University of São Paulo (USP), where she continues to develop her research in ethnology, history, indigenous rights, ethnicity, and traditional knowledge.

Adams⁸, and Antonio Carlos Diegues⁹ himself, who has already been with us in the Graduate Program in Agrarian Law.

The *Caiçaras* had support to structure themselves, to develop, and to understand themselves as a traditional people, especially the group on the coast of São Paulo.

The *Caiçaras'* proposal is very interesting. Today, they have already managed, for example, to implement a *caiçara* school in a part of the community that is isolated. They have advanced a lot with this and also with the preservation of their subsistence models: the *coivara* (slash-and-burn) field and artisanal fishing technologies.

It is challenging to work with them because there is no article in the Constitution saying that they have territorial rights. So, we are building this path. Now, we are working, for example, with extractive projects for fishermen, taking this proposal to them. It is a first possibility for construction, but we still have difficulties.

Luciana Jordão: Professor, you had an article published now, in 2026, by the journal *Pensamento Jurídico*, entitled “Etnoeconomia quilombola desde o Brasil: entraves para a exploração e proteção do patrimônio cultural” (Quilombola Ethno-economy from Brazil: barriers to the exploitation and protection of cultural heritage). In this work, you discuss the State's duty to ensure the right of traditional communities to exist in accordance with their ways of life and indicate a series of legislative acts aimed at protecting this right, even citing the constitutionalization of the right to culture.

In your view and based on your experience, what is missing for the community recognition processes to convert into real protection of these peoples' rights? How can we proceed, as a country, and continue the public policies that, at times, are more effective in this protection?

Maria Cristina Vidotte: I think we have a set of measures there. We already have some legislative measures. But I think what is most lacking is an understanding of this. For example, in the Judiciary, I feel this lack of understanding a lot. You discuss the control of conventionality thinking about ILO Convention no. 169, which is the cornerstone for the protection of traditional peoples, and

⁸ Dr. Cristina Adams is an Associate Professor at the School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities (EACH) at the University of São Paulo (USP). As a professor in the Graduate Programs in Modeling of Complex Systems (EACH), Inter-unit Applied Ecology (ESALQ/CENA), and Environmental Science (PROCAM), she develops research on governance and forest management by traditional populations in Brazil.

⁹ Dr. Antonio Carlos Sant'ana Diegues is a Professor in the Graduate Program in Environmental Science (PROCAM) at the University of São Paulo (USP), conducting research that involves the analysis of socio-environmental conflicts, the ways of life, and the knowledge of traditional Brazilian fishing communities.

it is rarely known or part of the practice of conventionality control in lawsuits referring to this convention.

Education is lacking, information is lacking.

Public policies are practiced by people. And people, not always—perhaps in the vast majority of cases—know, have assimilated, or have understood the protection due to these peoples and these communities. This has greatly hindered the progress of the implementation of public policies. First, it is necessary to convince, it is necessary to teach the public authorities; then, to apply and ensure that the public policy effectively reaches these communities. This is a great difficulty.

Thiago Silva: Moving forward to address the topic of the day, which is climate change, we see, today, a discourse, including from this agriculture oriented toward manufacturing and export—the large agribusiness—publicizing practices or stating that it is establishing sustainable practices capable of combating climate change.

Do you believe that these systems can, in fact, develop policies and practices that face the scenario of climate change? And, in this context, what do we have to learn from traditional communities?

Maria Cristina Vidotte: It seems to me that we must, first, learn to respect traditional knowledge. Not to start from the principle that they are ignorant people who do not understand science. On the contrary, there is a science, a knowledge built there. And this is a fact. Nobody will deny this, because the communities are in these places, and these places are preserved.

We have everything to learn. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) itself has already understood this. There is already a huge catalog of agro-traditional food production systems. These differentiated systems, these traditional systems, can save the planet, can save it from a possible great hunger.

And, as for agribusiness, that model of agribusiness agriculture, I do not see the possibility of it achieving an ecological transition.

There is a lot of masking, a lot of makeup... "Let's use bio-inputs... Now, it's not using chemicals anymore, it's doing something ecological." No, it is not doing something ecological, there is no ecological balance at all. We are killing life; we are killing the birds. Monoculture still continues. It is no use putting in biological fertilizer because that will not solve the situation. We have to learn a lot from traditional agriculture, from traditional peoples. And I think we have to try, at least, to establish a dialogue with these practices to see if it is still possible to save something.

3 IN THE FUTURE, LISTEN MORE...

Luciana Jordão: Professor, within these discussions, we would like to know your perception, as a professor and researcher, regarding what scholars of Agrarian Law and Environmental Law need to keep in mind in this debate about the struggle for land and the right to healthy food. What are the perspectives, based on the gaps you observe? What are the challenges that still need to be faced and that can guide future research? You can give us some work, because we need to work! (Laughter)

Maria Cristina Vidotte: I think this dialogue between disciplines is very important. But it is even more important to have a dialogue with other possibilities of knowledge. We live very much in models, in little boxes, predefined models, very closed to possibilities of thought. People are talking a lot inside bubbles, and that is a mistake. We need to listen. Even if we consider the starting point to be wrong, we have to listen. It is necessary to dialogue, because, otherwise, we will not think. We are saying things to a group that believes everything is fine. People do not dialogue with other cultures.

We start from the assumption that science has already advanced and that we already know everything. Even the human sciences, the social sciences, and anthropology... There is still a long way to go, many possibilities and alternatives with which we need to dialogue.

Thiago Silva: Professor, thank you very much for your time. I want to thank you, once again, for your availability to participate in this interview. Know that you are one of the great inspirations, both for my education and for Luciana's.

Thus, this Journal of Socio-environmental Law is, in a way, a fruit of your work as well, and it is an honor to have you with us in this meeting.

We wish you an excellent day. Thank you very much, once again.

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