

6 Conclusion

Doing Hope, Researching Hope

In this book, we have drawn from a number of theorizations and empirical cases to discuss how people variously engage with practical reason and grapple with semiotic resources at their disposal to enact hope in their communicative practice. And while we have alluded to various ethnographic works on hope as situated practice, we chose to look at *faveladas/os* and their struggle for redress of the historical inequalities in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil. Hope emerges as a situated practice not only of reorienting knowledge (Miyazaki, 2004), but also of reorienting temporality and the resources of language. Obviously, temporality – or “time as it is experienced within a way of life” (Lear, 2006, p. 40) – and language itself are part and parcel of knowledge as a hyperonym for situated practices of knowing, feeling, and inhabiting the world with others. Yet we emphasize the reorientations of both temporality and language because these forms of reinvention are very conspicuous in our empirical cases. For instance, Ernst Bloch (1986), a leading philosopher who wrote one of the most comprehensive treatises on the subject of hope, indicated that “[h]ope, this expectant counter-emotion against anxiety and fear . . . refers to the furthest and brightest horizon” (p. 75). As we discussed in Chapter 1, where we lay out the premises of our theoretical orientation to hope, Bloch and other authors have variously defined hope as an affect oriented to the “horizon of the future to be attained” (p. 131). Yet as we discussed in Chapter 3, for Marielle Franco and the mourning movement that surfaced following her tragic assassination, the horizon they have hoped for is not the indefinite future to be attained. As illustrated in the case studies of Chapter 3, her mourners’ hope lies not in a linear future to be aspired for but in the “present.” Through mantras that include “Marielle, presente” and “Marielle vive,” alongside a collective fight for actions to be carried out in the present circumstances of Brazil’s democratic collapse under Bolsonaroism, they invoke the specter of Marielle and her embodiment of the Black woman to ground their activism in the present of political action. They narrate Marielle as spectrally *presente* with them, and project the time and space for political change as right now, right here. This metaleptic narration of Marielle – that is, this narration through the “transgression of narrative universes” (Genette, 1980) – is widespread in current Brazil, and its weight goes beyond the progressivist circles where Marielle has been

influential. For progressives, Marielle has been a figure of present immanence, yet for the white supremacist movement that Bolsonaro has amplified, Marielle has been continuously narrated as a symbol of the Black gendered body whose life is not mournable but whose phantasmatic presence is a continuing threat (see Alves & Vargas, 2020; Fanon, 1969). Further, the narration of Marielle as a fundamental “absent presence” (Deumert, 2022) in this mourning movement – and by extension in a sizable portion of one of the world’s largest democracies – points not only to hope being contingent on situated and metaleptic time. As we discuss below, it is a piece of evidence we mount to debate, alongside Deumert (2022), the “naïve empiricism that has shaped sociolinguistic work over the decades” (p. 2).

The second reorientational work that concerns our empirical cases is language itself. At its most basic grammatical and textual levels, language is inherently adaptive (Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Verschueren, 1999). Yet we have privileged a particular dimension of reorientation – namely, the analogical and translational work across register formations that is often involved in enregisterment (Agha, 2015). These analogies – that is, “structural calques or partial analogues,” in our case, across slang lexemes and those attributed to a “standard” – are not neutral (Agha, 2015, p. 324). Through language ideology, users transform “facts of morphosyntactic or phonolexical difference into facts of sociological difference” (p. 324). In Chapter 4 and throughout the book we looked to the *papo reto* activist register as a fundamental language practice through which *faveladas/os* rescale repertoires, pragmatic features, and models of personae to a “speech level” that is recognized as belonging to the favela. For instance, in our discussion about the *fogos virtual* fired by Mariluce and Kleber as warnings for residents about the “crossfire” between traffic and the police and simultaneously as affirmative forms of describing the favela, we pointed to Kleber’s engagement with the reorientational work of *papo reto*. In Kleber’s words, on social media: “a gente consegue alcançar as pessoas tanto dentro da favela como de fora da favela, por que a gente consegue? porque a gente usou a linguagem que as pessoas entendem . . . a gente buscou uma linguagem que está ao alcance . . . não adianta eu falar lá que . . . ‘nós vamos fazer a desmilitarização da polícia,’ ninguém vai entender nada, entendeu?” or “we used the language that people understand . . . we tried to use a language within people’s reach . . . it’s no use saying, ‘we are going to demilitarize the police,’ no one will understand it, you see?” As much as the risks of shootings emanating from the dispute between “crime” and state are a present and pressing issue for *faveladas/os*, reorienting language in ways that others in the community readily understand is a fundamental pragmatic feature of *papo reto*. We have given a central importance to this reorientational communicative practice in this book not only because “ser *papo reto*,” or “being *papo reto*,” was a trope that Daniel often heard in his visits to Complexo do Alemão and

other favelas in Rio de Janeiro. Rationalized as a general attitude of “ser direto/o,” “ir direto ao ponto e desenrolar a conversa sobre desigualdades raciais e sociais,” and “não ser fã de canalhas,” or “being direct,” “going straight to the point in sorting out racial and social inequities,” and “not being fan of scoundrels,” the activist register *papo reto* is also central in this book because, for the favela activists we have engaged with, it is a fundamental language game to survive the “crossfire” and participate politically in one of the world’s most unequal countries.

An example for the simultaneous communicative and political effects of the *papo reto* activist register is the *Fogo Cruzado* digital app, informally known as “waze do pipoco” or the “Bang Bang Waze” (Fogo Cruzado, 2022). Devised by Cecília Olliveira, a Black journalist working for the Intercept Brazil, this digital app scales up grassroots forms of mapping shootings and (in)security that we document in this book. Mariluce and Kleber and the Coletivo Papo Reto activists marshal social media networks to provide residents with crucial information about areas where shootings and other events are taking place. As we discuss in Chapter 5, with the data they have produced through the sharing of texts, videos, and images about incidents, they have been able to challenge the violent policing of Complexo do Alemão. Through alliances with human rights institutions such as Amnesty International and the Update Institute, Cecília and the Fogo Cruzado activists have been able to tailor this digital app to offer live information about shootings and rescale hope from an abstract utopian aspiration into a pedagogically actualizable action. In explaining where the idea of the Fogo Cruzado app came from, Cecília says that it was a strategy by Complexo do Alemão residents that first prompted her to think of a systematic way to document shootings and other data on gun violence (see Filgueiras, 2017). Currently available in the cities of Recife and Rio de Janeiro, the Fogo Cruzado app allows users to insert information of shootings and other dimensions of armed violence, providing users with crucial information about insecurity throughout the city. It also provides experts and others with an open source database that has been more accurate than the data offered by official state agencies (Filgueiras, 2017). In fact, in just a few years, the data gathered and analyzed by Fogo Cruzado has made the Institute an influential counter-securizing agent in the debate on public security in Brazil. Cecília and other members of Fogo Cruzado have been invited to discuss data on (in) security in different social spaces and institutions, including Brazil’s Supreme Court (see Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2021). In spite of the threat of democratic and institutional collapse as a result of Bolsonarism in Brazil, the sociolinguistic and political action of Cecília and the Fogo Cruzado team aimed at realizing a more democratic policing and security policy has come to be all the more important. Further, the fact that Cecília scales the activism,

forms of talk, and language ideologies of agents like Coletivo Papo Reto, Mariluce, Kleber, Marielle, and other activists into broader digital and political arenas point to the efficacy and potential for change in the sociolinguistic struggle we have documented in this book.

While the individuals, activists, and collectives that we have dealt with in this book have identified creative ways to use language toward the enactment of hope variously, including in the present, much work is left to be done. And if we are to be serious about pursuing such work, it is important to reiterate here that one of the most persistent challenges to the continued research of hope is of our own creation: the critical distrust of the research enterprise as such by vulnerable populations as a result of exploitative tendencies by researchers, a longstanding problem alluded to in Anand Pandian's (2019) work, as we described in the Introduction. One of the more obviously problematic cases of such research specific to the Brazilian context might be Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1961) depiction of the indigenous Nambikwara people in *Tristes Tropiques*. Lévi-Strauss recounts a moment when he attempts to give the Nambikwara "a writing lesson" (p. 287). According to Lévi-Strauss, "[t]hat the Nambikwara could not write goes without saying. But they were also unable to draw, except for a few dots and zigzags on their calabashes" (p. 288). In a public gathering including Lévi-Strauss, the Nambikwara chief, and several members of their tribe, the chief, having been provided a pencil and a notepad just moments before, draws some "scribbled lines" (p. 289) on a piece of paper and, Lévi-Strauss, believing that he is reaffirming to the audience their leader's purported aptitude for this new skill, listens as the chief pretends to read for "two solid hours" (p. 289). Lévi-Strauss, by playing along with chief, believes that he has done the chief and perhaps all the Nambikwara people in attendance, a favor. Yet, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012) asks, "among the three parties, who is playing with whom?" (p. 66). Ngũgĩ proceeds to remind us that the man who was ostensibly so readily duped by the anthropologist is in fact the chief of the Nambikwara:

Whatever the marks he puts on paper, it cannot surely be for the sole purpose of impressing his people with his knowledge, for they know, and he knows they know, that he cannot write and read any more than they can. (p. 66)

But perhaps even more compelling is another observation by Ngũgĩ:

If the chief were in a position to describe the same encounter, he would tell a very different version of the event. At the very least he would not describe it as a writing lesson, nor would he confuse the gift of paper and pen with the gift of writing and therefore conclude that writing had come to his people. (p. 66)

The fact that research participants might have a different take on their encounter with researchers is something that is rarely discussed. How are we to

presume, in other words, that our interlocutors have had a positive (or even neutral!) experience by participating in research?

Also, by extension, how are we to presume that what they have shared with us what they actually mean? Was the Nambikwara chief actually being played by Lévi-Strauss? Or was Lévi-Strauss, the renowned anthropologist that the Nambikwara chief likely could not care less about, simply a nuisance and the chief simply performing the gesture of having “learned” how to write so he could go on with his life? We are reminded here of Partha Chatterjee’s (2004) description of *Dhorai Charitmanas*, a novel by Bengali writer Satinath Bhaduri, which portrays a moment of conflict between two ethnic groups: the Ramayana and Dhangars. As Chatterjee writes, for the Ramayana, “their general strategy of survival, perfected over generations of experience, is to stay away from entanglements with government and its procedures” (p. 10). Following an incident of neighborly conflict in which one of the neighboring Dhangars sets fire to a Ramayana house, the protagonist of the novel, Dhorai, “understands and tells the police that he had seen nothing and did not know who had set fire to their house” (p. 11), reflective of an ambivalence toward institutional forms of intervention, along with a recognition that such forms of support are merely short-term resolutions, insignificant in the light of the need to establish a collaborative and ultimately unofficial community ethic. It is important to note that Marielle herself, as an elected political official, would likely not have endorsed a unilateral rejection of the political order. Of course, in her “A Emergência da Vida” essay she does acknowledge that “a considerable number of favelada women view political participation with some distrust” (Franco, M., 2018, p. 138). She adds that “[t]hey are unlikely to be in touch with those who can access state institutions – seen by the majority as belonging to the undifferentiated ranks of the political elite” (p. 138). This being noted, Marielle does not outright reject the value of political participation. Their political participation is not limited to officially sanctioned avenues: for instance, through their artistic practice “the presence of these women resonates through the city” (p. 137). In addition, “[t]hey build networks of solidarity focused on sustaining lives and reinforcing dignity” (p. 137). And while there is much to be gained by enacting change through extant conduits of political participation, the reality is that many *faveladas/os* view research as performed by scholars from outside the favela with a great deal of skepticism, and for good reason. In the Introduction, we presented an excerpt of an interaction between favela activists Thainã and Renata on their podcast, *Papo Reto Cast*, in which they call out the exploitative tendencies of academic researchers. Here we present the next few moments of their interaction:

Excerpt C.1 Papo Reto Cast, Complexo do Alemão, 2018

- THAINÃ: e nós não sabe pra que que é o bagulho=
 RENATA: =e nós não sabe pra que que é, porque a
 pessoa não volta pra dar retorno
 THAINÃ: [e quando
 RENATA: [quando volta=
 THAINÃ: =é um negócio que a gente não entende
 nada (...) época de olimpíada e copa, cara, tava cheio de gringo aqui na favela,
 jornalista, antropólogo (.) nunca vi- nunca conheci tanto antropólogo na minha vida
 RENATA: nem eu, e aí, né, a Renata que já é mais pá e brose, já tá aí ali na atividade (.) falo
 logo, a partir de agora pesquisador só me pesquisa se me pagar, não vai levar meus
 conhecimentos de graça pra academia mais não
 THAINÃ: and we don't know the purpose of the stuff=
 RENATA: =and we don't know what that is for,
 because the person doesn't return here to give us feedback
 THAINÃ: [and when
 RENATA: [when they come back=
 THAINÃ: =it's
 something we don't understand at all (...) during the Olympics and the World Cup,
 man, it was full of gringos here in the favela, journalists, anthropologists (.) never in
 my life have I seen so many anthropologists all at once
 RENATA: me neither, and then, you know, Renata is more straightforward, she's already there
 struggling (.) I say right away, from now on scholars have to pay me, they won't take
 any more my knowledge for free to the university

(Trajano, R. & Medeiros, T., 2018, 21:59–22:50)

And while ethnographic researchers are well aware of the extractivist tendencies of anthropological research (even though they don't always act on such supposed awareness), Thainã and Renata provide a rare glimpse of how research subjects who have experienced such exploitative logics approach requests to participate in research with distrust. Thainã added that “if you want to understand the favela, come to the favela . . . Or alternatively, I will give you some theories and authors, just so you understand the favela. There is a group of philosophers from São Paulo, Racionais M.C.s. Listen to them and you will understand the favela. Go listen to MC Orelha and you will understand

the favela . . . ” In addition to enacting a skepticism about longstanding extractivist practices on the part of academics, Thainã and Renata were invoking the *nós-por-nós* (we by/for ourselves) stance (Fabrício & Melo, 2020) that we have discussed throughout the case studies. That is, the *favelado* and *favelada* were claiming that *favelada/os* produce relevant knowledge, and that for them, a valid scholarship about the favela has to necessarily engage with philosophers and intellectuals from the territory.

The *nós-por-nós* stance is iconic of a number of changes in the favela, including the fact that since 2003, Blacks and other minorities have had access to the public university through affirmative action. This is but one of the achievements of Brazilian Black social movements. If we were asked what methodologically a sociolinguistics of hope would look like, we would say that there is, of course, no algorithm for building trust with the subjects practicing hope and for abiding by a general set of ethical principles. The now increasingly common practices such as “acknowledging one’s positionality” are certainly a start, but they should not be treated as a passport to freely study marginalized populations. Going to the field to understand what communities think, as Thainã and Renata suggest above, is no guarantee of fair dialogue with interlocutors in the field either. Ana Deumert (2022), for instance, debates the “naïve belief that once we bring in speakers as agents, we can study them, their actions, and their practices” (p. 4). A common naïve empiricist claim is to say that once we have been there in the field – and once we look to our interlocutors not as informants but as “agents” – a field of visibility opens. Further, “[m]ethodological practices such as photography and/or audio/video recordings” (p. 4) would render visible the hidden meanings of what our interlocutors say (or do not say). Yet, Deumert hastens to add, “by making certain things visible, we simultaneously make other things invisible” (p. 4).

A conspicuous invisibility, so to speak, is the system of power that declares what counts as the “visible” meaning of an utterance or communicative practice that one witnesses in the field. Take the example of the *papo reto* activist register. On more than one occasion, we received pushback in peer reviewing and other forms of academic gatekeeping because what we were describing as *papo reto* was allegedly not a register. One reviewer, for instance, claimed that Bolsonaro could also be said to embody a *papo reto* (straight talk) style, which would invalidate the claim that this is the enregisterment of an anti-racist agenda. Another said that since they have spent a lot of time living in and researching Brazil but had never heard of *papo reto*, the phenomenon could not exist. Yet another one doubted that the reference of “*canalhas*” (in the informal dictionary definition provided by Coletivo Papo Reto) in the phrase “[to be *papo reto*] is not to be a fan of *canalhas* [scoundrels]” could mean not white supremacists/Bolsonarists, but “drug dealers.” Meanwhile, in Daniel’s

dialogue with *faveladas/os*, usually the agents of the drug trade are not referenced in derogatory terms, as they may be neighbors, acquaintances, or even friends (see also Rodrigues and Siqueira, 2012). In this example, what counts as visible, that is, as “empirically valid?” Adriana Facina (2016) – a scholar who, so to speak, would have listened to Thainã and Renata, and tried to understand the meaning of communicative practices in the favela by engaging with *faveladas/os* – reached similar conclusions as ours about the *papo reto* activist register. Through a sustained dialogue with *faveladas/os* and other scholars studying favelas, she describes the practice of *desenrolar a conversa* – to “unroll the conversation,” that is, to be *papo reto* – as signaling that the conversation will have, from that moment on, to be contextually “clear” and “serious.” This is “um dispositivo muito utilizado nas favelas para mediar e solucionar conflitos que em determinadas situações podem resultar em violência armada e morte” or “a very common device in favelas for mediating and fixing conflicts that could possibly lead to armed violence and death” (p. 219). She adds that *desenrolar* is important not only for those liminal situations but also for a number of other occasions, including those where physical or symbolic survival “depende de saber usar adequadamente argumentos e ter uma *performance* convincente” or “depends on one’s using arguments and having a convincing performance” (p. 219). Together with activists from Raízes, she named one of the main frameworks for the teaching of *papo reto* that we documented in Chapter 4 as “Vamos desenrolar.”

Adriana Facina and the Brazilianist reviewers and colleagues we discussed above clearly have different agendas vis-à-vis the visibility and validity of the knowledge that *faveladas/os* produce. One party is interested in building alliances and producing knowledge alongside interlocutors, the other decides what counts as knowledge based on their epistemological stance. In the case of *papo reto*, the latter party doubts that this particular practice is a register at all – or even that it exists.¹ Regarding the existence of *papo reto*, perhaps the more important question is: Does someone who embodies this style project a persona who is against white supremacy or not? Who decides what counts as reference for a particular utterance framed as *papo reto*? From our anecdote, the response to those questions will never be “empirical” – or at least not metaphysically empirical, as scholars like Derrida, Deumert, and others have claimed. Power is of course something that will participate in the logic of rendering visible something while invisibilizing something else – on one occasion, for instance, Daniel had a paper rejected on the basis of those comments, and therefore *papo reto* did not count as visible for that publication. Ultimately, the types of alliances in the field one builds, the (collective) aspirations one facilitates, the

¹ We are still not sure why our colleagues of Coletivo Papo Reto would go through the trouble of creating an organization based on something that does not exist.

spectral voices one allows to be cited, and the views one nurtures about scholarship, as the privilege of a few or a human right, all matter in a sociolinguistics of hope.

For researchers who have invested in the question and topic of hope, one of the major questions that remains, then, is quite simply: What counts as knowledge? We have been careful to emphasize throughout this book that knowledge cannot be limited to that which is produced by “empirical” means or only to that which is generated by those with the appropriate institutional credentials. In fact, although our theorization of hope draws, admittedly, from philosophers and other intellectuals, as we have seen, the most principled and sophisticated enactments of hope come not from the mind of the academy but from interlocutors and authors from urban peripheries characterized by conditions of unrelenting violence and seeming hopelessness. To repeat Claudia Blöser (2019): “We hope in a great variety of ways” (p. 212). We also hope using a great variety of resources. The resource we have focused on in this book, of course, is language. And whether it was from our treatment of metaleptic temporality, our description of the *papo reto* activist register, or the pedagogical scaling of hope by community-based collectives, we hope we have inspired our readers to continue to look to language as a reason, so to speak, for hope.