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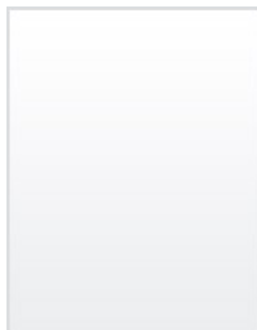

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Author: Bonifacio V.

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VALENTINA BONIFACIO

Building up the collective: a critical assessment of the relationship between indigenous organisations and international cooperation in the Paraguayan Chaco

In this article I aim at questioning the modalities through which international cooperation is promoting the creation of indigenous organisations in Paraguay by reinforcing specific notions of what is political and what is not, and in particular by abiding by the nature-culture divide. In particular, I argue that it ends up ignoring a variety of indigenous political practices by labelling them as 'religious' or not recognising them at all.

Key words Paraguay, Maskoy, political ontology, international cooperation, indigenous organisations

> Instead of a science of objects and a politics of subjects, by the end of the chapter we should have at our disposal a political ecology of collectives consisting of humans and nonhumans. (Latour 2004: 61)

> Now, in the word 'collective', it is precisely the *work* of collecting into a whole that I want to stress. (Latour 2004: 59; original italic)

Introduction: film fragment

[Territory Riacho Mosquito, Puerto Casado, Paraguay, September 2007] A mixed group of people, composed of the leaders of five Maskoy indigenous communities and the mayor of the nearby town, Puerto Casado, is having a meeting in the central space of an indigenous community. For one week a female initiation ritual is taking place in the community, and the mayor has agreed to support the ritual through food supplies. The food was not enough, though, and the leaders invited the mayor in order to negotiate more food for the people gathering there. During the meeting, an old man is sitting at the margins of the political assembly. He is the shaman of a nearby community. He looks distracted and keeps silent, but does not move. After a while, he moves away and an old woman arrives, herself a shaman, gently putting her hand on the mayor's shoulder and then sitting down in front of him. No one seems to notice her arrival, except for the mayor who hastily greets her and continues with the negotiations. She too looks distracted and keeps silent, and does not move. The meeting goes on, until the mayor agrees to bring more food. (Part of the scene appears in the film *Casado's Legacy* min. 35:48 to 36:45; Bonifacio 2009.)

In the 1980s, an indigenous group, whose members had worked in a tannin factory by the Paraguay River over a period of nearly 100 years, claimed back a portion of

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territory from the factory owner (the Casado S.A.). The fight was successful and in 1986 most of the Maskoy (a group including Angaite, Sanapana, Enxet, Guana and Toba ethnic groups) left the town of Puerto Casado, where they had built the factory in 1887, and settled in Territory Riacho Mosquito. Five communities were founded there, each of them officially recognised by the state – and in particular by the National Institute of the Indian (INDI) – and officially represented by a leader and a vice-leader. The following article is an analysis of Maskoy political practices and of the role of shamans in defining the limits of the political arena. By doing that, it aims at problematising the way in which international cooperation is contributing to shaping contemporary indigenous organisations and their political practices by operating within the limits of the 'modern constitution' (Latour 1991).

From leaders to representatives: the workings of the 'modern constitution'

Since the first encounters with non-indigenous colonisers, indigenous leadership in lowland South America has undergone transformations aimed at creating, strengthening, contesting or avoiding alliances with the surrounding society. Writing about the influence of the colonisers on Amerindian forms of leadership, Brown wrote: 'it is now a common place to observe that Europeans expected to find chiefs wherever they went and that, as often as not, this expectation had a self-fulfilling quality' (1993: 311). In particular, new forms of leadership, often based on Spanish/Portuguese literacy and on the capacity to mediate with missionaries, NGOs and state functionaries gradually arose, in contrast to shamanic forms of leadership. According to Santos-Granero, for instance, when considering the transformation of indigenous forms of leadership in the Amazon, one of the most critical aspects to be taken into account is the relationship between shamanic ritual powers, political authority and economic processes. For him, political power is based on the leaders' ability to intervene on productive and reproductive processes, which is often a shaman's prerogative. In fact, through interacting with spirits and deities, they possess and monopolise 'life-giving knowledge, ceremonial techniques and ritual paraphernalia' (Santos-Granero 1986: 658). In his analysis, he thus distinguishes two realms: the economic and the political one. The economic realm, whose prosperity is guaranteed by the shaman's life-giving knowledge, ties together society and the environment. The political one, on the other hand, coincides with society.

Similarly to Santos-Granero, Kidd (1995: 52) argues that among the Enxet of Paraguay shamans gain power through contact with the malevolent and dangerous spirits that inhabit the invisible world. The capacity of the shaman to get in touch with these spirits was used to protect the communities and to provide them with food and other material benefits. 'They understand it [power] to be derived from both outside knowledge and relationships with outside beings. The paradigmatic power relationship is that of the shaman with his auxiliary spirits' (1995: 61–2). Both authors underline the relationship between economic processes and political authority, and emphasise how shamans acquire political power through the ownership of the 'mystical means of reproduction' (Santos-Granero 1986: 658). In fact, by entering into the relationship with the spiritual world to which humans and other-than-humans (spirits of plants or animals) belong, they possess and control life-giving techniques, thus accumulating power that they capitalise in the political arena.

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This ability to ensure the connection between humans and other-than-humans seems to be an unnecessary quality on the part of the new leaders. According to Villagra, the Paraguayan state has encouraged – through the Law 904/81 – a transition from the figure of the 'traditional leader' to that of the 'transactional' one (Villagra 2008). While the first kind of leadership was based on the personal values of extended kinship, generosity, shamanic and discursive skills, bravery etc., the second one is based on the ability to mediate between the community and non-indigenous entities (the missionaries, the State, NGOs, etc.). Villagra's analysis is in line with Kidd when he underlines that the Enxet conceptualise power as something localised outside the community. In fact, when non-indigenous people are attributed leadership functions, it is because of a shift in the location of power from the natural world to the world of the Whites. Therefore, when the Whites came to represent a major source of resources, they replaced in the leaders' practices the spiritual world inhabited by the 'owners' of the natural elements. According to Villagra, if an outsider shows up in an indigenous community today in Paraguay, he will immediately ask for the (transactional) leader and never for the shaman if he wants to discuss serious – political and economical – matters (2010: 223–4). Using the language of international cooperation, we could say that leaders have become the only legitimate 'representatives' of their communities. Shamans, on the other hand, are excluded from the political sphere and they are more easily invited to take part in indigenous health programmes and cultural recovery programmes. I will show in the rest of the article how this view 'from the outside' – although in tune with current practices of international cooperation – does not always correspond with the one 'from the inside'.

While both Kidd and Villagra underline that leaders and shamans substituted the natural world – initially conceptualised as the main source of power – with the Whites' one in their practices, I would like to emphasise how shamans are still capable of tying these two worlds together. In order to do this, I propose to reframe Santos-Granero's conceptual categories without discarding his analysis. Instead of framing the environment and society as two separate domains, we could say that the role of shamans is to constantly reaffirm and re-establish, through their ritual practices, the limits of the socio-political realm where economic exchange takes place. To go beyond this division means to try reasoning beyond the separation between nature and society that Latour envisions at the core of the project of modernity from the 17th century onwards.

International cooperation and the separation between 'nature' and 'politics'

From June 2003 to June 2004 I worked as a functionary of the anthropological unit of an EU bilateral funded project – Prodechaco (Pro Desarrollo del Chaco) – aimed at supporting the development of the Paraguayan Chaco. In particular, I was in charge of supervising the allocation of funds to indigenous organisations and the activities they realised with these funds. Since the beginning of the project, in the 1990s, indigenous organisations had flourished all over the Paraguayan Chaco, with the support of both local NGOs and the EU project. These organisations were usually inter-ethnic in nature and they gathered together indigenous 'representatives' who were community leaders, ex-leaders or leaders of already existent indigenous associations. In Villagra's

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terms, they were 'transactional' leaders who could more easily relate with the non-indigenous society. Because 'indigenous organisations' had emerged in the encounter between indigenous communities and urban-based organisations, their indigenous representatives were usually elected among those leaders who had a better knowledge of how things worked in the capital city.

In *Storytelling Globalization*, Blaser describes the origins and development of Prodechaco. Talking about the negotiations between the EU and the Paraguayan government that preceded the implementation of the project, he also analysed the role of local NGOs in these negotiations. According to him, the 'critical *indigenistas* [who were also the functionaries of some local NGOs] first asked the EU to establish as a precondition for giving the Paraguayan government founding [...] that all standing indigenous peoples' land claims should be solved' (2010: 157). This precondition, initially endorsed by the EU, was later dropped in order to satisfy the interests of the big landowners, one of the most powerful economic sectors of the country. When the project was finally approved, in 1995, land issues were no longer a priority, nor did they become a priority in the following years when the first indigenous organisations started to be founded. As a consequence, some local NGOs assumed a critical position towards the European project and by the time I began working in Prodechaco there was a polite kind of avoidance. Despite this, the project was also given funding and support for some of the indigenous organisations that were founded and had a close relationship with these local NGOs. Instead of working together, the NGOs and Prodechaco became the two poles of a latent conflict that saw indigenous organisations as the object of contention. As I will show later on in the article, this ongoing tension might have contributed to the opening up of a space of collaboration between some members of indigenous organisations and some NGO functionaries that defied some of the existing well-established political practices.

In 2003, the main idea of the anthropological unit director of Prodechaco was to provide indigenous organisations with the 'technical' means that were necessary in order to achieve independence from the local NGOs, which basically meant to be able to write a development project on their own. In his view, indigenous organisations had to be free of asking for funding without having to depend on NGOs requirements. Moreover, they had to be able to handle the money of the projects in complete autonomy. For this reason, the project organised a cycle of workshops in order to teach the representatives how to write a project proposal. In theory, this process would have led to the materialisation of the 'self-representation' ideal. But Prodechaco was not the only one promoting this idea, as the German cooperation (GTZ) – we soon discovered – had already organised a workshop in order to teach indigenous leaders how to write a 'logical framework', one of the fundamental tools of international cooperation. Some of the indigenous leaders rapidly incorporated this suggestion. In 2004, during an inter-ethnic meeting, one of the leaders made a speech in order to sponsor his election as president of the pan-indigenous organisation by saying: 'I know what a specific objective is, what a development objective is, what an activity is, what a specific result is, what an indicator is [a list of concepts that appear in the logical framework], and therefore I am the person who could better represent you in the organisation'.

Rodrigo Villagra, anthropologist and member of the Paraguayan NGO TierraViva, notes how the leaders of an indigenous organisation they were collaborating with – the CLIBCH – made an open request to be trained how to write a project, and on other skills such as driving, that seemed to provide the NGO members with the

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capacity to produce and reproduce resources continuously. 'The leaders and the young students of the CLIBCH expected that with the right *capacitación* (training), they could not just learn laws, accountancy, computing, writing and/or driving skills but they would transform themselves virtually into lawyers, accountants and drivers, in other words, they would become like us: NGO Paraguayan employees' (Villagra 2010: 233). In a similar way, the kind of leadership that was imagined by Prodechaco to be at the centre of the indigenous organisations scene was at the same time political and technical. Indigenous representatives had to be able to voice their people's concerns through the form of a logical framework in order to assess them more efficiently and to gain independence from local NGOs. Moreover, international cooperation did need a formal representative of indigenous people that could act as their referent in the region and testify about the participatory nature of the project. The only power they had to summon up was that of international cooperation, without the mediatory role of small NGOs and their political concerns, and without having to worry about keeping control of the 'mystical means of reproduction'. Describing the processes that gave rise to the creation of the Yshiro indigenous organisation UCINY, Blaser writes that during one of the preliminary meetings 'The co-directors [of the EU project] again stated that because the Yshiro lacked an organisation with "representational and managerial skills" Prodechaco could not yet launch concrete projects' (2010: 205). By strengthening their role as intermediaries between the communities and the cooperation sector, the EU was thus promoting the role of transactional leaders and it was contributing to sever the links between indigenous leaders and the spirit world that was at the core of shamanic practices. As a consequence, they were encouraging the affirmation of a 'modern' configuration of politics as constituted by a collective of humans within whose limits political power was circulating and enacted.

I use the word 'modern' here with reference to Latour's definition of the 'modern constitution' as the separation between nature and politics and to Blaser's definition of the 'myth of modernity' as constituted by 'three basic threads: the great divide between nature and culture (or society), the colonial difference between moderns and nonmoderns, and a unidirectional linear temporality that flows from past to future' (2010: 4). Far from being a purely ontological dilemma, the 'myth of modernity' was guiding the configuration of indigenous organisations and their 'modern' configuration of power. By excluding shamanic practices from political assemblies, it assured that 'nature' would be left out of the political context. On the other hand, shamans kept having contacts with other-than-human beings in their communities and influencing some of the political processes that were happening around them. Being human, they were part of the ongoing political negotiations with the Whites; while being other-than-human in their ability to transform into something else and travelling in the spirit world, they continuously expanded the limits of the collective calling new matters of concern into presence. Their hybrid nature kept representing an obstacle towards the workings of the modern constitution.

Defying the 'myth of modernity': alternative forms of indigenous organisations

In 2006–2007, after the closing of Prodechaco, I started my PhD research in the Chaco region. Most of the indigenous organisations that had been sponsored by

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the project had stopped being active, and there was a growing discomfort on the part of small local NGOs about the structure that indigenous organisations had assumed since EU arrival. In particular, they were questioning the 'technical turn' in the organisations and the confusion between their technical and their political role. It is in this context that a small NGO based in the Chaco region decided to engage in a conversation with some indigenous 'representatives' in order to create a different form for inter-ethnic meetings. They aimed at experimenting with new forms of political praxis that could reactivate old relationships (between shamans, political leaders, the earth and human beings) in the political arena. In the end, they decided to organise an inter-ethnic and inter-community gathering with no restrictions on who should participate in the event and without a tight schedule based on a 'programme of the day' or some 'representatives elections'.

This type of event was not new in the area. Big gatherings of people were organised until recently in the Chaco region around traditional dances linked to female and male initiations, and to periods of abundance of food. These gatherings involved people from different settlements, but who shared a specific kind of dance now known as *choqueo*, *choco*, *choqueada* (Delporte 1992; Franco Domaniczky and Imaz 2007; Pittini 1924). The *choqueo* (as the Maskoy say in Guarani: *pachanga*), which is still widely practised in indigenous communities, consists of a circle of people dancing around a singer who is playing a water drum. The circle of dancers is initially a purely male one, but women go in and out of the circle, taking care to enter on their partner's (or aspirant partner) side. The main singer, according to Villagra, is always someone who received some kind of shamanic training. Describing the apprenticeship of a group of young drum-singers, he writes that

> in order to learn to sing and perform on the instrument they were told by a senior drummer-singer generally a close male relative (e.g. father, grandfather, uncle) to go the forest, fast for a while and drink the water contained in the hollowed palm trunk used as the frame of the drum. Then the 'owner' of the song would gradually teach the initiate, generally a young boy, his song, which he would practice on his own until reaching a desirable performance level. (2010: 244)

While I was living with the Maskoy, for instance, the oldest shaman of the community was often the main singer.

Instead of classifying them as religious ceremonies, the NGO was thus conceptualising these gatherings as political events. I propose to consider this shift as an ontological one, as the main objective of these inter-ethnic gatherings seemed to be the creation of a (political) collective constituted by human and other-than-human beings alike. In fact, through the shamans' singing earth-beings were summoned up at the gatherings together with the rest of the people. After participating in the event, one of the NGO members expressed his satisfaction with the fact that many people turned up at the meeting, and that people danced and talked the whole night without the necessity to perform any official political speech. Nevertheless, he also expressed his concern with the fact that the NGO had to finance these kinds of events without any kind of external support, as they had no hope of being financed by international organisations. In fact, they clearly fell outside of the international cooperation schemes of what a meeting of indigenous organisations should look like.

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Also, they didn't produce the documents that would have made them accountable for external funding.

Although it might be true that these kinds of gatherings do not directly foster a decision-making process, they re-establish the basis for a political arena that does not exclude earth-beings from the political praxis. Talking about the Araucanian civilisation of southern Chile, Dillehay describes the establishment of ceremonial practices where the summoning up of other-than-human beings is a necessary precondition for political gatherings. In his book about the ritual function of the building of earthy mounds after the conquest, he describes mounds as human-like beings situated at the centre of a ritual perimeter where *machi* shamans perform collective ceremonies. Mounds, according to Dillehay, 'mediate between people and earth; they are the agents of the upper world of the deities' (Dillehay 2007: 214). They are associated with the tomb of important rulers and later appropriated by the kindred spirit of shamans. Both political and religious leaders used to participate in sacred gatherings around the mounds, thereby facilitating the creation of a wide community that included a group of smaller communities residing in a specific geographical area and that could be activated in wartime. According to Dillehay, in fact, it is thanks to mounds that Araucanians could resist the Spanish and the Chileans for an extended period of time. Mound ceremonial grounds established a space where political units were defined and leaderships recognised in the presence of deity spirits residing in the environment. Moreover, mounds were recognised to have agency and thus the power to influence political negotiations carried out by the *lonkos* (non-religious chiefs).

Just like the ritual gatherings around the mounds, the gathering that was organised in the central Paraguayan Chaco in 2007 was intentionally 'spiritual' (in the sense that spiritual beings were summoned up at the meeting) and political at the same time. Moreover, it was explicitly organised in opposition to the type of meetings that were sponsored by international cooperation. Instead of convoking democratically elected representatives to a big 'parliament' of indigenous people, the NGO that supported indigenous communities in the organisation of the event helped establish a space where shamans could call other-than-human beings into presence in an inter-community and inter-ethnic ritual gathering. It is true that in EU-sponsored meetings, shamans or other priestly figures were sometimes encouraged to inaugurate them by performing a 'traditional prayer'. Talking about the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, Muehleback writes that 'According to the rules of the institution, public religious utterances such as prayers are usually not permitted in, before, or after meetings. […] Despite this, indigenous delegates have in the years of their work at the U.N. managed to remap this zone as one where moments of sacredness can be created' (2001: 426). Nevertheless, the blessing remained an isolated event that temporally preceded or succeeded – and was therefore different in nature – political meetings. Even if she does not specify to which kind of religious utterances she is referring, Muehleback describes these 'moments of sacredness' as circumscribed micro-events. Instead of delimitating two moments, one to summon-up spirits and one to take political decisions, the gatherings described by Dillehay in southern Chile involve the constant presence of a collective made up by shamans, people, political leaders, deities and living mounds. In fact, mounds kept marking the centre of the political assembly until the end of the ceremony, without handing over their role to the *lonkos*. Moreover, through the mediating work of the *machi* they literally spoke to the assembly.

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Shamanic practices and the political arena in contemporary Maskoy communities

'Working on' politicians

Let's go back to our initial scene: to the meeting between the Mayor of Puerto Casado and the Maskoy leaders during an initiation ritual in September 2007. In order to understand what the shamans were doing at the meeting, it is necessary to briefly recall the role of shamans in the fight for land in the 1980s. According to a variety of Maskoy testimonies, shamans would accompany political leaders to the capital city to help 'soften' (*aflojar*) governmental authorities (Bonifacio forthcoming). In order to soften the authorities, though, they had to enter into a relationship with other-than-human beings. According to Kidd, who gives a detailed description of shamanic practice among the Enxet of the Chaco region, shamans acquire the ability to enter into a relationship with the spiritual 'owners' of plants or other objects that 'have power/ability' to overcome the 'laws of nature' through fasting (1999: 40). Some of these spiritual beings are classified as 'things', others as 'people' (1999: 37). Through the help of these auxiliary spirits – that shamans summon up by singing their specific song – they can heal people or act on their 'stomach' (*wáxok* in Enxet or *py'a* in Guarani Yopara) by sending malevolent spirits. According to the Enxet, the *wáxok* is the centre of both cognition and emotion, and it can be soft/unlocked (a condition that characterises a loving and knowledgeable person) or hard/locked (a condition that characterises the opposite attitude). Nevertheless, although 'acting with a "strong/locked" wáxok is usually condemned within one's own in-group, when leaders meet with white people on behalf of their community they should have a strong wáxok and show no fear (1999: 59) in order to be able to defend their own people. It is for this reason that the Maskoy shamans were 'working on the mayor' during the 2007 meeting, softening his 'stomach' through the help of auxiliary spirits in order to allow indigenous leaders to negotiate from a position of power. Even though we cannot literally 'see' them in the shooting material, I suggest that shamans are calling into presence other-than-human beings during the meeting through (silent) singing in order to help the leaders entering the authorities' *wáxok* (Plate 1).

Plate 1. Still frames from *Casado's Legacy* shooting material. In both pictures shamans – a man in the left one and a woman in the right one – are 'working on' the mayor at a distance.

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The other-than-human beings that are summoned up at the meetings, as Kidd described, are the 'owners' or 'masters' of what naturalists – to use Descola's terminology (2005: 323) – would conceptualise as inanimate beings (plants, animals, and also objects such as guns or balls). These owners, who are the shamans' auxiliary spirits, are part of the everyday life in the Maskoy communities. They unexpectedly appear in people's everyday activities and influence the course of events. They are sometimes translated as 'things' (*mba'e* in Guarani) by indigenous people in the Chaco because of their lack of a definitive shape. They can frighten or reassure. Because of their transformative and unstable nature, and because they are 'felt' and not 'seen' it is difficult to name and describe them. We could try to describe them using Latour's definition of 'matter of concern': 'new [because they always change shape] entities that provoke perplexity [not a detached and unemotional one, though] and thus speech in those who gather around them, discuss them, and argue over them' (Latour 2004: 66). Differently from the rest of the people, shamans have the ability to establish with them a relationship and to communicate with them and sometimes to control them. Through specific training, they learn to perform their mediatory role.

In *The Politics of Nature* Latour defines the lab coats as nonhumans' spokespersons (2004: 64). 'In the single Kyoto forum', he writes, 'each of the interested parties can, at a minimum, agree to consider the other as a spokesperson, without finding it relevant to decide whether the other represents humans, landscapes, chemical-industry lobbies, South Sea plankton, Indonesian forests, the United States economy, nongovernmental organizations, or elected governments' (2004: 65). Through the intermediary role of scientists, non-humans are summoned up in a political meeting where decisions about the future of the planet have to be taken. According to Latour, the Kyoto forum represents a moment of rupture where the political nature of science suddenly reveals itself in public: 'facts' are no more able to speak for themselves and to reveal an uncontested scientific 'truth'.

The non-humans that scientists relate to and the other-than-humans shamans engage with are not approached through the same mediation processes. While in the first case scientific technology has an intrinsic role in the emergence of new matters of fact, thereby legitimising them, in the second case it is the shaman's body that is the most elaborated instrument. If shamanic singing gives materiality to the presence of other-than-human beings in a specific context, its connection with the owner of the song remains invisible. The shamanic practice is not the equivalent of the scientific one, and the shamans' role as mediators between beings that possess and beings that do not possess speech is denied. And even if Paraguayan politicians do sometimes believe in the existence of those entities with which shamans entertain relationships, they would not convoke them in a political assembly.

Marisol de la Cadena (2010) has emphasised how political practices that urge the presence of earth-beings (animals, plants and the landscape) in the political arena are gaining public visibility in the Andean context. For example, she mentions libations to the *pachamama* (that imply a symmetrical relationship between humans and earth) during political protests in Bolivia, and the appearance of sentient mountains as political subjects in Peru in the context of anti-mining protests. In fact, one of the reasons why people defend mountains against mining companies is that they are sentient beings who could react badly if violated without permission. While street demonstrations are familiar political practices, they are made unfamiliar by the appearance of unsettling presences. In her analysis, she points out the hybrid nature of indigenous politicians, as they participate in 'more than one and less than two socionatural worlds' (2010: 353). Moreover, she calls the kind of relationships that indigenous people entertain with other-than-human

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beings 'nonrepresentational, affective interactions' (2010: 346), and this might be another essential difference with respect to scientists as non-human's spokespersons. Shamans, in fact, do not provide stable representations of non-humans that would be unable to represent themselves, but they rather call them into presence in order to facilitate their interaction with humans. In order to interact with them, people do not need to know exactly what they look like and what they are.

Talking about Prodechaco, Blaser argues that the international cooperation failed to understand the 'relational moral logic of indigenous people' and its scope (2010: 151; see also Blaser 2009). Describing a sustainable crocodile hunting project with the Yshiro communities of Upper Paraguay sponsored by the EU project, he points at the frictions between two different 'translations' of the outcomes of the project. When the first conflicts around the management of the project arise, in fact, both the EU functionaries of the project and the representatives of a Spanish environmental NGO deny the indigenous interpretation of the events. According to them, indigenous hunters are exceeding the numbers they can catch in order to preserve the sustainability of the project. As some Yshiro explained to Blaser, on the contrary, 'a diminishing population of animals is not the result of the quantity of animals they hunt (or fish), but of the little return they obtain from trading their spoils from hunting (or fishing) activities' (2010: 214). An imbalance in the humans-to-humans exchange network is thought to have a direct influence on the animals-to-humans one. On the other hand, according to the NGO and EU functionaries, the number of existing crocodiles depends on the number of crocodiles that people kill in a certain period of time. In doing their calculations, they do not take into account the continuous web of relationships to which both humans and crocodiles belong: when reasoning about 'nature', social relationships between humans are not important. This is an interesting parallel case with respect to the EU's attitude towards indigenous organising, and a clear example of the separation of contexts in the project: when dealing with 'nature', human-to-human relationships (politics) need to be left out of the frame; when dealing with 'politics', non-human beings should not be taken into account.

Bringing shamans to political meetings (not to represent indigeneity but to weaken politicians)

I have already mentioned the performing of prayers and other rituals at the beginning of political meetings. These moments, though, are usually kept separate from the rest of the meeting and they have no direct influence on its form. Just like the relationship with sacred mountains described by de la Cadena, they are mostly considered – on the part of outsiders – 'all but folklore, beliefs that belong to another "culture", that can be happily commodified as tourist attraction, but in no case can [they] be considered in politics' (de la Cadena 2010: 359). External observers may consider them markers of authenticity with no direct consequence on the development of 'true' political praxis, which happens in the following phase of the meeting. Nevertheless, I would like to recall the attitude of a second Paraguayan NGO working with indigenous people in the Chaco region that defied the separation of contexts.

As part of their collaboration with indigenous communities, the NGO had decided to take seriously into consideration the centrality of the shamans' role in summoning up other-than-human beings in political encounters. The organisation used to give free

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hosting in the capital city, Asunción, to indigenous leaders who had meetings with state authorities or had to carry out bureaucratic practices in central institutions. I knew about this service because one of the Maskoy leaders confessed to me once that he was scared of sleeping in the NGO hostel because it was dangerously full of shamans. The high presence of shamans among political leaders could be due to a superposition of the two roles – shamans were also community leaders – or to the fact that shamans accompanied leaders to negotiate with state authorities. In both cases, their key political role was emphasised by their presence there. Nevertheless, the degree of consciousness on the part of the NGO functionaries about the role of shamans in political encounters was made clear to me during a casual conversation with one of them. In fact, this person admitted to me that they used to bring shamans together with the leaders when they had important meetings with governmental authorities in order to 'act upon' them. Similarly to the Maskoy context, shamans were encouraged to accompany political leaders in order to weaken the politicians they spoke to through the help of their auxiliary spirits. Nevertheless, this political praxis was never openly declared. not only in front of the politicians (one may think that in order for it to be successful it had to be kept secret), but also in front of other non-indigenous activists. In this case, the 'confession' was made to me after I talked about the role of shamans in the Maskoy struggle for land, thereby revealing a particular sensibility towards the issue. In most of the cases, on the other hand, they were afraid of being ridiculed by the indigenist sector and the international community from whom they were getting funding. As a way to justify the NGO's decision, he clarified that 'you never know' and that 'it's always worth trying'.

And yet, this NGO is also organising 'traditional' meetings where transactional leaders talk about their problems and produce documents that are accountable for external funding. To accept the shamans' presence in the political arena did not mean rethinking the structure of indigenous organisations. These had to be accountable to international organisations, and accountability might be a term that helps us think through issues of representation. In fact, indigenous representatives are accountable for international cooperation when they produce statements that can be made operative in the future. For example, they produce statutes that will rule the functioning of the next meetings, or take decisions about land-claiming processes. Shamans, on the other hand, although they establish the limits of the political arena by calling other-than-humans into being, do not produce inscriptions that are accountable by external observers. The influence of the beings they convoke on political assemblies is uncertain and hard to quantify. It escapes not only naturalist ontological categories or the divisions set up by the modern constitution, but also the logical framework schemes that modern indigenous political praxis should abide by.

Conclusion

Let us begin with the discomfort that a certain part of the indigenist sector felt in Paraguay right after the closing of Prodechaco and the abandonment of some of the indigenous organisations that the EU had contributed to fund. I have proposed to consider two kinds of practices – the realisation of political/religious gatherings and the inclusion of shamans during the meetings with state authorities – as a more or less explicit challenge to the exclusion of other-than-human beings from the political arena that the EU was promoting. On the one hand, in fact, the EU strengthened the figure of

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transactional leaders by 'promoting' them to representatives of inter-ethnic organisations; on the other hand, it promoted transactional leaders' technical skills as the main path towards self-determination. It is not by chance, I guess, that after working for one year in Prodechaco I decided to carry on my fieldwork among the only indigenous group that had no formal ethnic organisation. Probably because of their peculiar history, the Maskoy had decided to concentrate their efforts in the reactivation of a female initiation ritual (that involved shamanic singing) that had been abandoned in recent decades. This decision had not been explicitly taken as an alternative to the creation of an organisation (something the leaders had in project to do). Nevertheless, the performance of rituals had been prioritised once the Maskoy had settled on their legalised territory in the 1980s, and it was still prioritised until a few years ago.

The two kinds of 'nonmodern' political practices I have described in the article are steps towards the building up of a collective (or maybe more than one) composed by humans and non-humans. According to Latour, the anthropologist-diplomat has a key role in the articulation of the collective(s) as she 'renews contact with the others, but without making further use of the division between mononaturalism and multiculturalism' (2004: 235). Diplomats on two sides, naturalists and animists, who found themselves at the intersection between 'more than one, but less than two socio-natural worlds' – as Marisol de la Cadena would put it – have carried out this work in Paraguay. And they have forced me, a (mononaturalist) ex-functionary of the EU, to regard with perplexity and disquiet the whole mechanism that structured the strengthening of indigenous organisations in the Paraguayan Chaco. The risk of multiculturalism is here at the door. In fact, it would be easy to invest shamans with some degree of representativeness by inviting them to political assemblies where they could perform their rituals during the break (and that has already been done). Or to invite them to a meeting with political authorities where they could invoke some natural being to protect the encounter in order to fulfil their role. This would generate few perplexities (2004: 211) and no disquiet. Just like we cannot say: 'No more indigenous organisations, only rituals from now on!', as both indigenous people and EU functionaries would probably immediately stand up against it, the new matters of concern that the collective should take into account cannot be included without the claim to reality that other-than-humans have, nor should they be accepted once and for all. The work of diplomats remains at the core of the collective, and we should probably wish their proliferation.

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Valentina Bonifacio
University Ca' Foscari of Venice
Studi Umanistici
Dorsoduro 3484/D
Venice 30123, Italy
valentina.bonifacio@unive.it

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