Title: Co-management of Natural Resources Across "Radical Differences": Case Study of the Yshiro in Paraguay

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Abstract:

Since 2005, Unión de las Comunidades Indígenas de la Nación Yshir (UCINY) a federation of the Yshiro indigenous communities of Paraguay, actively sought participation in natural resource management projects implemented in their traditional territory without their being involved. In 2008, when the Paraguayan Secretariat of the Environment indicated its willingness to enroll the Yshiro in these projects, UCINY found itself facing another challenge: it was not clear how the communities wanted to manage natural resources. Moreover, given differences in how different Yshiro understand the things that go under the label of 'natural resources,' it was not clear whether a common vision could be possible. While some Yshiro understand their territory in a similar fashion as many governmental agents (i.e., as an aggregate of natural resources), other Yshiro understand it as a complex social network of reciprocity that involves both human and non-human persons. Grounded in such profoundly divergent understandings of what are the 'things' at stake when speaking of 'natural resource management,' these differences posed a challenge in terms of how to build a common vision that the federation could pursue.

Building a participatory methodology informed by the notion of translation across radical differences, this project sought to address this problematic and assist UCINY to generate among the Yshiro a common vision of natural resource management that could then be articulated with governmental projects underway. The project largely succeeded with regards to the generation of a common vision among the Yshiro, but the articulation with governmental projects was not as meaningful as it has been expected. This partial success nevertheless has generated important lessons regarding the challenges for meaningful grassroots participation in resources management projects.

 Keywords: Radical differences; Natural Resources management; Paraguay; Yshiro; Indigenous.

1. The Research Problem

The Yshiro indigenous peoples live in the Northeastern corner of the Paraguayan Chaco, in the border with Brazil and Bolivia. This region is part of the Gran Chaco Sudamericano, a bioregion that stretches across the borders of Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina and is considered the second richest in biodiversity after the Amazon.

Since non-indigenous settlers began to take control of the area a process of increasingly intense exploitation of natural resources has occurred. Although the Yshiro have been able to secure communal title for around 36,000 hectares of non-contiguous land, they continue to use for their economic activities resources that are located all through a larger territory that they have occupied since before non-Indigenous settlers came to the area. However, during the last decade and a half the Yshiro have found themselves at the intersection of two processes that are detrimental to their well-being. On the one hand, the extension of cattle-ranching operations has produced an intense process of deforestation and general loss of biodiversity; on the other hand, and in response to the first process, the Paraguayan state has began to strictly enforce a variety of regulations regarding the use of natural resources and to create and execute a series of schemes for the management of those resources, including the creation of a reserve of biosphere, zoning and the establishment of a national park. Caught between these two processes the Yshiro have been adversely affected both by the loss of resources and by the regulations that, established without consultations with them, restrict access to those still available.

Between 2007-2008, and on the basis of a collaborative research partly funded by IDRC, it was possible to determine a series of mechanisms that allowed the pan-Yshiro organization *Unión de las Comunidades Indígenas de la Nación Yshir* (UCINY) to convince the Paraguayan government to allow their participation in the management of the regulated area. In 2008, the Paraguayan *Secretaria del Ambiente* (SEAM, by the Spanish acronym) communicated to UCINY that they were ready to involve the Yshiro in the planning and management of natural resources. Having been mostly concerned with countering its lack of involvement, UCINY was not prepared to advance any particular vision of natural resource management that reflected the Yshiro communities' desires. In fact, such a vision had never been articulated. Thus UCINY faced the challenge to generate among members of the communities it represents a common vision of natural resource management that could be negotiated and articulated with the vision

SEAM was de facto promoting through existing programs. The need to generate such a common vision was the initial impetus for this project.

Creating a common vision of natural resource management among community members and articulating it with the one promoted by the government implied a double challenge, for in both cases what had to be connected were profoundly divergent notions of what was the 'thing' that goes under the label of 'natural resources.' For instance, for governmental agencies as well as for some Yshiro, the territory and the entities that compose it constitute 'natural resources' and their value is determined mainly by their service to humans and the larger ecosystem. Thus, while they might need to be conserved and used sustainably, they do not deserve any particular deference or concern beyond their utility. For other Yshiro this is an untenable proposition, for they conceive the entities that populate their territory as non-human persons with whom one must sustain respectful relations that are not fully expressed by practices of conservation and sustainability. The differences at stake here are 'radical' (or ontological) differences, that is, they are differences about the kinds of things that exist and make up the world.

These differences are not easily comprehensible for the parties involved and sometimes lead to conflicts. In fact UCINY, the PI and the Paraguayan government had had an experience of collaboration in the year 2000 that ended up in a conflict precisely because these differences were not taken into account in building a sustainable hunting program. In that case, the practices needed to ensure the 'sustainability' of natural resources were in contradiction with those needed for the sustainability of the territory conceived as a network of non-human persons (see Blaser 2009). This experience indicated that if these differences were not given attention in the proposed collaboration between UCINY and governmental programs there was a good chance for failure.

It is important to stress a point mentioned before, these kinds of differences do not only play out in the relations between Yshiro and non-Yshiro, they also emerge in the relations among diverse Yshiro individuals and groups. This is because the processes of colonization (evangelization, education, enrolment in the army, differential access to wage labor, etc.) have produced internal differentiation in this regard. Based on previous observations, the PI and the Yshiro leaders were pre-advised that this internal differentiation is often underplayed in processes of consultations and/or participation of the Yshiro communities promoted by external agencies. In these

processes there is a high risk of privileging the perspectives that are more easily understandable for the external agents that promote or facilitate them. A side effect of this is that the people who feel their views are not taken into account withdraw from participating in expert-informed interventions and feel resentful against those Yshiro who participate, all of which exacerbate internal tensions. The design of our project self-advisedly sought to avoid the latter problem through a very thorough process of self-driven consultation in order that through keeping 'radical differences' in sight a common vision of natural resource management could be generated within the communities.

As discussed below this objective was achieved, however, through the research process it became evident that communicating across radical differences with externally promoted project was to some extent a secondary challenge that could emerge only if another more immediate problem was overcome. In effect, once the Yshiro communities were able to generate a common vision the main obstacle to articulate such vision with those of external programs were not radical differences per se but rather the way in which the institutions in charge of those program operate.

It must be pointed out that while the Paraguayan government's SEAM has the official mandate to oversee and execute environmental policy, those aspects connected to biodiversity, conservation and wildlife have been largely outsourced to NGOs charged with applying for and securing international funding under various schemes and programmes to carry on with diverse aspects of natural resources management. In the Yshiro area the main organization in charge of this kind of arrangement is Guyra Paraguay (see http://www.guyra.org.py/index.php/gestion-compartida-alto-chaco). When this project started there were two main programs being pursued by this organization in traditional Yshiro territory: the provision of park wardens for the National Park Rio Negro and the establishment of a private reserve under the umbrella of a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) project. The latter was relatively advanced although involvement of the Yshiro communities had been practically insignificant. During the life of our project there was a strong push from UCINY to make this involvement more significant, however the research team ended up with the impression that being dependent on foreign funding, Guyra Paraguay has as a primary concern meeting deadlines and demands from funders. As a consequence, the actual work required for articulating its programs with

UCINY's vision has only been given rhetorical support, never quite coming around to deliver on some of the latter's central demands.

2. Objectives

The overall objective of the Project was *to enable Yshiro communities to identify and implement appropriate mechanisms for local communities' participation in governmental and non-governmental programs for the management of natural resources*.

The overall objective was achieved, although not exactly as it was envisioned at the beginning. Until 2008, UCINY had been consistently sidelined in natural resource management programs' planning and execution. Thus, the modality of engagement with those programs had been antagonistic. When in 2008 SEAM indicated its willingness to include UCINY in its programming we expected that, while not free from problems, the modality of engagement would become more collaborative. Thus, we envisioned that the 'appropriate mechanisms' we would develop were to be consonant with a truly collaborative environment. This has not been the case and we have come to the conclusion that the appropriate mechanisms for participation, at least in relation to external agencies, will continue to require some degree of antagonism. As we discuss under specific objective 2, we responded to this lesson by strengthening UCINY's capacity to make external agencies respect its views.

The specific objectives of the Project were as follow:

1. To shape, along with the communities, a shared vision of how and why to manage the natural resources;

This objective was fully achieved through a very laborious process of consultation, details of which are discussed in the methodology section. Through this process a set of principles and strategic objectives was produced and formally adopted by UCINY. The principles set some basic standards that UCINY has to respect and demand from projects and institutions with which it partners. The strategic objectives are organized under a common goal which allow the co-existence of at variety of visions held within the communities. The goal is the recovery and control of the Yshiro traditional territory. Both the principles and strategic objectives provided the ground to compose a road map with milestones with which the performance of UCINY and

its eventual partners can be evaluated. Two of those milestones under the responsibility of UCINY and the PI were to be pursued under the umbrella of this project. This are: A) the preparation of an anthropological report that is required in land claims processes in Paraguay; and B) producing materials for a public campaign to gain support on behalf of the Yshiro territorial claim. Both milestones have been achieved.

2. To communicate and articulate effectively this vision with the programs that the Paraguayan government is already pursuing and, if this is not possible, to still find ways of working together on some particular issues;

As pointed out above, this objective has been only partially achieved. UCINY connected with some of the programs underway in their area but, apparently more concerned with responding to external funders deadlines and demands, Guyra Paraguay (the institution in charge of them) has not been very responsive to the principles and objectives articulated by the Yshiro. Although Guyra signed with UCINY a formal partnership agreement to purchase a track of land to be co-owned under the umbrella of a REDD project, and later agreed to collaborate with UCINY in other concrete actions, it has been exceedingly difficult to make this institution responsive to UCINY's demands. This became evident during the last year of the project and lead the research team to rethink what an 'appropriate mechanism for participation' means. We concluded that in the present context the 'appropriate mechanism' required some capacity to force reluctant partners to pay attention to Yshiro demands. Thus, UCINY established a formal partnership with another NGO, Tierra Viva, that specializes in litigation on behalf of Indigenous rights in Paraguay. With power of attorney, Tierra Viva has taken charge of the legal aspects involved in the pursuit of the strategic objectives of UCINY. At the same time it has started to document the responses from Guyra Paraguay and the Paraguayan government to demands for information, transparency and abidance to the rule of law and the Yshiro expectations. So far the approach has been very laborious, at every step UCINY eventually have had to back its demands (for information, for meetings, etc.) with a warning that legal action and bad publicity will ensue in order to obtain a response from Guyra. Whether this 'confrontational' approach will work on the long run is uncertain.

3. To monitor and document both the participation process among the communities and the tools created and developed during the process

This objective has been fully achieved. We have developed a full report accounting for the experience (attached in the appendix) but some key elements are presented in the methodology section.

3. Methodology

Being one of the specific objectives of the project to monitor and document the participation process and the tools created through it, this section constitute a very substantive component of this report, however in the appendix there is a report paper with a more detailed rendering of the research process.

The Research Team and the Overall Design.

The main research team was composed by the principal investigator; three leaders from each community (total of 15); and an Yshiro research assistant who had collaborated in previous occasions with the PI and had acquired skills in facilitation of focus groups and interviewing.

The research project was divided into three stages A) Identification of Problem Areas or Mapping Differences; B) Elaboration of a Common Vision of Natural Resource Management that UCINY could pursue; and C) Communication and Implementation of Vision through partnerships with programs being pursued by the Paraguayan government.

Mapping Differences.

During this phase the research team focused on gaining an understanding of the areas on which community members disagree regarding their understandings of the land. The purpose was to produce a conceptual 'map' of those points in which different groups of community members differed on their understandings of processes that were taking place in the Yshiro territory. This was done through a combination of focus groups; informal discussions; and community meetings (usually organized around festive meals).

The research process started with an informative workshop facilitated by the PI for the Yshiro leaders on Indigenous rights in relation to protected areas. This workshop also served the purpose of consolidating the research team and refreshing the purposes of the project as it had taken two years from the original plan to the moment the project was funded. The leaders and the

Yshiro research assistant then relayed the information of this workshop to the rest of the Yshiro through community meetings. The intention of these meetings was to place the 'topic of the project' in the minds of community members in preparation for the invitations to participate in the focus groups.

Focus Groups.Crucial to organizing the focus group was a wealth of familiarity the PI had with the Yshiro communities and the dynamics of interactions between different groupings. For instance, through several years of participant-observation the PI had seen that illiterate Yshiro are more reluctant to put forward their opinions when they diverge from those of more literate individuals. This reluctance is even more acute among older illiterate individuals. However, illiterate individuals that publicly self-describe as traditionalists are not shy at all in airing their views, although they often grow frustrated by what they see as the 'ignorance' of the most literate Yshiro and particularly the literate youth. Depending the context, some of this literate youth feel intimidated by the presence of traditionalist Yshiro and thus are reluctant to voicing their opinions in their presence.

The points above are meant to illustrate the kinds of considerations that informed the criteria adopted to organize focus groups. The point is important as it foregrounds how crucial it was for the project to have someone who could provide a 'distanced intimate' view on community dynamics. In effect, while in conversations with the leaders they quickly could recognize the kinds of dynamics just mentioned, they would have had some difficulties in articulating them if someone would have come and asked them what would be the relevant criteria to form focus groups so that a good sense of variability of views on natural resources could be gained. Similarly, the usual criteria (gender, age, and the like) would have not captured the complexities of community dynamics and would have generated a biased understanding of the differences at stake.

The focus groups were formed according to the following criteria:

A) 'social age' (the pertinent distinction in life cycle for the Yshiro is not the number of years a person has but a combination of sexual maturity and whether one has or no children and then grandchildren and great-grandchildren). Groups of youngsters (young

people with no-children) and elders (people with great-grand children) were formed with these criteria.

B) Self-identification as traditionalist. These groups were intergenerational and included both male and female.

C) Reliance on wages Vs. reliance on 'natural resources' for subsistence. Depending the communities this criteria determined the formation of, on the one hand, groups of state employees (nurses, teachers and municipal clerks) and wage laborers in cattle ranches; and, on the other hand, groups of fishers, hunters, artisans and small farmers.

D) Literacy (groups of male and female, young and older individuals fully literate people and similarly composed groups of illiterate people).

E) Women groups.

The criteria were cross-used. That is, participants in each group were identified according to the other criteria as well. For example, in reporting a focus group formed by youth the facilitator would identify participants as male/female, traditionalist/non-traditionalist, literate/illiterate; wage/subsistence and so on. In addition, we prepared a list with the names of each adult and made sure that every one of them (around 700 in total) was invited to participate in, at least, one focus groups. Only 20% of those invited did not attended, but they did participate in community meetings and informal discussions.

The questions and the procedure The PI and/or the Yshiro research assistant, in person or through a third party, invited prospective participants to the focus groups. It is important to point out that while the PI is not fully fluent in Yshiro language, he understands it enough to get the general contours of a conversation without needing immediate translation. A first set of the focus groups were run by both the PI and the Yshiro research assistant in one of the Yshiro communities over a period of ten days and subsequently the Yshiro research assistant continued facilitating them in the remaining communities until they were all completed (8 groups of about 10-15 people in each of the 5 communities).

The meetings were held in schools or community centres (in the cases one was available). They lasted between 3 and 5 hours and were very relaxed. The conversations were opened by reference to the preparatory discussions in the community meetings about Indigenous rights in

relation to protected areas, a topic which had become ever-present in conversations given the increasing presence of governmental programs. The PI would offer a brief characterization of the argument made by governmental and non-governmental institutions promoting natural resource management programs to justify these programs. The Yshiro RA would then translate -- in subsequent meetings the RA would do this introduction.

The governmental argument was rendered in very plain language as the notion that there are less and less things in the *yrmo*. This is an Yshiro word that has an expansive meaning going from the forest to the whole of reality or universe. The word of course includes but exceeds the kinds of 'things' non-indigenous peoples call 'natural resources,' thus we specified that the government meant animals, trees, and fish. After this, we asked people to give their impressions about this argument, were they in agreement, disagreement, partial agreement? why?

Once conversations around this topic fizzled out the research team would raise another question: What, in your opinion, is the way of taking good care of the yrmo? After this other topic was 'drained' another question was posed to the group: Do you think the Yshiro have good enough knowledge and education for the following generations to live well in/with the yrmo? We would elaborate on the question discussing different possible livelihood scenarios available today, for example, heavy reliance on direct use of natural resources; agriculture; wage labor and a mix of all of them. Further we would ask, what was needed in order to make any of these scenarios viable.

The discussions were fully recorded and then translated into Spanish by Yshiro individuals who are fully bilingual. These translations were then transcribed and the PI and the Yshiro RA revised the transcripts eliciting common threads that would allow grouping answers. From this process a first draft of the 'map of differences' was produced. The map consisted of a document in which the three main questions were presented and under each of them a range of answers that had been provided and the research team had rendered in one or two sentences; all of them presented in bullet points.

Translation, Informal Discussions and Feedback through Community Meetings. The first draft of the map was translated into Yshiro and then was orally performed by the Yshiro research assistant who has had experience in community radio broadcastings. This performance was

recorded in CDs that were distributed in the communities so that people could listen to it and discuss informally with their friends and family. After two or three weeks of the CDs having circulated in the communities, community meetings were called and facilitated by the leaders and the Yshiro RA. In these meetings the content of the draft map were discussed and commentaries and feedback were requested from community members. The RA also instigated informal conversations with individuals and families that did not participate or did not spoke in the community meetings. People were asked if they felt that their views of the issues were reflected in some of the answers given to the questions. They were also invited to give their opinions on answers they did not like or felt that were problematic. These discussions were again recorded, translated into Spanish and transcribed so that the PI and RA could incorporate these views and modify the map of differences.

The Map   The entire process of elaborating the map of differences took eight months. The final version was also translated into Yshiro and recorded for the benefit of those Yshiro who are illiterate. The actual 'map', as well as the transcripts in Spanish of the focus groups are not available for the public as the Yshiro leadership consider this sensitive information that might be used by external interests in ways detrimental to the Yshiro communities. However, for illustrative purposes let us indicate the general tenor of the differences that came up through the process.

While among community members there was a widespread perception that 'things' in the yrmo are harder to get, people were divided in their view as to the causes and possible solutions. In general terms, peoples' views spread between the two poles that we had foreseen from the beginning as the most contrasting views. In effect, on one end there was a view that tended to remain very focused on direct chains of causality to explain the situation and the possible solutions. This view could be expressed thus: "Yes, there are less animals and trees because the cattle ranchers are clear cutting. Therefore the government has to put better controls. One way to do this will be to train Yshiro personnel." On the other end there was a view that put the emphasis on the most expansive meaning of the word *yrmo* and thus stressed the sense of the problematic as deriving from a lack of respect to the proper way of relating among humans and between humans and non-human persons, which is the way to ensure a healthy yrmo.

Besides the two contrasting views just described, the map of differences also laid down a series

of contrasting middle range views. That is, views on the problems that were very pragmatic and circumscribed. For example, in discussing the causes, effects and possible responses to diminishing raw materials immediately accessible to artisans, some people suggested that the problem was clear cutting for cattle-ranching and therefore that the response should be aimed at stopping this process. Such view was in contradiction with other Yshiro participants' view that the problems of the communities (including that of the artisans) would be solved if cattle ranching rather than curtailed was intensified and further promoted (through subsidies) among community members. It was argued that in this way, most community members would have jobs available and would not need to do handicrafts. These contrasting middle range views were also accompanied by other views that while differing were not necessarily at cross-purposes of each other.

Although in order to protect the Yshiro communities from misuse of the information we cannot offer further details it is important to point out that a number of correlations were established between particular groups and certain ways of understanding the problematic and possible solution. In very general terms the strongest correlation was between, on the one hand, dependence on wage labor and a tendency to see the problematic of diminishing natural resources as an opportunity to demand from the state a set of solutions that would further enmesh Yshiro livelihoods with the formal economy; and on the other hand, more or less direct reliance on natural resources and a tendency to see the problematic of diminishing natural resources as demanding a vigorous push to retain and regain control over territory and autonomy. In short, the map provided a clear view of the kinds of differences that, in principle, made the elaboration of a common vision truly a challenge.

Elaborating a Common Vision

The second phase of the project was aimed at the elaboration of a common vision that different internal groups of Yshiro could embrace. For this, the project had envisioned a crucial role for elders and current and ex-leaders. As it is made clear below, the rationale for this involvement was very pragmatic.

The role of elders.   Two observations, enabled by years of involvement of the PI with the Yshiro communities, ground the key role that elders played in the methodology of this project.

The first observation is related to demographics. Over a total population of about 2,000 individuals, 800 are adults. Given that the contemporary Yshiro are the descendants of a reduced group that survived various epidemics until the 1950s, they are all closely related. Thus, in other words, under the criteria of direct kinship, a group of the oldest elders (those who at least have great-grand children) constitute a 'representative group' of the entire Yshiro communities. In effect, virtually any adult Yshiro will have a direct connection to one of the oldest elders either through maternal or paternal lineage. The second observation (which might or might not be related to the first) is more subtle: the oldest Yshiro elders usually raise above the endemic factional politicking of younger generations and take a more inclusive approach to defining problems and possible solutions. These characteristics led us to hypothesize that the elders could provide valuable suggestions regarding how to bridge the differences made evident through the mapping phase.

The procedure to involve the elders (35 of them, both male and female) in the research process was twofold. First elders constituted one of the focus groups in each community during the mapping of difference process. When the process was over these focus groups were convened to work with the map of difference. The PI and the RA facilitated one of these meetings in a community and the RA conducted the other four. The meetings were convened twice a day between two and three hours and without a deadline other than the time required by each group to come out with a set of proposals that they strongly agreed would be acceptable for people having divergent views on the problematic of natural resources. The minimum amount of time that these discussions took was three days in one community and the maximum was six on another. The work was organized thus: in the first meeting the Yshiro RA would present orally the map of differences in terms of 'problems,' that is, how different people conceived 'the problem' posed by diminishing natural resources. Then the elders were asked to discuss and come up with a group answer to this question:

"If you were leaders what would you propose to all these peoples as a solution to what they see as a problem? Remember, you want to have as many followers as possible."

The PI and RA did not intervene in these discussions but adopted the role of 'devil's advocate.' Every time the group of elders came up with possible answers the PI and/or RA would pose

challenges modeled after the different profiles of views that had emerged from the mapping of difference phase. For example, if some of the proposals tended to overlook that some Yshiro saw the problem of diminishing natural resources as an opportunity to demand more state presence, the PI or RA would adopt this perspective to challenge the answer, demanding that it be made explicit how this view was contemplated in such answer. It was left to the elders to call off further discussions when they felt that regardless of the effort a given view could not be fully encompassed by their answers.

The discussions were recorded for archival purposes but were not translated or transcribed. In this stage, the PI and/or the RA recorded in writing different points that emerged out of the conversations and that the elders indicated they had reached an agreement on and did not want to pursue further discussion. From each group then the PI and/or RA drafted a brief document with the main points of what the group had considered their best answer to the question posed. Then the groups in each community selected one elder that took their results to a discussion with the representatives of other communities. In this meeting, the elders' representatives were asked to merge the results and come up with a common 'answer.'

Throughout the discussions and the constant challenge to make the possible 'solution' as encompassing of diversity as possible, one aspect of the 'answer' provided by the elders started to take the shape of a set of principles and a set of objectives that UCINY would have to pursue. These principles and objectives were made the focus of the next stage.

The role of leaders and ex-leaders.   The PI and RA organized the responses of the elders in the form of a draft document containing a set of principles and objectives for UCINY. This document, translated orally was presented to a workshop of leaders and ex-leaders. The purpose of the workshop was to determine the degree to which this group of individuals with various experiences with non-Yshiro institutions saw the principles and objectives workable both internally in the communities and in relation to potential allies and detractors. From this process a new draft of principle and objectives was generated.

Translation and Community Feedback.   This draft was again recorded in Yshiro language in

CDs that were circulated in the communities for informal discussions. After a while the leaders and the RA called for community meetings were feedback on the principles and objectives were elicited. These were modified again and the final results were presented for ratification in community meetings. The process of elaborating a common vision took five months.

Articulating with Other Potential partners

The next and final step in the project was to articulate with potential partners the common vision that had been elaborated through the previous phase, although it must be pointed out that UCINY had already engaged in more intense exchange with Guyra Parguay (the NGO that was carrying out natural resources management programs in the Yshiro territory) and with Tierra Viva (the Indigenous rights advocate NGO). Nevertheless, to launch the final step of the project UCINY invited these institutions as well as other governmental and non-governmental agencies to a workshop. The purpose of the workshop was first to present the principles and objectives adopted by the Yshiro communities, second to determine potential partners that could assist UCINY in their pursuit and third to establish with them a road map for concrete actions.

The three-days workshop was facilitated by a specialist in SAS2 (see http://www.sas2.net). The use of this tool during the research process had been contemplated as a possibility from the start of the project. The PI had the opportunity to familiarize himself with the tools in a workshop organized in Labrador in July 2010. In that opportunity participants included representatives from two aboriginal governments, the Innu and the Inuit of Labrador. Although the PI saw the value and usefulness of the tools some of its limitations were made evident too. Basically, notwithstanding the important effort SAS makes to escape cultural specificity, many of the tools are unavoidably marred to cultural assumptions that are specific to western logics. For instance, in subsequent conversation Innu representatives pointed out that the layout of space and materials needed for some of the techniques used by SAS strongly contrasted with what they saw as the ideal site/situation to discuss issues of relevance to the Innu, this is the hunting camp. They also pointed out that many of the techniques assume particular notions of temporality (linear time) and the divisibility of criteria (for instance between values and interests) that are foreign to many Innu. Given some similarities between the Innu and the Yshiro, the PI decided to reserve the use of SAS for working at the interface between UCINY and external agencies.

During the actual workshop some of the imitations observed before were made evident again. Some of the Yshiro participants who had little formal education and experience with 'White' institutions had a hard time to grasp the rationale of the exercises and at time felt uncomfortable with the setting. In contrast, the representatives from NGOs and the Yshiro leaders with more experience working with outside institutions were very comfortable with them. In any case, the workshop was nevertheless productive as UCINY had come already with a clear idea of what it sought to achieve and the discussion centered on how potential partners could help. Thus the workshop provided the road plan and chronogram the Yshiro leaders hoped for. The plan eventually also provided a set of indicators of how the partnerships committed in that meeting was actually working. Both Guyra Paraguay and Tierra Viva reconfirmed their commitment to work in partnership with UCINY and declared to be in agreement with the principles and objectives that the latter had adopted. The other participating institutions provided information but none made further commitments.

As pointed out before, subsequently to the workshop Guyra Paraguay started to lag behind in delivering on concrete responsibilities it had undertaken, including sharing detailed information (legal and budgetary issues) on the REDD project that was pursuing in (supposed) partnership with UCINY. All of which led the research team to suggest that a confrontational approach would be required from UCINY until Guyra shows a substantive change in regards to how it responds to UCINY's demands.

4. Project Activities

The activities supported under the project can be grouped according to the three stages of research A) Identification of Problem Areas or Mapping Differences; B) Elaboration of a Common Vision of Natural Resource Management; and C) Communication and Implementation of Vision. Most of the activities in the tables have bee discussed in more detail in the methodology section, hence only activities that were not mentioned there are discussed further here.

Building repair (Dec 2010- May 2011)

UCINY has a meeting center in the community of Puerto Diana that was used for several of the research activities and was planned as the site to held meetings with external institutions. This building that was in very bad shape was repaired between December and May 2010.

Mapping of Differences 2010

Activity	Workshop with leaders on Indigenous Rights	Community discussions of Indigenous rights	Focus Groups	First draft of 'map' of differences. Translated, recorded in CDs and circulated in communities.	Community Meetings and collection of feedback on Map of differences	Final Map of differences presented to leaders and communities	Interviews with prospective partners
Apr-May	x	x	x				
Jun-Jul			x				
Aug-Sep				x			
Oct-Nov					x		
Dec-Jan						x	x

SAS Workshop in Labrador (July 2010)
Elaboration of a Common Vision 2011

Activity	Elders' groups working in each community	Elders' representatives Generate draft Principles and objectives	Leaders and ex-leaders work on principles and objectives	Draft of principles and objectives translated, recorded in CDs and circulated in communities	Community Meetings and collection of feedback on Principles and Objectives	Final draft of Principles and Objectives
Jan	x					
Feb		x	x			
March				x	x	
April						x

Communication and Implementation of Vision 2011-2012

After the Workshop where partners (Including the research team) committed to take responsibility for different tasks, the Yshiro RA and PI kept monitoring advances. In May the PI travelled to Paraguay and during this trip it became evident that internal problems in UCINY had hampered the capacity of the organization to keep Guyra Paraguay on track with its commitments. Community meetings were organized to correct the problem. And afterward the Yshiro leaders made several trips to the capital Asuncion to request Guyra to fulfill its commitments. In the meantime the PI completed an anthropological report that is required in land claims processes. Subsequently with this report at hand Tierra Viva and UCINY organized a series of workshop in the communities to discuss how the land claims to recover the territory can be pursued.

Activity	Workshop Road Map of concrete actions	Monitoring of actions by partners	Leaders and Community meetings to evaluate actions by partners	Elaboration of anthropological report for Land Claims (by PI)	Workshop with Tierra Viva on pursuing land claims
May-Jun	x				
Jul-Aug		x			
Sep-Oct		x			
Nov-Dec		x			
Jan-Feb		x			
Mar-Apr		x			
May-Jun		x	x		
Jul-Aug				x	
Sep					x

Subsequent activities Sept 2012-June 2013

From September 2012 onwards the PI concentrated on producing audiovisual and textual materials to be used on a public campaign to be organized in support of the Yshiro territorial claim. In November 2012, UCINY warned Guyra Paraguay that it was to pursue legal actions if

the latter was not forthcoming on providing the legal and budgetary documentation related to the REDD project that UCINY had been requesting for over a year. Guyra finally responded and a meeting took place on March 2013 where Guyra presented some documentation and restated its intent to sustain a serious partnership with UCINY. However, going over the documents along with Tierra Viva's staff it became evident that not all information requested was there. Since then UCINY has been requesting the missing information without results yet (as of June 19, 2013).

5. Project outputs (all outputs in the form of documents are attached in the appendix section)

A) A number of research outputs contribute to UCINY's capacity to operate in pursuit of its objectives by providing: clear indicators to measure advances; standards to evaluate adherence to principles and objectives; and information required in legal processes. These include:

- Memoria de taller Tierra, Territorio y Recursos Naturales para la Nacion Yshir. This document contains a series of milestones to evaluate the performance of UCINY and various partners. It also lays down the road map for actions needed to achieve the goals that constitute the common vision of the Yshiro communities.
- Guiding Principles for UCINY (Text included in "Memoria de Taller" translated and audio-recorded in CDs that circulate in the Yshiro communities).
- Strategic objectives for UCINY (Text included in "Memoria de Taller" translated and audio-recorded in CDs that circulate in the Yshiro communities).
- Procedures for obtaining informed consent from Yshiro communities (Text included in "Memoria de Taller" translated and audio-recorded in CDs that circulate in the Yshiro communities).
- Reivindicación Territorial de la Nación Yshir. Informe Antropológico. Report prepared by the PI for UCINY and Tierra Viva. This is a legal requirement in any land claim in Paraguay.
- A very solid partnership has been established between UCINY and Tierra Viva where the latter provides legal counsel and representation.

- UCINY now counts with a researcher (Andres Ozuna) that is highly qualified and who has been able to remain independent from factionalist infighting. The best indication of this is that leaders (or would-be leaders) that are strongly opposed to each other now seek the support of Andres to prepare proposals for diverse projects and to seek advice on projects being proposed to them.

B) Other research outputs are intended for participatory action research practitioners, policy makers, academics and the general public. These include:

- A documentary: "Biodiversity Conservation. For whom?" (the documentary has also a Spanish language version). Until they are uploaded to the campaign site under preparation the documentary is accessible in the following links:

  English:
  http://www.lifeprovida.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11168%3Ax&catid=16%3Amultimedia&Itemid=6&lang=es

  Spanish:

  http://www.lifeprovida.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11170&Itemid=6

- A report for practitioners: "When Natural Resources Are Also Persons: Building Agreements Across Radical Differences: A Research Experience". The report presents the methodology employed in the project.
- Blaser, M. 2012   "On the Political Ontology of Heterogeneous Assemblages" in Cultural Geographies. Published online before print October 4, 2012, doi: 10.1177/1474474012462534.

- Blaser, M. 2013."Notes Towards a Political Ontology of 'Environmental' Conflicts," in Lesley Green Ed. Contested Ecologies: Nature and Knowledge. Cape Town: HSRC Press. Pp. 13-27.

6. Project Outcomes

The project has had a number of very positive outcomes.

a) It promoted an experience that works as a template for what a thorough process of discussions and consultations should be.

b) Community members now have concrete elements (principles, objectives, milestones) with which to evaluate the performance of their leaders and are eager to use them. In effect, during the community and leaders meetings of May 2012 several of these tools were invoked to oust some leaders that were not working as the communities expected.

c) Although it has proven laborious and frustrating, the 'confrontational mechanism' to ensure Yshiro participation on externally generated projects, put in place through the alliance with Tierra Viva, has given some results.

7. Overall Assessment and Recommendations

Overall and in spite of the unforeseen problems, the project can be considered a success. In particular because it has changed the disposition inside the Yshiro communities with regards to what consultation and participation can mean. In effect, the exceedingly thorough process of discussions that was undertaken in the communities has no precedents, among the Yshiro but also more generally in Paraguay. The consequence of this process has been that the 'bar' for what the Yshiro communities consider an acceptable process of consultation has been raised several notches. This is very positive given the context. In effect, as discussed in this report the dependency on foreign funding for natural resources management seem to bend the focus of local non-indigenous institutions towards upward accountability and away from downwards accountability.

In such context superficial consultations and token 'local involvement' are becoming the norm. To counter this, communities need two things: a) to have a clear idea of what meaningful consultation might look like; and b) to have some basic tools to disrupt the smoothness of 'token consultations and participation.' In this regard, the project has provided the Yshiro communities with invaluable tools. The Yshiro now have a clear idea of how they want to be consulted, they also have a clear idea of what they want to achieve, and have an understanding of where to apply pressure on reluctant partners who stride away from the goals jointly agreed.

If dependency on external funding generates a tendency in local non-indigenous institutions to

respond almost exclusively to upward accountability, this very same dependency makes them relatively vulnerable to the public opinion. Briefly, if a grassroots organization like UCINY starts to consistently denounce an institution like Guyra (that presents the former as its willing partner and key beneficiary of its projects) the latter may end up seeing its flow of external funding affected. Thus, in the situation there is the potential for introducing some balance in the chain of accountability through which foreign funders, local non-indigenous institutions and grassroots Indigenous organizations find themselves connected. But in order to realize this potential it is crucial that grassroots Indigenous organization have a clear vision of what they want to demand from their (more or less reluctant) partners and the means to pressure them to heed to their demands. This is ultimately what UCINY has gained from this project.
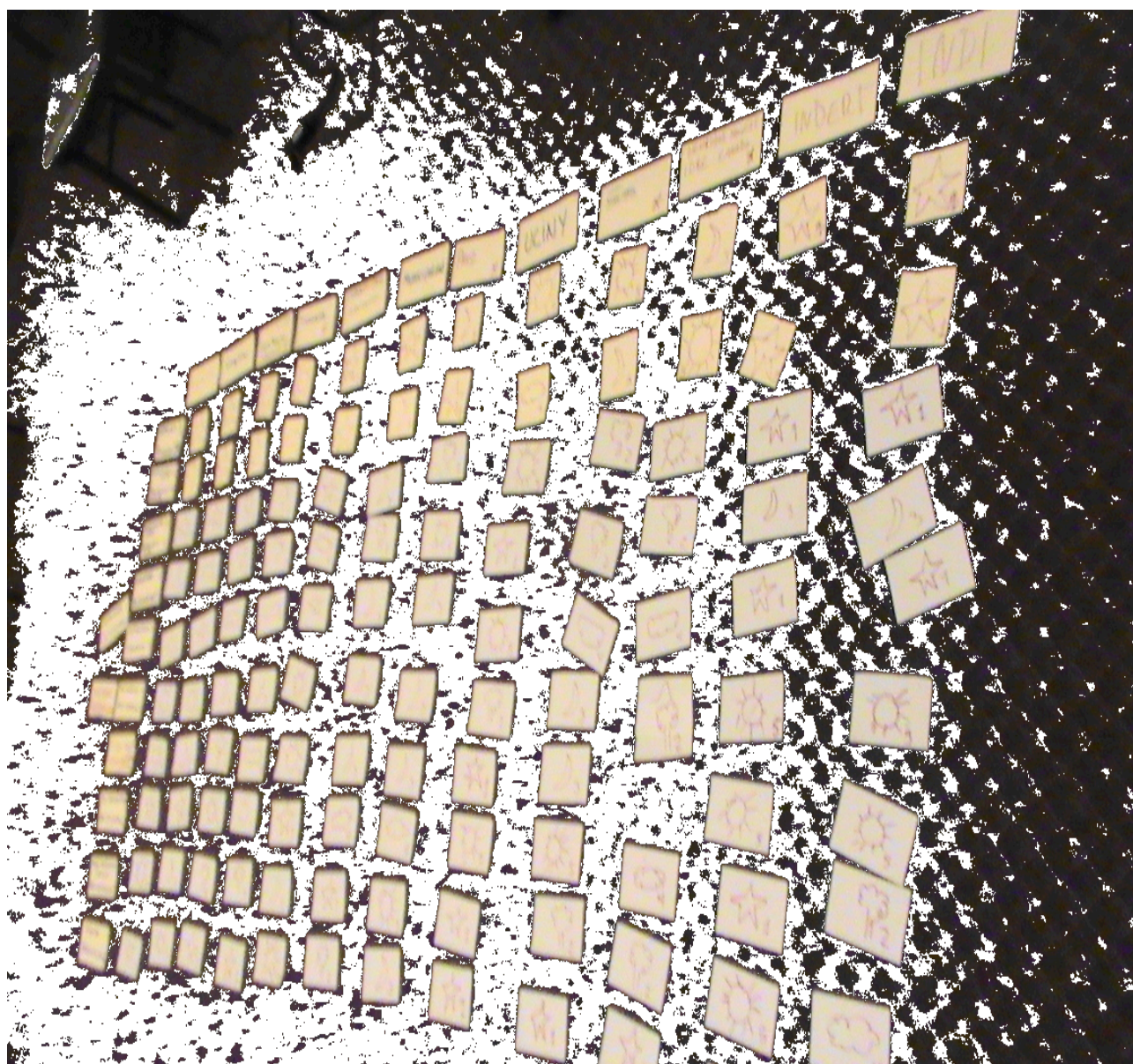
List of Materials in Appendix

- Memoria de taller Tierra, Territorio y Recursos Naturales para la Nacion Yshir. Text in Spanish. Includes: Guiding Principles for UCINY ; Strategic objectives for UCINY; Procedures for obtaining informed consent from Yshiro communities. Reivindicación Territorial de la Nación Yshir.

- Informe Antropológico. Report in Spanish prepared by the PI for UCINY and Tierra Viva.

- "When Natural Resources Are Also Persons: Building Agreements Across Radical Differences: A Research Experience". Report paper

- Blaser, M. 2012   "On the Political Ontology of Heterogeneous Assemblages" in Cultural Geographies. Published online before print October 4, 2012, doi: 10.1177/1474474012462534.

- Blaser, M. 2013."Notes Towards a Political Ontology of 'Environmental' Conflicts," in Lesley Green Ed. Contested Ecologies: Nature and Knowledge. Cape Town: HSRC Press. Pp. 13-27.

- "Biodiversity Conservation. For whom?" (CD with the documentary in English and Spanish versions). Also available at www.lifeprovida.net

MEMORIA TALLER
TIERRA, TERRITORIO Y RECURSOS NATURALES PARA LA NACIÓN YSHIR

ASUNCIÓN
MAYO 2011

Metodología, facilitación y documentación
David R. Mercado

Contenido

Introducción

La Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Nación Yshir (UCINY), con el apoyo de un proyecto financiado por *International Development Research Centre de Canadá* (IDRC) emprendió el año pasado un amplio proceso de consulta y discusión dentro de las comunidades para establecer los diferentes puntos de vista y expectativas de sus miembros con respecto a la temática de tierra y recursos naturales. De este proceso surgieron una serie de preocupaciones comunes y de sugerencias que han constituido la base para: a) establecer una serie de principios guías que tienen que ser observados por UCINY en su accionar; b) una serie de objetivos a ser conseguidos en el mediano y largo plazo..

Durante este tiempo, y mientras las consultas se llevaban a cabo, la UCINY ha ido estableciendo contactos y creando los inicios de alianzas de colaboración con varias entidades gubernamentales y no-gubernamentales. Ahora, con las consultas concluidas y con los principios y objetivos establecidos, UCINY busca cimentar estas posibles alianzas de trabajo, buscar su alineación con dichos principios y objetivos y coordinar los esfuerzos para que no se superpongan unos con otros sino que se apoyen mutuamente.

Como objetivo superior se aspira a generar una experiencia única en Paraguay: la formación de una alianza multisectorial que colabore con la UCINY en el establecimiento de un territorio para la Nación Yshir.

En este contexto, los días 12 y 13 de mayo de 2011, en el Hotel Chaco de Asunción – Paraguay a convocatoria de la UCINY, se desarrolló el taller "**Tierra, Territorio y Recursos Naturales para la Nación Yshir"**

El taller ha contado con la participación de representantes de algunos organismos del estado, organizaciones no gubernamentales y de la cooperación multilateral, que junto a los líderes de la UCINY contribuyeron al análisis de la problemática de las comunidades de la Nación Yshir y al establecimiento de una estrategia conjunta y coordinada para la consecución de los objetivos construidos y propuestos por la UCINY.

Los resultados de este esfuerzo de diálogo y aprendizaje colaborativo entre los(las) líderes de la nación Yshir y los(las) representantes de instituciones que trabajan en apoyo a los pueblos indígenas, han sido sistematizados con un propósito de síntesis, para su mejor comprensión y aplicación de las recomendaciones y acciones propuestas en el taller.

Nos planteamos objetivos, roles y reglas para trabajar en el taller

Porqué estamos Aquí?

- *Estamos Buscando y construyendo la unidad*
- *Porque queremos interrelacionarnos*
- *Acompañarnos*
- *Por la tierra- e territorios y RR:NN*
- *Conocer y acercarse a la cultura Chamacoco*
- *Para encontrar soluciones a las problemas*

Cuál es nuestro rol?

- *Participar*
- *Compartir*
- *Aprender colaborativamente*
- *Construir*
- *Integrar*
- *Aplicar*

Que debemos hacer para que el taller fracase

- ***No** opinar*
- *Tener prendido los celulares*
- *No participar*
- *No comprometer*
- *Dudar*
- *No escucha*
- *No aplicar lo aprendido*
- *Criticar*
- *Tener puntos de vista cerrados*

Los principios y los objetivos primarios de la UCINY

La UCINY ha desarrollado de manera participativa y en consulta con las comunidades un conjunto de principios que guían sus acciones y relacionamiento con las organizaciones externas ya sea del estado o de la cooperación

Principios Guía Para la Acción de UCINY

1. UNIDAD
   Los proyectos en los que se involucre UCINY tienen que servir para unir a las comunidades y no para dividirlas.
2. BENEFICIO COMÚN
   Los proyectos individuales tienen que formar parte de un plan general que beneficie a todas las comunidades y grupos dentro de las comunidades.
3. INTEGRALIDAD
   Los temas de medioambiente, la propiedad y acceso al territorio tradicional, la educación y las posibilidades de trabajo para los Yshiro forman una unidad. Por lo tanto, la UCINY no aceptara que organismos externos promuevan proyectos o políticas sobre un aspecto sin consideración de los efectos que pueden tener en los otros.
4. NO ASISTENCIALISMO
   Excepto en casos de emergencia, proyectos que se reducen a la donación de materiales o insumos sin ningún plan de trabajo o consideración de las necesidades de seguimiento y apoyo no le sirven al pueblo Yshir pues crean dependencia.
5. CONSULTA
   Los proyectos y políticas que afecten al pueblo Yshir deberán ser consultados en forma apropiada de acuerdo a los procedimientos establecidos por UCINY
6. PRINCIPIOS COMPARTIDOS
   Las organizaciones que quieran trabajar con UCINY deberán acordar con estos principios.

OBJETIVOS PRIMARIOS DE LA UCINY

Los objetivos primarios establecidos y propuestos por la UCINY, son la base para el desarrollo de alianzas colaborativas con las instituciones de cooperación y del estado, abordan cuatro ámbitos o dimensiones: el territorio, medioambiente, educación y salud, que constituyen la problemática y aspiraciones más sensibles de las comunidades de la Nación Yshir.

Territorio:

1- Recuperación de más espacio de los territorios tradicionales, preferentemente tratando de incorporar tierras colindantes con aquellas de las cuales las comunidades poseen titulo. El objetivo de largo alcance es reconstituir el territorio Yshir como un espacio contiguo.
2- Titulación de las tierras que se poseen
3- Buscar mecanismos para hacer efectivo el derecho a acceder a los recursos naturales que se encuentran dentro del territorio tradicional Yshir pero fuera de las tierras de propiedad legal de las comunidades así como lo establece el artículo 15 del convenio 169 de la OIT.

Medioambiente:

Generar mecanismos de consulta y cooperación con organismos del estado y ONGs para:

1- Asegurar que las comunidades Yshiro no sufran las consecuencias directas o indirectas del deterioro del medioambiente causado por las actividades de terceros. Por consecuencias indirectas nos referimos a las políticas y proyectos que apuntan a paliar los efectos de dicho deterior ambiental.
2- Asegurar y promover el uso sustentable de los recursos naturales
3- Educar y hacer respetar por las instituciones y organismos relacionados con la temática medioambiental sobre los derechos y las formas de entender el medioambiente que tienen los Yshiro.

Educación:

1. Promover programas educativos que contemplen la integración de tres modalidades
   - La preservación y fortalecimiento del conocimiento que poseen las generaciones más ancianas, incluyendo la lengua, las tradiciones orales, el conocimiento del monte y los valores.
   - La promoción de una educación practica orientada al desarrollo de habilidades técnicas que sean de utilidad en las comunidades
   - Asegurar mecanismos que faciliten el acceso a la educación superior para aquellos jóvenes que lo deseen. Esto implica reforzar la calidad de la educación básica y secundaria.

2. Asegurar la participación de las comunidades en el diseño de planes y políticas educativas promovidas por las agencias del gobierno.
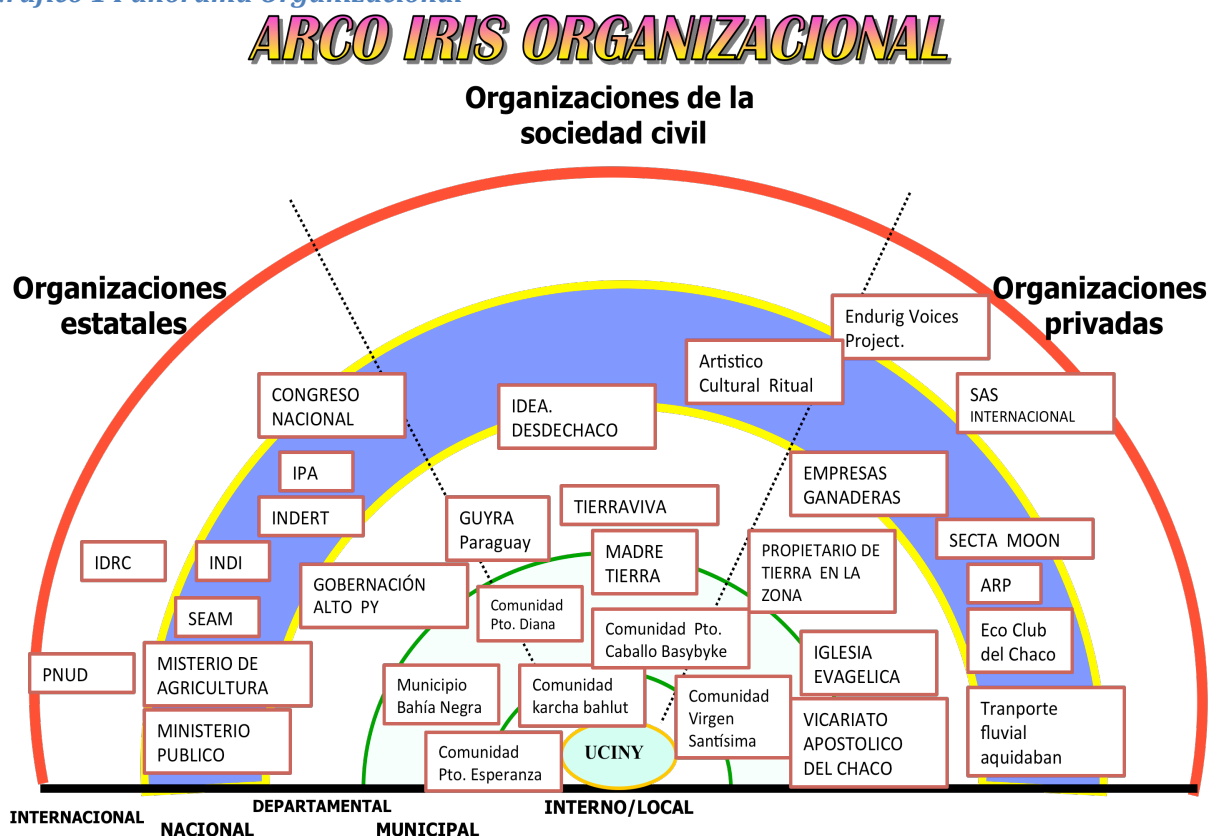
Salud:

1. Promover y fortalecer un sistema eficiente de atención integral de la salud de las comunidades
   - Asegurar la provisión de un servicio de salud eficiente e integral incluyendo entrenamiento de personal de salud, equipamiento, e insumos y campañas educativos diseños en forma apropiada para llegar a todos los sectores de nuestras comunidades.

LOS ACTORES ESTRATÉGICOS PARA LOS OBJETIVOS DE LA UCINY

El contexto institucional es importante para la UCINY, en la perspectiva de establecer alianzas colaborativas para el logro de los objetivos y para abrir nuevos campos de cooperación.

Las instituciones y organizaciones de cooperación son seleccionadas del arcoíris o panorama organizacional (gráfico 1) :

Grafico 1 Panorama Organizacional

ARCO IRIS ORGANIZACIONAL

Organizaciones de la sociedad civil

Organizaciones estatales

Organizaciones privadas

Endurig Voices Project.

Artistico Cultural Ritual

CONGRESO NACIONAL

IDEA. DESDECHACO

SAS INTERNACIONAL

IPA

INDERT

GUYRA Paraguay

TIERRAVIVA

EMPRESAS GANADERAS

IDRC

INDI

GOBERNACIÓN ALTO PY

MADRE TIERRA

PROPIETARIO DE TIERRA EN LA ZONA

SECTA MOON

ARP

SEAM

Comunidad Pto. Diana

Comunidad Pto. Caballo Basybyke

Eco Club del Chaco

PNUD

MISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA

Municipio Bahía Negra

Comunidad karcha bahlut

Comunidad Virgen Santísima

IGLESIA EVAGELICA

VICARIATO APOSTOLICO DEL CHACO

Tranporte fluvial aquidaban

MINISTERIO PUBLICO

Comunidad Pto. Esperanza

UCINY

INTERNACIONAL

NACIONAL

DEPARTAMENTAL

MUNICIPAL

INTERNO/LOCAL

De este amplio grupo de organizaciones se priorizaron aquellos que los líderes de la UCINY consideran estratégicos para el desarrollo de alianzas y negociaciones en función de los objetivos definidos:

INDI, Instituto Paraguayo del Indígena
CONGRESO
GOBERNACION
INDERT
SEAM, Secretaria del Medio Ambiente
PNUD, Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo
MUNICIPIO
GUYRA PARAGUAY, Organismo no gubernamental
MADRE TIERRA, Organismo no gubernamental
TIERRA VIVA, Organismo no gubernamental

Para definir los perfiles de estas instituciones desde el punto de vista de los líderes de la UCINY, se construyeron criterios o características sencillas para establecer diferencias y similitudes entre actores:

- Publico/privado
- Trabaja con unos cuantos/trabaja con todos
- Enfoque sectorial/enfoque integral
- Más Autonomía de decisión/menos autonomía de decisión
- Muy jerarquizado/más horizontal
- Conocemos/No conocemos
- Trae problemas/trae beneficios
- No comunican y consultan/comunican y consultan
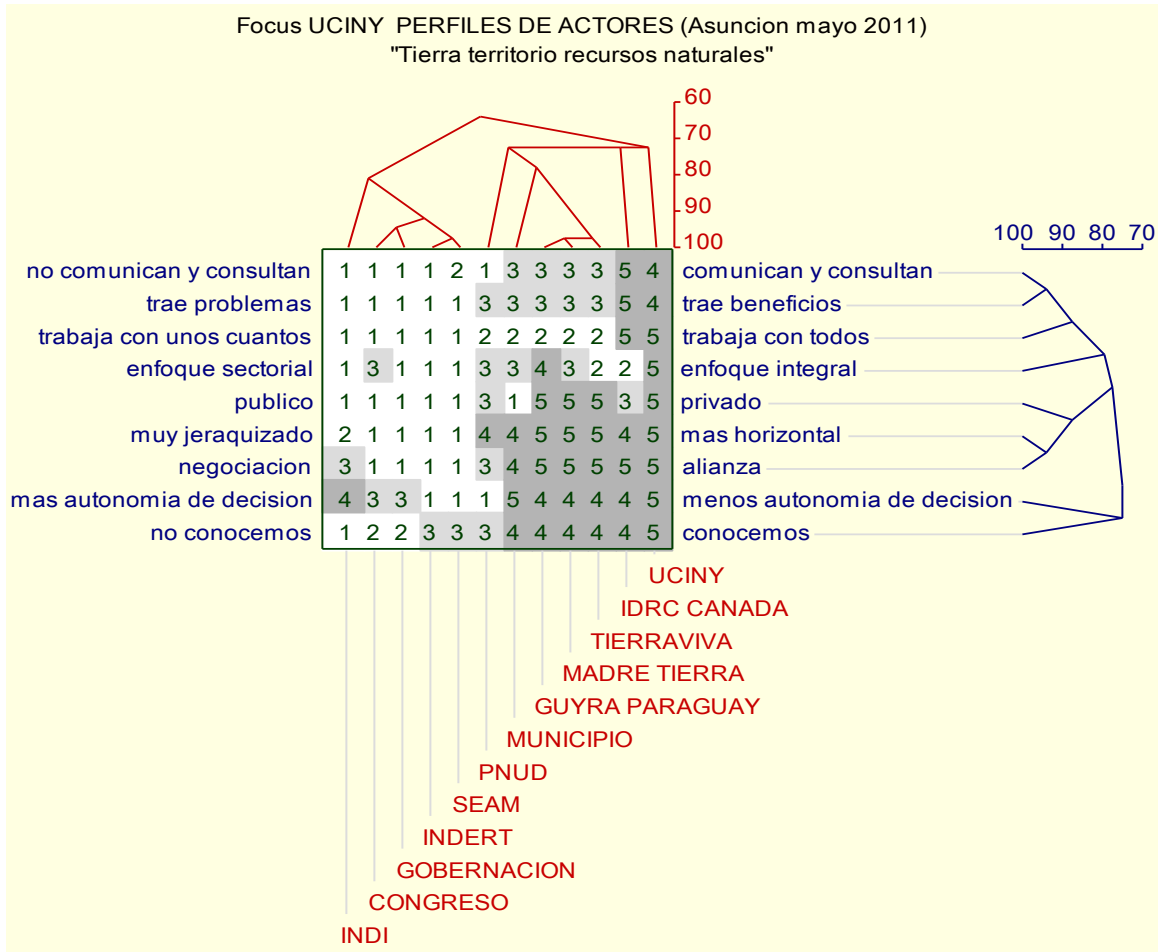- Alianza/negociación

Con estas características valoramos a cada institución y a la propia UCINY para ver cuál es su perfil

Un primer grupo de instituciones está constituido por las ONGs Guyra Paraguay, TierraViva y Madre Tierra (con 98% de similitud, ver gráfico 2), provienen del sector privado, a veces comunican y consultan con las comunidades y otras veces no, trabajan solo con unas cuantas comunidades, tienen un enfoque sectorial, son conocidas por las comunidades, traen beneficios y también problemas a las comunidades, tienen menos autonomía de decisión y son viables al desarrollo de alianzas para la cooperación.

Otro bloque de instituciones están conformado por el SEAM, INDERT, Congreso y Gobernación (90% de similitud) su perfil señala que son instituciones públicas que no comunican ni consultan con las comunidades, traen problemas, trabajan para unos cuantos, tienen un enfoque sectorial (aunque el Congreso combina lo sectorial con lo integral) son muy jerarquizadas y de mucha negociación. El INDI también comparte muchas características de este grupo pero se diferencia en su dependencia o poca autonomía de decisión y porque se debe realizar negociación para lograr alianzas con esta institución.

Los perfiles diferenciados son los del Municipio, PNUD, IDRC y el propio UCINY.
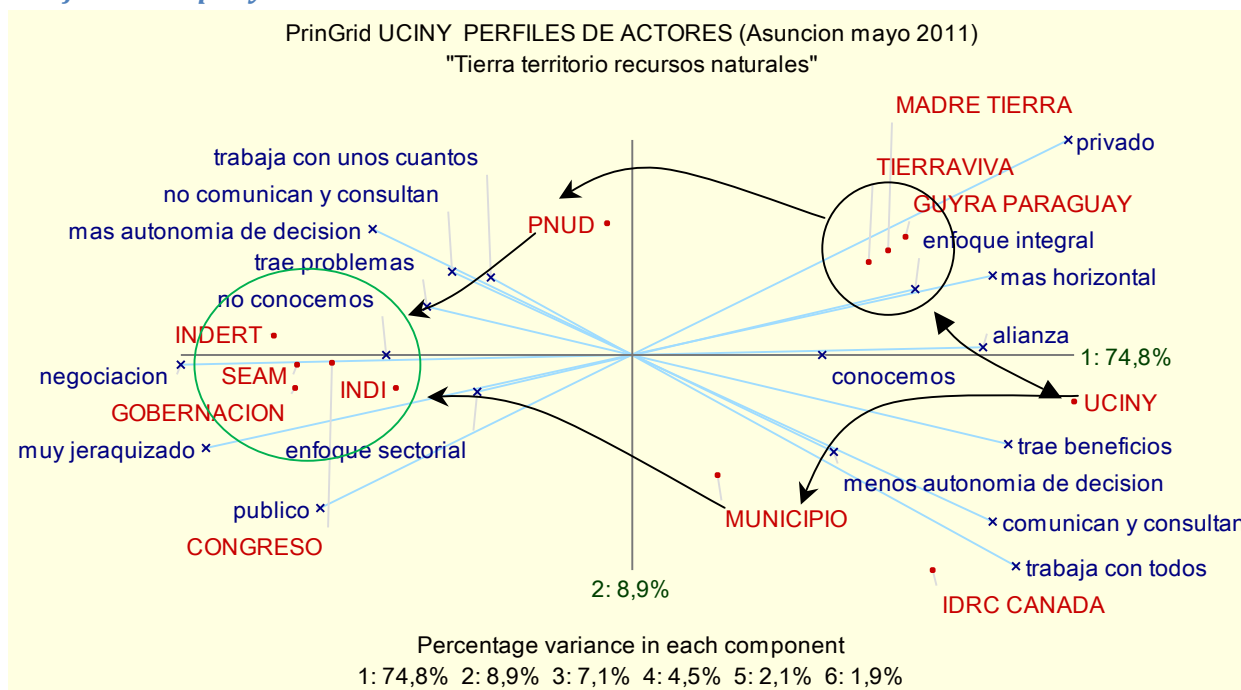
Gráfico 2: Diferencias y similitudes entre instituciones

Focus UCINY PERFILES DE ACTORES (Asuncion mayo 2011)
"Tierra territorio recursos naturales"

	UCINY	IDRC CANADA	TIERRAVIVA	MADRE TIERRA	GUYRA PARAGUAY	MUNICIPIO	PNUD	SEAM	INDERT	GOBERNACION	CONGRESO	INDI	
no comunican y consultan	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	3	3	3	5	4	comunican y consultan
trae problemas	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	5	4	trae beneficios
trabaja con unos cuantos	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	5	5	trabaja con todos
enfoque sectorial	1	3	1	1	1	3	3	4	3	2	2	5	enfoque integral
publico	1	1	1	1	3	1	5	5	5	3	5		privado
muy jeraquizado	2	1	1	1	4	4	5	5	5	4	5		mas horizontal
negociacion	3	1	1	1	3	4	5	5	5	5	5		alianza
mas autonomia de decision	4	3	3	1	1	1	5	4	4	4	4	5	menos autonomia de decision
no conocemos	1	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	conocemos

Las instituciones forman familias que toman posiciones en relación a la UCINY; el grupo de instituciones públicas se ubican en un bloque muy distante y opuesto a la UCINY (ver gráfico 3) mientras las ONG y el IDRC, incluso el Municipio, están más cerca, aproximados por una perspectiva de alianza por sus características de relacionamiento mas horizontal, su enfoque integral y el conocimiento que se tiene de éstas, algunas de estas características responden a los principios planteados por la UCINY.

Sin embargo, es necesario y estratégico una aproximación de la UCINY a las instituciones públicas, de gobierno, por los objetivos que se ha propuesto (recuperación de espacio y titulación de tierras) y que requiere de una relación de negociación con este bloque. El gráfico también muestra algunas posibilidades de mediación entre la UCINY y este bloque extremadamente jerarquizado y va por dos vías: el PNUD y el Municipio, el primero por su presencia a través de programas bilaterales en el Estado y el segundo por la incidencia política que se puede lograr en el ámbito local y que tendrá repercusiones en los niveles departamental y nacional.

Gráfico 3: Grupos y características de relaciones

PrinGrid UCINY PERFILES DE ACTORES (Asuncion mayo 2011)
"Tierra territorio recursos naturales"

Percentage variance in each component
1: 74,8% 2: 8,9% 3: 7,1% 4: 4,5% 5: 2,1% 6: 1,9%

Oportunidades para la UCINY del relacionamiento institucional

PNUD

El **PROGRAMA DE PEQUEÑAS DONACIONES** del PNUD, tiene recursos para financiar pequeños proyectos a través del Fondo Mundial para el Medio Ambiente, cuyo grupo meta son las Organizaciones Comunitarias de Base, que cuenten con personería jurídica y donde UCINY califica altamente.

Cómo se presentan los proyectos:

- Deben tomar como base la ESTRATEGIA PAIS
- Usar el formato PNUD
- Los fondos solicitados deben ser el 50% del proyecto y el otro 50% debe ser la contraparte de la comunidad (mano de obra, materiales e insumos locales, especies y otros)
- Los tiempos de duración van de 6 meses a 2 años
- El monto máximo de financiamiento 30 mil Dólares Americanos
- No se financia gastos administrativos
- Deben resaltar el componente de género

Los temas calificables para los proyectos son:

- Biodiversidad (manejo – conservación – recuperación – aprovechamiento)
- Reducción de contaminantes (basura, industriales, etc.)
- Degradación de uso del suelo

- Cambio Climático (reforestar, energías alternativas, etc.)

Plazo de presentación hasta el 2 de julio de 2011

Contacto: Ing. Oscar Ferreiro
Telf. 021-611980 ext. 143
Cel 0981-431819
Email: oscar.ferreiro@unpd.org
Programa de pequeñas donaciones PNUD
Mariscal López y Saraví
Asunción

ONG TIERRAVIVA

Han comprometido su apoyo a UCINY en función a las demandas de tierra y territorio y los derechos humanos, apoyo jurídico y legal. Además de también apoyar en los aspectos logísticos de movilización y organizaciones de eventos y reuniones en las comunidades.

ONG GUYRA PARAGUAY

Ofrece su apoyo en proceso de titulación de tierras, aclaró que el mecanismo de la compra de tierras para los programas *carbón trade*, tienen la figura de condominio entre UCINY con el socio (en este caso Guyra Paraguay), de acuerdo con las reglas de las empresas que pagan los bonos de carbono, este socio es el garante del cumplimiento del contrato establecido entre el condominio o sociedad y las empresas de carbón trade. El tiempo de trasferencia real de la propiedad a manos de la comunidad o el UCINY es de 20 años.

La ONG puede apoyar además a la UCINY con información técnica sobre los recursos naturales, mapas, tareas de manejo y aprovechamiento, proyectos sustentables en áreas de bosque y otros aspectos relacionados con la biodiversidad.

DIRECCION GENERAL DE EDUCACIÓN ESCOLAR INDÍGENA

La DGEEI está trabajando en el desarrollo de currículos diferenciado (multicultural) a través de investigaciones con cada pueblo para la malla curricular.

Tiene un Plan piloto de regularización académica, formación docente (para bachileres en 3 años)

Tienen identificados a los lideres, profesores y otros actores para el desarrollo de estos procesos
- La DGEEI- UCINY deben acordar programas y procesos para el diseño del curriculum para los pueblos indígenas Yshir en la educación formal no formal.

PAUTAS PARA EL DISEÑO DE ESTRATEGIAS DE ACCIÓN

TIERRA Y TERRITORIO

Reclamos de la UCINY al estado sobre el territorio

- Debemos elaborar un Plan de recuperación del territorio tradicional del pueblo yshir
- Realizar una reconstrucción documental histórica
- Hacer carpetas, fotocopias por comunidad
- Preparar Mapas, con el Uso actual, Comunidades, Servicios, Recursos y otros

Estrategias para la titulación

- Negociación para comprar expropiar tierras
- UCINY debe asumir sus roles y responsabilidad para impulsar los procesos iniciados

UCINY debe generar y tener incidencia en la Municipalidad

- El plan del ordenamiento territorio, va a imponer su punto de vista y normativa para el manejo del territorio y los recursos sin considerar a las comunidades Yshir.
- Debemos informarnos y discutir sobre el POT M y lanzar una contrapropuesta
- Preparar información – documentos para justificar las propuestas

MEDIO AMBIENTE

Muchas familias dependen de la caza y recolección y los Recursos naturales y estos se agotan
Existe interdependencia entre comunidades y el medio ambiente
Se están generando cambios en el modelo de manejo y aprovechamiento de los RRNN incorporándose la lógica productiva en las comunidades indígenas
No hay políticas que fomenten el uso productivo de la tierras de los indígenas por ineficiencias e indiferencias del estado.
Las comunidades son heterogéneas hay varias combinaciones de actividad económica (artesanía, recolección, etc.)
UCINY debe tener una política que integra estas actividades diversas como parte de la identidad.
 Al indígena se le pone muchas trabas para que desarrolle la pesca y caza
La SEAM no es eficiente y no desarrolla su actividad, (solo se preocupa de los impuestos).
El rio está contaminado y es un riesgo para la salud.

Estrategias

- **UCINY** debe fortalecer el conocimiento de las leyes y la educación de su población

- UCINY y algunas ONGs deben Plantearse una estrategia de alianzas para la negociación con la SEAM para facilitar los procesos de manejo y aprovechamiento de los RRNN en función a su forma de entender el medio ambiente.
- UCINY debe preparar proyectos de uso sustentable de los RRNN

EDUCACIÓN

- Desarrollar Consultas y acuerdos con los pueblo indígenas para el diseño del curriculum
- La DGEEI –UCINY deben acordar programas y procesos para los pueblo yshir
- Explorar posibilidades para la Educación alternativa, No formal, formación Técnica.

SALUD

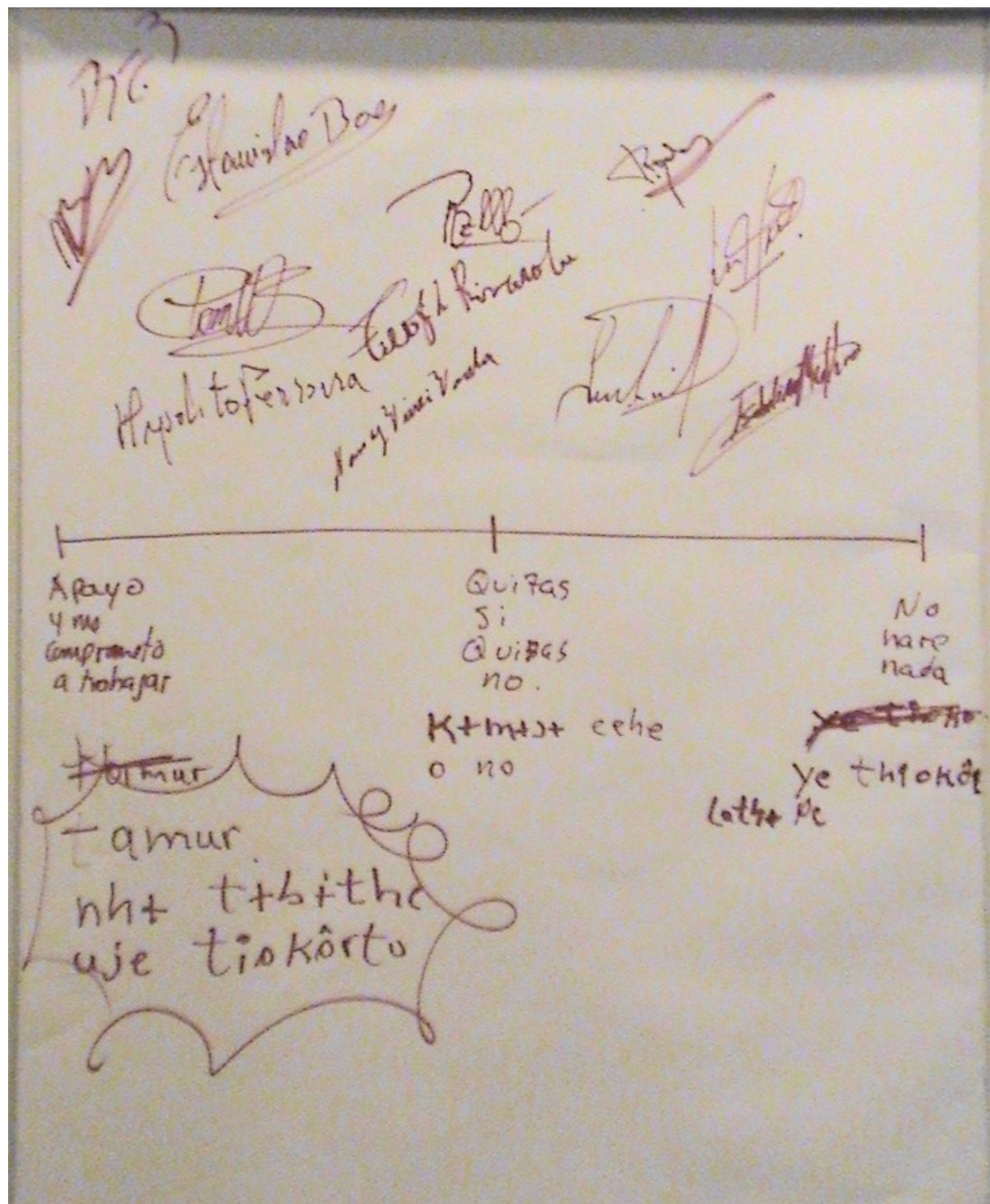**No** se cuenta con servicio de salud, equipado y con insumos
Solo hay personal, no hay medicamentos
La población de las comunidades Yshir requiere de hospitales.
Barco ambulancia (corto plazo)
- Programa preventivo para las comunidades indígenas (información comunicación, educación, atención)
- Formación de promotores de salud en las comunidades indígenas
- Agua potable.

Acuerdos y compromises

Apoyo
y me
comprometo
a trabajar

Quitas
si
Quitas
no.

No
hare
nada

K+m+s+ eehe
o no

ye th+oꞷꞷ

Ta mur

Tamur

nh+ t+b+th
uje tioꞷôrtu

Lotha Pe

Procedimiento para una consulta apropiada con UCINY

Los siguientes pasos deberá seguir cualquier organización u organismo que quiera emprender acciones y proyectos que afectan a las comunidades Yshir para asegurar que dichas acciones o proyectos han sido debidamente consultados con ellas.

1- Se discutirá con la comisión directiva de la UCINY las acciones, políticas o proyectos que se están considerando para que la Comision Directiva le comunique a los lideres y organicen una reunión

2- Un borrador de la propuesta se presentara en la reunión con los lideres en formal oral, tomando los recaudos necesarios para explicar bien los aspectos técnicos que puedan ser mas difícil de comprender.

3- Se enviara un borrador escrito para que los líderes lo evalúen con suficiente tiempo para considerar todos sus aspectos, consultar a terceros si es necesario, e introducir modificaciones y sugerencias.

4- Se enviara un borrador final para aprobación por los líderes. Esta aprobación deberá ser debidamente documentada incluyendo las firmas de los líderes.

5- Cuando se envíen proyectos para ser financiados por terceros, la organización u organismo que promueve el proyecto deberá comunicárselo a UCINY indicando el tiempo estimado para la resolución del pedido.

6- Al cumplimiento del tiempo estimado se comunicara a UCINY el estado del pedido.

7- Cuando un proyecto sea aprobado se realizara una reunión con la asamblea de UCINY (es decir los lideres de cada comunidad) previa a la ejecución del mismo con el fin de refrescar y ajustar las acciones que se van a emprender.

8- Se establecerá un cronograma de encuentros regulares para informar sobre la marcha de los proyectos tanto en sus aspectos técnicos como financieros..

Reivindicación Territorial de la Nación Yshir
Informe Antropológico

Preparado por: Dr. Mario Blaser, Antropólogo
Universidad Memorial de Terranova y Labrador, Canadá

Datos Demográficos, Económicos y Situación de la Tierra:

La Nación Yshir (también conocidos como Yshiro Ebitoso y como Chamacocos) está constituida por unos dos mil (2.000) individuos distribuidos en cuatro comunidades base (Pto. Diana, Karcha Bahlut, Pto. Esperanza y Fte. Olimpo), cuatro comunidades satélites (Pto. Caballo; Pto. Pollo, Buena Vista y Abundancia) en el Alto Paraguay y una comunidad asentada en Asunción. El censo del 2002 registro solamente 1,468 individuos pero no incluyo a los residentes (temporarios y permanentes) en Asunción.

Sobre la base de un censo realizado a pedido de UCINY en el año 1999 y entrevistas realizadas en el 2009, es claro que las actividades económicas preponderantes en las comunidades del Alto Paraguay están relacionadas con el uso de recursos naturales, ya sea para consumo directo o para venta (tanto de productos crudos como con algún valor agregado). Le sigue en orden de importancia ganadería en pequeña escala, horticultura y cría de animales pequeños. La changa es el tipo preponderante de trabajo asalariado y, en la amplia mayoría de los casos, es un complemento de las actividades detalladas previamente. Trabajo asalariado permanente constituye la excepción ya que solo unos pocos individuos dependen de él.

En la actualidad, la Nación Yshiro controla y tiene acceso a unas 54.902 hectáreas de tierra no contiguas. Distribuidas de la siguiente manera de Norte a Sur:

Comunidad de Puerto Caballo. 14.281 hectareas tituladas pero aun no transferido a nombre de la comunidad. Titulo está en manos del INDI.

Puerto Diana. 2.420 hectáreas   con titulo a nombre de la comunidad

Puerto Pollo. 980 hectáreas, sin título.

Karcha Bahlut. 12.300 hectáreas con titulo a nombre de la comunidad

Puerto Esperanza. 21.500 hectáreas con titulo a nombre de la comunidad.

Virgen Santisima (Fte. Olimpo) 21 hectáreas, no tiene titulo .

Buena Vista. 1800 hectáreas. Con titulo del INDI

Abundancia (lindando con Olimpo). 1600 hectáreas. Con titulo.

Historia de relacionamiento con los blancos

La información etnográfica relativa a los ancestros del pueblo Yshir contemporáneo es fragmentaria para el periodo anterior a la década de 1850. Aseveraciones acerca de la ubicación y el territorio de estos grupos basadas en el registro escrito anterior a dicha fecha es fundamentalmente conjetural. Sin embargo, considerando una combinación de registros escritos

con las tradiciones orales del pueblo Yshir es posible estimar que, hasta la década de 1880 cuando los blancos empiezan a establecerse en forma permanente en el área al norte de Fuerte Olimpo sobre la costa occidental del rio Paraguay, los grupos Yshiro tiene controlado el territorio formado por un triangulo cuya línea de base es el paralelo 22, comenzando en el rio Paraguay y extendiéndose hacia el Oeste hasta la intersección con la línea de longitud 60, y desde allí hasta la zona de confluencia entre los rio Negro y Paraguay (ver Mapa Etnográfico de Belaieff adjunto).

Es claro a través de la literatura etnográfica más antigua (Boggiani 1894, Baldus 1923) que hasta tiempos cercanos al asentamiento definitivo de los blancos la zona ribereña constituía un área de disputa y guerrilla intertribal con los Caduveo cuya base territorial era en el Brasil. Relatos orales de los Yshiro sin embargo enfatizan que el área ribereña estuvo en disputa solo por algunos años. En efecto, la tradición oral localiza eventos míticos como el establecimiento del ritual de iniciación masculino, la creación de ciertos animales y numerosos detalles de la formación del mundo en referencia al rio Paraguay. Esto indicaría una presencia sostenida desde tiempos inmemoriales por parte de los ancestros del pueblo Yshiro en el territorio descripto. La presencia Caduveo tiene la apariencia de haber sido un interregno propiciado por las tecnologías adquiridas de los portugueses (es decir armas de fuego y caballos). Sin embargo, la conocida saga de Basebuky, una serie de relatos Yshiro que describen como el cacique Basebuky venció a los Caduveo poniendo fin a sus ataques sobre la ribera occidental del Rio Paraguay, señalan que los Yshiro rápidamente aprendieron a usar estas tecnologías para defender su territorio (ver relato que comienza en línea 92 del anexo A).

Lo cierto es que en la década de 1880 cuando los blancos empiezan a establecerse en el área los Yshiro tienen el control exclusivo del territorio. La llegada de los blancos inicialmente significo un cierto grado de acomodamiento, pero esto fue el caso para ambos lados y ciertamente para los Yshiro no significo en principio la pérdida del control del territorio. De hecho, los blancos que comenzaron a arribar al área no tenían un interés particular en controlar el territorio pues sus objetivos eran más bien acotados. Por un lado la avanzada Boliviana que en 1885estableció Puerto Pacheco (donde hoy está la ciudad de Bahía Negra) buscaba simplemente asegurar el acceso al rio Paraguay y hacer un alarde de soberanía en el sector. Por otro lado, la avanzada Paraguaya estaba fundamentalmente formada por empresarios privados quienes habían obtenido concesiones de tierras para la tala de quebracho a ser procesado por la plantas fabriles más al sur. En 1888, esta avanzada fue reforzada con la presencia militar que desplazo a los Bolivianos de Puerto Pacheco y fundó la base naval de Bahía Negra.

Por aquellos años, el rio Paraguay ya se había establecido como una ruta fluvial bastante visitada por buques que llegaban hasta las ciudades del Matto Grosso. Por lo tanto los Yshiro estaban acostumbrados a ver blancos y existe evidencia de intercambios y trueques con ellos. También existe evidencia de interacciones más o menos pacificas con los habitantes de Fuerte Olimpo. Sin embargo el establecimiento permanente de blancos en el corazón del territorio Yshiro creó algunos conflictos. Así la tradición oral señala que el encuentro con el primer grupo de colonos blancos (Bolivianos) genero una escaramuza con muertos y heridos hasta que las partes llegaron a un arreglo (ver relato que comienza en la Línea 239 del anexo A). Es posible entender por estos relatos que **los Yshiro buscaron establecer con los recién llegados un entendimiento basado en la cooperación y no en la subordinación**. Esto es crucial para entender la historia del área y

como los Yshiro se adaptaron las nuevas circunstancias que el establecimiento permanente de los blancos significo.

Es posible dividir la historia de relacionamiento con los blancos en cuatro fases: a) De contacto simétrico; b) De progresiva interconexión con la economía de los blancos; c) De tutelaje afluente y autonomía empobrecedora; d) De autonomía afluente en peligro

Contacto Simétrico (1880- 1920)
Hasta los alrededor de la década de 1920 el relacionamiento entre los Yshiro y los blancos puede caracterizarse como de relativa simetría. De acuerdo a la tradición oral grupos de Yshiro liderados por cabezantes establecían arreglos de trabajo con varios 'patrones' de obrajes sobre la costa del rio. Es importante entender que desde la perspectiva Yshiro ellos trabajaban 'con' los patrones y no 'para' ellos. En este sentido, el trabajo a destajo operaba como un 'bien' que se intercambiaba por otros bienes manufacturados. Los términos del intercambio estaban dictados por una serie de factores: 1) dado el acceso a los recursos dentro de su territorio, los Yshiro tenían lo que hoy en día se denominaría soberanía alimentaria, es decir sus necesidades básicas de alimentación no dependían de su relacionamiento con los blancos; 2) los Yshiro estaban interesados fundamentalmente en ciertos productos manufacturados (elementos de metal, mosquiteros, armas de fuego y secundariamente en ropas y alimentos cuyo atractivo en particular para los jóvenes residía en que al ser 'exóticos' no estaban regulados por tabúes alimentarios). En este contexto, los blancos no controlaban los términos del intercambio, que debía satisfacer las expectativas Yshir, quienes se movían entre los obrajes y sus asentamientos en el interior de acuerdo a sus necesidades y deseos. Este intercambio no siempre operaba sin conflictos, y a veces estos conflictos se derivaban en hechos de violencia por ambos bandos. Sin embargo, en general parece haber predominado un ambiente cooperativo basado en la mutua conveniencia y en algunos casos amistad y confianza.

Progresiva Interconexión con la Economía de los Blancos (1920-1940)

La evidencia oral y escrita sugiere que para los años 1920s esta situación ha comenzado a cambiar. En general la zona de Alto Paraguay comienza a tener más presencia blanca, incluyendo grupos de bandidos y aventureros que, mezclados con algunos indígenas, atacan y roban indiscriminadamente los obrajes así como las aldeas Yshiro. Las autoridades responden con expediciones punitivas que atacan cualquier asentamiento fuera del radio cercano a los obrajes. Esto comienza a hacer el nomadismo Yshiro un tanto arriesgado y restringe (en forma relativa, no absoluta) la movilidad de los grupos. Además, casi medio siglo de contacto permanente comienzan a producir cambios en los patrones de consumo de los grupos Yshiro, especialmente para las nuevas generaciones el gusto por los productos manufacturados blancos se va convirtiendo poco a poco en necesidad. Esto comienza a cambiar el balance de poder entre los patrones blancos y los Yshiro. Los primeros comienzan a tener más capacidad de dirigir las acciones de sus empleados y ante conflictos y disputas tienen a su disposición la fuerza de las autoridades militares. El proceso que llevara a la guerra del Chaco intensifica estos problemas para los Yshiro haciendo su supervivencia relativamente más conectada a la economía de los blancos. Esto no significa que no hacen uso de su territorio, por el contrario, el General Belaieff no encuentra problemas en conseguir guías expertos entre los Yshiro para preparar las defensas de Bahia Negra -de hecho es sobre la base de estas informaciones que el construye el mapa del

territorio Yshiro adjuntado en este informe-. El punto relevante es que durante este periodo se intensifica el proceso por el que los bienes manufacturados se convierten en necesidades centrales para los Yshiro. Como consecuencia, aun las actividades de caza y recolección en el territorio comienzan a estar ligadas a la obtención de productos manufacturados ya sea como medio para realizar dicha actividad (armas de fuego) o como objetivo final de la actividad, por ejemplo vender los cueros de animales cazados.

Tutelaje Afluente y Autonomía Empobrecedora (1940-1980)

Aunque después de la Guerra del Chaco el acceso al territorio tradicional deja de ser problemático o peligroso, ya las actividades realizadas en él han quedado fuertemente ligadas a la economía de mercado. Emerge así una economía mixta donde los Yshiro combinan la caza comercial y de subsistencia, la pesca, la recolección, la changa en obrajes y estancias, y la estiba en puertos. Hacia 1950 los grupos Yshiro están mayormente centralizados en la misión católica de Fuerte Olimpo, la misión protestante de Puerto Diana, con algunas familias extensas teniendo sus bases en estancias como Puerto Leda, Puerto Nuevo, Puerto Esperanza y Puerto Ramos. Mientras que en esta economía mixta la subsistencia mínima está asegurada por el acceso irrestricto a la mayor parte del territorio tradicional, el acceso a bienes manufacturados y servicios como la educación y la salud están fuertemente condicionados por la dependencia hacia los patrones, ya sean seculares o religiosos. Se establece así una correlación inversa entre autonomía y acceso a bienes y servicios. Es decir, mientras más se recuesta un grupo o individuo en la autonomía que provee el acceso irrestricto a los recursos del territorio, menor es su acceso a bienes y servicios provenientes de los blancos y viceversa. Por este motivo, el vivir bajo tutelaje provee cierta abundancia material mientras que la autonomía genera escasez relativa. La consecuencia de esta situación fue que muchos Yshiro tuvieron que ponerse una 'máscara' y negar prácticas culturales que resultaban ofensivas a los patrones seculares o religiosos. Así sucedió con el abandono del ritual de iniciación entre otras prácticas.

Autonomía Afluente en Peligro (1980-presente)

Hacia la década de 1980 y a la par con los cambios aparejados por la ley 904/81, el fin del régimen de Stroessner y más tarde con el capitulo V de la nueva constitución de 1992, se comenzó a consolidar un proceso de creciente autonomía con bienestar en las comunidades Yshiro. Con la adquisición de Puerto Esperanza en 1986, este proceso tomo ímpetus, llevando a los Yshiro a recuperar la confianza en su propia capacidad de gestionar sus asuntos. Así en los años subsiguientes las comunidades de Puerto Diana y Fuerte Olimpo se deshicieron del tutelaje de misioneros pasando a ejercer de hecho su autonomía. Para mediados de la década de 1990 se habían formado cuatro comunidades independientes (Puerto Diana, Karcha Bahlut, Puerto Esperanza y Santa Teresita-Buena Vista). Es constatable en los comentarios de los pobladores y en varios indicadores (salud, educación, crecimiento demográfico, reducción de mortalidad, etc.) que la combinación de autonomía con acceso a gran parte del territorio tradicional tuvo como efecto un periodo de bienestar relativo solo equivalente al primer periodo de contacto, donde los Yshiro podían establecer en forma más o menos simétrica los términos de relacionamiento con la sociedad blanca.

Valga como comparación que mientras en el periodo anterior los Yshiro tuvieron que abandonar

sus prácticas ceremoniales para salvaguardar el acceso a bienes y servicios controlados por sus patrones, desde 1987, una vez que se aseguro el acceso autónomo a esos bienes y servicios, esas prácticas volvieron a realizarse. Más allá de la importancia cultural de este evento, el punto a resaltar es que durante este último periodo se logro un mejoramiento integral en las condiciones de vida de los Yshiro. Es decir, no solo tuvieron acceso a bienes y servicios a través de su trabajo e iniciativa sino que también pudieron determinar en forma autónoma el tipo de desarrollo más apropiado para sus comunidades, combinando elementos propios y de la sociedad mayor. Todo esto fue posible por la disponibilidad de uso del territorio tradicional. Sin embargo, esta situación duro poco y en los últimos diez años se ha comenzado a revertir rápidamente.

Para entender cabalmente las raíces del reclamo territorial Yshiro es conveniente resaltar que hasta mediados y fines de los años 90, una buena parte del territorio tradicional Yshiro, especialmente las áreas colindantes a las comunidades establecidas, estaban en manos de personas que no realizaban actividades agropecuarias intensivas. Como consecuencia, los Yshiro tenían un acceso prácticamente irrestricto a los recursos naturales de un territorio libre de deforestación. Esta fue la base del corto periodo que hemos descripto como de autonomía afluente. Desde fines de los 90s las tierras empiezan a ser compradas por nuevos dueños, especialmente Brasileros o sus testaferros, que comienzan a restringir el acceso de los Yshiro a sus áreas de uso tradicional y también comienzan a desmontar en gran escala. A esto se suman políticas de gobierno que comienzan a restringir y regular el acceso que los Yshiro tienen a los recursos naturales (incluyendo el establecimiento de una zona protegida, del parque Rio Negro, así como vedas de pesca y de caza comercial). Estos procesos se han combinado de forma tal que están llevando a las comunidades a una situación crítica que tendrá efectos catastróficos en el corto y mediano plazo.

Estado actual de las comunidades y el reclamo territorial.

Las comunidades Yshiro se pueden distinguir como comunidades satélites y comunidades de base. Las comunidades de base son las comunidades que están pobladas durante todo lo año y que se han mantenido así desde su establecimiento. Las comunidades satélites son de ocupación estacional para diferentes actividades y diversas familias alternan periodos de habitación en ellas con periodos de habitación en la comunidad de base. Tanto las comunidades de base como las comunidades satélites tienen sus propios líderes. Puerto Diana es la comunidad base de los satélites Puerto Caballo, Puerto Pollo y Dos Estrellas. Karcha Bahlut es comunidad base de Potrerito (o Wututa); Esperanza no tiene comunidad satélite. Virgen Santisima (Olimpo) tiene como satélites Buena Vista y Abundancia.

Dado el aumento progresivo de las restricciones que los Yshiro sufren para acceder a los recursos naturales que siempre han usufructuado, las tierras actualmente bajo su control no son suficientes para mantener a la población. El problema se complica por el hecho que las actividades de terceros que desforestan perjudican a los Yshiro aun en sus propias tierras. En resumidas cuentas, los recursos naturales se están volviendo inaccesibles, ya sea porque están situados en tierras que no son de la propiedad legal de los Yshiro (estancias o zonas de reserva natural) o porque las actividades de terceros destruyen los hábitats de especies que los Yshiro utilizan, dejando a las tierras de las comunidades como pequeños oasis de monte que son insuficientes para mantener la biodiversidad en un desierto desforestado.

La consecuencia de estos procesos ha sido la pérdida progresiva de la capacidad de auto-sustento. Aunque eviten las hambrunas, las comunidades viven entre periodos de escasez y periodos de escasez extrema y son extremadamente vulnerables a alteraciones climáticas como sequias e inundaciones (donde el peligro de hambre se vuelve tangible). Los pocos que tiene trabajos asalariados (permanentes o temporarios) se encuentran sobrellevando el peso de mantener a familias extensas en un contexto donde la alta oferta de mano de obra tiende a reducir los salarios por debajo del mínimo legal. Los jóvenes con disposición a continuar con sus estudios encuentran cada vez más difícil hacerlo ya que se constituyen en pesos para sus familias. Y el resultado neto de estos procesos es la emigración de jóvenes a Asunción donde pasan a integrar la creciente masa de población en la villas periféricas de la ciudad.

Dejando de lado que tanto la expansión agropecuaria como el establecimiento de zonas de reservas naturales han vulnerado los derechos del pueblo Yshir a la consulta y el consentimiento, la situación actual claramente vulnera el artículo 14 inciso 1 del convenio 169 de la OIT: "Deberá reconocerse a los pueblos interesados el derecho de propiedad y de posesión sobre las tierras que tradicionalmente ocupan. Además, en los casos apropiados, deberán tomarse medidas para salvaguardar el derecho de los pueblos interesados a utilizar tierras que no estén exclusivamente ocupadas por ellos, pero a las que hayan tenido tradicionalmente acceso para sus actividades tradicionales y de subsistencia."

La Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Nación Yshir (UCINY), la organización que federa a los lideres Yshiro, después de realizar varias consultas y discusiones internas ha concluido que la mejor forma de enfrentar esta situación es por medio de un reclamo territorial. La visión de UCINY es recuperar por medio de diversas estrategias, un territorio contiguo y con las dimensiones necesarias para servir de espacio de reproducción de la diversidad natural y del modo de vida Yshir. Al referirse al modo de vida Yshir no se está implicando una imagen petrificada del pasado sino el espacio de autonomía necesario para que los Yshiro diseñen su propio proyecto de vida, tomando de la sociedad nacional lo que les sirve y articulándolo con sus propias tradiciones. En términos concretos esto significa que el territorio que se busca recuperar tiene que permitir el sustento de la economía mixta descripta anteriormente, donde el uso sustentable de recursos naturales sea posible junto con la explotación comercial y la generación de empleo.

La UCINY está abierta a explorar todas las rutas posibles para llegar al objetivo. Esto incluye en orden de prioridad:

1) La titulación de las tierras en posesión.
2) La resolución y titulación de pedidos en conflicto (Pto. Pollo)
3) La reactivación de pedidos que se hicieron con anterioridad y que no fueron atendidos por el INDI (Pt. Ramos, Pt. Nuevo—Seccion de Pto. Leda)
4) Transferencia de tierras fiscales remanentes en el área (franjas de tierras existentes entre propiedades establecidas)
5) Compras de tierras a ser co-gestionadas con terceras partes pero tituladas a nombre de las comunidades Yshiro (por ejemplo, con organizaciones medioambientales)
6) Compras y/o expropiación de tierras o parcelas co-lindantes para formar un corredor que

conecte Parque Rio Negro y Puerto Caballo en el Norte hasta Pt. Nuevo (en el sur).

7) Obtener el co-manejo del Parque Rio Negro.

Listado de Toponimos mencionados en la compilacion de entrevistas con miembros de las comunidades Yshiro

1. **aklegra** (line 221/ page 5)
2. **Alegre** (line 2299/ page 51)
3. **Amomishi** (line 1851/ page 41)
4. **Arahbit** (line 75/page 2)
5. **Asunción** (line 435/page 10, line 491/page 11, line 536/page 12, line 665/page 15, line /page 15, line /page, line 714/page 16, line 1132/page 25, line 1289/page 29, line 1550/page 34, line 1946/page 44, line 2111/page 47, line 2188/page 48, line 2711/page 60, line 2784/page 61)
6. **Bahía Negra** (line 3/page1, line 254/page 6, line 404/page 9, line 720/page 16, line 811/page 18, line 1089/page 24, line 1119/page 25, line 1196/page 27, line 1685/page 37, line 1757/page 39, line 1826/page 40, line 2001/page 44, line 2050/page 45, line 2087/page 46, line 2266/page 50, line 2418/page 53, line 2550/page 56, line 2754/page 61, line 2927/page 65, line 2983/page 66)
7. **Beshike (se dice OIETA)** (line 56/page 2)
8. **Boquerón** (line 1931/page 43)
9. **Brua** (line 85/page 2)
10. **Buena Vista** (line 615/page 14, line 2289/page 51)
11. **Caballo** (line 60/page 2, line 727/page 16, line 1836/page 41, line 2680/page 59, line 2911/page 64, line 2941/page 65, line 2967/ page 65)
12. **Carya Balut** (line 1160/page 26)
13. **Casata** (line 1016/page 23)
14. **Cerro cora** (line 93/page 3)
15. **CHEJER WYRBTA** (line 33/page 1)
16. **Chiborra** (line 58/page 2)
17. **Deyá** (2312 /51)
18. **Diana** (289/7, 326/8, 334/8, 432/10, 444/10, 611/14, 641/14, 708/16, 761/17, 969/22, 1119/25, 1173/26, 1231/27, 1286/29, 1421/32, 1525/34, 1542/34, 1559/35, 1637/36, 1778/39, 1808/40,1895/42, 2097/46, 2250/50, 2288/51, 2437/54, 2596/57, 2625/58, 2657/59, 2804/62, 2872/63, 2929/65, 2978/66)
19. **Dos Estrellas** (1819/40)
20. **Echauta** (73/2)
21. **eitycry** (33/1)
22. **Eshima** (61/2, 111/3, 2738/60, 2958/65)
23. **Esperanza** (12/1, 44/1, 321/8, 335/8, 342/8, 373/9, 431/10, 444/10, 448/10, 617/14, 719/16, 1089/24, 1186/26, 1290/29, 1434/32, 1512/34, 1542/34, 1615/36, 1650/37, 1730/38, 1778/39, 1799/40, 1872/41, 1884/42, 2037/45, 2047/45, 2067/46, 2170/48, 2305/51, 2444/54, 2562/57, 2595/57, 2625/58, 2657/59, 2804/62, 2894/64, 2910/64, 3004/66)
24. **Estancia** (2586/57)
25. **Fortin bogado** (531/12)
26. **Fortín Galpón** (966/22)
27. **Kaanhart** (59/2)
28. **Karcha bahlut** (168/4, 261/6, 337/8, 468/11, 738/17, 1702/38, 1831/41, 2068/46, 2469/55, 2533/56, 2603/57, 2658/59, 2991/66)
29. **Keiporta** (59/2)
30. **Keiwano** (59/2)
31. **Kirkyby** (752/17)
32. **Kukyrby** (2720/60)

33. **Kukerby** (2738/60)
34. **Manene** (1645 /36)
35. **Maria Elena** (433/10, 702/16, 2201/46, 2805/62)
36. **Marin (donde le llamaban Pachija)** (187/5)
37. **Mianovichi** (267/6, 1932/43, 1996/44, 2293/51, 2739/60, 2821/62)
38. **Moiene/Moyene (se llamaba Caacupé y despúes Oya)** (58/2, 129/3, 533/12, 982/22, 1716/38, 1851/41, 2905/64)
39. **Morel** (221/5)
40. **Mori** (1852/41)
41. **Necauta** (1837 /41)
42. **Nepurwirch (**532/12, 549/13
43. **Notecaque** (1836/41)
44. **Nykauta (donde se llama Rio negro)** (2967/65, 3012/66)
45. **Nymich Puult** (64/2)
46. **Nypwirch** (58/2, 197/5, 2721/60, 2738/60, 2765/61)
47. **Nytbult** (2989/66)
48. **Ñanoviy?** (949/21)
49. **Ocho** (2352/52)
50. **Olimpo** (206/5, 278/7, 416/10, 433/10, 445/10, 493/11, 614/14, 628/14, 653/15, 743/17, 1182/26, 1366/30, 1404/31, 1873/41, 2038/45, 2451/54, 2625/58, 2641/58, 2755/61)
51. **Pechiuta** (86/2)
52. **Peishajek** (31/1)
53. **Pitiantuta** (74/2, 236/6, 2233/49, 2721/60, 2824/62, 2862/63)
54. **poitdebio** (32/1)
55. **Pooch Debio** (56/2)
56. **Portreritos (se llamaba CHESHYLE, Potreitsa),** (18/1, 58/2, 364/8, 644/15, 769/17, 1055/24, 1160/26, 1197/27, 1280/28, 1394/31, 1408/31, 1464/32, 1471/33, 1513/34, 1551/34, 1607/36, 1716/38, 1762/39, 1787/40, 1831/41, 1891/42, 1913/42, 2006/44, 2098/46, 2167/48, 2315/51, 2385/53, 2430/54, 2533/56, 2595/57, 2621/58)
57. **Pueblo Ayoreo** (2693/59)
58. **Pueblo Maskoy** (2693/59)
59. **Puerto Casado** (583/13, 805/18, 864/19, 1441/32, 1474/33, 1627/36, 1881/42, 1939/43, 1991/44, 2047/45, 2664/59)
60. **Puerto Grande** (2352/52)
61. **Puerto Guarani** (201/5, 267/6, 278/7, 1024/23, 1594/35, 1661/37, 1733/38, 1922/42, 2034/45, 2079/46, 2144/47, 2342/52, 2641/58, 2707/60, 2767/61, 2791/62, 2977/66)
62. **Puerto Leda** (3/1, 222/5, 227/5, 266/6, 342/8, 372/9, 465/11, 517/12, 582/13, 679/15, 713/16, 740/17, 768/17, 1285/29, 1647/36, 2046/45, 2066/46, 2152/47, 2272/50, 2288/51, 2306/51, 2333/52, 2527/56, 2739/60, 2775/61, 2835/62, 2858/63, 3021/67)
63. **Puerto Nuevo** (342/8, 470/11, 2669/59)
64. **Puerto Pollo** (2913/64)
65. **Puerto Ramos** (720/16, 738/17, 2316/51, 2970/65, 2918/64, 2935/65, 2956/65, 2970/65, 2998/66)
66. **Puerto Sanchez** (2149/47)
67. **Puerto Sastre** (872/20)
68. **Puerto pachiya (Pacheco)** (186/5, 239/6, 2158/48, 2754/61, 2825/62)
69. **Puerto Pinaco** (885/20)
70. **Puerto Rosario** (3/1)
71. **Rio costa** (533/12)
72. **Río Negro** (60/2, 706/16, 3014/66)
73. **San Carlos** (1509/33, 1669/37, 1883/42, 1955/43)

74. **San Pablo** (1849/41)
75. **Shymyta** (56/2)
76. **Talviera** (212/5)
77. **Tierra viva** (2971/65)
78. **Toro Pamapa** (86/2)
79. **Uturra** (32/1)
80. **Vera** (2037/45)
81. **Voluntad** (342/8, 467/11, 593/13, 2370/52, 2731/60)
82. **Yeyle** (2317/51)
83. **Yiminea** (793/18)
84. **Ynychyt** (3017/66)
85. **14** (47/2, 468/11, 532/12, 550/13, 565/13, 1161/26, 1643/36 2733/60, 2865/62, 2911/64, 2990/66)

MAPA ETNOGRAFICO DEL CHACO PARAGUAYO

FAMILIAS INDIGENAS DEL CHACO

RAZAS DE AMERICA

EXTRACTO DE LOS MAPAS DEL MUSEO DE MEXICO AL 24 MEXICO DE 1936

ESQUIMALES
ATABASCA
SIOUX
IROQUES
BERLENI
BARAFTIN
MAYA
PALENQUE

AZTECA
OTOMI
MIXTECA
ZAPOTECA
TOTONAC
ARAWAK
CARIBE
TAPUYEGRI
GUAYCURU
ARAUCANO
PUELCHE
TEHUELCHE

ESCALA 1: 2.000.000

Por Gl. J. Belaieff
Antiguo Miembro
de la Sociedad Geografica
de la Imperial Rusa
1932
Editado en 1941
SOCIEDAD CIENTIFICA DEL PARAGUAY

NOTA

CENTROS Y MISIONES
Existente y Abolicionados ○ ● ☉ ✝

ERRUPCIONES Y RAZZIAS

NOMBRES DE LOS RIOS Riachos y Lagunas
En idiomas (XVII) y dialectos (1-6) nativos

TRIBU DESAPARECIDA Apae-Cepçé

TRIBU AUSENTE Payagua
(Hoy en la Colonia Capitán Bado)

LEYENDA
FAMILIAS INDIGENAS

I — **MBYA** (Mbue Guaraní)
**Chiriguano, "Cadiuveo, "Mbayas, "Caingua.

II — **CHANE** (Un idioma sagrado y ara moderno (guaraní y tupua)
"Tembeta, "Guarañocs, "Tapuyos, "Tapiete, "Nanaigua, "Guaná.

III — **GUAYCURU** (idioma Lengua y variaciones)
"Einslet, "Lengua, "Angaité, "Sanapá, "Toba.

IV — **TOBA** (Idioma Toba. Mascoy hablan el Toba, pero las mujeres el Angaité)
"Apgue - Cepçué (†) "Collagá, "Pilagá, Masecoy,
Toba, Sapt. y Occ.

V — **NOCTENES** (Cuatros idiomas parientes)
Mataco, "Choroti, "Chulupi, "Maccá.

VI — **ZAMUCO** (4 dialectos)
Echiro (Chamacoco, Bravo y Manso)

VII — **MORO** (dialecto distinto) relacionado al Zamuco
Mascuuslis, Potoreros, Caatani, Otuqui, Moro
Guarañocs, Siracua.

TRIBUS GUARANIZADAS G.
TRIBUS LENGUAIZADAS L.

OBSERVACION: Los Tapuyos antiguamente se han lla
mado Ñandeyig, su vieja patria Tong. Tong. Los
Chamacocos descienden de los Ueralia, y vivian en el
Noreste.

FAMILIAS INDIGENAS DEL CHACO

ESCALA 10. 000000

Potoreros (Jaidbe)
Otuquis (Xarabu)
Moros (Dexrat)
Guarañocas (Jaant)
Caaduies (Coustuta)
Cuarayos (Axusuraquis)
Tapuyos (sofhada)
Sirionas
Chiriguano
Tembeta
Zamuco
Chané
Toba
Mataco
Choroti (Yofuaha)
Chulupi
pilagá (Tokoshua)
Sanerosi
Sintó!
Renaigua
Apgue-Cepçé
Collagá
Mascá
Pitilla
Collagá
Xolaibá
Payagua
Toba
Lengua
Chamacoco
Toida
Cadiveos
Gerda
Kadubé
Maese
Wora (Peyega)
Avarri (tʔy)

L. Pitanaha
L. Picuiguo
L. Yrendague
NEHAUTA

When Natural Resources Are Also Persons
Building Agreements Across Radical Differences: A Research Experience

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Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Nación Yshir (UCINY)

The research problem

In 2008, and after three years of struggling with the Paraguayan government, Unión de las Comunidades Indígenas de la Nación Yshir (UCINY), a federation of the Yshiro Indigenous people of Paraguay, was invited by the Paraguayan government' Secretariat of the Environment (SEAM) to become involved in ongoing projects for natural resource management that had been unfolding in their traditional territory since the turn of the 21st century. Having been mostly concerned with countering its lack of involvement, UCINY was not prepared to advance any particular vision of natural resource management that reflected the Yshiro communities' desires.[1] In fact, such a vision had never been articulated. Thus UCINY faced the challenge to generate among members of the communities it represents a common vision that could be negotiated and articulated with the government promoted vision of natural resource management for the area.

Creating a common vision among community members and articulating it with the one promoted by the government implied a double challenge for in both cases what had to be connected were profoundly divergent notions of what was the 'thing' at stake in the visions. For instance, for governmental agencies as well as for some Yshiro, animals and trees are resources whose value is determined mainly by their service to humans and the larger ecosystem. Thus, while they might need to be conserved and used sustainably, they do not deserve any particular deference or concern beyond their utility. For other Yshiro this is an untenable proposition, for they conceive animals and trees as non- human persons with whom one must sustain respectful relations that are not fully expressed by practices of conservation and sustainability. Moreover, in some cases the practices arising from these different conceptions clash with each other (see Blaser 2009).

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[1] For a detailed discussion of the wider background of these struggles and the eventual involvement of the Yshiro in natural resource management projects see…

In partnership with UCINY, the Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland obtained funding from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa to carry out a research that had as its objectives: 1) To shape, along with the communities, a shared vision of how and why to manage the natural resources; 2) to communicate and articulate effectively this vision with the programs that the Paraguayan government is already pursuing; 3) to monitor and document both the participation process among the communities and the tools created and developed during the process.

This paper reports on the 3rd objective providing an account of the methodology used and created as well as an evaluation of what has been learned in the process.

Defining radical differences and the problem of translation

The project and the methodology proposed for the research started from the assumption that the kinds of differences that the project sought to articulate are radical or ontological. In a nutshell what this means is that the 'thing' at stake in, lets say, 'wildlife management,' is not the same for the Yshiro shaman and for the biologist. Where the biologist see an animal species, (i.e., a group of organisms sharing a certain genetic make-up, sharing certain demographic patterns, and instinctual behavior), an Yshiro shaman see *doshipo* (fully volitional non-human persons with whom humans can sustain relations of reciprocity).

The usual way to understand this difference is that it entails a cultural difference: what we have here are different 'perspectives' (expressed by the different words) on the same 'thing.' The problem is that the claim of different perspectives is often followed by the subordination of some perspectives to the one that claims to better represent the 'thing' at stake. Not surprisingly, it is usually the scientific perspective that makes such claim and thus becomes the standard against which other perspectives are measured.

In the Yshiro case, these kinds of differences have also emerged within the communities. This is largely due to the differential impact that formal education, and patterns of employment in state and other non-Yshiro institutions has had. Thus, while not claiming scientific credentials, the views of those Yshiro (often the most literate) that are more consonant with the views of scientifically trained 'experts' are the ones that end up being uphold in specific interventions, even when they supposedly involve consultation and participation of the communities affected. This has two consequences. First, externally driven processes of consultation tend to disregard radical differences and assume mutual understanding when it might be an equivocation what is taking place. For example, Yshiro claims that animal are persons with whom they engage in social relations are often translated by external interlocutors into a sort of natural ecologism that is consonant with their own understanding of the environment. This is not the case and such assumptions had led in the past to sever conflicts (see Blaser). The second consequence of this oversight of radical differences is that the people who feel their views are not taken

into account withdraw from participating in externally promoted interventions and feel resentful against those Yshiro who participate, all of which exacerbate internal tensions.

This project self-advisedly have sought to avoid these problems by operating on the assumption that there is no 'thing' out there that can be distinguished from the 'perspectives' on it. For the purposes of this paper it will suffice to assume that we are operating just with perspectives and that the 'thing' out there is irredeemably unknowable. Now, this starting point poses a challenge to the usual way we understand the possibility of translation and communication across different cultures or perspectives. In effect, the possibility of translation between different cultures is often premised on existing a 'reality out there' that provides the common ground. *Part of the challenge of this research was then to find whether and under what conditions translation and communication across radical differences were possible. Thus, a central rule of thumb guiding the overall design of the project was never to minimize differences and rather suspect any apparent agreement.*

The Specificity of the Situation:

In order that the reader can properly gauge the value of, and draw lessons from, the experience here presented, it is important to foreground some relevant features that are very specific to it.

The Yshiro live in five main communities in the area of Alto Paraguay. Physical communications with the rest of the country are limited for three of these communities as they depend either on dirt roads that are not accessible during rains or on long boat trips through the Paraguay river. Of the other two communities, one has access to a military airport (also inoperable with rains) and the other has a more secure road that can hold through the rains. Two of these communities are composed by about 500 individuals each, and the other three by about 300 each. Over a total population of about 2,000 individuals, 800 are adults. Given that the contemporary Yshiro are the descendants of a reduced group that survived various epidemics until the 1950s, they are all closely related. Thus, most of the 800 adults are direct descendants (great or great-great-grand child) of one of the 35 elders that participated in the research project. As it will be explained below this was a very important characteristic that made possible some of our research methods.

Of the Yshiro adult population, about 50% are completely illiterate and have limited command of Spanish, although many are quite fluent in Guarani, the other official language in Paraguay, which is also the first language of most of the lower class in the country. Perhaps 15% of the adult Yshiro is fully literate. The other 35% have variable degrees of literacy.

Each Yshiro community is lead by a 'comision directiva' composed by an elected head leader, a deputy leader, and a secretary. The three leaders from each of the five communities in turn compose the general assembly of UCINY, and from among its members a general coordinator, a secretary, and a treasurer are chosen by the leaders. UCINY was created in 1999 and with more or less intensity has been active since then. Although in its beginning the intention was that the organization would eventually generate a group of leaders with extensive experience in dealings with external institutions, this has never happened. Rather, the leadership of the organization, as well as at the community level, has remained very unstable with frequent changes of leaders. While from a certain perspective (and particularly from governmental and non-governmental institutions that have to plan and carry out diverse projects and often need stable interlocutors) this is a problem, from the perspective of the grassroots this has been positive for it has forced the entire Yshiro leadership to be very responsive to the demands of community members. Moreover, the Yshiro communities are relatively equalitarian and non-hierarchical. While there is some incipient economic differentiation, the capacity by wealthier families and individuals to turn this economic inequality into power differentiation that will secure their position in the future is limited.

The relatively small number of adults and the characteristics of the Yshiro leadership bot compelled and enabled a very thorough process of consultation and participation. In effect, the research processes ended up involving in one way or another all the adults living in Yshiro communities (as opposed to Yshiro individuals living in urban centers). Having over 20 years of experience working with the Yshiro communities, the principal investigator was also able to foresee, bring into discussion with the leaders, and generate preventive mechanisms to address potential ways in which the participation of specific groups could be hampered. These discussions were also very helpful to generate a sense among the leaders that there was no 'cutting corners' if we wanted to generate a common vision of natural resource management that could hold through time.

The Research

The Research Team and the Overall Design

The main research team was composed by the principal investigator; the leaders forming the *comision directiva* of each community; an Yshiro research assistant who had collaborated in previous occasions with the PI and had acquired skills in facilitation of focus groups and interviewing. A few other individuals collaborated at different points of the research and they will be mentioned in due time.

Although it was not in the original design of the project, having the leaders being part of the research team turned out to be very helpful to create a sense of

ownership of the research process.[2] In effect, instead of having a research team asking and responding to a research question to then transfer the research result to the leadership and the community, the leaders had to address the question themselves: how do we get the various visions held by community members to feed into a common vision?

The research project was divided into three stages A) Identification of Problem Areas or Mapping Differences; B) Elaboration of a Common Vision of Natural Resource Management that UCINY could pursue; and C) Communication and Implementation of Vision through partnerships with programs being pursued by the Paraguayan government.

Mapping Differences

During this phase the research team focused on gaining an understanding of the areas on which community members disagree regarding their understandings of the land. The purpose was to produce a conceptual 'map' of those points in which different groups of community members differed on their understandings of processes that were taking place in the Yshiro territory. This was done through a combination of focus groups; informal discussions; and community meetings (usually organized around festive meals).

The research process started with an informative workshop facilitated by the PI for the Yshiro leaders on Indigenous rights in relation to protected areas. This workshop also served the purpose of consolidating the research team and refreshing the purposes of the project as it had taken two years from the original plan to the moment the project was funded. The leaders and the Yshiro research assistant then relayed the information of this workshop to the rest of the Yshiro through community meetings. The intention of these meetings was to place the 'topic of the project' in the minds of community members in preparation for the invitations to participate in the focus groups.

Focus Groups

Crucial to organizing the focus group was a wealth of familiarity the PI had with the Yshiro communities and the dynamics of interactions between different groupings. For instance, through several years of participant-observation the PI had seen that illiterate Yshiro are more reluctant to put forward their opinions when they diverge from those of more literate individuals. This reluctance is even more acute among older illiterate individuals. However, illiterate individuals that publicly self-describe as traditionalists are not shy at all in airing their views, although they often grow frustrated by what they see as the 'ignorance' of the most literate Yshiro and particularly the literate youth. Depending the context, some of this literate youth

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[2] Originally the PI and the Yshiro leaders had agreed that the research team would be composed

feel intimidated by the presence of traditionalist Yshiro and thus are reluctant to voicing their opinions in their presence.

The points above are just a couple of examples of the kinds of considerations that informed the criteria adopted to organize focus groups. The point is important as it foregrounds again how crucial it was for the project to have someone who could provide a 'distanced intimate' view on community dynamics. In effect, while in conversations with the leaders they quickly could recognize the kinds of dynamics just mentioned, they would have had some difficulties in articulating them if someone would have come and asked them what would be the relevant criteria to form focus groups so that a good sense of variability of views on natural resources could be gained. Similarly, the usual criteria (gender, age, and the like) would have not captured the complexities of community dynamics and would have generated a biased understanding of the differences at stake.

The focus groups were formed according to the following criteria:

A) 'social age' (the pertinent distinction in life cycle for the Yshiro is not the number of years a person has but a combination of sexual maturity and whether one has or no children and then grandchildren and great-grandchildren). Groups of youngsters (young people with no-children) and elders (people with great-grand children) were formed with these criteria.
B) Self-identification as traditionalist. These groups were intergenerational and included both male and female.
C) Reliance on wages Vs. reliance on 'natural resources' for subsistence. Depending the communities this criteria determined the formation of, on the one hand, groups of state employees (nurses, teachers and municipal clerks) and wage laborers in cattle ranches; and, on the other hand, groups of fishers, hunters, artisans and small farmers.
D) Literacy (groups of male and female, young and older individuals fully literate people and similarly composed groups of illiterate people).
E) Women groups.

The criteria were cross-used. That is, participants in each group were identified according to the other criteria as well. For example, in reporting a focus group formed by youth the facilitator would identify participants as male/female, traditionalist/non-traditionalist, literate/illiterate; wage/subsistence and so on. In addition, we prepared a list with the names of each adult and made sure that every one of them was invited to participate in, at least, one focus groups. Only 20% of those invited did not attended, but they did participate in community meetings and informal discussions.

The questions and the procedure

The PI and/or the Yshiro research assistant, in person, invited prospective participants to the focus groups. It is important to point out that while the PI is not

fully fluent in Yshiro language, he understands it enough to get the general contours of a conversation without needing immediate translation. A first set of the focus groups were run by both the PI and the Yshiro research assistant in one of the Yshiro communities over a period of ten days and subsequently the Yshiro research assistant continued facilitating them in the remaining communities until they were all completed (8 groups of about 10-15 people in each of the 5 communities).

The meetings were held in schools or community centres (in the cases one was available). They lasted between 3 and 5 hours and were very relaxed. The conversations were opened by reference to the preparatory discussions in the community meetings about Indigenous rights in relation to protected areas, a topic which had become ever-present in conversations given the increasing presence of governmental programs. The PI would offer a brief characterization of the argument made by governmental and non-governmental institutions promoting natural resource management programs to justify these programs. The Yshiro RA would then translate -- in subsequent meetings the RA would do this introduction.

The governmental argument was rendered in very plain language as the notion that there are less and less things in the *yrmo.* This is an Yshiro word that has an expansive meaning going from the forest to the whole of reality or universe. The word of course includes but exceeds the kinds of 'things' non-indigenous peoples call 'natural resources,' thus we specified that the government meant animals, trees, and fish. After this, we asked people to give their impressions about this argument, were they in agreement, disagreement, partial agreement? why?

Once conversations around this topic fizzled out the research team would raise another question: What, in your opinion, is the way of taking good care of the yrmo?

Finally another question was posed to the group: Do you think the Yshiro have good enough knowledge and education for the following generations to live well in/with the yrmo? We would elaborate on the question discussing different possible livelihood scenarios available today, for example, heavy reliance on direct use of natural resources; agriculture; wage labor and a mix of all of them. Further we would ask, what was needed in order to make any of these scenarios viable.

The discussions were fully recorded and then translated into Spanish by Yshiro individuals who are fully bilingual. These translations were then transcribed and the PI and the Yshiro RA revised the transcripts eliciting common threads that would allow grouping answers. From this process a first draft of the 'map of differences' was produced. The map consisted of a document in which the three main questions were presented and under each of them a range of answers that had been provided and the research team had rendered in one or two sentences; all of them presented in bullet points.

Translation, Informal Discussions and Feedback through Community Meetings

The first draft of the map was translated into Yshiro and then was orally performed by the Yshiro research assistant who has had experience in community radio broadcastings. This performance was recorded in CDs that were distributed in the communities so that people could listen to it and discuss informally with their friends and family. After two or three weeks of the CDs having circulated in the communities, community meetings were called and facilitated by the leaders and the Yshiro RA. In these meetings the content of the draft map were discussed and commentaries and feedback were requested from community members. The RA also instigated informal conversations with individuals and families that did not participate or did not spoke in the community meetings. People were asked if they felt that their views of the issues were reflected in some of the answers given to the questions. They were also invited to give their opinions on answers they did not like or felt that were problematic. These discussions were again recorded, translated into Spanish and transcribed so that the PI and RA could incorporate these views and modify the map of differences.

The Map

The entire process of elaborating the map of differences took eight months. The final version was also translated into Yshiro and recorded for the benefit of those Yshiro who are illiterate. The actual 'map', as well as the transcripts of the focus groups are not available for the public as the Yshiro leadership consider this sensitive information that might be used by external interests in ways detrimental to the Yshiro communities. However, for illustrative purposes let us indicate the general tenor of the differences that came up through the process.

While among community members there was a widespread perception that 'things' in the yrmo are harder to get, people were divided in their view as to the causes and possible solutions. In general terms, peoples' views spread between the two poles that we had foreseen from the beginning as the most contrasting views. In effect, on one end there was a view that tended to remain very focused on direct chains of causality to explain the situation and the possible solutions. This view could be expressed thus: "Yes, there are less animals and trees because the cattle ranchers are clear cutting. Therefore the government has to put better controls. One way to do this will be to train Yshiro personnel." On the other end there was a view that put the emphasis on the most expansive meaning of the word *yrmo* and thus stressed the sense of the problematic as deriving from a lack of respect to the proper way of relating among humans and between humans and non-human persons, which is the way to ensure a healthy yrmo.

Besides the two contrasting views just described, the map of differences also laid down a series of contrasting middle range views. That is, views on the problems that were very pragmatic and circumscribed. For example, in discussing the causes, effects and possible responses to diminishing raw materials immediately accessible to artisans, some people suggested that the problem was clear cutting for cattle-ranching and therefore that the response should be aimed at stopping this process.

Such view was in contradiction with other Yshiro participants' view that the problems of the communities (including that of the artisans) would be solved if cattle ranching rather than curtailed was intensified and further promoted (through subsidies) among community members. It was argued that in this way, most community members would have jobs available and would not need to do handicrafts. These contrasting middle range views were also accompanied by other views that while differing were not necessarily at cross-purposes of each other.

Although in order to protect the Yshiro communities from misuse of the information we cannot offer further details it is important to point out that a number of correlations were established between particular groups and certain ways of understanding the problematic and possible solution. In very general terms the strongest correlation was between, on the one hand, dependence on wage labor and a tendency to see the problematic of diminishing natural resources as an opportunity to demand from the state a set of solutions that would further enmesh Yshiro livelihoods with the formal economy; and on the other hand, more or less direct reliance on natural resources and a tendency to see the problematic of diminishing natural resources as demanding a vigorous push to retain and regain control over territory and autonomy. In short, the map provided a clear view of the kinds of differences that, in principle, made the elaboration of a common vision truly a challenge.

Elaborating a Common Vision

The second phase of the project was aimed at the elaboration of a common vision that different internal groups of Yshiro could embrace. For this, the project had envisioned a crucial role for elders and current and ex-leaders. As it is made clear below, the rationale for this involvement was very pragmatic.

The role of elders
Two observations, enabled by years of involvement of the PI with the Yshiro communities, ground the key role that elders played in the methodology of this project. The first observation has already been mentioned: given the demographic history of the Yshiro communities, a group of the oldest elders can constitute a fairly good 'representative group' of the entire Yshiro communities under the criteria of direct kinship. In effect, virtually any adult Yshiro will have a direct connection to one of the oldest elders either through maternal or paternal lineage. The second observation (which might or might not be related to the first) is more subtle: the oldest Yshiro elders usually raise above the endemic factional politicking of younger generations and take a more inclusive approach to defining problems and possible solutions. These characteristics led us to hypothesize that the elders could provide valuable suggestions regarding how to bridge the differences made evident through the mapping phase.

The procedure to involve the elders in the research process was twofold. First elders constituted one of the focus groups in each community during the mapping of difference process. When the process was over these focus groups were convened to work with the

map of difference. The PI and the RA facilitated one of these meetings in a community and the RA conducted the other four. The meetings were convened twice a day between two and three hours and without a deadline other than the time required by each group to come out with a set of proposals that they strongly agreed would be acceptable for people who understood the problematic of natural resources (as expressed trough their answers to the questions) in very different ways. The minimum amount of time that these discussions took was three days in one community and six on another. The work was organized thus: in the first meeting the Yshiro RA would present orally the map of differences in terms of 'problems,' that is, how different people conceive that was 'the problem' posed by diminishing natural resources. Then the elders were asked to discuss and come up with a group answer to this question:

"If you were leaders what would you propose to all these peoples as a solution to what they see as a problem? Remember, you want to have as many followers as possible."

The PI and RA did not intervene in these discussions but adopted the role of 'devil's advocate.' Every time the group of elders came up with possible answers the PI and/or RA would pose challenges modeled after the different profiles of views that had emerged from the mapping of difference phase. For example, if some of the proposals tended to overlook that some Yshiro saw the problem of diminishing natural resources as an opportunity to demand more state presence, the PI or RA would adopt this perspective to challenge the answer, demanding that it be made explicit how this view was contemplated in such answer. It was left to the elders to call off further discussions when they felt that regardless of the effort a given view could not be fully encompassed by their answers.

The discussions were recorded for archival purposes but were not translated or transcribed. In this stage, the PI and/or the RA recorded in writing different points that emerged out of the conversations and that the elders indicated they had reached an agreement on and did not want to pursue further discussion. From each group then the PI and/or RA drafted a brief document with the main points of what the group had considered their best answer to the question posed. Then the groups in each community selected an elder that took their results to a discussion with the representatives of other communities. In this meeting, the elders' representatives were asked to merge the results and come up with a common 'answer.'

Throughout the discussions and the constant challenge to make the possible 'solution' as encompassing of diversity as possible, one aspect of the 'answer' provided by the elders started to take the shape of a set of principles and a set of objectives that UCINY would have to pursue. These principles and objectives were made the focus of the next stage.

The role of leaders and ex-leaders

The PI and RA organized the responses of the elders in the form of a draft document containing a set of principles and objectives for UCINY. This document, translated orally was presented to a workshop of leaders and ex-leaders. The purpose of the workshop was

to determine the degree to which this group of individuals with various experiences with non-Yshiro institutions saw the principles and objectives workable both internally in the communities and in relation to potential allies and detractors. From this process a new draft of principle and objectives was generated.

Translation and Community Feedback

This draft was again recorded in Yshiro language in CDs that were circulated in the communities for informal discussions. After a while the leaders and the RA called for community meetings were feedback on the principles and objectives were elicited. These were modified again and the final results were presented for ratification in community meetings. The process of elaborating a common vision took six months.

Articulating with Other Potential partners

The next and final step in the project was to articulate with potential partners the common vision that had been elaborated through the previous phase. For this UCINY invited several state and non-governmental agencies to a workshop. The purpose of the workshop was first to determine potential partners that could assist UCINY in the pursuit of its objectives and then to establish with them a road map for concrete actions. The workshop was facilitated by a specialist in SAS2 (see http://www.sas2.net) hired by the project. In principle there were no difficulties in eliciting support for UCINY's vision. In part this was because, as we will discuss in the final reflections, the work of translation done by the Yshiro had already 'softened' the radical differences embedded in the principles and objectives that were presented in the workshop.

Final reflections

In this section we want to highlight two aspects of the research. On the one hand, we are confident that we were able to carry out an extremely robust process of participation. In effect, the permanent generation of feedback loops and the care put on translation (both of language and of 'media') had as an effect that community members were very energized by the process and now have the principles and the objectives as a reference point to evaluate the performance of leaders and of UCINY. On the other hand, the process of translation across radical difference, particularly as performed by the elders, was very revealing. Our impression was that a 'traditionalist ethos' predominated in the way they worked.

As pointed out above, the word yrmo (which is often translated as forest) is expansive, but it is precisely those self-defined as traditionalist who put the accent on the most encompassing meaning: i.e., as the whole of reality or 'the world.' Now, this is a particular notion of reality or world. First, reality/the world is conceived as all-encompassing threads of relations (the image of a multidimentional spider- web somehow might convey the idea). Second, there is no outside to this web, no possibility of conceiving that someone can see it from outside. This assumption has

two consequences: a) no possibility of conceiving a relation of objectivity (i.e., a subject distinct from the object to be known); b) no possibility to assert a given understanding as more accurate than another, all understandings are a function of the position one has in the web. Third, the entities that emerge from this web are like the knots in a net, and more importantly they are all 'persons' (human and non-human) which respond meaningfully.

In practical terms, these notions played out an important role in how the elders grappled with the divergences revealed through the mapping of differences exercise. In effect, in the final meeting of elders' representatives they first reached a general consensus very much based on traditionalist assumptions. Translated into English the consensus could be described thus:

The overarching concern of the Yshiro and UCINY should be with keeping good relations within the Yrmo. No-thing in the yrmo stands by itself, all 'things' are related, all 'things' must be respected. We must not allow anyone to deny these relations (i.e., create false divisions) and endanger the Yrmo.

The elders were very aware that these notions could not be communicated exactly in these terms to the rest of the communities for they would generate some adverse reactions. This is the case because what I present here is already a translation of a conceptual universe that is communicated largely by referencing the oral tradition or mythology, the mention of which might generate adverse reaction among the Yshiro that have adopted Christian faiths and those that associate 'tradition' with backwardness (usually the most literate and those working in the state). So, what the elders did was to draft a set of guidelines in a language that could be acceptable for everyone while at the same time addressing some of the concerns that arise from a traditionalist understanding of the yrmo. The guideline they drafted included these points:

1.   Projects promoted by UCINY must not generate divisions in the communities
2.   Projects must be conceived as components of a larger vision that encompass all communities and groups within the communities.
3.   All aspects of life in the communities are interconnected. Thus, UCINY cannot accept that external agents carry on projects or actions in one aspect without attending to all their consequences in other areas of life.
 4.   To understand all consequences those who promote projects must consult those who will be affected.

What was really interesting in this exercise was that the elders were not as concerned with communicating a certain vision of the yrmo as with generating practices that would enhance the principles that they see sustain the yrmo. For this they 'translated' their consensus into a language that still might instigate the practices they hoped for. This 'translation' however implies a loss. As it is evident, in the first iteration of the consensus, it is clear that for the elders 'relations' transcend the human/non-human divide. In the second iteration (the proposed guiding principles), the human/non-human

divide is slowly reintroduced by distinguishing concerns for humans (i.e., the first two points focusing on communities), from concerns with things (the third point focusing on 'aspects' of life). The four point is very interesting as it leaves on the 'eye of the beholder' to decide whether consultations with those affected implies only humans or not.

When the principles proposed by the elders were put up for discussion and feedback by the leaders a further translation took place. This translation was informed by what the Yshiro leadership perceived of the institutional environment in which they operate. The final drafting of UCINY's the principles read thus:

UNITY: Projects in which UCINY becomes involved must be conducive to unity rather than divisions in the communities

COMMON BENEFIT: Particular projects must be part of a general plan that benefits all communities and groups within the communities.

INTEGRALITY: The topics of environment, property and access to traditional territory; education, and work opportunities for the Yshiro are one and the same thing. Thus, UCINY will not accept that external organizations promote projects or policies focusing on one topic without consideration of its effects on other topics.

NO TO CHARITY: Except in emergencies, projects that boil down to donations of goods without a working plan or considering the need for ongoing follow-up and support are of no use to the Yshiro as they only promote dependence.

CONSULTATION: The projects and policies that affect the Yshiro people will have to be consulted with the people in appropriate forms according to the procedures established by UCINY

SHARED PRINCIPLES: Organizations that want to work with UCINY must agree to these principles.

As it might be evident, at each stage the traditionalist understanding of the yrmo has been further 'camouflaged' under a terminology that might be comprehensible and acceptable for the potential audience and yet promote practices that at least partially coincide with those traditional understandings. In other words, **through the research process, the key methodological strategy that emerged to 'translate' across radical differences was focusing on the practices that can be promoted rather than on trying to convey a set of particular understandings.** This would indicate that a viable way of addressing radical differences is to achieve 'productive misunderstandings,' that is situations in which interlocutors may not be referring to the same 'thing' but the practices associated to these different things do not interfere with each other. But crucial for this is to always keep in sight that even if the misunderstanding works, it is nevertheless a misunderstanding.

Cultural Geographies

Ontology and indigeneity: on the political ontology of heterogeneous assemblages

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What is This?

Ontology and indigeneity: on the political ontology of heterogeneous assemblages

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Abstract
The first challenge faced by a project that seeks to bring concerns with ontology and indigeneity into a conversation is to sort out the various (and possibly divergent) projects that are being mobilized when the former term is used, not the least because what do we mean by ontology impinges upon how we can conceive indigeneity. In this article I play a counterpoint between two 'ontological' projects: one in geography, that foregrounds a reality conceived as an always-emergent assemblage of human and non-humans and troubles the politics that such assemblages imply. The other in ethnographic theory, that foregrounds that we are not only dealing with a shifting ontology, a (re)animated world, but also with multiple ontologies, a multiplicity of worlds animated in different ways. Thus, if the heterogeneity of always emerging assemblages troubles the political, the very heterogeneity of these heterogeneous assemblages troubles it even more. What kinds of politics and what kinds of knowledges does this troubling demand? I advance the notion of political ontology as a possible venue to explore this question.

Keywords
assemblages, heterogeneity, indigeneity, ontologies, political ontology

Considering the increasing references to the term 'ontology,' one cannot but agree with Escobar that we are witnessing an ontological turn in social theory.[1] Yet, beyond the widespread use of the term, what is actually meant by the 'ontological' in the 'turn' is a rather mixed bag. Thus, an important challenge faced by a project that seeks to bring concerns with ontology and indigeneity into a conversation is to sort out the various (and possibly divergent) projects that are being mobilized when we use the former term, not the least because what we mean by ontology impinges upon how we conceive indigeneity. It is beyond the scope of this intervention to attempt such a mapping project in any thorough manner; rather, what I do here is to gesture in this direction by playing a counterpoint between two specific versions of the ontological turn. One involves works

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that show an increasing interest in notions of more-than-human agency in geography. The other involves ethnographic theory's reinvigorated engagement with radical alterity. Certainly these versions do not exhaust how ontology and indigeneity can be thought of together, I single them out because playing a counterpoint between them pushes a reconsideration of both ontology and indigeneity and delineates a promising field of inquiry and practice that I will tentatively call political ontology.

Lively assemblages (of all kinds!)

'More-than-human' agency has come to the fore along with the increasing clout that Science and Technology Studies (STS), Deleuzian philosophy, and some versions of phenomenology have gained in geography.[2] As several articles gauging this development make evident, however, neither is the problematic entirely new nor so the approaches to it constitute a singular and homogenous corpus.[3] The strands that interest me the most here are those that, to paraphrase Whatmore, put the onus on the livingness of the world and, more specifically among these, those approaches that stress a sort of distributed agency which troubles modernist ontological assumptions and categorizations (e.g. human/non-humans, animate/inanimate, nature/culture and so on).[4] These approaches delineate a picture of socio-material worlds as always-emergent heterogeneous assemblages of humans and more-than-humans.

One spinoff of such conceptualizations has been a revaluation of the political prompted by the

sheer density of things that suffuse and shape everyday life . . . In such a context it is perhaps no longer possible to imagine either the human as a living being or the collectivities in which we live apart from the more-than-human company that is now so self-evidently internal to what it means to be human and from which collectivities are made.[5]

What is politics, and what kind of politics do we need when heterogeneous assemblages are at stake that overflow stable categorizations of human/non-humans, animate/inanimate, nature/culture and so on? What ethical demands are associated with such questioning of the political? What is knowledge in a context where the distinction between subject and object becomes moot? These are some of the profound and unsettling questions associated with a conception of the world as a lively assemblage of humans and more-than-humans.[6] Yet, a cursory look at the more-than-humans that, according to some of these approaches, trouble the political reveals that they are quite specific: formerly labeled objects; entities that were formerly slotted to nature such as atmospheric phenomena or animals; and emerging techno-entities from Glofish to new diseases.[7] In other words, the focus here is on the troubling of modernist ontology by entities that, while overflowing its categories, still appear as legitimate matters of concern in terms of such ontology. A brief commentary on Isabelle Stengers' contribution to Braun and Whatmore's edited volume, *Political Matter*, which itself exemplifies the kind of concerns raised by the livingness of the world, will help me underscore the significance of the point.[8]

In her contribution, Stengers points out that one of the problems faced by the project of including non-humans into political theory is that

we may have to face the eventual demands of beings that were comfortably put away as creatures of human imagination . . . Gods and goddeses, djinns and spirits are not objects for positive, factual knowledge; they do not even have the power to persuade all of us that they exist, in the way that Hurricane Katrina did.[9]

A possible alternative, she suggests, would be that only that which is able to satisfy experimental demands and resist experimental tests would be deemed to truly exist. In other words, the very specific protocols of the experimental sciences would sort out the things that really exist from those that our culture makes us believe exist. Might something of this sort be happening with the new approaches in geography which, again paraphrasing Stengers, open themselves to the question of living together with the creatures of technoscience, and yet do not seem to address the concerns of those who know that Gods, djinns and spirits matter? The absence of these kinds of entities is telling with regards to the homogeneity of assumptions that help to sort out legitimate from illegitimate matters of concern.[10]

The importance of these absences is thrown into sharp relief when we consider the extent to which some events in Latin America further trouble the troubled waters of a modernist ontology — and its correlated political theory – that is trying to cope with animated stuff and nature. For instance, if something is troubling the political in the Andean countries (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru), it is the political activation of earth-beings such as *pachamama*, which, while mistakenly translated as Mother Nature, has many characteristics that would situate it along what Stengers calls 'creatures of the imagination,' such as Gods, djinns and spirits. Albeit articulated in a different way, the presence and reality of pachamama in these countries is as inescapable as that of Hurricane Katrina. Indeed, in Ecuador and Bolivia, and through the mobilization of the heterogeneous assemblage that brings it into being, pachamama has forced its own constitutional recognition as a subject with rights![11]

My commentary underscores the point that we are not only dealing with a shifting ontology, a (re)animated world (if it ever was not animated), but we are dealing with multiple ontologies, a multiplicity of worlds animated in different ways. Put in other words, if the heterogeneity of always emerging assemblages troubles the political, the very heterogeneity of these heterogeneous assemblages troubles it even more. What kinds of politics and what kinds of knowledges does this troubling demand? This is one of the crucial questions that a conversation between ontology and indigeneity should bring to the fore. But before even attempting to tackle the question directly, we need to discuss different uses of 'multiple ontologies' in the context of Indigenous research.

Multiple ontologies are not 'cultures'

Though not exclusively, to a large extent the term ontology in the context of Indigenous research is used to signal a difference between a given Indigenous group and various agents of western modernization/colonization.[12] In this use, it is sometimes hard to discern how ontology is different from the concept of culture besides being somehow 'deeper.' In effect, in this usage, the meaning of ontology seems to be captured by a dictionary definition:

> any way of understanding the world must make assumptions (which may be implicit or explicit) about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence, relations of dependency, and so on. Such an inventory of kinds of being and their relations is an ontology.[13]

Staying just with this definition of ontology, however, opens it to the now well-established postcolonial critique that a focus on this 'inventory' might recall old ethnographic conventions where an essentialized 'Other' is constructed in a way that homogenizes both the West and the rest and occludes on-going colonial relations.[14] But then, is there a way of addressing difference that does not necessarily fall back into essentialisms? Such is the attempt of an emerging corpus of ethnographic theory, which both grapples with an unexpected 'side-effect' of the postcolonial

concern with 'othering' and radicalizes some of its aims.[15] The side effect has been that in avoiding 'othering' analysts have many times, and almost blindly, jumped into 'saming.' To paraphrase Naomi Schor, if othering involves attributing to the objectified other a difference that reinforces the primacy of the self, saming denies the objectified other the right to her difference and subjects her to the laws of the self.[16] Translated into scholarly practices, this has meant the proliferation of studies in many diverse settings that implicitly assume the universal applicability of the categories and the concerns emanating from a Eurocentric canon. From such vantage point, and to return to my Andean example above, pachamama appears to the analyst simply as a symbol of strategic essentialism in the field of ethnic politicking, a token in the struggle for resources in the context of globalizing capitalism, and/or a metaphor mobilized to save the environment from the ravages of industrialism, among other familiar conceptualizations. Comfortable on the assumption that the subaltern cannot speak, we surrender any effort to hear about 'things' that our categories cannot grasp; we cannot bear ourselves to treat seriously the claim that pachamama is an active and sentient being.

Ethnographic theory's re-engagement with radical alterity interrupts these forms of saming by radicalizing a key aim of postcolonial theory, namely the challenge to 'deeply enshrined colonial and Eurocentric ways of categorizing the world.'[17] And the radicalization stems from the fact that the challenge is done at the level of ontology, more specifically through taking other ontologies seriously.[18] As one of the exponents of these rethinkings of ethnographic theory, Matt Candea, has argued, at least in anthropology, the turn to ontology 'comes from the suspicion that cultural difference is not different enough, or alternatively that cultural difference has been reduced by cultural critics to a mere effect of political instrumentality. By contrast, ontology is an attempt to take others and their real difference seriously.'[19] Briefly, besides countering the 'thinning' of a concept of culture that has been converted into a symbol of identity politics, the main argument for displacing culture with ontology goes like this: the notion of 'cultural difference' is a function of the modernist ontological assumption that there is one reality or world out there and multiple perspectives or cultural representations of it. Thus, when we treat difference as cultural we are sneaking up and advancing a particular ontology, which does not do justice to the ontological difference that might be at stake.[20] Of course, the contrasting ontological assumption that is at play in this proposition is that there are multiple realities or worlds, period.

It is useful to stress that the argument involves two related yet different moves, and, depending on where one puts the accent, the results vary. One of the moves involves the claim of multiple ontologies. The other involves the inclusion in the analysis of the analyst and her/his ontological assumptions. The first move alone quickly leaves us feeling that we have replaced culture with ontology without much gain. This is patently obvious in works where one could replace the word ontology with culture without any significant impact in the analysis presented. Less obvious, but perhaps more generalized, are the cases in which modernist ontological assumptions are enacted (and thus reinforced) even when they are being denounced. Without detracting from its many contributions to the 'ontological turn,' Philippe Descola's monumental work of synthesis appears to me as the paradigmatic example of this reassertion of the modernist ontology.[21] In effect, Descola situates the modern ontology as one among others, thereby refuting the former's ontological assumption that what we have is one world or reality, and that differences reflect multiple perspectives on that reality. Yet, Descola's project is a mapping of the totality of ontologies; what he is saying is: look there, multiple ontologies! Thus, the very basic ontological assumption of a single (describable) object world and a describing subject gets enacted, even as this world is said to contain multiple ontologies rather than multiple cultures. As a consequence, the claim of multiple ontologies is turned into a sort of meta-ontology, the statement of a fact, the really real ultimate

nature of reality. In this way, the crucial problem of the one-reality world remains unshaken: that which differs from the ultimate reality being postulated does not exist, or only exists as error, belief, or false consciousness – in short, we cannot take that difference seriously.

To counter this circling back to the problems of a one-reality world Martin Holbraad proposes ontology as a heuristic device, a tool to force our attention on how we deploy our own ontological assumptions in the analysis and how they might differ from those of our interlocutors:

> So what makes the ontological approach to alterity not only pretty different from the culturalist one, but also rather better, is that it gets us out of the absurd position of thinking that what makes ethnographic subjects most interesting is that they get stuff wrong. Rather, on this account, the fact that the people we study may say or do things that to us appear as wrong just indicates that we have reached the limits of our own conceptual repertoire . . . The . . . task, then, is not to account for why ethnographic data are as they are, but rather to understand *what* they are . . . Rather than using our own analytical concepts to make sense of a given ethnography, we use the ethnography to rethink our analytical concepts.[22]

So, here is ontology as heuristic device, a tool to rethink our analytical concepts. However, what is not self-evident is why rethinking our analytical concepts is something that should be pursued. For many espousing the 'multiple ontologies' approach, it goes without saying that doing otherwise betrays the existing multiplicity of worlds or realities.[23] But this leads us back to the problem of the claim of ontological multiplicity as an ultimate reality, which poses a contradiction to the project of ontology as heuristic device. The contradiction is particularly evident when one faces the modern ontological assumption of one reality and multiple perspectives of it. If this is how things really are, then the claim of multiple ontologies is wrong. Conversely, if the claim of multiple ontologies is right, the modernist claim cannot but be wrong. And then we end up in the very same absurd position (our ethnographic subjects get things wrong) from which the ontological approach was supposedly able to take us out. I try to avoid this dead end by treating ontology as a way of worlding. And it is precisely in this point where I see a potentially fruitful counterpoint between the developments in geography and ethnographic theory just discussed.

A way of worlding (the tool enacts the fact)

Before moving forward with my argument I need to clear up some possible misunderstandings. I am aware that the term 'worlding' is usually associated with Heidegger; however, I am not building on his philosophy for my own use of the term, at least not directly. As I discuss further, I use worlding because it seems to capture succinctly the understanding I am trying to give to the term ontology. I must recognize my limited qualifications to discuss in depth whether and to what extent my use coincides or differs from Heidegger's. However, I should point out two issues in this respect. First, some of the authors I build on more directly, Latour for example, explicitly distance their approach from this philosophy.[24] Second, the Heideggerian project of establishing a fundamental ontology sounds very close to a claim of ultimate reality, and in this respect it seems to run counter to what I seek, that is, enacting a proposition hospitable to multiple ontologies. Let me unpack now this idea.

As I advanced, I find an alternative to the dead ends of taking ontology either to be an ultimate statement of fact or a heuristic device in taking it as a way of worlding. In this formulation the heuristic device contributes to enact the reality of the fact. It is critical to stress, however, that the understanding of reality being postulated here is one that I draw from some of the same sources as

the 'lively geographies' I discussed, namely the material-semiotics versions of STS (e.g. Donna Haraway, John Law, Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, Annemarie Mol), and thus share with them the assumption that reality is always in the making through the dynamic relations of heterogeneous assemblages involving more-than-humans. Yet, as I indicated at the beginning of this piece, the first difference that engaging with indigeneity introduces to the lively geographies' idea of ontological heterogeneity and fluidity is that we must grapple with the idea of multiple ontologies, which is being developed in very sophisticated ways by what can be dubbed new ethnographic theory. Now, if we also attend to Indigenous traditions of knowledge, we also need to consider what for lack of a better term I call storied performativity. Annemarie Mol's work with atherosclerosis will help me to clarify what I mean by storied performativity.[25]

Mol has shown how, in a Dutch hospital, atherosclerosis emerges as a different entity depending on the practice under consideration. Under the microscope and the manipulations of the pathologist, it emerges as a narrowing of the artery. According to the records and interpretations of the clinician, it emerges as the patient's expressed pain. In turn, in the graph of the radiologist, it emerges as differential blood pressure in a limb. In each case, there is a different enactment of atherosclerosis, a multiplicity that does not always add up as pieces in a puzzle. Sometimes there is pain but no narrowing of arteries, or there is differential blood pressure in a limb without pain, and so on. This multiplicity is eventually (and provisionally) rendered singular through a series of conceptual and politico-managerial procedures, through which some versions of atherosclerosis are discarded or made to fit uneasily with each other.

The key point to be drawn from Mol's ethnography is that *in practice*, atherosclerosis (or reality) is multiple because there are multiple practices. Yet, for the radiologist, the clinician and the pathologist, it goes without saying that they are treating a single entity/disease. Moreover, the assumption of singularity is crucial to the very practices through which they perform atherosclerosis. This enacted assumption can be storied thus: there is an objective reality out there (the disease atherosclerosis) and there are (more or less accurate) subjective or disciplinary perspectives on it. This is the succinct version of the modern 'myth' telling us what kinds of things (e.g. subjects and objects) and relations (e.g. of perspective) make up this particular world. Of course, the connections can be narrated in the reverse order: we can move from one of the various storied versions of the modern myth to its enactment in practices. This is the road often taken by ethnographers when showing how myths are enacted in the practices and embedded in the institutions of the Indigenous peoples they work with. However, the key point that I want to stress is something that numerous Indigenous philosophers and intellectuals have made explicit: stories are not only or not mainly denotative (referring to something 'out there'), neither are they fallacious renderings of real practices; rather, they partake in the variably successful performance of that which they narrate.[26]

One implication of this understanding is simply that different stories imply different ontologies or worlds. The stories do not 'float' over some ultimate (real) ontology. Another crucial implication is that the stories being told cannot be fully grasped without reference to their world-making effects. And the corollary of all this is that, indeed, some 'ethnographic subjects' can be wrong, not in the sense of a lack of coincidence with an external or ultimate reality, but in the sense that they perform wrong, they 'world' worlds we do not want to live in or with.

In short then, if ontology refers to ways of worlding, my own formulation of ontology constitutes a way of worlding. It is not a description of how the ultimate reality gets done but rather a proposition that seeks to be hospitable to the notion of multiple ontologies. But, as with any proposition, to hold it needs to be enacted; this is where ontology becomes political ontology.

Politics and knowledges otherwise

Here we come back full circle to questions about the kinds of politics and knowledges that the heterogeneity of heterogenous assemblages demands. As Bingham has pointed out, tackling an increasingly fuller world in which coexistence with non-humans is a condition and not a choice, the vision of a city-polis in which all kinds of things may coexist and thrive must

> recognize the necessity of supplementing in practice the ethical imperative of unconditional hospitality to the strange(r) or the new arrival with the political responsibility of questioning, assessing, and ultimately perhaps only admitting certain of those candidates (new people or new things) to join the collective (or, at least, only admitting them under certain conditions).[27]

Hovering over this formulation is the Latourian notion that ontological multiplicity demands the 'progressive composition of a common world' through due process. Indigeneity troubles the project of a 'common world' by querying what due process means. What procedures are deemed acceptable to rule in or to rule out the kind of entities that make up the collective? Indigeneity troubles this precisely because it signals that collectives (or assemblages, or, to use my term, ways of worlding) do not get constituted in a vacuum but rather in relation with each other. Put bluntly, you cannot have GMOs without the electricity produced by dams that destroy the abode of the *Kanipinikassikueu* (Innu spirit master of caribou). So a discussion aimed at sorting out whether GMOs are to be part of the collective or not will unavoidably involve the question of whether or not, and how, *Kanipinikassikueu* is or becomes a legitimate 'matter of concern.'[28] How to do this?

I do not have a proper answer, only a hunch about a possible contribution that a conversation between ontology and indigeneity can offer: a political ontology. The term is meant to simultaneously imply a certain political sensibility, a problem space, and a modality of analysis or critique. The political sensibility can be described as a commitment to the pluriverse – the partially connected unfolding of worlds – in the face of the impoverishment implied by universalism and potentially by the project of a common world. I say partially connected because the idea here is that these worlds are not sealed off from each other, with clear boundaries – they are certainly connected, yet there is no overarching principle that can be deduced from these connections and that would make this multiplicity a universe.[29] Of course, the pluriverse is a heuristic proposition, which, in the context of the previous discussion, means that it is an experiment in bringing itself into being. The problem space can then be characterized as the dynamics through which different worlds or ontologies bring themselves into being and sustain themselves even as they interact, interfere, and mingle with each other. Finally, and in contrast with other modalities of critique or analysis, political ontology cannot be concerned with a supposedly external and independent reality (to be uncovered or depicted accurately); rather, it must concern itself with reality-making, including its own participation in reality-making. And this, of course, cannot be conceived as an autonomous move from how we engage the ways in which others make realities, which to me is ultimately what the term indigeneity denotes.

Notes

1. Arturo Escobar, 'The "Ontological Turn" in Social Theory: A Commentary on "Human Geography without Scale" by Sallie Marston, John Paul Jones II and Keith Woodward', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 32(1), 2007, pp. 106–11.
2. B. Braun, 'Environmental Issues: Inventive Life', *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(5), 2008, pp. 667–79.
3. Castree and Nash for instance remind us that what they call posthuman geographies are informed by 'long-standing interests in the complex relationalities and generative capacity of the categories "humans" and "nature",' in Noel Castree and Catherine Nash, 'Posthuman Geographies', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(4), 2006, p. 503. Similarly, Whatmore stresses the character of 're-turn' of these new developments, see Sarah Whatmore, 'Materialist Returns: Practising Cultural Geography in and for a More-than-Human World', *cultural geographies*, 13(4), 2006, pp. 600–9. For reviews of the various trends concerned with more-than human agency see Whatmore, 'Materialist Returns'; and Braun, 'Inventive Life'.
4. Whatmore, 'Materialist Returns', p. 603.
5. Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore, 'The Stuff of Politics: An Introduction', in Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore (eds), *Political Matter: Technoscience, Democracy, and Public Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. ix–xi.
6. See Braun, 'Inventive Life'.
7. See Jane Bennett, 'Thing-Power', in Braun and Whatmore, *Political Matter*, pp. 35–62; N. Bingham, 'Bees, Butterflies and Bacteria: Biotechnology and the Politics of Nonhuman Friendship', *Environment and Planning A*, 38, 2006, pp. 483–98; Braun and Whatmore, *Political Matter*; Castree and Nash, 'Posthuman'; A. Donaldson, 'Biosecurity After the Event: Risk Politics and Animal Disease', *Environment & Planning A*, 40(7), 2008, pp. 1552–67; Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
8. Braun and Whatmore, *Political Matter*.
9. Isabelle Stengers, 'Including Nonhumans in Political Theory: Opening Pandora's Box?', in Braun and Whatmore, *Political Matter*, p. 4.
10. See also Sundberg this issue.
11. Marisol de la Cadena, 'Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond Politics', *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(2), 2010, pp. 334–70.
12. For a variety of takes that nevertheless underscore the use of ontology in relation to Indigenous alterity see Ruth Panelli, 'Social Geographies: Encounters with Indigenous and More-than-White/Anglo Geographies', *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(6), 2008, pp. 801–11; Richard Howitt and Sandra Suchet-Pearson, 'Rethinking the Building Blocks: Ontological Pluralism and the Idea of "Management"', *Geografiska Annaler*, 88(3), 2006, pp. 323–35; Jay Johnson and Brian Murton, 'Re/placing Native Science: Indigenous Voices in Contemporary Constructions of Nature', *Geographical Research*, 45(2), 2007, pp. 121–9; Richard Howitt, 'Scale and the Other: Levinas and Geography', *Geoforum*, 33(3), 2002 pp. 299–313; Renee Louis, 'Can You Hear us Now? Voices from the Margin: Using Indigenous Methodologies in Geographic Research', *Geographical Research*, 45(2), 2007, pp. 130–9; Philippe Descola and Gísli Pálsson, *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996); N. Bird-David, 'Feeding Nayak Children and English Readers: A Bifocal Ethnography of Parental Feeding in "The Giving Environment"', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(3), 2008, pp. 523–50; Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro, 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 4(3), 1998, pp. 469–88;
13. John Scott and Gordon Marshall, 'Ontology', in *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). This seems to be the dominant understanding of ontology in GIS parlance, where the thrust is to render in visual form the 'conceptual maps' according to which Indigenous peoples understand the entities that make up their territories. See David M. Mark and Andrew G. Turk, 'Landscape Categories

in Yindjibarndi: Ontology, Environment, and Language', Lecture Notes in *Computer Science*, 25, 2003, pp. 28–45.

14. Joel Wainwright, for example, refuses ethnography on these grounds in his *Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008). In anthropology the critique is already standard, for a recent restatement see Orin Starn, 'Here Come The Anthros (Again): The Strange Marriage of Anthropology and Native America', *Cultural Anthropology*, 26(2), 2011, pp. 192–3. For one of the original sources of this kind of critique see C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

15. See da Col and Graeber, 'Foreword: The Return of Ethnographic Theory', *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 1(1), 2011, pp. vi–xxxv.

16. Naomi Schor, 'This Essentialism Which is Not One', *differences*, 2, 1989, pp. 38–58.

17. Catherine Nash, 'Cultural Geography: Postcolonial Cultural Geographies', *Progress in Human Geography*, 26(2), 2002, p. 222.

18. Again, to use the Andean example, the mobilization of *pachamama* would raise questions not only about homogenizing categories such as West, Indigenous, and the like but also about the applicability and scope of categories such as ethnic politicking, capitalist expansion and environmental crises. The point is not that these categories might be wrong but rather that they do not exhaust what might be there; that is, they do not exhaust the ontological question. In this sense, (reinvigorated) ethnographic theory resonates more with the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality and Decolonial thinking (MCD) paradigm than with the postcolonial theory that emerged from the French and British colonial experience. In contrast to the latter, which takes aim at Enlightenment ideals as central to understanding the entrapments generated by colonialism, the former foregrounds how the 16th century Spanish and Portuguese colonial encounters were formative of the very configuration of ontological assumptions that will be expressed in the Cartesian *cogito*. Thus, MCD opens the door for a critique of the very ontological categories of modernity as being inherently connected to coloniality. For an overview of the MCD paradigm, see Arturo Escobar, 'Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program', *Cultural Studies*, 21(12–13), 2007, pp. 179–210. For a comparative discussion of postcolonial studies and MCD, see Nalini Persram, 'Spatial and Temporal Dislocations of Theory, Subjectivity, and Post()Reason in the Geocolonial Politics of Subaltern Studies', *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies*, 11(1), 2011, pp. 9–23.

19. M. Carrithers, M. Candea, K. Sykes, S. Venkatesan and M. Holbraad, 'Ontology is Just Another Word for Culture: Motion Tabled at the 2008 Meeting of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory, University of Manchester', *Critique of Anthropology*, 30(2), 2010, pp. 152–200. Candea in Carrithers et al., 'Ontology is Just Another Word', p. 175.

20. See Mario Blaser, 'Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without "Cultures"?', *Cultural Studies*, 23, 2009, pp. 873–96; Holbraad in Carrithers et al., 'Ontology is Just Another Word'.

21. Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

22. Holbraad in Carrithers et al., 'Ontology is Just Another Word'.

23. Holbraad poses the point thus: 'The alternative [to assuming that differences are differences in the way people represent the world] must be to reckon with the possibility that alterity is a function of the existence of different worlds per se', Holbraad in Carrithers et al., 'Ontology is Just Another Word', p. 183.

24. See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

25. Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham, MD: Duke University Press, 2002).

26. Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe, CA: Clear Light Publishers, 2000); Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2008); Jo-Ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); Brian Burkhart, 'What Coyote and Whales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology', in Anne Waters (ed.), *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 15–33.

27. Bingham, 'Bees', p. 495.
28. Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik – An Introduction to Making Things Public', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds), *Making Things Public-Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 96.
29. Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004).

Biographical note

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Notes towards a political ontology of 'environmental' conflicts

Mario Blaser

ON 5 JUNE 2009, a deadly confrontation took place in the Peruvian Amazon between police forces and a group of protestors mostly composed of indigenous Awaj'un people who had taken control of a highway to protest President Alan Garcia's decrees facilitating the concession of their territories to oil, timber and hydroelectric corporations. Leni, a young Awaj'un leader, explained what motivated his participation in the protests:

> We speak of our brothers who quench our thirst, who bathe us, those who protect our needs – this [brother] is what we call the river. We do not use the river for our sewage; a brother cannot stab another brother. We do not stab our brothers. *If the transnational corporations would care about our soil like we have cared for it for millennia, we would gladly give them room so that they could work here – but all they care about is their economic benefit, to fill their coffers with wealth.* We do not understand why the government wants to raze our lives with those decrees. (IWGIA 2009; emphasis added)

Around the same time, in the Paraguayan Chaco, the Yshiro indigenous people were struggling to force a network of state institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with transnational connections to allow them to participe in various plans for the so-called management of 'natural resources' in their traditional territories. The plans included the creation of a reserve of biosphere, zoning, and the establishment of a national park. The background to these plans was an intense process of deforestation, led mainly by large cattle ranchers who had been enticed to move into the area by the economic policies of the Paraguayan state. The combined result of this process and the government responses to it had been the curtailment of the Yshiro's capacity to live life as they had done previously. In an interview with the author, Modesto Martinez, an Yshiro leader, described his people's concerns about the way things were being done:

These ecologists now come and tell us we cannot hunt, they tell us we cannot fish, they tell us we cannot cut trees. Why? I don't know, they always say we have to care for nature ... mother nature. Why they don't go to those ranchers who bulldoze the forest? Why they speak of nature? I went to Spain, those environmental NGOs took me to meet their friends there and I saw very well, in Spain there is no more trees, all is cement. The poor earth cannot breathe, all flattened out under the heavy cement. And the children, they only want to drive in cars and write with computers. They have no trees to climb on. The Spaniards buy trees from other places, I saw the boatloads with my own eyes ... Then they go to university and learn about nature in their blackboards ... and then they come and tell us we have to respect nature ... why they don't come and stay with us? *We grow along with the trees. They are our relatives ... they give life to us and when we die we give life to them ... Why they speak of nature? That's something on the paper, they need to come and learn with us about the trees, just like this, face to face, person to person.* (Emphasis added)

These vignettes illustrate the two faces of environmental conflicts that are proliferating where indigenous peoples find themselves at the intersection of the push from capital and states to tap into so-called 'undeveloped natural resources' (Mander & Tauli-Corpuz 2006) and the counter-push from civil society and governments to protect 'hotspots of biodiversity' from the effects of the first phenomenon (Dowie 2009).

Environmental conflicts are the bread and butter of political ecology, which Joan Martinez-Alier (2002) has defined as the study of ecological distribution conflicts, meaning conflicts about access to, and control over, natural resources. However, as is evident from the expressions of indigenous participants, in some cases these conflicts go beyond the issues of access to and control over 'natural resources' to involve the very definition of the 'things' that are at stake. Neither the Awaj'un nor the Yshiro spokespersons posed their primary concern as being about control of and access to resources; in fact, both were explicit about 'making room' for, or inviting, others (corporations or environmentalists) into their territories. Rather, their concern was with the values and assumptions with which others approach their territories, without care and without a personal relationship with the nonhuman inhabitants of these territories. One is warranted in saying that in these cases the indigenous peoples are defending not simply access to and control over resources; they are defending complex webs of relations between humans and nonhumans, relations that, for them, are better expressed in the language of kinship than in the language of property.

Attending to the limitations of an approach that takes for granted that 'natural resources' are what is at stake in so-called environmental conflicts, Arturo Escobar has stressed the need to consider the power differentials between various knowledges and cultural practices (Escobar 2008). To continue with our examples, by privileging a perspective that sees 'the environment' as natural resources to be exploited or protected over a model that conceives its constituents as nonhuman agents whose relations with humans are better conveyed in terms of kinship, a cultural distribution conflict is created. In other words, in these cases two different culturally specific ways of understanding the environment clash with each other. Of course, whichever cultural perspective gains the upper hand will determine the access to, use of and relation to 'the thing' at stake.

Thus far the idea of cultural distribution conflict does not pose major conceptual difficulties. However, Escobar is also pointing at something else: he signals that we must remain attentive to the power relations between different knowledges. Once we follow this line of reasoning it becomes pressing to shift focus from culture to the epistemic formation of which the very concept of culture is a part. Why? Because besides being used by analysts and commentators to explain and know the conflicts, this concept is also used as a weapon wielded in the conflicts. For example, indigenous peoples appeal to notions of cultural rights to confront processes that will affect their capacity to sustain their 'life projects.' In response, states, corporations and environmentalists dismiss those claims on the basis that respect for the culture of indigenous peoples should not obstruct the rational 'management' (whatever this might mean) of what in the last instance is just nature. At bottom what is being argued is that not all cultures or ways of knowing 'nature' (the world out there) have the same standing in rational politics, the arena where decisions affecting a territory and its population are debated. Then the questions arise, based as they are on the concept of culture: What is the standing of our own analysis in these struggles? What do our analyses do in these contexts? The short answer is that they perpetuate existing power relations.

In this chapter I will unpack this answer by advancing the argument that the problem raised by the kinds of environmental conflicts illustrated in the examples I described above is a politicoconceptual one, and thus cannot be fully addressed by using the established concept of culture; rather, it requires a political ontology approach. I present my argument in three sections, beginning with a characterisation of the politicoconceptual problem, then moving on to present political ontology as a possible way to address it, and closing with a brief discussion of what a political ontology of environmental conflicts could entail.

Environmental conflicts as a politicoconceptual problem

The thrust of my argument is that some environmental conflicts both unsettle what is commonly construed as reasonable politics (i.e. a politics where the parties agree about what is at stake) and make evident the limitations of the concept of culture, the tool with which the social sciences try to apprehend and make reasonable what in principle appears as lying beyond reasonable politics. The first step in building this argument will be to delineate the contours of reasonable politics. Some examples of responses given by governments to the kinds of environmental conflicts I depicted will be of help in this.

The Peruvian president, Alan Garcia, tried two kinds of responses to the conflict in the Amazon mentioned previously. Before the violent clashes took place, he tried to dismiss indigenous demands as irrationality trumping progress. In declarations to the press he said,

> These people are not first-class citizens. What can 400 000 natives say to twenty-eight million Peruvians, 'You don't have any right to come round here'? No way, that would be a grave error, and those who think that way want to lead us into irrationality and a backward, primitive state.[1]

After the violent clashes, public opinion at large turned against the government. Thus, seeing that his appeals to 'reasonableness' did not work to sway the 'twenty-eight million Peruvians' in his favour and against the natives, Garcia tried another argument: foreign left-leaning governments (Venezuela and Bolivia) were behind the protest.[2]

A year after these events, in June 2010, indigenous peoples from the lowlands of Bolivia marched towards the capital city to demand from the leftist government of Evo Morales more participation in deciding whether and how natural resources that lie in their territories should be extracted. Morales accused the marchers of being manipulated by right-wing forces and by the US embassy.[3]

At around the same time, June 2010, the National Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador rejected the mining and water law passed by their former political ally, centre-left President Correa. The indigenous concern was that the law did not leave in the hands of affected communities the decision as to whether disruptions to be caused by mining in their territories were deemed acceptable or not, and therefore whether projects should proceed or not. Correa responded by saying, 'We cannot be beggars sitting on a bag of gold because that will keep us in poverty, backwardness and immobility. We must develop our extractive potential and not fall in an extreme ecologism.'[4]

Besides demonstrating the self-interested readings that governments can make of popular protests, the responses are illustrative with regard to what is considered reasonable politics in Latin America. Facing indigenous demands for the right to decide over the conditions of their own lives, the right-leaning Peruvian government first sets a limit on what indigenous peoples can reasonably aspire to as citizens of a multicultural society: their 'cultural differences' (e.g. their conception of natural resources as relatives) cannot override the progress and greater good of the nation. Seeing that the characterisation of the indigenous demands as irrational does not really work, the government then turns to another explanation: the mobilisation is not irrational but ideologically motivated. In other words, the mobilisation is about natural resources that leftist political forces want to use and control for their own purposes. The Bolivian leftist government goes directly for this kind of explanation, but inverts the ideology they assign to dissidents: the right is manipulating them. The Ecuadorian president essays a variation: he accuses dissidents of being extremists, of going beyond a reasonable concern for the environment, where a reasonable concern would be to care for the environment as a *resource* for human ends.

In sum, between the roof of reasonable cultural demands and the floor of reasonable environmental concerns, and between the left and right walls, lies the realm of reasonable politics. Beyond those confines lies irrationality, where politics is no longer possible. And precisely what lies beyond any rational politics is what these governments (like many others) refuse to engage with: the possibility that what is at stake in the conflicts does not fit within the nature/culture and left/right categories. Certainly anthropology and other social sciences have picked up what lies beyond reasonable politics and, showing that it has its own rationality as 'culture', have contributed to bringing it back into the arena of reasonable politics – but always subject to being judged according to dominant conceptions of what counts as a reasonable demand to have cultural differences respected (Povinelli 2001). Thus, crucial to an understanding of the limits of culture to intervene in the conflicts that concern us is gaining a grasp of how the 'reasonable' gets defined in reasonable politics.

Dismissing indigenous peoples' claims about what motivates their mobilisation and protests with the argument that such claims are unreasonable (either because they are based on mistaken beliefs or because they hide the real motivations) carries the implicit assertion of an epistemologically superior standing. The dismissals are saying either 'You are confusing how things really are with what your culture tells you about them', or 'For ulterior motives you are trying to confuse us about how things really are'; and in either case they are also saying 'We do know how things really are and must act in consequence.' Where does this 'epistemological confidence' come from? Bruno Latour's characterisation of the two great divides shaping the 'modern constitution' might give us some hints:

> The Internal Great Divide [between Nature and Culture] accounts for the External Great Divide [between Us and Them]: we [moderns] are the only ones who differentiate absolutely between Nature and Culture whereas in our eyes *all the others* – whether they are Chinese or Amerindians, Azande or Barouya – *cannot really separate what is knowledge from what is society*, what is sign from what is thing, what comes from Nature as it is from what their cultures require. (Latour 1999: 99; emphasis added.)

In short, 'moderns' have more than a culture, more than a perspective: they have knowledge. And the confidence that they have more than a perspective is premised precisely on recognising the difference between what is nature (or reality out there) and what is culture (the subjective representation of reality). Recognising such difference has allowed moderns to develop the proper procedure for knowing reality as it is: universal science.[5]

Here we go back to the justifications that the various agents of modernity (governments, corporations, environmentalists) advance to override the claims of indigenous peoples: we cannot stop progress and the greater good in the name of respecting picturesque, perhaps lovable and romantic but ultimately unrealistic cultural beliefs. The forests are lumber, genetic pools, oil and water; mountains are rocks and valuable minerals; these are all things that can be turned into commodities for the growth of the economy. Certainly, environmentalists will jump in and say, 'Well, the science of ecology tells us that these are delicate ecosystems that cannot be destroyed without consequences.' 'No problem,' is the response, 'let the ecologists make environmental impact assessments and figure out exactly how much and in which ways we can pull resources out of the earth without completely destroying it. Perhaps we can even preserve some hotspots of biodiversity for the benefit and aesthetic enjoyment of humanity.' Now, at this point the conversation does not involve indigenous peoples any longer; now it is a conversation among members of the tribe of the moderns who are using their only reasonable protocol to determine how to treat nature: they use universal science. Nonhuman relatives? Spirits? Ancestors? Those are not within the purview of science, they are not real, they are human fabrications and therefore fall within the domain of culture.[6]

What is left for those who have culture but not knowledge? Well, they can claim in the political arena their right to keep their identities, their cultures and their beliefs, but can never expect that they will be taken seriously and at face value when they speak about what the moderns call nature (Poirier 2008; Povinelli 1995). It is true that evolving national and international frameworks increasingly recognise a variety of indigenous rights (to be consulted, to have their territories respected, to be compensated and so on), thereby creating a whole new set of instruments and avenues that indigenous peoples can use to defend their worlds. But these rights are

all crafted to fit dominant parameters of reasonability. Can you imagine a politician or a corporation stopping a profitable mega-development project because the natives say a spirit or ancestor does not want it? At best, the natives might mobilise their various rights and, if the political conditions are favourable, build alliances with other concerned groups until they are able to have politicians and corporations stop the project, but on reasonable grounds!

The reasonableness of the demands will depend on the degree to which they are aligned with 'reality out there'. In other words, the test question that will be posed to these demands will be whether they are grounded on 'reality' or not. And who is to determine this alignment? Universal science? No surprise then about the army of expert consultants that indigenous peoples have to enrol to back up their claims and demands. Thus, one of the problems with using the concept of culture to intervene in and analyse certain (so-called) environmental conflicts is that some participants in the conflicts seem to be more cultural than others, that is to say, they do not have real knowledge, they have cultural beliefs.

But we can take the idea that some participants are more cultural than others in another direction: it might indicate that for some participants the world cannot be encompassed by the concept of culture, or nature for that matter. Following this meaning would lead us to cosmopolitics. But to show this I need to remain for a moment with the idea that some are more cultural than others in the sense that they don't have real knowledge, and discuss what I consider to be a misguided attempt to counter this assumption.

Since the 1980s and especially in the domain of development, conservation and natural resource co-management, some social scientists have advanced the argument that other cultures also produce valid knowledge, labelled Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous Knowledge (IK), and that these knowledges could be integrated with scientific knowledge on an equal footing (Berkes 1999; Brokensha et al. 1980; Sillitoe 2000, 2007; Warren et al. 1995). I will not rehearse the many critiques that have been made of the idea of knowledge integration (see Agrawal 2005; Nadasdy 2003, 2007); rather, I am interested in discussing a common assumption underlying these debates, namely that the problem posed by other knowledge traditions is politico-epistemological.

At bottom, the question that proponents of IK or TEK first raise is the eminent epistemological question: how do certain indigenous people know the world? Then follow related questions and debates: How does this way of knowing relate to others (and particularly scientific knowledge)? Are they equally valid? Can they be integrated? And so on. The debates and the questions gravitate towards the affirmation or denial of a certain assumption: that we are all equally cultural or, what amounts to the same thing, that we all have valuable perspectives on the world that we can call knowledge. What is not in question is the *world* that is to be

known. Put another way, debates around IK do not raise the ontological question (what is there to be known?); rather they surreptitiously return us to the terrain of reasonable politics where the ontological distinction between nature and culture dominates. Let me briefly illustrate how this return to reasonable politics takes place.

In Figure 2.1 we have two sketches of different ontological armatures. The one on the left is a sketch of the modern ontological assumptions that would make debates on IK an epistemological problem, that is, a problem of the perspective afforded by a particular culture's vantage point on the world. On the right we have the sketch of a relational ontology, where there is no distinction between nature and culture but rather the entities that exist emerge from a web or network of relations. If you imagine the sketch of the relational ontology being shrunk or reduced to a small square, then labelled 'culture' (or 'way of knowing') and then repositioned in the left side of the figure alongside the other squares with the label 'culture', you get a sense of how debates on IK bring us back to the terrain of reasonable politics by converting radical differences (ontological differences) into just another cultural perspective on nature (or reality out there).

Once we are securely within the modern ontology, we are back on the terrain of reasonable politics, and here those who know by assuming the nature/ culture divide, that is those who have universal science, run with the advantage. The epistemic privilege of universal science might not be obvious and apparent in all cases where different 'claims to know' collide, precisely because of the role

FIGURE 2.1 *Modern and relational ontologies compared*
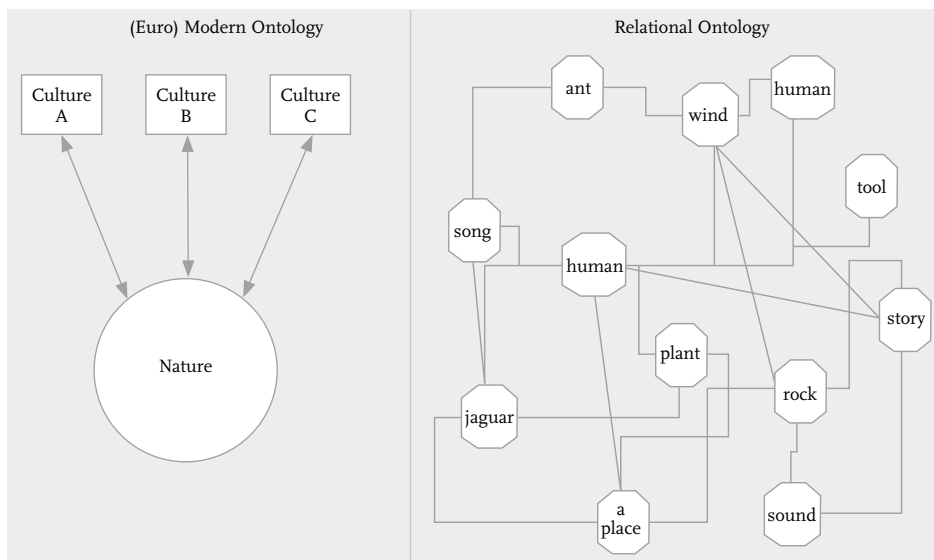
that multicultural tolerance plays nowadays in relation to indigenous peoples. Thus some cultural difference is tolerated inside the 'house' of reasonable politics. However, it is precisely the term 'tolerance' that gives the game away: in this context to tolerate means to suspend the application of the most rational understanding of reality in deference to those who do not know best. But as we can see time and again in many of the cases where 'claims to know' collide, tolerance can only go so far before universal science is brought to bear to demarcate the limits beyond which disciplining force is required to meet unreason – 'unreason' or 'irrationality' being just different words used to deny ontological differences.

For critical analysts it is important to keep in mind that framing these conflicts as being cultural or epistemological may backfire. In effect, analysts may be trying to empower indigenous claims by bringing them into reasonable politics as culture claims or expressions of a different epistemology, but by doing this they end up reinforcing modern ontological assumptions that are central to the very process by which indigenous worlds are being destroyed. This backfiring occurs because an ontological conflict (i.e. a conflict about what is there) is treated as an epistemological conflict (i.e. a conflict about how different cultural perspectives see, know or struggle for what ontology has already established is there). If we want to avoid this self-contradicting move we must consider that environmental conflicts, like those in my examples at the start of this chapter, might also be ontological conflicts.

Ontological conflicts exceed reasonable politics – including the politics which denounces the limits of reasonable politics by trying to incorporate what lies beyond as peculiar (but reasonable) cultural or epistemological stands. Ontological conflicts fall into the domain of cosmopolitics, the terrain where multiple and diverging worlds encounter each other and the possibility (without guarantees) of composing mutually enlivening rather than destructive relations.[7] In order for analysis to avoid the backfiring I have just mentioned, it must embrace the radical multiplicity at stake. For this, a political ontology is needed.

Political ontology

To characterise the concept of political ontology it is convenient to start by clarifying my use of the term 'ontology'. The term can be seen as operating in three simultaneous registers. The first register corresponds to a dictionary definition:
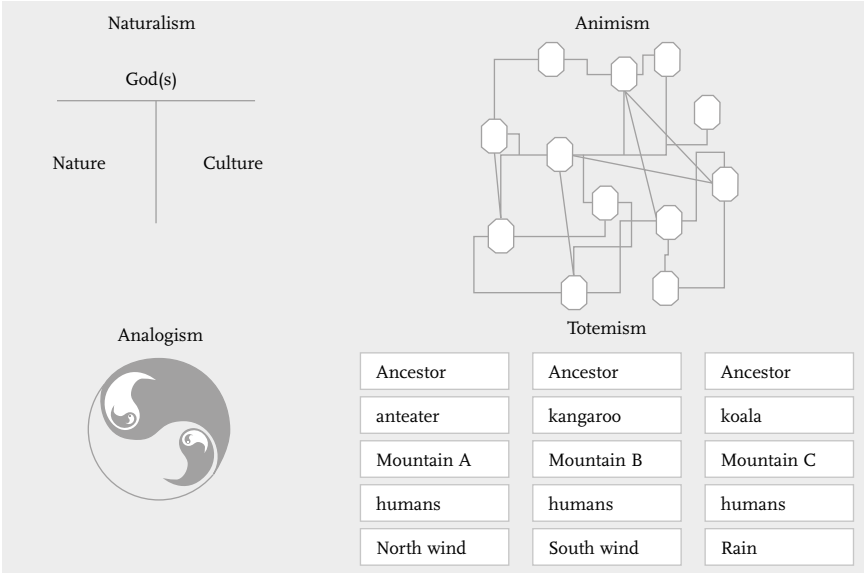
> Any way of understanding the world must make assumptions (which may be implicit or explicit) about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence, relations of dependency, and so on. Such an inventory of kinds of being and their relations is an ontology. (Scott & Marshall 2005)

The second register resonates with the insights of science and technology studies, and in particular with Actor-Network-Theory: ontologies do not precede mundane practices, rather are shaped through the practices and interactions of both humans and nonhumans (see Latour 1999; Law 2004; Mol 1999). The third register resonates with a voluminous ethnographic record that traces the connections between 'myths' and practices: ontologies also manifest themselves as 'stories' in which the assumptions of what kinds of things and relations make up a given world are readily graspable.

The three registers taken together are not exactly the same as each on its own, for they modify each other in crucial ways, thus providing the grounding for the project of a political ontology. A good place from which to start discussing how these three registers work together is Philippe Descola's (2005) recent work, which helps us to quickly grasp the notion of multiple ontologies.

Descola delineates four basic ontological armatures (see Figure 2.2). *Naturalism* (which includes what we have previously presented as the modern ontology) distributes what exists between two large domains, Nature (the domain of nonhumans) and Culture (the domain of humans). *Animist* or relational ontologies conceive of entities (represented in the figure as hexagons) as emergent from the relations that bind them to other entities as knots in a net. *Analogism* operates in terms of the notion of an originating dynamic which repeats itself from the micro to the macro, permeating the entire cosmos and holding it together. And *Totemism* allocates a mix of humans and nonhumans within ontologically distinct groups that

FIGURE 2.2 *Four ontological armatures*

Naturalism		Animism
God(s)		
Nature	Culture	

Analogism		Totemism	

Ancestor	Ancestor	Ancestor
anteater	kangaroo	koala
Mountain A	Mountain B	Mountain C
humans	humans	humans
North wind	South wind	Rain

originate from a common ancestor. Neither the figure nor my discussion of it touches any deeper than the mere surface of this work's arguments, but they illustrate two crucially important points. The first is the existence of a multiplicity of ways of distributing and establishing what exists, and their mutual relations. Second, and following from the first point, the figure helps us to provincialise (see Chakrabarty 2000) the modern ontology, i.e. Naturalism, as one particular ontological formation among others. These other ontologies differ from the modern one not because, as moderns would assume, they lack what modernity has (i.e. the distinction between nature and culture,) but because they distribute what exists and conceive their constitutive relations in a different way.

The second register introduces more complexity to the notion of multiple ontologies, for it counters the potential equation of ontology with a sort of mental map of the world: in this register an ontology is a way of worlding, it is a form of enacting a reality. It is critical to stress, however, that a different understanding of reality is being postulated here, one that, building on Actor-Network-Theory, bypasses the nature/culture (or subject/object, material/ideational) divide to arrive at a material-semiotic formulation. What does this mean? First, that we avoid the assumption that reality is out there, and that in here (the mind) one has more or less accurate cultural representations of it. And second, that reality is always in the making by means of the actions of hybrid assemblages that only after the fact are purified by moderns as pertaining to either nature or culture. One way to grasp what is at stake here is to start from the idea that humans are involved in the enactment of realities, but not under conditions of their own choosing – they have to grapple with an 'environment' whose features have been more or less sedimented and crystallised through previous actions. But, crucially, the agents of those actions are not humans per se but heterogeneous assemblages from within which moderns later distinguish as humans and non-humans, along with an associated asymmetrical distribution of agency (see Law 2004).

Further, the understanding of ontology as a performance or enactment adds the notion of ontological multiplicity to that of multiple ontologies. Annemarie Mol's (2002) work with atherosclerosis is a good example of what ontological multiplicity entails. She has shown how in a Dutch hospital, atherosclerosis emerges as a different entity under the microscope of the pathologist (i.e. a narrowing of the artery), the interpretation of the clinician (i.e. the patient's expressed pain), and the graph of the radiologist (i.e. differential blood pressure in a limb). In each case we have a different enactment of atherosclerosis, producing a multiplicity that does not always cohere as pieces in a puzzle. Sometimes there is pain but not narrowing of arteries, or differential blood pressure in a limb without pain, and so on. This multiplicity is eventually rendered singular through a series of conceptual and politico-managerial procedures, through which some versions of atherosclerosis are discarded or made to fit uneasily with each other. But the key point is that when you

want to see atherosclerosis *in practice* (or more generally in reality) what you find is multiplicity, because there are multiple practices.

The third register again modifies the whole mix, for it reintroduces multiple ontologies with a twist. Enactments are 'storied' and stories are themselves enacted. Let's take Mol's case again. While Mol may show us that atherosclerosis is multiple *in practice*, for the radiologist, the clinician and the pathologist it goes without saying that they are treating a single entity/disease. Moreover, this assumption of singularity is crucial to the very practices through which they perform atherosclerosis. This enacted assumption can be storied thus: there is an objective reality out there (the disease atherosclerosis) and there are (more or less accurate) subjective or disciplinary perspectives on it. This is the succinct version of the modernist myth telling us what kinds of things (e.g. subjects and objects) and relations (e.g. of perspective) make up this particular world. Of course, the connections can be narrated in the reverse order: we can move from one of the various storied versions of the modern myth to its enactment in practice. This is the road taken many times by ethnographers when showing how myths are enacted in the practices and embedded in the institutions of the peoples they work with. In any case, the important point is that these stories are not only or not mainly denotative (referring to something 'out there'); neither are they fallacious renderings of the real practices. Rather, they contribute to performing or enacting the reality that they narrate.

This notion of ontology, where ontological multiplicity, multiple ontologies, and performativity of stories are entangled with each other, constitutes the grounding for the political ontology project. The term 'political ontology' simultaneously implies a certain political sensibility, a problem space, and a modality of analysis or critique. The political sensibility can be described as a commitment to defending the pluriverse – the partially connected (Strathern 2004) unfolding of beings – in the face of the impoverishment implied by universalisms. I say partially connected because the idea here is that these worlds are not sealed off from each other, with clear boundaries – they are certainly connected, yet there is no overarching principle that can be deduced from these connections, and that would make this multiplicity into a universe. The problem space can then be characterised as the dynamics through which different worlds or ontologies bring themselves into being and sustain themselves even as they interact, interfere and mingle with each other. Finally, and in contrast with other modalities of critique or analysis, political ontology is not concerned with a supposedly external and independent reality (to be uncovered or depicted accurately); rather, it is concerned with reality-making, including its own participation in reality-making. Or put in another way, the stories that the political ontology critic tells are not meant to debunk other stories on the basis of claiming more accuracy in relation to a reality out there; rather these stories seek to weave a different configuration of a reality that is in a state of permanent becoming, not least through the stories that are being told.

A political ontology of 'environmental' conflicts?

What might a political ontology of environmental conflicts entail? I will make just a few general points about this.

First, it entails caution in not rushing too quickly to define what the conflict is about. Hence the use of quotation marks around the word 'environmental'. At the very least we are signalling here that the 'environment' might be only partially what is at stake. In other words, for some parties involved in the conflict it might be the environment, for others we do not know. When we face statements like those of Leni or Modesto, which indicate that for some parties the entities and the relations at stake might not be fully encompassed by the notion of the environment, then we are warranted in considering the possibility that we face an ontological conflict – that is, a conflict where different worlds are bumping heads. So, a road opens there to lead us to investigate what these actual worlds are, how they narrate themselves and the conflict, and how our analyses might relate to those narratives and intervene in the conflicts.

Second, it is important to stress that not all conflicts involving indigenous peoples are ontological conflicts. Ontological differences may overlap with certain identity groups but do not necessarily map onto them. Performance, not group ascription, is the key process we must attend to in evaluating whether we should treat a conflict as ontological or not. In effect, treating conflicts as cultural or resource-distribution conflicts might in many cases very well be the most productive and politically sensitive way to intervene.[8]

Third, political ontology is not about providing a more accurate story of what is happening (i.e. saying that in reality these are ontological conflicts and not epistemological ones); the concern is rather with telling stories that hold together, opening up possibilities to further the commitment to the pluriverse. This is at bottom the reason why the claims of kinship between indigenous protestors and the nonhumans that form part of their territories should not be addressed with the usual modernist conceptual tools of the social sciences. Not because such analyses might be wrong, but because a reality-making event takes place through these analyses, an event where the pluriverse is denied. As we saw earlier, this is what happens when a different ontology is reduced to just another cultural perspective on the world within the modern ontology.

Thus, where we suspect that an ontological conflict is taking place, a political ontology approach is crucial, for it is at these points of encounter between ontologies that the pluriverse might be protected or abandoned. These are the spaces where political ontology as a cosmopolitical tool that reaffirms the pluriverse can show its utility, or give in to a cosmopolitics that, through the reaffirmation of modernist ontological assumptions, denies multiplicity and contributes to its destruction.[9]

Notes

1   Accessed 27 January 2011, http://inside.org.au/garcia-peru/.
2   Accessed 27 January 2011, http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elmundo/4-126326-2009-06-09.html.
3   Accessed 27 January 2011, http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elmundo/4-148063-2010-06-22.html.
4   Accessed 27 January 2011, http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elmundo/4-148319-2010-06-26.html accessed.
5   By universal science I refer to an assemblage of knowledge practices that, associating themselves with but distorting the very specific nature of the truths produced by the experimental sciences, claims to know reality 'as it is' (see Stengers 2000). This assemblage has come to constitute a veritable regime of knowledge ingrained in modern governmentality (Dean 1999).
6   Interestingly, the further environmentalists' claims move from the assumption of ecosystems as anything more than a very complex organic machine ruled by laws that are knowable and therefore manageable, the more they start to join the ranks of 'cultural' claims, that is, claims based on morals, beliefs or whatever but not on the hard facts that science is supposed to deal with.
7   I borrow the term 'cosmopolitics' from philosopher Isabelle Stengers, in whose work the cosmopolitical refers to 'the unknown constituted by ... multiple divergent worlds and ... the articulations of which they would eventually be capable' (Stengers 2005: 995).
8   This does not mean that attention to ontological multiplicity and the kinds of analyses advanced by Actor-Network-Theory might not be relevant, even when conflicts are not ontological in the sense used here (see Mol 2002).
9   The ideas presented in this chapter are the product of a truly collaborative endeavour in which I have been engaged with Arturo Escobar and Marisol de la Cadena for some years now. I am also grateful to Lesley Green, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Helen Verran for very illuminating conversations. Research grants from the International Development Research Centre and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (both of Canada) have been crucial in supporting the groundwork upon which the arguments presented here are based.

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