

The Passion for Civilisation
Encounters between Paraguayan and Maskoy
people in Puerto Casado, Paraguayan Chaco

**A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the
degree of PhD in the Faculty of Humanities**

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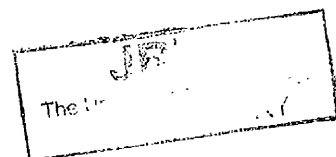
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With the thesis:

DVD 1: 8 Clips + Baile Kuña (September 2007)

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DVD 3: Film: Casado’s Legacy (50 min.)

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Abstract: The Passion for Civilisation.

Encounters between Paraguayan and Maskoy people in Puerto Casado, Paraguayan Chaco.

This thesis is about encounters, ways of knowing and similarities between Paraguayan, Maskoy people and the anthropologist in Puerto Casado, Paraguay. By discussing these topics, I will explore the borders that mark the relationship between all these subjects, and I will emphasise the mechanisms that can be deployed in order to cross them.

I begin by tracing the history of Maskoy people, showing all the encounters and events that have led, in the 1980s, to the legalisation of Territory Riacho Mosquito and to the birth of Maskoy people, as a collective subject and owner of the land. In particular, I describe the events that allowed the creation of Territory Riacho Mosquito from two distinctive points of view: one that of indigenous people, and the other that of the missionaries. By comparing the two perspectives, two different ontologies come to light, and in particular the role of shamans in the fight for land.

In the second chapter, I analyse the way in which the State has influenced, and continues to influence, the lives of Maskoy people residing in Territory Riacho Mosquito. In particular, I show the State as embodied in the State functionaries and politicians that for different reasons have contacts with the Maskoy. Throughout the chapter, unexpected similarities emerge between the indigenous perspective on politics and the way in which the State has been organised and is performed by its representatives. In fact, idioms of kinship and food exchange are used to describe this relationship. Moreover, I argue that the way in which everyday relationship between Paraguayan and indigenous people are experienced influences the way in which Maskoy people experience the State and politics.

Finally, I explore the notion of 'mimetic faculty' in order to analyse the adoption of football and volleyball on the part of the Maskoy communities. The reproduction of the 'outer form of something' seems to be a distinctive knowledge strategy in the encounter between Whites and Maskoy. But this distinctive strategy is experienced in different ways, depending on the epistemology of reference of the subject of the experience.

The way in which the thesis is structured has significance on its own, as it aims to preserve the process of remaining open to the unanticipated and allowing one's assumptions to become unsettled, contributing to the de-colonisation of the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Three DVDs are enclosed in the thesis. DVD 1, contains film fragments that accompany chapter 2 and 3, and a documentary presented in Paraguay in June 2008. DVD 2, contains the shooting of a female initiation dance performed in January 2007. This DVD has been enclosed as an appendix, for reasons of documentation. DVD 3 contains the film *Casado's Legacy* which is an integral part of the PhD project and should be treated as the fourth chapter of the textual thesis.

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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List of Abbreviations:

ANR (Asociación Nacional Republicana; mostly known as “The Colorado Party”)

AIP (Asociación Indigenista del Paraguay)

API (Asociación de Parcialidades Indígenas)

CEADUC (Centro de Estudios Antropológicos de la Universidad Católica)

CEN (Comité de Emergencia Nacional)

CEP (Conferencia Episcopal Paraguaya)

CEPAG (Centro de Estudios Paraguayos Antonio Guasch)

DAI (Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas)

ENM (Equipo Nacional de Misiones)

INDI (Instituto Nacional del Indígena)

ODD (Osvaldo Domínguez Dipp)

SAS (Secretaría de Acción Social)

Notes on language and translations:

For the transcriptions in Guarany, I have followed the phonetic rules adopted by Guasch and Melia in their Guarany Dictionary (Guasch & Melia 2005. *Diccionario Básico Guarani-Castellano, Castellano Guarani*. CEPAG)

All the quotes from the following authors: Arenas, Agüero, Ballin, CEP, Chase-Sardi, Cominges, Delporte, Escobar, Giordano Leiva, Obelar, Martínez-Crovetto, Pitarch, Regher, Susnik, Unruh and Kalisch, Zanardini; are personal translations from the Spanish.

Introduction

The main question of this thesis was formed in August 2004, after two years of work in the international cooperation sector in Paraguay. At that time I was making a self-produced documentary whilst visiting a number of Maskoy communities, about their struggle for land. While there, I was invited to participate in a radio program held by a member of a Maskoy community. At the beginning of the programme an interview was aired in which an NGO worker was calling for more projects to halt the 'loss of Maskoy culture'. At the end of the interview the Maskoy presenter agreed on air that the NGO worker was right, and unfortunately Maskoy people were losing their culture. He then passed the microphone to me and asked me to describe what I was doing. After describing my video project, I concluded by stating the opposite, that Maskoy people weren't losing their culture, even if I was unsure at that time what I meant by that. Strangely, the presenter agreed with me that Maskoy people weren't losing their culture, and the radio programme ended. The same day, I travelled from the indigenous community to a neighbouring town (Puerto Casado) on a motor boat. On the boat I began chatting with the lawyer of the Moon Sect, a religious group that had recently bought most of the land inside and around Puerto Casado. This included a fraction of the Maskoy community where I had just been. The lawyer was a Paraguayan from the capital city, but he seemed to know the Maskoy communities quite well. Expressing an opinion even more radical than that of the NGO worker, he told me that the Maskoy people had already lost their culture. This was evident to him from the way that they dressed, spoke and lived. They wore Western clothes and spoke Guaraní (the Whites' language). They no longer performed any rituals and their communities looked like Paraguayan peasant communities. To clarify, he told me, "they have no culture anymore".

Apart from the evident contradiction of people living without culture, I was left to wonder about the political implications of these statements. In fact, I was not concerned with theoretical debates about the concept of culture, but with the use of the word "culture" in the Paraguayan context, and with its possible consequences. According to the national Law 904/81, indigenous people are entitled to claim their traditional land back on the grounds that they have the right to live 'according to their traditional culture' (cf. Blaser 2004). However, Maskoy people had already recovered 30,000 hectares of their traditional

territory in the 1980s. Despite this, I thought that the claim that 'Maskoy people have lost their culture' could say something relevant about the daily interactions between Maskoy and Paraguayan people in Puerto Casado in a more subtle way, and I wondered if it said something about the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people more in general.

The use of 'culture' as a strategic tool in the interaction between indigenous and non-indigenous people has been analysed already in anthropological literature by authors like Turner (Turner 1991) and Conklin (Conklin 1997). The situation I encountered in Puerto Casado, on the other hand, was of a different kind. Maskoy people seemed to be seen by Paraguayans as an impoverished version of themselves, and 'culture' didn't take place in its more tangible and self-evident way. The opinion of the Moon Sect lawyer wasn't new to me, as I had often heard it during my work in the international cooperation. I then decided that it deserved a deeper attention, and it finally became the starting point of my research, when I decided to engage in a PhD about one year later.

I had initially decided to locate my thesis inside the space of encounter between Maskoy and non-indigenous people in Paraguay. Nevertheless, locating myself inside a 'space of encounter' proved to be an ambiguous task once on the fieldwork. In fact, I had to find a physical location that was neither Maskoy nor Paraguayan, but both at the same time, and this proved impossible to be found. In order to face the situation, I decided to be temporarily adopted by three different social contexts: the Maskoy community of Castilla (where Maskoy people were my main interlocutors), the non-indigenous side of Puerto Casado¹ (where I would mainly relate to Paraguayan people), and Asuncion (where I was engaged in a conversation with the NGO indigenist sector). I have to say, nevertheless, that I ended up spending more time with Maskoy people than with everyone else.

During the writing up of the thesis, I realised that I could re-create an ideal 'space of encounter' between the reader and the Maskoy people through structuring the text into prologues and chapters. The reasons behind this decision will become clearer in the prologue to the first chapter, but I would like to clarify from the outset that this is why I

¹ The town of Puerto Casado, despite being mainly populated by non-indigenous settlers, has got an indigenous district called *Pueblito Indio Livio Farina*, where part of the Maskoy people reside.

have decided to discuss the theoretical and methodological background to my study throughout the thesis, rather than condense it into a single discussion in the introduction.

The Paraguayan Chaco - and in particular the indigenous groups belonging to the Maskoy linguistic family - have been little analysed in the anthropological literature, with the exception of two rather encyclopaedic books (Metrax 1996; Renshaw 1996), and the pioneer studies of a Slovenian anthropologist, whose books and manuscripts are carefully kept in the Andrés Barbero Museum in Asunción [and cited in this thesis as: (Susnik & Chase-Sardi 1995; Susnik 1953; Susnik 1954; Susnik 1977; Susnik 1981)]. Regher's studies, even if some of them remain unpublished, also contain an interesting anthropological analysis of specific situations [cited in this thesis as: (Regher 1980; Regher 1993)]. Extended references to Maskoy people appear in a recent book about indigenous people and the State during Stroessner's dictatorship (Horst 2007). Other authors that are worth mentioning are Kidd (Kidd 1997; Kidd 1995; Kidd 1997; Kidd 1999), Villagra (Villagra 2005; Villagra 2007; Villagra 2008; Villagra forthcoming) and Grant [even if she did her fieldwork amongst the Nivacle people (Grant 2006)]. The three of them did their PhDs at St Andrews. Recent literature has also tackled the issue of the participation of indigenous people in the Chaco war (Richard 2008). An author that has certainly influenced me considerably, even if he did his fieldwork in another region of the Chaco, is Blaser (Blaser 2004; Blaser forthcoming). His book, like Villagra's thesis, has in fact focused on the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people (Blaser forthcoming; Villagra forthcoming). I have to say, nevertheless, that I have also found the anthropological literature about the neighbouring Amazonian region a major source of inspiration; this literature will also be cited throughout the thesis. Although much of my theoretical inspiration has come from anthropologists working on Latin America, I have also drawn more widely on related approaches from the literatures of other regions where this supported the development of my analysis.

Before starting the fieldwork, I had decided to engage in a collaborative film-making process with the Maskoy community where I was going to stay. The small documentary I made in 2004 was a great success amongst the Maskoy communities, and people asked me to continue filming with them. I will describe in the prologue to the fourth chapter the outcomes of my project.

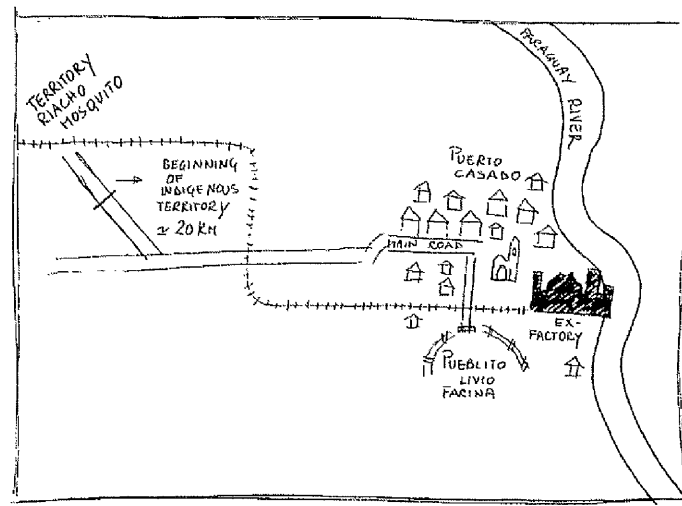
It is important to specify from the beginning of this thesis that I will temporarily adopt the Maskoy categories in order to talk about non-Maskoy people. I will indeed use the term 'Whites' to refer to all non-indigenous people in Paraguay (foreigners are also included in the category of Whites), and I will use the term 'Paraguayans' to refer to non-indigenous national citizens. The centrality of these categories in the writing of the thesis depends on their centrality in the context of my fieldwork.

In the Puerto Casado area, borders are not only conceptual but also geographical. In the town itself, the indigenous district (*Pueblito Livio Farina*) is separated from the rest of the population by Carlos Casado's railway track, and fenced off. Territory Riacho Mosquito, whose entrance is located about 25 km from Puerto Casado, is also a closed space (even if not yet fenced) where only Maskoy people live. Spaces, like people, are always Maskoy or Paraguayan.



Figure 1: Pueblito Livio Farina's entrance in 2004. Photo by the author.

The old railway track looks like a straight line in front of the entrance.



Map 1: Map of Puerto Casado and Territory Riacho Mosquito. Drawn by the author.

Outline of the chapters

In the first chapter, I narrate the birth story of Territory Riacho Mosquito and of Maskoy people themselves. The involvement of Maskoy people in Carlos Casado's tannin factory is an important part of the story, as is their encounter with the Salesian missionaries. In this chapter, I discuss the interaction amongst these three subjects during the 20th century and especially during the Maskoy's fight for land during the 1980s. At the end of the chapter I outline one of the main topics of the thesis, which is the existence of an ontological difference at the roots of diverging ways of interpreting the same episodes. This ontological difference rests upon a different conceptualisation of the spirit world. In particular, I show how a different conceptualisation of the fight for land didn't obstruct the collaboration between indigenous people and the missionaries, even if it did prevent them from constructing a solid alliance in the future.

In the second chapter, I analyse the embodiment of the State in Puerto Casado, by looking at it from different perspectives. I begin by outlining the tensions between some politicians and indigenous people that take place in the capital city and in the national press, and gradually shift my attention towards the Maskoy's point of view on daily interactions with politicians in Puerto Casado. One of the consequences of this trajectory is a change from the ontological perspective described in chapter one into a phenomenological perception of borders. The relationship with the State is embodied

through the analysis of the interaction with local politicians, and the latter is contextualised in the wider experience of encounters between maskoy and non-indigenous people. In particular, I will argue that the borders with the State are partially kept through the enactment of sensorial barriers.

In the third chapter, I use both concepts of 'ontological difference' and of 'sensorial borders' in order to analyse the football and volleyball matches in the community of Castilla. The Maskoy way of knowing is compared to that of White people through the concept of "mimetic faculty" (Taussig 1993). The football and volleyball grounds are spaces where the encounter with Paraguayans is mimetically achieved. This happens through both the adoption of the outer form of Paraguayan sports and the circulation of one of the symbols of non-indigenous civilisation: money. Whilst the encounter takes place, borders between indigenous and non-indigenous people are not suspended but rather enacted and enhanced.

The fourth and last chapter is a film about encounters between White and Maskoy people. Three threads intersect with each other throughout the film: an initiation dance, the story of Casado's factory, and the visits of and to politicians. The consumption and exchange of food will help to articulate the dynamics of the relationships between the protagonists of the film.

All chapters are anticipated by a prologue. I want to emphasise here that they do not represent the theoretical framework of the chapters, but they rather aim at creating a gap between the reader and the substance of the chapter; working as an *epoche*, they invite the reader to suspend some of the beliefs that guide her daily experience of the world. The first prologue, for example, analyses the ethnographer's assumptions about what it means to make history and it explores the possibility of alternative ways of doing it. The second prologue, by analysing the difficulties in defining the role of indigenous organisations vis-à-vis NGOs and the State, questions the idea that the State means the same for all the subjects involved in the interaction. The third prologue articulates the reasons why the ethnographer cannot share the Maskoy's beliefs in a spiritual world. In particular, it investigates the role of vision in her way of knowing and locating truth in the world. The final prologue describes a failed attempt to engage in a collaborative filmmaking process, and considers the possible explanations for this failure.

Chapter 1 - Prologue

On collecting history in Castilla

In this prologue I will discuss the way in which I expected collective memories of the past to be located in narrative speeches and in visual artefacts, and I had to re-locate them in the perception of the environment. I will then clarify why, and how, despite this, I decided to write a chapter about the history of Maskoy people.

1. Unmaking history

I was doing fieldwork in the Maskoy community of Castilla from November 2006 to August 2007. After a few weeks of loneliness, where I was sleeping in the health centre of the community, I was asked by one of the schoolteachers, Antonia, if I wanted to move to her house. As soon as I moved into her house, Antonia began taking care of me: she would prepare my food, and integrate me in the conversations that took place in the house every night and morning. At some point, maybe because she regularly cooked my food and I shared the bed with her elder daughter, the rest of the community began referring to Antonia as “your mother”.

I decided not to go around interviewing people. Rather, I wanted to film in an observational way, and as this meant I would always have a video-camera with me, I needed to become as invisible as possible. I gradually got involved with my family's daily life, and time passed quickly. I never thought about gathering information about the history of Maskoy people. I expected history to pop up spontaneously in specific moments of the day, in casual conversations, or public commemorations. I wanted to know how Maskoy people recalled their history, and how history was condensed in visual/material places and objects. Nearly at the end of my fieldwork, though, my knowledge about the past of Maskoy people was close to zero.

Olivia Harris has raised the problem of biased periodisation in the writing of Latin American history. According to her, an excessive importance has been attributed to the arrival of the Whites as a unique event marking a before and an after in the history of indigenous people (Harris 1995). My concern, though, is not with the way in which history has been conceptualised by non-indigenous people, but with the process of making history itself. In other words: I am interested in the ways in which the past is re-elaborated in order to become part of the collective memory of Maskoy people.

The problem of collecting history in indigenous communities began intriguing me while reading Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism and the White Man* (Taussig 1986). The book is split in two parts: an historical one, that describes the horrors of the gum industry in the Putumayo region of Colombia, and an ethnographic one, that concentrates on the contemporary situation of a group of indigenous inhabitants of the same area. There is an unsettling absence in the second part of the book: the absence – in the daily lives of contemporary indigenous people – of memories related to the traumatic events described in the first part of the book. History appears to be obliterated.

Concerned with a similar problem, Peter Gow considers the question of the way in which Piro people inhabit time. Instead of existing as one linear sequence of objective events – a memory of the chain of events that happened until that moment - time is obliterated through myths. Gow defines myths as historical objects that “generate the appearance of stability, an illusion of timelessness that cannot be affected by changes in the world, but they do so by means of their ceaseless transformations” (Gow 2001: 11). Despite retaining the past, myths continuously transform it. Nothing is given, once and for all, in a unique and unchangeable version. Myths allow the past to be forgotten and changed. This is why, according to Gow, the Piro's particular way of making history depends upon “experiencing their being in the world as inherently transformational, as intrinsically subject to change” (Gow 2001: 9).

Myths however, hold in themselves traces of history. Through the analysis of myths as historical objects, the historical analysis is brought back in anthropology (Gow 2001: 22). Following Gow's suggestions, Rodrigo Villagra has made an historical analysis of a myth about the arrival of Paraguayans amongst the Angaité² people of Paraguay (Villagra forthcoming).

² One of the five ethnic groups that constitute the Maskoy people.

According to him, storytelling is part of the daily life of Angaité people, and it is usually performed in the evenings, just after dinner. In the past, however, it took place during collective gatherings such as initiation dances.

Probably due to the peculiar history of Maskoy people (see Chapter 1) myths were not told in my house at night, nor they were performed in other public events, such as the traditional dances mentioned by Villagra with respect to the past. The two myths I had the opportunity to listen to were performed in situations of encounter with non-indigenous people. My first experience of the telling of a myth in fact happened when a French couple visited the community and started a one week collaborative project with the children. The project consisted of a collective staging of a local myth, through the technique of the shadow play. As the children did not know any local myths, the adults asked the help of Ojeda, the flute musician of the community. Ojeda - nephew of the famous *Cacique Michi*, whom we will talk about in the next chapter – told the following story:

An armadillo mother left her den in the ground to go and look for food for her children. When she came back, she found the corpses of three of her children hanging from the roof of the den. Only the smaller one was left alive, but he was a baby and he couldn't speak. The baby pointed out with his finger towards a precise direction in the space, that the mother decided to follow. After a while, the culprit of the murderers was found: he was a fox. The armadillo then asked for the help of a bee, who clogged up the arse of the fox with some wax. The fox's belly [and this was the hilarious part of the story] started growing and growing because it couldn't shit. He then decided to ask for help from a bird who removed the wax from his arse, so he was finally able to shit. From that moment on, the bird [I can't remember the exact species] began smelling bad.

As the reader will appreciate, my first encounter with the history of the community through myths was quite obscure. What is interesting in the myth however, is the way in which the killing of the three armadillos is brought to a close. The reference to the bodies hanging from the roof, and to the incapacity of the smallest armadillo to talk suggests a distinct human quality. Following on from this, we might pose the question of whether there is a violent memory encapsulated in the myth. However, to ask Maskoy people about the historical objectivity of the episode would be – from their own point of view – an epistemological contradiction. If myths obliterate time, what is the sense in trying to force people to do the opposite with them? As Fabian notices, every act of remembering also implies an act of forgetting that which is not remembered (Fabian 2003). Digging inside the past of indigenous

people through her own way of doing history, the anthropologist contributes to bring the forgotten back to light, a task which requires a certain degree of responsibility.

Ernesto Unruh and Hannes Kalisch³ made use of myths in order to analyse the relationship between indigenous (Enlhet-Maskoy) and non-indigenous (Mennonite) people, with particular reference to the context of the Chaco war between Paraguay and Bolivia⁴ (Unruh & Kalisch 2007).

When the field was burning and the fox was trapped in the middle of the fire, the tarantula invited it to share its den in the ground: "Here you will be safe from fire!". Having accepted the invitation, the fox had no other option but to stay there, and it was sodomised during various months. "Let me out!", the fox cried. "You stay here, I will go out and check if there is still fire", answered the tarantula. It went out and shouted to the fox, "Stay there! It's still burning!". After a while, the tarantula got bored of the fox and threw it out of the den. Going out, the fox was surprised, "The grass has grown up again!". Then it realised it was hungry. But when it ate, it realised that its arse had become so big that the food was slipping away. Nothing remained (Ibid. 2007: 122).

According to Unruh and Kalisch, the fox in the myth symbolically points to indigenous people. Trapped between soldiers and Mennonites the Enlhet decided to ally with the latter (the Mennonites) in order not to succumb to the former. The decision was one forced by events however, thus preventing a balanced relationship between the Enlhet people and the Mennonites. On the contrary, the fact that the "savers" claimed gratitude from the "saved" further silenced the latter, effecting from them a total surrender.

According to Villagra, the value of the *Nanek Anya* (in *Angaité Konablok*: old news/stories) "is not that the events narrate what 'truly' happened in the past but that these events have social and moral consequences for the present lived reality" (Villagra forthcoming). It is interesting to notice, in the case of the myth referred by Unruh and Kalisch, that the past is distilled in the

³ I will talk about them extensively in the conclusions to this thesis.

⁴ The Chaco war (1932-1935) was fought between Bolivia and Paraguay over control of a great part of the Gran Chaco region. The territory in dispute was actually inhabited by indigenous people, who suddenly got trapped in between the two armies: the Bolivian and the Paraguayan one. On the other hand, the Paraguayan side of the region was also inhabited since the 1920s by a group of Mennonites: a pacifist and protestant religious group of ancient German origins.

myth in the form of a complex dynamic of relationships. What deserves to be kept from the past are 'relationships'.

This unfamiliar way of dwelling time, this "obliteration of time" through myths, is often challenged by the way history is dealt with by the Whites. I was surprised to find, in Castilla, one episode about the past that everybody was able to tell, but its presence in the community could be explained by the context in which it was produced. During the fight for land of the 1980s against the Casado S.A., in fact, the ENM (National Committee of Catholic Missions) decided to help the Maskoy people get part of their lands back. One of the tasks of the lawyers was to find evidence about the violence inflicted by the Casado S.A. on local indigenous people. We have no record of the methods of investigation, but two episodes do finally appear in the final report of 1985. One of them, the one that took place in Castilla, is the one that people continuously recount to White people enquiring about their past:

In this place, personnel of the Casado Company found a cow with a lasso around its neck. They accused the Indians of having done this and called the police from Puerto Casado. [...] The foreman told the Indians that they would receive their salary the following day. The following night, after hearing the bell, the Indians went to the foreman's house. It was eight at night. They were ordered to enter into a warehouse. Everyone sat down. The soldiers were hiding in an adjacent room but the Indians didn't know it. They opened the door and started shooting. Four people were killed, including the leader Corrientes. [...] (CEP 1986: 25 - personal translation)

In July 2008, the "Commission of Truth and Justice" convoked a public hearing on the abuses committed by the State against indigenous people at the time of Stroessner dictatorship (1954-1989). The Commission asked Indigenous people to prepare "legal cases" of "denunciations" they wanted to present to the Paraguayan State. Apart from a few indigenous organisations, whose alliance with the NGO sector produced outstanding power-point presentations, most of the peoples' narratives (the cases were presented per ethnic group) did not fit into the category of "historical legal cases". Rene Ramirez, the Maskoy representative, was amongst them. After recalling the two historical episodes above mentioned – which the Catholic Church had already gathered twenty years before – he switched to the present situation and focused on the ongoing racism towards indigenous people:

Little time ago, a young man (a school teacher) came to Asuncion (the capital city) to talk with his school supervisor. But they didn't receive him, and they threw his documents just like this [he makes the movement of someone throwing rubbish in a bin]. [...] They have to receive people as

persons, as humans. We fruitlessly say “brothers” here [in the public hearing], and outside there it’s not “brothers” anymore⁵.

Instead of focusing on facts, Ramirez decided to focus on actual relationships. A member of the commission later on complained that people had not been able to “present cases”. The public hearing failed in its quality of a space of encounter between White and Indigenous people, because it implied a certain treatment of time and memory that belonged in first instance to the Whites. There were other reasons, moreover, why the past could not be told so easily. As Ramirez pointed out to his white audience:

It’s really sad what happened in the past. If you approach an elder [asking about the past], he’s going to get upset and he’s not going to tell you anything. Because he would still feel it. He saw all the mistreatments⁶.

In a recent book, *Time and Memory in Indigenous Amazonia*, Carneiro da Cunha significantly anticipates that the history narrated in the book “is not a history that will back territorial claims in a western Court of Law, a Western official history” (Fausto & Heckenberger 2007: xi). It is clear that there is not just one way of narrating history. The mechanisms through which it is reproduced or obliterated respond instead to specific ways of inhabiting the world. Even “historical accounts”, like the one recorded by the missionaries in Castilla in the 1980s, can be better defined as “authorised imaginations”: “entities whose links to other entities have been occluded and, thus appear to the modern eye as an independent and self-contained entity, that is, a reality out there” (Blaser forthcoming). In other words, so-called ‘objective’ historical accounts, despite their appearance as descriptive ‘facts’, are the product of specific contextualised relationships.

I will discuss in the prologue to the third chapter the absence of visual signs (for example monuments) to commemorate a collective past in Castilla. I will rather focus now on the way

5 “Hace poco nomás, en este año, un joven que vino a hablar con el supervisor en Asunción, no le recibieron, le tiro’ nomás su carpeta así, [...]. Ellos tienen que recibir como persona, como humano. De balde decimos acá “hermanos” y después allí afuera ya no es mas hermano”.

6 “Muy triste toda esa cuestión, vos acercas una señora o un señor anciano, se emociona y no te va a contar, porque ya se siente, ya el veía todo el maltrato.”

in which the past can be commemorated in non-narrative ways (Bal 1999), posing the question of what happens with the past when myths are no longer told.

In an article about Gypsy memories on the holocaust, Michael Stewart discusses the ways in which the past is collectively “remembered” without being “commemorated”, in what he calls non-discursive forms of memory. In the Romany community of Hungary where he did his fieldwork, “there were no forms of collective commemoration in which the historical memory of persecution was re-lived and re-created anew for each generation. [...] Gypsies manage not to forget crucial aspects of their history **because of the ways in which personal, fragmentary narratives interact with broader cultural understandings and a series of prompts** in the world in which Gypsies live” (Stewart 2004: 565-66) [my bold emphasis]. What would history look like if it were not organised in a narrative or visual way, but rather inscribed in embodied fears and perceptions?

The community of Castilla is located 30 km away from the small Paraguayan town of Puerto Casado, and the road between Castilla and Casado is a no man’s land surrounded by wood. During the rainy season, the only viable medium of transport is walking. The first time I decided to walk alone from the community to the town, however, people would highly discourage me. My first thought was that people feared a jaguar would attack me, as they often attacked domestic animals. When I asked if that was the reason why I should not walk alone, they replied that no, there were no jaguars on the way, but many Paraguayans instead. This is not extraordinary, if this idea was not accompanied by the fact that according to the people themselves nothing had actually ever happened between Maskoy and Paraguayan people along that road. Towards the end of my fieldwork, the only tragic event I had heard of, that happened along that road, was the raping of a young girl, and yet on the periphery of Puerto Casado a few years before.

After one year of fieldwork, I still did not share the perception held by the community of the road between Castilla and Puerto Casado as a highly dangerous place, and I started walking alone along the road without any problem. However, my perception of the Maskoy’s fear as “unrealistic” is situated outside the Maskoy’s lifeworld. I would argue that it is the condensing of violent memories of the past, which made the road to Castilla a dangerous place. It is important to note that I am not referring to memories related to that particular place ((Ferre 2001; Gordillo 2004), as would be those of traumatic events that happened along that

particular road. I am rather referring to collective memories of violent encounters between White and Maskoy people that happened elsewhere in the past, and that retain a way of conceptualising a relationship. Collective memories were retained as a “cultural (sensory) understanding of things” (Stewart 2004) that was forged in the past relations between Maskoy and Paraguayan people. Absent in collective narrative memories, Paraguayans’ violence was remembered in the no man’s land that separated Casilla and Puerto Casado.

One last aspect is worth mentioning, and it will continue appearing throughout the first chapter. There is a tendency in Maskoy narratives to avoid a self-victimisation of indigenous people with respect to their relationship with the Whites. In the already mentioned book, Carneiro da Cunha writes that: “Our historiography renders the events as their defeat: their narrative renders the same events as their labour of domesticating, of pacifying us together with our germs and our commodities” (Fausto and Heckenberger: xi). How might we explain the absence of “narratives of defeat” in Castilla, apart from the two collected by the Catholic Church? I am not implying here that indigenous people are not able to produce historical accounts where they appear as victims, but rather that these narratives seem to appear in strategic situations of contact with White institutions.

I would thus like to consider the question of how to write about the past of an indigenous community.

2. Making history

After the previous considerations, we can ask if it is possible to write the history of the Maskoy’s struggle for land “from the native’s point of view”, like Olivia Harris suggests (Harris 1995). Shall we, for example, formulate that history in the form of a myth? If we adopt the starting point that there is not a universal and objective way of writing history, how to decide which point of view and which rethorical form we should embrace in writing about the past?

In a book about the first encounters of European explorers with the American continent, Greenblatt writes that: “wonder is [...] the central figure in the initial European response to the New World, the decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical

difference". He then defines wonder as a "cracking apart of contextual understanding", "an elusive and ambiguous experience", a "suspension or failure of categories" which even leads to "a kind of paralysis" (Greenblatt 1991). This immobility of the mind is accompanied by an immobility of action. No power circulates within the encounter. For Greenblatt, marvel is the antidote to the colonial activity of taking possession. It suggests "an alternative to ownership", a "refusal to occupy" (Seed 1995).

I will use wonder as a starting point for a different approach to history. Firstly I would like to question whether wonder was actually present in the first encounter between White explorers and Maskoy people. The pioneer White man to visit indigenous settlements around the Puerto Casado area, Juan Cominglez, describes the Angaité as poor and annoying people, continuously negotiating favours and objects. By that time however, at the end of the 18th century, indigenous people were no longer a novelty anymore.

What about contemporary encounters between Maskoy and White people? A glimpse of marvel emerges in the film, during the visit of the Secretary of Education of the local government to the Maskoy community of Km 39. The secretary is caught by surprise when he sees for the first time an initiation dance. "I've already seen [*indigenas*] people dancing in Pueblito", he says, "but this is different. God wanted me to come here today". He looks around him, so as to absorb everything with the gaze. But then immediately – colonially - takes possession of the situation: "Could we do it again next week (to show it to the Minister of Education)?", he says to the Maskoy leader of the community. 'Difference' is immediately reduced to 'folklore', tamed for the enjoyment of the ruling class. On a small scale, this situation evokes Guatemala in the 1980s, when the ruling class organised "Maya folklore festivals", while under-paying indigenous people's jobs, and killing them if suspected to be revolutionary (Zurita 1992).

The discussion on wonder drives attention to the physical moment of the encounter, usually dismissed from anthropological writing for methodological reasons. The act of writing is in fact founded on a "denial of coevalness", as if the ethnographer and the people he/she had been talking to belonged to different time dimensions (Fabian 2007: 22). By encapsulating the moments of wonder in the academic writing, my aim is to bring 'time' back into my writing, and in so doing avoid the 'coloniality' of knowledge that seems to be part of academic history.

In my case, to bring 'wonder' into academic writing means taking into account the existence of an ontological difference between the writer and the subjects she is writing about (cf. Young 1997: 56). Coining the expression "asymmetrical reciprocity" in political philosophy Young states that "it is ontologically impossible for people in one social position to adopt the perspective of those in the social positions with which they are related in social structures and interactions" (Young 1997: 38). The use of the word 'ontology' evokes a difference that resists translation, as the ontological premises of a discourse are the pillars that sustain a certain way of dwelling in the world. Although it is impossible to attribute to all societies a coherent ontological system like the one inaugurated by the Greeks [see also (Willerslev 2004)], it is still nevertheless possible to look at ontological differences as a way of turning inside out the anthropologist's premises that could pre-determine her approach to the fieldwork. This is why I structured my thesis in the form of prologues before each chapter. This division elicits a time gap that brings us back to the moment of the encounter.

The reference to the existence of different ontologies amongst different peoples has been explicitly introduced into the anthropological theory by Viveiros de Castro. Writing about Amerindian cosmology, he attracted attention to the ontological divide between Western and Amerindian conceptualisations of the Other (Viveiros de Castro 1998). The contemporary debate on a great divide between two conceptualisations of the world, or two ways of dwelling in the environment (Ingold 2004), has been summarised by Blaser in his analysis of modernity as myth. Bringing together different traditions of thought, he defines the modern myth – what is termed by Viveiros de Castro "Western thought" (Viveiros de Castro 1998) - as constituted by three elements: a divide between nature and society, the colonial difference between moderns and non-moderns, and a unilinear temporality going from past to future (Blaser forthcoming). It is thus possible to talk about a divide between modern and non-modern lifeworlds at the root of the conceptualisation of different ontologies.

During my fieldwork, this ontological difference emerged suddenly and unexpectedly in conversations I had with Maskoy people. It also emerged in the sudden silences that marked a misunderstanding, a suspension of dialogue, such as in my attempts to record a "truthful account" of the past of Maskoy people, or when Rene Ramirez, with particular clarity, started telling me his own version of the history of the fight for land, from a perspective so unfamiliar to me (that of shamans' agency) that it took me a while to properly listen to it.

According to Marisol de la Cadena, regional indigenous movements in South America have started to challenge the “notion of politics as we know it” (De la Cadena 2007), and unsettling practices have emerged in the political arena. Instead of one politics, she says, we should better recognise a “multiplicity of politics”. The differences between modern and non-modern conceptualisations of politics, for instance, rely on contrasting ways of placing value on the agency of non-human entities in political practices. The divide between nature and society, that is a constitutive part of the project of modernity (Latour 1990), is thus overcome by the indigenous way of making politics.

De la Cadena’s analysis makes reference to ritual practices that took place in political public events. The invasion of the secular on the part of the spiritual took place in the Maskoy case in a more silent, and less public, way [see also (Gordillo 2003)]. It is in fact the secret role of shamans that challenged my understanding of the fight for land of the 1980s, as I had learnt it through books and conversations with activists. How might one therefore write a history of the fight for land of Maskoy people, whilst taking into account the ontological and colonial divide?

Beginning with Mignolo’s notion of “border thinking”, Blaser has coined the alternative definition of “border dialogue”. Like Mignolo, he is concerned with the establishment of symmetrical relations between different “loci of enunciation”, avoiding the hierarchy that is built inside the colonial difference. His solution though is not that of speaking from two different points of view, which would imply representing the point of view of the others. Rather, it involves performing a storytelling that takes the Other into account because it results from a long process of dialogue with the indigenous intellectuals he engaged with. In this way Blaser aims at overstepping modern thinking and contributing to the formation of a non-modern one:

Border dialogue aspires to produce a locus of enunciation that performs itself as a mediation articulating in symmetrical terms the worlds/realities that the colonial difference articulates hierarchically. [...] I must stress that my aim is not to explain and represent these [indigenous] intellectuals’ views of the world, as traditional ethnography would do it, but **to narrate/enact the present moment from an enunciative position that has emerged from the relation with these intellectuals’** embodied views of the world (Blaser forthcoming: 26) [my bold emphasis].

Despite feeling attracted to Blaser's theoretical agenda, I have difficulties in applying his suggestions to my own writing. During the fieldwork, I was, in fact, constantly reminded of borders by the people I was living with. I also experienced those borders through the feeling of not being able to make a sense of what I was living or what was told to me. It is precisely this wonder, experienced as the perception of borders, which I want to maintain in my writing. I thus prefer to assume the responsibility of representing other people's experiences, in order to be able to analyse interactions. What I find valuable in Blaser's discussion is the possibility of questioning my discursive location inside the myth of modernity, as defined by the author. I agree with Carneiro da Cunha when she writes that "The work of anthropology, as often as not, is not about writing or reconstructing history but about relating alternative histories, each with a unique perspective and voice" (Carneiro da Cunha 2007: 19).

The history of the fight for land of Maskoy people I shall write about is a modern one. Despite this, I have tried not to privilege any one of the perspectives, but rather show them interacting (or non-interacting) with one another.

As the interviews are focused on the leaders, the history is told from a restricted point of view. The rest of the population, however, was not interested in telling me that segment of the past. Perhaps it was because they were not used – as the leaders were for strategic reasons – to recounting "the history of the fight for land". Each of the leaders, moreover, had the tendency to describe himself as the absolute protagonist and decision-maker of the events. However, the point at which the majority of Maskoy people share this narrative that the struggle for land was centred on the leaders' and shamans' agency, I would not be able to say.

It is not by chance that my main interlocutor is Rene Ramirez, who was pointed out to me by the other leaders as the most appropriate person for telling the story of the fight for land (are the protagonists of history, we could ask, the most apt to retell it?). For several reasons, Rene Ramirez had a key role in many of the historical processes that took place in the negotiation between Maskoy people and the Whites. He had been a seminarian and then a catechist. He had also been a Maskoy representative in the trade union, a general leader in the fight for land, a servant of the Casado family and national celebrity in 1989 when he spoke to the Pope. He was the first Maskoy to be an active member of a Paraguayan political party, and in 2004 he was elected city councilman. Coincidentally, he also became my *compadre* during the fieldwork.

Apart from the interviews with the Maskoy people, I rely on the documents of the Catholic Church that were kept in the Catholic parish of Puerto Casado. I have to admit however, that I had access to them through the mediation of a friend. I also discovered, thanks to the support of an ex-administrator of Casado S.A. (and to the passion of a French friend for any kind of archive), an abandoned archive in the ex-factory of Puerto Casado. The letter that marks the beginning of the next chapter was found in that archive⁷. The most compromising documents of Casado S.A. however, as I learnt in a confidential way, were burnt just before the selling of the factory, and the land, to the Moon Sect.

In the writing of the chapter I also heavily rely on the anthropological work of Bratislava Susnik, who was the only external observer to write about the involvement of Maskoy people in the cattle ranches during the 1950s-1960s.

Casado's empire, like Macondo, lasted about one hundred years (1887-2001). The following chapter is a first attempt to give an alternative version to a story that never had an official one.

⁷ As soon as I showed my interest for the archive, other inhabitants of Casado became interested in the mountain of old papers that was wasting away in the old factory. I hope that the archive will soon be safe.

1. WORKING CITIZENS

Birth of the Maskoy People

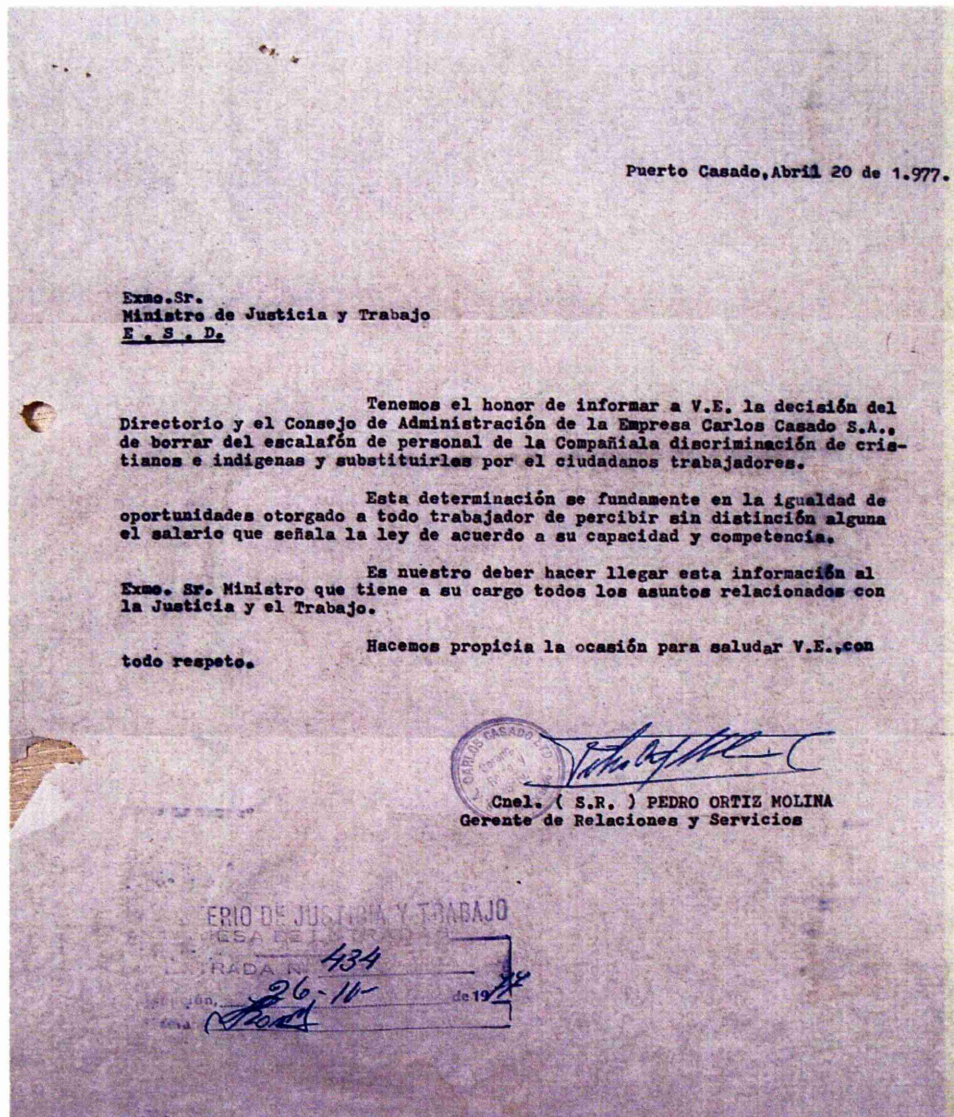


Figure 2: Letter found by the author in the abandoned archive of Casado's ex-factory.

Puerto Casado, 20th of April 1977

Estimable Minister of Justice and Work,

We have the honour to inform Your Eminence that the Board of Directors and the Administration Council of the Company Carlos Casado S.A. have decided to erase from the working registers of the Company the discrimination between 'Christians' and 'Indians', and to substitute both categories with the common denomination of 'working citizens'.

Our decision is grounded on the principle of equal opportunities, which allows every citizen to receive a salary determined by his competence and abilities – as granted by the Law – independently from any other source of discrimination.

It is our duty to facilitate this information to Mr. Minister, who is in charge of all the matters concerning justice and work.

We send our most respectful greetings to Your Eminence.

Coronel (retired) Pedro Ortiz Molina
Relationships and Services Manager

~~~~~

- [Me]: Where do the Indians work?
- [Captain]: They don't like working. They just want to eat. They don't want to work.  
[Interview with a Paraguayan boat captain along the Paraguay river – August 2005]

## 1.1 The arrival of the Whites

When Carlos Casado's tannin factory was built on the Western edge of the Paraguay River, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Paraguayan Chaco was still considered a wild territory yet to be colonised. Far from being an empty land however, it was a territory characterized by nomadic settlements, some of which had been at war with one another at various points in time. The relative neglect of the Chaco territory, up to that moment, was due to its lack of precious natural resources and its arid lands. For these reasons, it was considered by the few explorers who tried to cross it as a gate, an uncomfortable passage to the more affluent lands of Bolivia and Peru.

The history of the ethnic denominations of the indigenous groups inhabiting the Chaco is a complicated issue in itself. Most of the self-denominations described particular features of the place where a specific group of people used to live (e.g. 'people from the land of the *algarrobo* trees', or 'people who eat black beans'. See Renshaw 1997: 213). The colonisers, however, replaced these denominations by others of uncertain origins, usually in Spanish or Guaraní. People who spoke different languages, moreover, were often grouped together - as if they belonged to the same socio-political unit - even when they didn't (Villagra 2005). The 'Toba' Indians, for example, have probably received their denomination from some Argentinean observer, who called them with the name of the only indigenous group he had come in contact within his own country (Susnik 1981).

In 1983 an intricate mix of people, whose common denominator was their involvement as workers with Casado S.A. for about one hundred years, agreed to call themselves 'Maskoy'. In a simplified version of past denominations, accepted and retold by the protagonists themselves, Maskoy people are constituted by five different ethnic groups: Toba, Angaité, Sanapaná, Guaná and Enxet. I will trace in this chapter a brief history of the Maskoy people, who were officially born as a "people" in the 1980s, and whose individual remote pasts became a common one as a result of the following events. The common denomination as Maskoy people has been officially recognised by the State in the recent national census. Categorised inside the linguistic family "Lengua Maskoy", they appear under the denomination of "Toba Maskoy" without any further explanation.



| FAMILIA LINGÜÍSTICA | ETNIA              | Total  | Asunción | Concepción | San Pedro | Guairá | Cagayari | Cazapa | Itapúa | Alto Paraná | Central | Ameríndio | Caribayá | Presidente Hayes | Boquerón | Alto Paraguay |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------|----------|------------|-----------|--------|----------|--------|--------|-------------|---------|-----------|----------|------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1. GUARANI          | TOTAL              | 66.540 | 90       | 2.670      | 2.736     | 1.058  | 6.854    | 2.526  | 2.102  | 4.697       | 1.038   | 10.519    | 9.529    | 19.751           | 19.754   | 3.185         |
|                     | Guarani Occidental | 2.155  | -        | -          | 120       | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | -       | -         | 7        | 32               | 1.994    | -             |
|                     | Ache               | 1.190  | -        | -          | -         | -      | 157      | 237    | -      | 110         | 12      | -         | 675      | -                | -        | -             |
|                     | Ava Guarani        | 13.430 | 62       | 136        | 1.308     | 7      | 1.024    | 9      | 1      | 3.562       | 21      | 302       | 6.957    | 1                | 6        | 4             |
|                     | Mbya               | 14.324 | 26       | 667        | 781       | 1.049  | 5.695    | 2.280  | 2.053  | 527         | 25      | -         | 797      | -                | -        | -             |
|                     | Pai Tavyterá       | 13.132 | -        | 1.479      | 384       | -      | 6        | 1      | 1      | -           | -       | 10.211    | 1.050    | -                | -        | -             |
| 2. LENGUA MASKOY    | Guarani Misionero  | 1.954  | -        | -          | 6         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | -       | -         | -        | 3                | 1.974    | -             |
|                     | Taba Maskoy        | 756    | -        | 1          | 1         | -      | 1        | -      | -      | -           | -       | 1         | -        | 36               | 9        | 705           |
|                     | Lengua             | 7.221  | -        | 111        | -         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | 4       | -         | -        | 3.553            | 3.553    | -             |
|                     | Enxet              | 5.844  | -        | 25         | 3         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | 2       | -         | -        | 5.741            | 69       | 4             |
|                     | Sanapaná           | 2.271  | -        | 47         | 2         | -      | -        | -      | -      | 2           | -       | -         | -        | 2.126            | 20       | 74            |
|                     | Taba               | 1.474  | -        | 10         | -         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | -       | -         | -        | 1.278            | 132      | 54            |
| 3. MATACO MATAGUAYO | Argase             | 3.594  | -        | 89         | 1         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | -       | -         | -        | 3.150            | 279      | 145           |
|                     | Guana              | 242    | -        | 64         | -         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | -       | -         | -        | 69               | 2        | 87            |
|                     | Mavale             | 12.028 | -        | 1          | -         | -      | 1        | -      | -      | -           | 42      | -         | -        | 2.143            | 9.835    | 3             |
|                     | Makú               | 1.282  | -        | -          | -         | -      | -        | -      | 47     | 96          | 890     | -         | -        | 239              | 10       | -             |
| 3. ZAMUCO           | Marajá             | 452    | -        | -          | -         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | -       | -         | -        | 1                | 451      | -             |
|                     | Ayoreo             | 2.016  | -        | -          | -         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | 2       | -         | -        | 5                | 1.408    | 601           |
|                     | Chamacoco          | 1.456  | -        | -          | 1         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | 39      | -         | 13       | 1                | 7        | 1.437         |
| 5. GUAIKURU         | Tomarino           | 123    | -        | -          | -         | -      | -        | -      | -      | -           | -       | -         | -        | -                | 1        | 102           |
|                     | Taba Com           | 1.474  | -        | -          | 129       | -      | -        | -      | 1      | -           | -       | 2         | -        | 1.341            | 1        | -             |
| NO INDIGENA         |                    | 555    | -        | 11         | 25        | -      | 41       | 16     | 3      | 65          | 2       | 22        | 56       | 106              | 155      | 12            |

Nota: Se excluyen departamentos sin población indígena

Fuente: DGEEC. II Censo Nacional Indígena 2002

Table 1: National Census 2002. Indigenous population divided per ethnic group (vertical column) and political region (horizontal column). Source: DGEEC (General Direction of Statistics, Enquires and Census).

Bratislava Susnik, Slovenian director of the anthropological museum of Asunción for more than forty years, described the characteristics of the area between 1650 and 1910, in a huge systematizing effort. According to Susnik, the five ethnic groups that formed Maskoy people were mainly hunters-gatherers (even though they sometimes cultivated small parcels of land in the bush), except for the Guana, who undertook an important agricultural role that included breeding domestic animals. Furthermore, the Maskoy people as a whole tended to marry “women ethnically different from their tribe” obtained through incursions into the enemy territory (Susnik 1981: 143). The different ethnic groups, in fact, were separated into allies and enemies, and it was a common practice to steal alimentary resources and women from antagonist groups (as with, for example, the relationship between Lengua and Sanapaná). To strengthen the links with the allies, the different groups used to gather in cyclical festivals (*kyaiya* in Enxet) and in female puberty rites [*yanmana* in Enxet - now called in Guaraní *baile kuña*] (Susnik 1981; see also Chapter 3 in this thesis).

In 1786 the first religious mission, the Melodia reduction, was founded in the Southern part of the Chaco (Susnik 1981: 143). Indigenous people learnt to visit the mission asking for gifts, the most yearned for of which were sheep and cow meat. In specific episodes

(even if we don't know which) the mission also worked as a defence against possible injuries from the Whites in those frontier territories. It eventually closed at the beginning of the 19th century because none of the indigenous groups really got to settle down in the mission. Apart from the gift exchange relationship that happened with missionaries and sporadic travellers, the relationship between White and indigenous people, up to that moment, had been based on robberies on the part of the latter and military incursions on the part of the former. But the gradual occupation of their land forced indigenous people at the borders to stop the robberies and begin bartering. According to Susnik, indigenous people initially bartered wool blankets, wool, brooms, leather, wax and feathers, in exchange for the tobacco, machetes and meat of the Whites, and vice-versa (Ibid.).

Curiously enough, the Whites judged severely since the beginning the indigenous partners with whom they bartered. Susnik, for example, describes the Guana people as the less aggressive ones because of their decision to negotiate with the Whites, but also accuses them at the same time of 'utilitarianism' (Susnik 1981: 159). Was Susnik thinking that the contact with White people should have been driven by some kind of spiritual reason? Cominges, an Argentinean explorer who in 1879 visited the area surrounding the future town of Puerto Casado for commercial reasons, gave a similar opinion. His intermediary with the indigenous leaders of the area was in fact the Angaité leader *Cacique Michi* (*Short Stature Leader*), whose settlement was located just on the edge of the Paraguay River, and whom he describes in the following way:

This leader is about forty years old, of small stature, [...] opportunist, fussy, capricious, annoying, always drunk, liar, cunning, disloyal and thief. These defects, more than belonging to his own race, depend upon the geographical location of his settlement: his proximity to the coast is at the root of all his misfortunes and vices.<sup>8</sup> (Cominges 1882: 7)

The image of degradation is completed by the description of the cacique humiliating himself for a piece of bread:

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<sup>8</sup> Este cacique representa unos cuarenta años de edad, es pequeño de estatura, [...]; interesado, exigente, antojadizo, pedigrüño, borracho, embustero, taimado, desleal y ladrón. Defectos, mas que propios de su raza, hijos de las circunstancias en que le ha colocado la situación topográfica del lugar donde radica su toltería. Su proximidad a la costa es causa de todas sus desdichas y todos sus vicios.

He had to resign himself with fishing and hunting in order to survive; and with some piece of bread dropped – for commiseration or entertainment – by the passengers of the steam boats, who take pleasure at watching the ability of these human amphibians at swimming or canoeing. [...] To summarise, the *Cacique Michi* is a dangerous and abhorrent man, just like all indigenous people whose education comes from the trade which exploits, degrades, and corrupts them.<sup>9</sup> (Cominges 1882: 8)

I will describe later in the chapter how the *Cacique Michi*, still remembered by contemporary Maskoy people, is described and valued in a very different way by his Angaité descendants. Cominges' judgment is however interesting in that it reveals a dichotomy that has remained the same through time: the dichotomy between the 'Proud Indian', detached from the Western goods<sup>10</sup>, and the 'Miserable Indian', ready to cheat or humiliate himself for a few Western goods, apparently repudiating his own culture. Cominges is particularly critical about one of *Cacique Michi's* passions: alcoholic beverages. If we analyse in detail one of the scenes he describes, though, we are lead to think that something deeper is going on around the leader's passion for wine:

With a demijohn in one hand, and a glass in the other, I distributed the wine amongst a big circle of people, without excluding anyone: even children who were still breastfeeding were offered a sip by their mothers, and they drank avidly, despite being scared of my beard and glasses.<sup>11</sup> (Cominges 1882: 115)

If Cominges' description is truthful, and even children were invited to taste the wine, the motivation behind the drinking of the wine cannot consist of a mere desire for drunkenness. Instead, it probably needs to be interpreted in the framework of a peculiar way of relating to the Whites, a sensual one. To support this interpretation, we can rely on Cominges' complaints about the pressures that the Guana people put on him to play his accordion in all the villages they were visiting:

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<sup>9</sup> Tuvo que conformarse con pesca y caza para sustentarse, y con alguna galleta lanzada, por misericordia o por entretenimiento, por los pasajeros que, desde los vapores, gustan ver la agilidad que en la natación y en el manejo de la canoa despliegan estos humanos anfibios. [...] En una palabra, el Cacique Michi es un hombre peligroso y repugnante, como lo son todos los indígenas cuya educación proviene del bajo comercio que los explota, los degrada y los corrompe.

<sup>10</sup> Represented in Cominges narration by the Guana leaders.

<sup>11</sup> Con la damajuana en una mano y el vaso en otra, di la vuelta a aquel inmenso círculo, repartiendo lo que había entre todos, sin excluir ni aun a los niños que estaban en la lactancia, pues que su madre les sacaba el pecho de la boca para que empinaran el vaso, lo que hacían con avidez, aunque muy asustados de mis barbas y de mis anteojos.

After the wine distribution, when people were finally tired of watching me, touching me, laughing at me, trying my hat on and pulling my beard, the Cacique Michi brought me the accordion and ordered me to play.<sup>12</sup> (Cominges 1882: 115)

This initial reaction to Cominges' presence is based on a "predatory" (Carneiro de Cunha 2007) attitude towards his material and immaterial (musical) possessions. In other words, he is immediately and sensorially 'known' (where the act of knowing implies a transformation through assimilation) through indigenous people's taking hold of his possessions. Cominges is not feared and kept at a distance, but immediately "cannibalized" (Viveiros de Castro 1992) through the objects that belong to him. A similar scene, in fact, is described around indigenous people's reaction to his bag that had been left unattended:

A young man took my bag, and after emptying it on a mat, he distributed all of its contents around. But after a few hours I saddled up my horse and I realised – with surprise – that my bag was there, filled up and closed as it was before being emptied by the Indians.<sup>13</sup> (Cominges 1882: 191-195)

There is a sensual approach to Cominges' alterity that is not only attributable to a difficulty in verbal communication. I will refer in the third chapter to Taussig's description of the mimetic faculty as an alternative "way of knowing", based on a sensual yielding into the Other (Taussig 1993); but I shall leave it suspended for the moment. It is clear however from Cominges' description that the explorer found reproachable some attitudes that we can attribute to an unusual (for the Whites) way of relating to the Other.

The first Whites to spend a considerable amount of time with the indigenous people that were to become the Maskoy were solitary travellers or missionaries. Until the implementation of the first tannin factories, there weren't in fact non-indigenous settlements in the Chaco area (Kidd 1995: 47). The colonisation of the region was instead delegated by the State to the Anglican and the Catholic churches and to foreign investors,

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<sup>12</sup> Concluida esta operación y cansada ya la gente de mirarme, de tocarme, de reírse de mí, de ponerse alternativamente mi sombrero, y de tirarme de las barbas hasta quedarse con ellas en la mano, el cacique Michi me trajo el acordeón y me ordeno' que tocara.

<sup>13</sup> Este joven tomo' mi morral, y vertiendo cuanto contenía sobre una estera, hizo reparto general de todos los objetos. [...] Ensille' mi caballo y no sin asombro, vi sobre el montón de nuestros equipajes que mi morral estaba repleto y abrochado como antes de que fuese vaciado por los indios.



Carlos Casado amongst them. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the selling of State lands at the end of the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870), the first cattle ranches and tannin industries were established. In the 1920s' Emilio Sosa Gaona founded the first Salesian mission on the island of Napegue. Meanwhile, with the beginning of the conflict with Bolivia, the army finally occupied the Chaco in 1924 (CEP 1986: 27).

Since the end of the 19th century, the indigenous people that were to become the Maskoy began working for the Whites. Some of them, however, had only sporadic contact with the Whites' working context. In fact, they sometimes accepted temporary jobs in order to obtain particular goods but went back to their territories as soon as they could. We know from Gipsy, one of the first cattle ranchers of the Chaco (quoted by Susnik 1981: 149), that each familial group had a special relationship with a certain area, also called *valle* (valley - a term still in use today), where they made use of a reliable source of water (a lagoon, a river or a well), and where they lived when they were not working. I have already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter that indigenous self-denominations were based at some point on the link between a certain group of people and a specific place. The permanence of these 'shelters' in the middle of the Chaco territory, however, was finally endangered by a period of scarcity of water that produced a struggle over the best territories (Susnik 1981)<sup>14</sup>. Indigenous people were left with no choice but to live closer to White settlements.

## 1.2 Foundation of and decline of Carlos Casado's tannin industry

Once in contact with White people, the transformation of the Maskoy society is described by most of the observers as a process of degeneration. Angaité people, for example, were the ones that most rapidly lost their hunting territories because of their proximity to the Paraguay River. Following the foundation of Casado's tannin factory in 1887, in 1918 the tannin centre of Puerto Pinasco<sup>15</sup> was founded in the core of the Angaité territory. According to Susnik, the consequence of the Angaité involvement in the tannin industry was the exploitation and "progressive de-valorisation of their culture" (Susnik 1981: 56). Obelar – a bishop deeply involved in the Maskoy's fight for land of the 1980s – offers a

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<sup>14</sup> The same situation is happening now in Paraguay at a wider level as foreign people are buying lands situated above the Guaraní Aquifer and the US army has set up one of its bases there.

<sup>15</sup> Owned by the American International Products Corporation.

similar opinion with respect to the Guana and Angaité people living in the proximity of Casado's tannin industry:

Guaná. They are the most 'de-culturised' and 'de-tribalised' of the Chaco region. Tannin production was the disintegrating factor. [...] The arrival of the tannin industry and the colonisation of the Chaco led to the proletarianization of the Angaité Indians, their sedentariness and dependency (Obelar 1981: 16) .

Obelar's critical comments need to be contextualized in the decline of Casado's tannin industry in the 1980s'. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, the tannin industry was the sign that civilisation was finally arriving in the Chaco region.

Carlos Casado del Alisal was born in Spain in 1833. Still young he emigrated to Argentina where he founded the Carlos Casado Bank in 1865, which, in 1866, was bought by the international London and River Plate Bank (bought in 1923 by Lloyds Bank). Back in London, Casado made contact with the English financier Waring Bros & Co. Ltd., which in turn became involved with the foundation of the first national bank of Paraguay. The role of Carlos Casado in Paraguayan national life was initially due to his personal links with the international financial system. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Eligio Ayala, before becoming President in 1923, was the Casado company's lawyer (CEP 1983: 28).

Immediately after the War of the Triple Alliance, because of the huge financial crisis, the Paraguayan State began selling state-owned lands. Between 1886 and 1889 Carlos Casado took advantage of the situation and, acting through dummy intermediaries, he finally managed to buy 5.625.000 has. of land in the Chaco. The core of the 'empire' was located in the town of Puerto Casado - 550 kilometres away from the capital city - that in 1893 became the administrative and industrial centre of Carlos Casado's territory.

An alternative version of the story says that the Argentinean army – one of the winners of the conflict - gave the lands for free to Carlos Casado. A proof of this fact would be that there are no documents that testify to the selling of the land to Casado on the part of the Paraguayan State (Aguero 2005).

The top managers (*mayordomos* and *administradores*) of Casado S.A. described Casado as the man who brought development and civilisation to the Chaco region. Don Heugenio

Hermosa, historian of Puerto Casado and *mayordomo* (cattle ranch manager) of the Casado S.A., spoke about the “civilising mission of Casado’s company, which possessed by the pioneer and conquering spirit of his founder unraveled richness from a green hell [the Chaco]” (In: Aguero 1985).

The activities of Casado S.A. were divided since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into three sectors: the factory, the logging centres (*obrajés*), and the cattle ranches (*estancias*). The factory was located in the little town of Puerto Casado, on the Western bank of the Paraguay River. The tannin was processed in the factory and then sent by boat to the capital city and to Argentina. The logging centres, where the *quebracho* trees were extracted, were located towards the centre of the Chaco. In order to facilitate their transportation, a 160 km railway was built from Puerto Casado towards the centre of the region. People working in the logging centres were called *hacheros* because of the use of axes in their work. In order to organise the work in the logging centres, their management was sub-hired to the so called *contratistas* (those who make contracts). One *contratista* could be in charge of up to six *obrajés*. Apart from the tannin production, Casado also had cattle ranches. A *mayordomo* was responsible for a group of cattle ranches, and each of the ranches had one manager (*gerente*) who was directly hired by Casado. The hierarchical structure ended with *capataces* (foremen) who were in charge of the manual workers: the *peones* (o *estancieros*<sup>16</sup>). Mobility in the hierarchical structure was determined by trust and political favours.

Casado’s presence – as a kind of subliminal message – was such that it even structured the religious domain. The triad of Saints, which was, and still is, behind the altar of the main church was an incarnation of his family. In fact, the main statue represents San Carlos, with San Ramon (from Ramona, Casado’s wife) on its left and San Jose (from Jose, his son) on its right. His three daughters are in turn incarnated in the bells of the church that still bear their names.

The relationship between the firm and the State was consolidated since the beginning in the frame of an exchange of favours. Casado would, for example, guarantee the access of the State to international credit; and later on, during the Chaco war, the railway that was

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<sup>16</sup> *Estanciero* is the term used by Maskoy people to refer to the cattle ranch workers. It is interesting to notice that the term is used by the Whites to refer to the cattle ranch owners, and not to the workers. The adoption of this word on the part of Maskoy people could be seen as a valorisation of their working position.

used to transport the *quebracho* trees to the factory would be used by the Paraguayan soldiers. The State, on the other hand, beside granting access to an illegal quantity of land, would also allow the exploitation of the natural resources of the whole area, even in the case of state-owned lands.

With the International crises in tannin production of the 1970s, the relationship with the State became tense however, and in the 1980s tensions arose between the Central Bank of Paraguay and the firm. In a memorandum of Casado S.A. to the Government, for example, we find that: "Suddenly, the 16<sup>th</sup> of January of 1984 the Carlos Casado S.A. is included in a list of firms for whom it is prohibited to export. [...] The central bank did not intervene despite the multiple requests for a solution from the Casado S.A." (Letter found in the abandoned archive of the ex-factory). In 1996 the tannin production is brought to a halt. In 2000, in bankruptcy and with a huge economic debt, Casado S.A. unexpectedly sells 600.000 has. of its lands, including part of Puerto Casado itself and the tannin factory, to the Atenil S.A., a society of the Unification Church known as the Moon Sect.

#### **Maskoy people and the birth of Casado's tannin industry**

According to Rene Ramirez, who played a key role as leader in the history of Maskoy people, the tannin factory of Puerto Casado was built entirely with an indigenous work force, under the direction of an Argentinean engineer. In those times, indigenous workers used to sleep in the factory, while their families were living in settlements scattered around the area:

Between 1870 and 1880 indigenous people began settling down in Puerto Casado. Then the missionaries came, in 1922 or 1928, and they occupied the place where indigenous people are now residing [Pueblito]. Before, the district of San Juan was entirely populated by indigenous people. And the district called '*oleria*' too. White people were only settled down around the hotel, and the rest of the town was populated by indigenous people. A huge quantity of people. It is different now. (Rene Ramirez, interview)

The majority of the sources refer to the fact that Casado S.A. built the factory in 1887. According to Kleinpenning, however, the factory was built in the same year by Juan Battista Vierci, a Paraguayan citizen, and then sold to Carlos Casado (Villagra, personal communication).

In his diary of 1879, Cominges describes *Cacique Michi*'s settlement as located exactly in the area where the factory was built. A map of Casado S.A. [see next page, Figure 3] seems to confirm his observation, and it is interesting to notice how – surrounded by all the cattle ranches – the land occupied by an indigenous settlement is explicitly marked on the map, as if the firm itself had legitimised its occupation. That same parcel of land, however, corresponds to the land occupied by the Guana people during the epoch of the fight for land of the 1980s. According to Cominges, the *Cacique Michi*'s people were already working in 1879 in the logging centre of Colonia Apa (just opposite Puerto Casado), where they were paid with a fistful of corn. It is reasonable to think that Michi's settlement, initially located in the proximity of the factory, gradually moved towards km 40 of the railway track, where contemporary Maskoy testimonies locate it. We can also believe that, as Ramirez says, at least the Angaité were involved since the beginning in the construction of the factory. Rene Ramirez himself is in fact the classificatory nephew of the Cacique Michi, who was probably his father's brother.

As recorded by an investigation of the Catholic Church at the time of the struggle for land, in 1906 there were 1,000 employees working in Casado's factory, of which 400 were indigenous (CEP 1983). The numbers declined over the years, and by the 1950s one hundred Indians were employed by Casado S.A. In this same period all indigenous workers were suddenly "sent back to the woods" (*enviados de vuelta al monte*) under the pretext that they did not work efficiently (*no rendían*). Seventy of them were then hired again thanks to the local trade union, which demanded in turn the payment of a quota from each re-hired worker. This episode seems consistent with the testimony of Bratislava Susnik, according to whom there were communist unionist leaders doing activism in the Chaco at that time - before the dictatorship would start repressing them (Susnik 1953). In 1979 there were again 150 indigenous workers in the factory; but in the next decade, out of 500 indigenous people living in Pueblito, only 18 of them worked full time for Casado S.A., and 18 more had temporary jobs in the same factory.



the name of a Catholic priest). As a Paraguayan teacher once pointed out to me, the railway track that still divides Puerto Casado in two parts, also divides in two the local population: indigenous people on one side, and Paraguayans on the other. The foundation of Pueblito, if we have to deduce from the following quote by Susnik, follows the building of the railway track and dates back to the 1940s:

Father Bruno Stella, the Salesian priest of Puerto Casado, identifies the difficulties of his missionary work in the instability of the Indians. In order to constitute a compact group of Christian Indians, he founded the "Christian village" [Pueblito Indio Livio Farina], where he gathered together indigenous people from different ethnic groups (Enxet, Angaité, Sanapaná, Tobas, Chamacoco). This mixing up of indigenous people should result in a common indigenous Catholic conscience, instead of the old relationship with their own pagan people. It is difficult to foresee how this experiment will end up. Father Stella is convinced about the success of his enterprise, but he is forgetting that the indigenous people living along the Paraguay River are being influenced by White people working in the factories and docks (Susnik 1954 - pt).

Despite the Father's efforts, we know from Regher's report that in the 1970s indigenous people settled down in Pueblito were still divided according to ethnic groups (Regher 1980). According to him, in fact, one group of 35 families refused to settled down inside the limits of the 'indigenous reserve' (this is how it was defined by Casado S.A.) of Pueblito Livio Farina and they built their houses in a place called Valley of the Carob Trees (*Valle del Algarrobo*), just outside the limits of the 'reserve'. Two other families were also located in a separate place called Valley of the Paradise Tree (*Valle del Paraíso*). Luis Leiva, a Toba intellectual who wrote a book about the history of his people<sup>17</sup>, describes a similar situation whilst talking about a group of Toba who left Puerto Casado and emigrated to Loma Plata (Central Chaco) in the 1970s. According to him, "our people are really racist, not only amongst each other but also with other tribes. The Toba and Lengua tribes always created conflicts in the mission, despite living in the same community"<sup>18</sup> (Leiva 2004).

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<sup>17</sup> I've met Luis Leiva in 2004, while working for PRODECHACO. He asked the project's anthropological unit for help to type his book on a computer. As a consequence, I have personally transcribed his book while he dictated it to me, and saved a copy of it.

<sup>18</sup> Nuestra gente es muy racista no solo entre nosotros sino también con otras tribus. [...] Los Tobas y la Tribu Lengua siempre creaban conflictos en la misión, aunque todos vivían en una misma comunidad.

The adoption of a common Maskoy identity does not appear to be a spontaneous outcome of the cohabitation of the different groups, but it was rather a consciously planned project that began during the first years of the fight for land in the mid-1980s, and continued later on when people settled down as 'modern communities' (see Chapter 2). It is legitimate to think, however, that inter-marriages between the different groups had already started before the 1980s.

The jobs of the Indians in the factory were harder than those of the Paraguayans. The ovens that were used to burn the wood in order to extract the tannin were placed at the bottom of the factory, where the workers had to stay really close to the fire, while in the upper part of the factory the temperature was more endurable. Paraguayan workers were located in the upper part, whilst the Maskoy worked in basement. Those who were not working with the ovens were working as 'carriers' (*cargadores*), which means that they had to carry the tannin bags on their shoulder and deposit them on a cargo boat on the Paraguay River. The fact that the *cargadores* had to sleep in the factory in order to wait for the boat is one often emphasized by Maskoy people, as if the fact of sleeping far from home involved a true sacrifice. The only specialized job that was the responsibility of a Maskoy worker, and that I got to know about, had to do with the preparation of a chemical solution that was used in the final stage of the preparation of the liquid tannin. Don Suarez, the expert, is one of the few workers to have received a pension from the State for his work in Casado S.A.

Other jobs performed by indigenous people were related to the transportation between Puerto Casado and the cattle ranches and logging centres. The *carreros* (cart drivers) brought milk and other necessities from Casado to the cattle ranches. The *cuadrilleros* (those who work in squads), in turn, fixed the railway track. In order to their job, the workers moved with a railway car along the tracks, pushing the wooden platform with the help of large sticks. As we'll see later on, accidents were really frequent.

### From Indians to Working Citizens

As we know from the letter that opens this chapter, the distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous workers in Casado's registers was only recently erased in 1977. Indigenous



people were in fact initially considered as 'minor in age' because of their lack of documents, and they were paid less than the other workers. Their work, moreover, was considered to be inferior to that of Paraguayan people because it was less efficient (see also Kidd 1997). In some cases, the workers would be paid with vouchers that were only convertible for food in Casado's own food stores. The decision of Casado S.A. to overcome the discrimination towards indigenous people is the result of their involvement in the local trade union. Susnik and Chase-Sardi explain the incorporation of Maskoy people in the trade union with the activities of the Marandu Project. Sponsored by the Catholic University of Asuncion, the project was founded in the 1970s to provide indigenous leaders and their communities with information about their legal rights (Renshaw 1996). In 1975, members of the Project visited Puerto Casado, where they hold a seminar for about fifteen days (Ibid.), and immediately after Maskoy people were incorporated in the trade union. According to Susnik and Chase-Sardi, it was precisely because of this episode that Stroessner's dictatorship imprisoned and tortured in 1975 some of the leading Paraguayan members of the Project, Chase-Sardi amongst them (Susnik & Chase-Sardi 1995: 329).

The representative of Maskoy people in the trade union was once again Rene Ramirez. He likes to tell how Don Hermosa, *mayordomo* (cattle ranch manager) of the Casado S.A. and Liberal politician, stopped him several times in the street in order to convince him to abandon the fight, but with no results. This is how Ramirez describes his involvement in the trade union (Interview with R.Ramirez - June 2007):

- (Me): Were the Indians paid the same as the Paraguayans?
- (RR): No, they received less money. They weren't paid as they should have been.
- (Me): What did the Indians say about this?
- (RR): They didn't know anything. They just received what was given to them. They didn't know how much they were paid. They received the money and were happy.
- (Me): And then what happened?
- (RR): Later on, there was the civic education. The firm didn't like it. I started working in the trade union. [...] The firm was claiming that they were Argentinean, and had their own laws. We had to fight with this.

This apparent indifference about the quantity of money received from the boss could be partially due to people's ignorance of what the Paraguayans received. It is more likely, though, that they knew they earned less than Paraguayans, but they conceptualised the money as part of a wider set of relationships, and its related system of giving-receiving.

## Work

The reports of the *Equipo Nacional de Misiones* (an ecclesiastic institution) unfailingly emphasise that indigenous people have always been exploited. The work in the factory and the logging centres is described as a forced solution, as a result of a pressure on the land and local natural resources that had began in the 1920s. This description serves the portrayal of indigenous people as victims, a role that had to be emphasized during the fight for land. In contrast however, Delporte and Susnik, talk about the work for Paraguayans as something voluntarily sought and valued by indigenous people.

According to Delporte, himself a Salesian missionary working in the Chaco for about ten years, the Angaité people considered the cattle ranches as 'places of abundance' (*lugares de abundancia*), in that they guaranteed a constant availability of food:

River ports were interpreted as places of abundance, because they had stores full of food. [...] This is why indigenous people approached the ports: not because they were interested in working or in learning about technological development, but because in the stores there was plenty of food (Delporte 1998: 250 - pt).

His analysis echoes other anthropological theories that describe Chaco people as fundamentally 'gatherers' - of food, objects, and finally NGO projects (Von Bremen 1987). What it does not take into account, however, is the significance of the relationship that is performed and imagined between employers and employee. In other words, the use of the gathering activity as an explanatory category fails in that it does not take into account the relationships in which it is immersed.

Cominges mentions the work of the Angaité in the logging centre of the Colonia Apa as a collective form of work: a contract between a White boss on the one hand and the leader and his people on the other. We know from Regher, however, that the work in the factory, the cattle ranches and logging centres was set up as an individual contract between the employees and the employer. As he says: "the working and missionary contracts were realised since decades with single individuals" (Regher 1980). This fact is confirmed by the variety in provenance of the familial groups settled in Pueblito.

Bratislava Susnik, who did her fieldwork in the Chaco in the 1960s, gives a more articulated account of the appearance of 'work' in Maskoy life. According to her, there is a shift in those years in the Enxet concept of 'man skilled in searching for things' (*hombre habil en rebuscarse cosas*). In fact, with the beginning of the work in the cattle farms, there is a new appreciation of 'work' as the masculine activity par excellence, such that the value of a man, in the new socio-economic configuration, was constituted in his ability to find a job in a cattle ranch. The lack of regular work, for example, is one of the most mentioned reasons for justifying feelings of 'sadness' and 'yearning', together with being separated from the group of 'mates' (*comunes compañeros*) (Susnik 1977: 14).

The work in the logging centres, so often spoken of as an example of exploitation and miserable living conditions on the part of the missionaries, was also valued. Again, according to Susnik, strong men were highly appreciated by the Enxet for their ability in handling the axe, a demonstration of their physical strength. Another type of work that was highly valued, as I myself came to appreciate during my fieldwork, was the work as *estanciero* (cattle ranch worker). What was valued in this case, was the ability to learn how to ride and domesticate a horse. The work of *estanciero*, as that of *bachero* (axe worker), was usually shared with Paraguayan workers (the fact that the cowboys had a special outfit, as we will see in chapter 3, had a special significance of its own).

Maskoy people are ambivalent in their characterisation of the work for Casado S.A. On one hand, they describe it as 'heavy' (*pesado*), whilst on the other hand, it is valued as part of the auto-biographical past of individuals. The documents of the Catholic Church often remark on the exploitative conditions suffered by Maskoy workers, but it is important to consider how the workers themselves described their work. Talking about the work in the cattle ranches, for example, Susnik remarked that "even if Lengua people sometimes show tiredness, they never admit to be tired, and they rather deny it. To admit tiredness would result in being judged as 'man not strong', or weak" (Susnik 1977: 150). In a similar way, self-victimisation regarding the way in which Casado S.A. treated Maskoy people at work is usually absent in their narrations of the past. Rather than evoking an unfair treatment on the part of their bosses, the ex-workers focus their attention on the contemporary condition of their bodies: their scars, their physical weakness. We might consider whether this act of concentrating on bodily injuries is a kind of blindness with respect to the bosses' responsibility. But I would rather argue that this is not the case, for the following reasons.

According to Seeger, da Matta and Viveiros de Castro “the peculiarity of Brazilian tribal societies (and more in general of the South-American ones) consists in a particularly rich elaboration of the notion of person, with a special reference to the body as focal symbolic idiom. [...] The physical production of an individual is inscribed in a context aimed at the social production of people as members of a specific society” (Seeger et al. 1979: 3-4 - my translation). Focusing the attention on their bodies, the ex-workers are calling into question the social context that produced them (cf. Conklin 1996; Conklin 1996a). The ex-workers’ wounded bodies are the result of an anti-social context: the failed relationships between them and their bosses (Carlos Casado del Alisal and his many descendents<sup>19</sup>) over time. While in contemporary Maskoy communities the body is ‘made beautiful’ through the physical interaction with other people in social events like foot and volleyball games<sup>20</sup>, the work for Casado S.A. produced bodies that had deteriorated or been consumed by death.

Indeed, the generation of the daughters and sons of the last workers often describes the death of their parents as caused by the harshness of their work in Casado S.A. Antonia Melgarejo for example, told me that her father, along with many others, had died because of the many knocks received during his work as *cuadrillero* (while fixing the railway tracks), and Rene Ramirez attributes the death of his father to the “tiredness” (*cansancio*) caused by his work as cart driver (*carrero*).

But how do ex-workers describe the relationship with their bosses? An interpretation of money transactions as bearers of a depersonalising effect in the interaction between workers and bosses would be inadequate in this case (Parry & Bloch 1989: 6). Money transactions and debt-peonage relationships (as was often the case in Casado S.A.) cannot be thought of independently from the establishing of social and moral bonds between the workers and their bosses. As Hugh-Jones says about the Barasana, talking about the chain that binds White patrons to lesser patrons and finally to Indians who exchange with other

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<sup>19</sup> Carlos Casado arrived in Paraguay with his wife Ramona Sastre and his sons Jose’ and Carlos Casado. After his death, the top management of the firm passed to his sons (Jose’ administrated the factory until 1943), and later on to his nephew Marcos Casado Sastre (and one of his brothers), to Jose Casado’s son in law Juan Cavanagh (and his son), his sister’s son Miguel Peralta Ramos and Diego Leon Casado.

<sup>20</sup> Women, for example, would often refer to volley matches during my fieldwork as occasions to ‘make exercise’.

Indians: "the morality of the market penetrates that of kinship, and the morality of kinship may be extended to dealings with White people" (Hugh-Jones 1992: 51).

It is a common habit in the Chaco region to pay someone's job at least partially with food, a scarce resource in an arid and isolated land. The differentiation made by the workers between the (monetary) salary and the food that they received for their job, can be said to materialise the conceptual differentiation between "the morality of food and the morality of the market". According to Susnik, in fact, while money was considered an individual possession of the worker, food was meant to be for the whole family. Moreover, while the amount of money received by the worker was considered non-negotiable, food was conceptualised as a gift on the part of the boss, and it was negotiable. As such, it was the food and not the salary that was object of frequent complaints on the part of the workers:

Work is for them the real 'payment-barter', what men consider their exclusive ownership, without any obligation of sharing it with other people, not even with their closer relatives. It is their exclusive right. Complaints are focused on the weekly ration of food that the worker receives for him and his family. It is a shared opinion that: 'food is not enough', 'it is not sufficient for the whole family'. [...] 'Food' is not equivalent to 'payment'. It simply represents the right to eat while working, extended to the whole family. The cattle ranch worker is always reluctant to use the money he receives for his work in order to buy food for his family (Susnik 1977: 156).

Through the separation between food and money, the obligation on the part of the boss to take care of his workers was brought back into the relationship. This same division between food and money, as we will see in chapter 3, is still performed in contemporary Maskoy communities. It is interesting to notice the existence, emphasised by Kidd, of an old Paraguayan Law that obliges ranch owners to "give their employers free food, sufficient to provide an adequate diet for the worker and his family" (Kidd 1997). We are left to wonder about the relationship between this Law and the differentiation between food and money made by the indigenous workers mentioned by Susnik. Is it only a fortuitous case?

According to Kidd, in order to understand how Enxet people conceptualise 'work', it is important to take into account not only the relationship with their bosses, but also the value they place on personal autonomy:

The value placed on respecting the personal autonomy of others means that no one should be obliged to do anything against their will. [...] Each person, therefore, has a great deal of autonomy in choosing their activities and, when deciding to enter the labour market, they are influenced by a range of factors in addition to those that are more strictly economic. [...] The Enxet, therefore, are not interested in maximizing production but are more concerned with generating a tranquil and contented affective state in which their personal autonomy is respected. (Kidd 1999: 130-131).

In Kidd's analysis, a job is refused when it is not seen to be in the context of a respectful and convenient working relationship, even in situations of scarce economic resources. Given these premises, it becomes more complicated to understand why and how the Maskoy workers accepted to work under the rigid hierarchical conditions imposed by Casado, where a wide margin of abuses was left to the foremen in order to keep the situation under control: "It is forbidden to protest, said an indigenous man. If someone protests in the company, they get rid of him. They are all scared. Noone wants to speak" (CEP 1983: 18).

The answer to the involvement of Maskoy people in the factory work might be related to the missionaries' role as intermediaries and to their project of civilising the Indians through work. Missionaries, tannin industry businessmen and cattle farmers were all interested for different reasons in introducing indigenous people to labour relationships. As Grubb, the founder of the Anglican mission of Maklawaya, used to say: "Each settler has to be a hard worker and every child a student" (Susnik 1981: 152). There are archive sources that talk about the active involvement of the priest of Puerto Pinasco, another tannin centre, in the enrolment of workers for the factory<sup>21</sup>. There are unfortunately no such sources available regarding the work in Casado's factory. In order to imagine how the relationship with the missionaries could have influenced working relationships, I shall thus rely on Rene Ramirez' personal trajectory.

Rene Ramirez began working for Casado S.A. in 1965. Just prior to this, he studied for three years as a seminarian in the Eastern part of the country, although he did not complete his studies. In 1965, father Ballin, who was in charge of the parish of Puerto Casado, visited him at home in order to ask him to work in the warehouse of the Casado S.A. His

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<sup>21</sup> Marie Morel, personal communication.

father had already died and he had to maintain his sisters, so he decided to accept the job. "In order not to disappoint the Father, I worked well", he underlined in an interview. In 1980 he began working as waiter in the house of Casado's family. This elevation however, was soon to come to an end, as in 1983, he was elected *cacique principal* (main leader) in the fight for land against Casado S.A. In 1989 he was transferred to the factory to "make him tired with the hard work" (*aburrirlo con trabajo duro*), and in order to receive his pension, he kept working until 2000, when the factory finally shut down. Personal relationships of "trust", in this case with the missionary, are thus described as the origin of the working relationship.

According to the missionaries, the dependency of the workers on Casado was enhanced by the fact that he would give a small glass of *caña* (rum) to the workers, including the youngest ones, every afternoon after the end of the working shift. According to Rene Ramirez, though, alcohol consumption gave strength to the workers, and it was seen as a positive thing [see 'Casado's Legacy']. We can connect this episode with the one described previously in the chapter, in which Cominges distributed wine in an Angaité settlement. I think it is possible in fact to link the association between alcohol and strength to the one between alcohol and Whites.

How did Maskoy people describe the relationship between Casado and his workers? Rene Ramirez mentions the existence of a collective contract between Marcos Casado and some indigenous leaders, very similar to that described by Cominges between White bosses and Angaité people at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The contract with the workers overlapped in this case with a gift-exchange relationship with the leader:

- (Me) Were indigenous people happy with how Casado treated them?
- (RR) Yes, they were. (*Sí, se hallaban*). The bosses (*patrones*) themselves talked to indigenous people. The boss himself approached them. Each new year, he brought a gift to the leader. The boss himself offered him a gift. It could be trousers, or a shirt that could be used at work. And also food. That's his gift. The bosses gave food to the leader so that he could share it amongst his group of people. The leader distributed the food to each household.

In some of the cases, the leader was acting as a foreman for Casado. In these cases, however, following a traditional Maskoy leadership pattern (Villagra 2008), he would first distribute the things to his people, and only after - and if - everyone received his/her share,

would he keep something for himself (Ramirez, personal communication). The leader was the last to receive anything, and as a consequence, everyone knew what he received, an amount that was supposed to be less than what everyone else received. We shall see in the next chapter how this practice was modified by the advent of politics.

In other cases, Ramirez mentions the exchange of personal gifts between the boss and the leader, whereby the latter kept hold of the entire gift without having to re-distribute it amongst his people. This was the case with shamans, and in particular, the already famous *Cacique Michi*. The *Cacique Michi* lived in the vicinity of Km 40 of the railway track, in a place called *Ko Arta*, or *Ko Alta*, according to two different versions. He was a shaman and, in contrast to his brothers (of which he had four, one of them named *Samandu*) who worked for Casado S.A., he lived from the produce of the field, which his auxiliary spirits would work for him. Marcos Casado (unlike Cominges fifty years before) respected him, and gave him gifts for his services:

Each time that Marcos Casado arrived in Puerto Casado, he visited him [the Cacique Michi]. Casado asked him if his family was doing well, and he shaman told him that everything was fine, and that he would keep watching at a distance (*mirar de lejos*). In fact the company knew... the wizards (*los brujos*). (Rene Ramirez, interview).

According to Ramirez, still housed in the National Institute of the Indian is a land property title under the name of Cacique Michi, a "small circle" located in proximity of km 40 on the railway track. If we accept Cominges' description of Michi's *toldería* (indigenous settlement; see Chapter 2 for an analysis of the term) as situated on the bank of the Paraguay River, we have to suppose a gradual displacing of Michi's settlement towards a location more isolated from the Whites. It is in *Ko Arta* that Michi's possessions were finally buried, following a traditional pattern, after his death. And it is there that they still remain.

### The closing of the factory

The existence of a moral bond between Casado and his workers is a key factor in Rene Ramirez' account of the closing of the factory. Here, the role of the shamans as mediators in the relationship between Maskoy people and the external world is re-established.



According to Ramirez, in fact, mysterious signs anticipated the shutting down of the factory:

I was surprised. First, I saw a snake inside the factory. And then, an armadillo. Wandering inside the factory. And then the monkey came in, and then an alligator, and then lots of them. [...] It was a sign coming from people... from the woods (*Ese es señal de gente...ellos son monte*).

These signs were interpreted by a Maskoy shaman as the announcement of the imminent closing of the factory. In the same period, Marcos Casado – one of the three members of the Casado S.A. board of directors - began to be visited by snakes:

Marcos Casado opened the door of his room from inside, and that's when he saw the snake. I wasn't there when it happened. The following day, Casado and his wife called me and they told me that they got really scared. That same afternoon, they left Puerto Casado and never came back. It wasn't the first time for Marcos Casado. On another occasion, he told me that he went fishing. But instead of a fish, a snake bit the hook. He cut the line and left. When he told me, I said: "Are you joking?". And he said: "No, I'm not". And so, I shut up.

The reference to the snake is not accidental. During my fieldwork, the appearance of a snake in someone's house was regularly interpreted as sent by a shaman. It is then reasonable to think that shamans were sending 'things' to Marcos Casado in order to harm him. In this version of the story, there is a subtle reclaiming by Rene Ramirez of the shamans' active role in the closing of the factory. There had to be a reason why the factory was suddenly visited by wild animals:

It's strange: animals belong to the woods. That's a sign. They cannot enter in the factory by chance. There had to be a reason. How can they enter like that? But, on the other hand, who is going to believe that the factory is going to close? Only after it happened, I could believe it. It was impossible to believe like that. Who is going to believe it? They said that Casado was a multimillionaire. The company had 2 or 3 planes, 4 cars, 2 big motor boats. Beautiful. The hand of God was there [in the closing of the factory]. (*Todo son trabajos de Dios, su mano.*) God exists, I realised.

The sudden reference to God in the episode could be a way to hide an explicit reference to shamanism. On the other hand, the references to snakes and wild animals leave no doubts. Later on, in the same interview, Ramirez suggested that Marcos Casado's fault, the origin

of his disgrace, has been his incorrect behaviour with the workers, and thus his breaking of the caring relationship that is the basis of any social tie.

- (Me) You think that Casado did something wrong, and that's why...
- (RR) It is a consequence of what happened. First, he treated human beings in a bad way. He cheated them. That's the starting point. First, he doesn't pay enough. He just gives when he feels like giving (*cuando se le antoja*). And when you ask him something, even if kindly, he doesn't give. This is why God had to be strict with him (*pone la mano dura*).

Ramirez would also remind me of an episode which dated back to his job as waiter in Casado's house, and that was important enough to him to be worth mentioning on several occasions. Marcos Casado – Rene says – had the habit of eating cow kidneys every day. One day, however, the butcher forgot to put aside the boss's daily portion. A servant was sent to the butchery to collect the kidney but he came back with empty hands. Casado got really angry and – unable to decide who was primarily responsible for the lack of meat – he fired the servant and the butcher. That day, Rene Ramirez adds with a certain anxiety, it was fortunately his rest day.

### 1.3 Violence

Carlos Casado invaded our settlements, robbed our houses, our animals, and drove us away from our lands. Our leaders couldn't resist because White people had weapons and killed, and for many years they subjugated our people and treated them like animals. From that day, our people began to disperse. (Leiva 2004)

Violence – in the sense of voluntary physical harm inflicted on someone – was an intrinsic part of Casado S.A. administration. As is so common in similar cases, violence was kept invisible and present at the same time, officially condemned and secretly practiced. The only testimony we have about the infamous profession of the *capanga* (a man paid by the bosses to secretly kill specific workers) is that of Father Ballin, who received the confession of one of them just before his death.

Ballin relates the profession of the *capanga* to Casado S.A.'s need to maintain discipline amongst the workers. He also mentions the fact that in 1905, because of an unfair murder,

all the indigenous workers of the factory “started a rebellion against the Whites and forced them to leave [the factory] together with their boss]”. “The company asked for help to the government, who sent the army to solve the situation” (Ballin 1998: 61). And yet he himself partially keeps his silence, and does not provide a detailed description of the episode. None of the Maskoy people I have talked to, remember anything about this episode.

According to one report of the ENM, Maskoy people turned into a “disciplined and docile” labour force because of the violence inflicted upon them since the first decades of the tannin industry (CEP 1986). According to the testimonies, in 1920 – frightened by an epidemic of black smallpox – Jose Casado locked all the sick Maskoy in a warehouse and set fire to it. In 1920, a group of Guana living in the proximity of Cerro Nandu, was accused by the Casado S.A. of stealing its cattle. Forty people were subsequently murdered, with the help of a squad of soldiers. Only one person survived and managed to run away and recount what happened to his people. His son is now living in Territory Riacho Mosquito.

It is difficult to match the two sides of the coin: Stephen Kidd’s description of the value placed on the caring relationship between a boss and his workers on the one hand, and these episodes of violence that seem to disrupt any possible trust, on the other. How could the relationship have evolved? How could people keep working – and value their work – for Casado S.A.? Do we have to assume a distinction – made by Maskoy people – between the “entity” of Casado S.A. as an ambiguous, impersonal subject, and the relationships they built with the individual people they had to deal with? And what was the role of the army in diverting the attention from the violence perpetuated by the company?

We know from Susnik (Susnik 1981) and Cominges (Cominges 1882), that already before the arrival of Casado some of the Maskoy groups violently fought one another. Cominges even describes in his diary the terror of Guana people when they suspected an attack of the Mbaya on their settlement. Unfortunately, there are no more articulated descriptions of the relationship between Maskoy people and their enemies. We can at least deduce however, that perhaps Casado’s violence (in the sense of physical aggression) was not as surprising – or as new – as we would be led to think.

What was probably new was the ambiguous relationship with the bosses: on one hand, they gave work and sought the alliance of Maskoy people, whilst on the other hand they inflicted physical violence on them. This ambiguous form of relating to indigenous people on the part of White people, has condensed into a contemporary conceptualisation of Paraguayan people as “angry people”. They are seen as people easily engaging in physical violence for no justifiable reason, other than a lack of control over their emotional states. According to Kalish, it is a popular opinion amongst indigenous people from the central Chaco that “both the Mennonite and the Paraguayan get easily angry. But while the Mennonite shouts only, the Paraguayan kills” (Kalisch 2000: 18).

#### 1.4 The fight for land

Although securing land for the Maskoy was another attempt [on the part of the dictatorship] to dampen rising opposition, the campaign [read: the struggle of Maskoy people] still stands as a monument to indigenous organisation. (Horst 2007: 131)<sup>22</sup>

As Renshaw notes, “when the traditional system of production based on the master-client relationship is replaced by market-oriented dynamic farms, indigenous people are often thrown off the land becoming an itinerant labour force” (Renshaw 2001). With the decline of the tannin industry and changing production conditions, the risk of the ex-workers of the Casado company becoming an “itinerant labour force” increased, and the adjudication of a piece of land for them became essential. The first to make this reasoning were probably the missionaries, or maybe the indigenists of the Marandu project who visited Puerto Casado in 1975. It is a shared opinion though that the Maskoy people, as a collective denomination shared by a group of people, were born in the 1980s during the struggle for land.

The term Maskoy had already been used in the anthropological literature to define five ethnic groups with a common linguist root: the Sanapaná, Angaité, Guaná, Tobá and Enxet. Despite Susnik’s assertion that it was common amongst the Maskoy people to “steal” their wife from an antagonist group, contemporary Maskoy people agree that there

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<sup>22</sup> Even though Horst dedicates several pages to the Maskoy struggle for land, he never mentions the role of shamans. His narration is limited to (what seems to me) the point of view of social organisations, despite being apparently based on an interview to René Ramírez.

were not inter-ethnic marriages before the time of the missionaries. It appears to have been the Catholic Church that promoted the idea that they were “all brothers, with no differences”. I have already mentioned Susnik’s remark that Pueblito, the indigenous district of Puerto Casado, was the result of Father Stella’s experiment to create a “Christian village”. Despite this, Maskoy people only adopted the common denomination of ‘Maskoy’ during the fight for land of the 1980s, and explain it as meaning that they “are more” (‘more’ is spelled *mas* in Spanish, a morpheme that also appear in the word Mas-koy). The fact of having fought altogether against Casado S.A. is often underlined with pride, as something positively valued by the Paraguayan authorities themselves.

The fight for land of Maskoy people, as I am going to show, is the result of the convergence of two struggles: that of Maskoy people for the attainment of a space in which they can develop a new life, and that of the Paraguayan Catholic Church for an overcoming of “colonial relationships”<sup>23</sup>.

In 1985, when the outcome of the struggle was still uncertain, the Equipo Nacional de Misiones published a book that summarised the situation up to that moment. The introduction to the book is an interesting starting point in understanding the reasons for the Catholic Church’s support for the Maskoy fight. Both indigenous people and the church are in fact described as external to the logic of the “economy of money” that it is corrupting of contemporary society. Two discourses - that of a nationalist resistance against the foreigners and that of a moral resistance against the alienation of capitalism - along with the defeat of communism, are the axes around which the logic is built.

Indigenous people are described essentially as victims - of the liberal system of economic exploitation, of a secular discrimination and of the despoliation of their traditional territories. In order to save them from their condition as “poor, defenceless and hopeless” (Obelar 1981), the only solution is the achievement of land:

To help the Indians to recover their ethnic identity; to help them developing as people; to help them leaving their vices and recovering their physical strength; to help them to be Christians and human, they need land. (Obelar 1981: 14 – personal translation).

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<sup>23</sup> See the Barbados Declaration of 1971.

Indigenous people feel responsible in front of the Creator of the land that sustains their life. This land can't be bought or sold. To leave their land would be an apostasy, an infidelity towards God, whom they call with thousands of different names. Living on their land they will continue praising him, a praise that represents the centre of their cultural life [...] When they have no land on which to live everything tends to collapse: the economy, the social order, the arts, and religious celebrations. (CEP 1983: 5 – personal translation).

In 1975, the CEP (Paraguayan Episcopal Church) started negotiating with Casado S.A. to buy land for Maskoy people. The company offered 5.000 has. of flood-zone land in the form of a donation, and 5.000 has. of land to be sold at an advantageous rate. Due to difficulties with a parallel case – the Casanillo one – the negotiations became paralysed until 1981. As we have seen, the conflict with Casado S.A. embodied for the Church the conflict between moral values (i.e. the right to dignity) and commercial values: Casado S.A. represented a stereotype of the capitalist enterprise whose main object was the enrichment of the members of a wealthy family based on an aggressive exploitation of the local population. This is how the CEP described the struggle in 1983:

In 1981, the Apostolic Vicariate negotiated again with the Company, indicating from the outset that the case of indigenous people in Puerto Casado wasn't commercial but instead represented an humanitarian case. [...] Taking into account the indisposition of the Company to donate the 3% of its land as a compensation for the harm inflicted to the indigenous population, we can only think about Carlos Casado S.A. as a 'capitalist' company in the worst sense of the word<sup>24</sup> (CEP 1983: 25 – personal translation).

Sheltered by the new Law 904/81, which granted 100 has. of land per indigenous family in the Chaco by way of compensation, the CEP decided to re-formulate the fight in terms of expropriation, and hired a lawyer, Mirna Vasquez, to support Maskoy people in their fight. Maskoy people saw Mirna Vasquez and Gladys Casaccia (sociologist, also hired by the CEP) to be their main allies in the fight for land. The legal plan of the fight became very important, and the role of the State as mediator between the Maskoy and Casado S.A. began to be emphasised by the lawyers. It may be worth noting that the power of the company had already declined because of the collapse in the international demand of

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<sup>24</sup> And also: "La tecnocracia y el comercio lucrativo de alta escala, desconocen el dolor ajeno y la dignidad de la persona humana y de la comunidad humana". [...] "¿Donde hay más violencia? En una expropiación de tierra o en el hecho de dejar que vayan muriendo 300 familias indígenas, sin tierra para trabajar. (Communications of the press office of the archbishop, 1987)

tannin, and there was an ongoing tension between Casado S.A. and the State. Despite this, however, the negotiating power of Casado S.A. still proved to be very strong.

It was around this time that the Maskoy people collectively became involved in the fight, taking on a protagonist role. There were about five hundred people living at that time in Pueblito. For logistical reasons, they needed in their fight a commission and a general leader. This is how Rene Ramirez describes his election as *cacique principal* (main leader) at the beginning of the fight for land:

At the beginning, there was no organisation. I didn't participate in any kind of organisation. Then some indigenous women asked me if I could lead the fight. But I told them: "I can't. I have no experience. And I am too young. I'm not used to this. I should be able to understand, to discuss. I can't." And then the lawyers asked me to lead the fight, but I answered that I wasn't able. They didn't like it. And then the missionaries came and told me: "You have to go". But I said: "No! I can't". I wanted someone else to do it. [But why did they choose you?] I don't know, I think they trusted me. They had hope. Something like that. For one year I worked organising the people, but I didn't want to do that at the beginning. That's how I started to be leader. That's how everything started. Even now, all my group of people call me their 'chief' (*cacique*). And when I visit Asuncion they call me 'chief'. It means that I have a good relationship with people, that people still trust me.

When Ramirez was elected main chief, according to a report of the Catholic Church, there was a lack of leadership in Pueblito. In 1980 Regher refers to the testimony of a Maskoy settler who says: "All our chiefs have died. We need an intelligent man to gather all the people together" (Regher 1980: 10). According to the same anthropologist, "indigenous people learnt in the mission to cooperate as individuals with these institutions [the company and the church], and above all to obey their orders. This process of individualisation debilitated their traditional sense of group cooperation and their traditional leaders" (Regher 1980: 9). Therefore, as a consequence of the work in the factories, the link between the leader and his people was weakened, and he no longer acted as an intermediary who could lead them towards the achievement of material wealth. This was, at least, Regher's analysis of the situation. I will analyse in the second chapter the contingency of leadership in Maskoy communities. It is sufficient to emphasise here that even if the function of leader seemed to disappear under specific conditions, it could also be reactivated in case of necessity. That is what happened in the case of Rene Ramirez.

As other Maskoy leaders describe him, Rene Ramirez acted, from that moment, as himself a lawyer for his people. His power was not that of taking decisions but rather that of defending, in front of the Whites, the decisions taken by the common assembly. Together with Ramirez, a committee of between seven and ten leaders was also elected in order to lead the expropriation. Their trips to the capital town were financed by a Youth Committee, composed essentially of women, who collected money through the organisation of bingo and by selling food. The male leaders however, when recalling the fight for land, rarely remember their role.

This is how Juan Gonzales, at the time the youngest member of the Commission, described the beginning of the fight:

All started in 1983. And lasted until 1987. But the fight (*la lucha*) ended in 1986, and the approval of the Government in 1987. One Thursday in the afternoon Father Ballin began his catechism, where forty people participated. And forty people sent a notice to Rene Ramirez – catechist, and President of the Don Bosco commission – that he urgently had to travel to the capital city with five representatives of the Maskoy people, in order to present a document that reclaimed the historical site called 'Riacho Mosquito'. The following Saturday, we travelled to Asuncion, on a motor boat called 'Panchita He'. It was five of us, all representatives of the Maskoy people. In Asuncion we left our document in the offices of INDI (National Institute of the Indian) and IBR (Institute of Rural Welfare), and we went back to Puerto Casado.

The first trip of the Commission to Asuncion marks the beginning of the fight. As Juan Gonzales underlines, all the authorities received them, and the Maskoy became optimistic about the future, probably because they did not expect them to have been easily received by the authorities. The missionaries, on the other hand, was less optimistic about the results of the visit:

The Maskoy delegation was finally received by General Martinez, President of INDI, who made them the dangerous promise that he will try to get land for them, but less land than what they requested. And in a place different from Riacho Mosquito. The indigenous representatives looked happy, but our missionary team foresee several dangers. (Letter of Father Robin to Father Joa'e)



The content of the meeting does not seem to have been as important to the Maskoy delegation as the fact of having been received by the authorities. This perception of things began to change after the first meeting however. In fact, Juan Gonzales says that:

At the beginning we didn't encounter any difficulty, but rather received congratulations. But after a while the same representatives travelled again to the capital city, and that's when the difficulties began to appear. Casado in fact presented an offer [of land] that did not coincide with that of Maskoy people, and Maskoy people didn't want to accept it. In 1984, Maskoy people travelled once again to Asuncion. And that's when the battle started, the fight started. (*Ya empezó como si fuera una batalla. Empezó la lucha.*) [...] At that time, there were 180 families in Pueblito. Twelve (Paraguayan) people arrived in Pueblito from Asuncion, in order to meet with Maskoy people: representatives of the INDI, the IBR, and Casado's company. They wanted us to accept Casado's offer. "You have to accept it", they said to the people. But the people said no; they didn't want their representatives to accept Casado's offer. As a consequence, each representative of each community raised their hand to say that they didn't accept Casado's offer. [...] In 1985, Casado presented his fourth offer. But it was rejected.

The fight for land is described by Gonzales as a battle between enemies. The personal will of politicians, from the Maskoy perspective, seemed to count more than any approved Law. And it quickly became evident that the State was not taking the side of the Maskoy, nor was the Institute of the Indian (INDI) itself. Meanwhile, Casado S.A. was acting on a local level to corrupt the leaders and convince them to abandon the fight. The moment when the bribe is refused is part of the story told by each of the Maskoy representatives of the commission:

One day he [Casado] congratulated me: "You work well, Ramirez [Faustino]. Tell me how much. I'm going to give you some millions. Just leave this project. The people can remain without land. I can give you 3.000.000 guaranies." And I said: "I'm not going to accept it. I don't want money, I want land. The land is never going to finish, but the money is. (Interview with Faustino Ramirez. August 2005)

Just when the fight appeared to have come to an end, Juan Gonzales tells how the president of INDI himself once more betrayed the Maskoy. Gonzales was in this occasion the youngest member of the commission, but – according to him – the only one capable of facing the military authorities without wavering:

In 1986 Casado presented an offer with half of the land: 15.000 hectares. And in October 1986, ten of us travelled to Asuncion. Amongst them: René Ramírez, Carlos López, Joaquín Cabrera, Román Villalba, Remigio, Carlos Álvarez and me. The president of INDI – but we didn't know it – had already negotiated with the company, and he was convinced that we were going to accept the 15.000 hectares. The president of INDI, General Martinez, convoked us in the capital city. At four o'clock in the afternoon we are there. At the door, Coronel Carrillo is waiting for us. This Coronel Carrillo receives the Indians and makes them pass through the door. Mirna Vázquez and Gladys Casaccia are there with us, and also a few journalists. But Carrillo let the Indians in, and then closes the door. The Whites are left outside. Coronel Carrillo tells them: "This is going to be a meeting with closed doors, you have to remain outside". General Gaspar Martinez, he had five stars, held the offer of 15.000 hectares in his hands. He told us that we had no choice but to sign. Rene Ramirez remained silent (*se calló*). And all the rest of the people (*los demás compañeros*) remained silent because they were scared. No one knew what was going to happen. The president of INDI had lied to us. He told us: go to the meeting, I'm going to go with you, and we are going to sign your document with the requested land. People were happy. But whilst we were in that room, with the door closed, we realised that he had betrayed us. He gave us a document and said: "This is your document. You have to sign." He gave Rene Ramirez the pen, but he refused to sign. "No!", he said, and didn't care. The president gave it to the next one. "No!", he also said. One by one they said no. And then it was my turn. I hit the table. In that moment, Rene Ramirez was startled (*se despertó*). I hit the table in front of the General. "No, sir! We haven't come to sign this. We are not going to sign. And we'll leave. I'm going to leave. If only one of us is going to sign, his sign doesn't count." And General Martinez said: "Why don't you sign this, and in five months we are going to give you more?". But I said: "No!". [...] Some of the authorities said: "They have told you to behave like this". But I said: "No, sir. Indigenous people know how they want to live. For their nephews they want this place [Territory Riacho Mosquito]."

And to emphasize that it was the final battle, Gonzales concludes: "In 1987, the President of Pargauay quickly signed our request".

Despite the fact that most government authorities were described as enemies, Juan Gonzales emphasised the existence of supposed allies even inside the Colorado Party, the party of the dictatorship. These allies turned out to be strategic in the last phase of the struggle:

Fortunately, Maskoy people had their friend, a member of the Parliament who fought a lot with us: Julio César Frutos of the ANR<sup>25</sup>. A great Member of the Parliament. And also the President of the Government (*el Presidente de la Junta de Gobierno*), Juan Ramón Chávez, supported us. At some pint, we told Juan Ramón Chávez: "We want to become members of the Colorado Party (ANR)". But he replied: "You, indigenous people, have got nothing to do with any political membership. You don't have to become members of any political party: you are free. And I like this. Ask for the land! The land is yours. You deserve it (*hay que darles nomás*). You have to recover your land. You've got more rights than us over the land". [...] In 1987, in several occasions the Maskoy met Julio Cesar Frutos and Juan Ramón Chávez. In 1987, political authorities were in charge of the documents. It was their task. (Interview with J.Gonzales)

In all the Maskoy leaders' tales, the moments of direct confrontation with the State authorities are emphasised as a crucial moment of the fight. The struggle with Casado S.A. became transformed into a fight with the State, the enemy, incarnated in particular individuals. These moments of clashes with the authorities determined the outcome of the fight. The lawyers of the ENM were the guides (*baqueanos*) who led indigenous people towards the encounter with their enemies, those who had the power to decide about the expropriation of their lands. It is in the context of this conceptualisation of the fight that the role of some of the hidden protagonists in the fight, the shamans, became essential. As Angel Martinez, one of the Maskoy leaders, once said: we also have our lawyers, the shamans. The use of the term battle (*batalla*) to describe the clash with the authorities is also used to describe the clashes between rival shamans in the Chaco (see Regher 1993).

One of the tactics that the Maskoy deployed in order to conquer their allies inside the Government was to stress their participation in the Chaco war, which thus made them 'deserving' Paraguayan citizens. But independently from the content of conversations, the

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<sup>25</sup> Asociación Nacional Republicana, más conocido como Partido Colorado, partido que estuvo en el poder durante más de sesenta años, incluyendo el periodo de la dictadura stronista.

role of shamans was crucial in creating the conditions for a balanced dialogue between indigenous people and governmental authorities.

### The role of shamans in the fight for land

There are powerful doctors (shamans). There still are.  
There are doctors, but they keep their silence.  
They look inoffensive.  
But if you bother them, they will rise again.  
(Interview with Ojeda, Castilla, 2007)<sup>26</sup>

Angel says that the reason why the Maskoy got their land back, is that they had shamans. There were two shamans, in particular, that always travelled with them and “saw everything”. They also prevented the soldiers from getting too nervous (*que les dieran los nervios*). He says that the Maskoy even had to confront Generals, and then he laughs, as if it was something incredible for an indigenous person. He tells me that a General threw Rene Ramirez out of his office once, because he (the General) had lost control over his nerves (*por puros nervios*). This is why, unlike Paraguayans, they have managed to get their land back. (Field notes)

We have seen in the first chapter how the shamans sent snakes to Marcos Casado because of his a-morality in the relationship with the workers. In the context of the fight for land, on the other hand, his life was seen as an impediment towards the achievement of the land. This is why, according to Ramirez, shamans got rid of him and three more representatives of the State. The role of the shamans however, was not just to directly attack particular enemies of the Maskoy people; rather their fundamental role in the fight was to weaken (*aflojar*) the authorities in the context of the encounter between the Maskoy representatives and the state authorities.

Shamans are our lawyers. There were two old women that spiritually took care of us (*siempre nos cuidaban espiritualmente*). People used to visit them and ask for information, when the leaders travelled to Asunción. Because they could see, people asked them for information. They saw (what happened in the capital city) as if they were watching a movie. “People are speaking, you have to stay silent”, they said. Without them, we couldn’t win. They said: “We are going to weaken (*aflojar*) the authorities, so that they are going to say: yes, we’ll give the land”. They were called Marciana and Ramona. They wanted to get buried in San Juan. It

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<sup>26</sup> Oi la medico mbaretea. Hasta que hoy oi. Ointe la medico o sino ha’e kuera bien calladitonte oi. Ibueno hikuai. Pero ojeamolestaro si, pepe omo opuata hikuai.

was their valley (*valle*) when they were children. When the land was expropriated, they cried a lot. They were happy (*se ballaron*). [...] Shamans also used to travel to Asunción. They remained out of the door, in order to spiritually (*espiritualmente*) help the leaders; in order to confront the authorities, so that the clash with them wasn't too strong (*muy fuerte*). [Interview with Rene Ramirez, August 2005].

We might consider how the shamans weakened the authorities. As described by different anthropologists, shamans in the Chaco learn the ability of travelling in the spirit world through fasting and the ingestion of rotten plants [Kidd 1999; Regher 1993; Arenas 1981]. They also learn, in the same way, to get in contact with the different types of spirits that are the owners (*dueños*) of the plants, animals, natural elements and objects. Each of these spirits corresponds to a different melody, and they are 'used' by the shaman through the performing of songs. A shaman can learn, for example, to see at a distance thanks to the ingestion of earth.

But shamans can also provoke illness in a person through the intermediation of an auxiliary spirit, stealing their soul or putting objects inside their body. According to Kidd, the *wáxoké* is – amongst the Enxet – the organ of the body which represents the affective and cognitive centre of the person, and is the place that more easily can be invaded by malevolent spirits or objects sent by shamans. An essential dichotomy is that between soft/unlocked *wáxoké* – a precondition that allows people to behave in a loving and generous manner – and locked/hard *wáxoké* – typical of people who behave in an egoistic manner (an attitude that is publicly condemned) (Kidd 1999: 49). We can thus suppose that when Ramirez says that the shamans are weakening the authorities, they are actually intervening through singing in order to soften/unlock their *wáxoké*, so that they will have a helpful attitude towards the Maskoy people. The Maskoy epistemology is kept in the Guarani/Spanish translation through the use of the verb *aflojar* (to make soft) in an unusual context. To weaken the authorities is also referred to as the shamans' job. This is how Rene Ramirez recounts, in 2007, the last encounter with President Stroessner, when the dictator's signature was the only missing thing from the document that declared the expropriation of the Maskoy's land:

It was the first expropriation in the history of Latin America. The first in history. Even more, if you think that Stroessner was in power. I talked to him twice. He usually kept people waiting for eight days, before receiving them. But he received me on the spot. Not even twenty-four hours I had to wait. Thanks to the shamans, because they acted on him

(*trabajaron por él*). They said: “We’re going to act on him (*Vamos a trabajar por él*)”. [...] “Don’t worry”, said Stroessner, “the 30.000 hectares are yours”. “*Ne mba’e umia cacique, ne mba’e.*” That’s why I got calm (*me tranquilice*). And so I told him: “I’m calm (*tranquilo*)”. [...] “If the document gets here, I’m going to sign”, said Stroessner. I think that the document was there for three days only, and then he signed. And then he immediately authorised the expropriation.

The use - made by Ramirez - of the word *tranquilo* (tranquil) can also be referred to as a specific state of the *wáxok*:

“Knowledge” is also associated with the ability to live tranquilly and, indeed, a desire for tranquillity is a key aim of many indigenous peoples of lowland South America. The Enxet are no different and express personal tranquillity by the term méke ektahakxa [-]wáxok, which can be best translated as “nothing happening in the wáxok.” [...] It portrays a person who is emotionally comfortable and whose wáxok has not been disturbed by such things as breaches in social relationships and misfortune. It is a state that is not incompatible with certain other agreeable conditions of the wáxok such as “sweetness” and a wáxok that “spreads out.” (Kidd 1999: 56)

We can thus see, in Ramirez’s account of the past, idioms that belong to a particular experience of the World. The Whites, however, easily misinterpret these idioms; their translation of what Ramirez says is such that they are unable to grasp their emic meaning.

The fact that shamanism is still linked to the political fight, not only amongst the Maskoy people but in other parts of the Chaco, is testified to by the comment of a Maskoy leader about a Paraguayan NGO in the capital town, which deals with land titling issues. The NGO offers free lodging for indigenous leaders from the Chaco region, who need to stay in the capital town for strategic reasons. But the leader of Castilla was always quite nervous about going there because the NGO lodging— as he said — was dangerously “full of shamans”.

## The end of the fight

Whilst the Maskoy people were coming face-to-face and negotiating with their enemies, the CEP also looked for parallel strategies aimed to put pressure on the State, in order for the expropriation to be finally signed. In the conclusion of the story, a key role was played by the announced visit of the Pope Giovanni Paolo II to Paraguay in 1988. The CEP took advantage of the event, threatening the dictator – whose power was already under threat – that they would publicly denounce the bad treatment that the dictatorship had imposed on indigenous people, if the expropriation of Territory Riacho Mosquito was not quickly approved by the Parliament:

Let's not forget mentioning the imminent visit of our Holy Father to our country. It would be extremely inconvenient if this issue [the expropriation of land in favour of Maskoy people] were still unresolved, and provoked words of reproach to our human and Christian conscience. On you and the Senators depends the solution to this problem. A solution that will give the necessary quietness to a suffering community, and to the whole Paraguayan nation that is sharing that suffering. [Letter of the 9th of June of 1987 to the Upper House (Cámara de Senadores)<sup>27</sup>]

The alliance between a sector of the Catholic Church and the Maskoy people finally led to the expropriation of Territory Riacho Mosquito 20th August of 1987, even though Maskoy people celebrate the recuperation of their land on 2nd September, the day on which the news was made public in Puerto Casado. Thanks to the shamans' role in supporting Ramirez's confrontations with the authorities, to Juan Gonzales' reaction in front of the Generals, and to the CEP lobbying strategy, the battles came to an end.

Twenty years after the recovery of the land, there is space to think about the relationship between the different subjects involved in the struggle. The relationship of the Church with indigenous people and (against) the State and Casado S.A., has often been conceptualised in terms of "help/support" of the Church towards Maskoy people's struggle against the State and the company. Perhaps we can ask a contrasting question however: What support did the Maskoy people provide the Church, in its moral fight against the injustice of capitalism "in the worst sense of the word"? This other fight, intermingled with the first,

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<sup>27</sup> Two and a half months before the definitive expropriation of Maskoy's land.

has been spelled out in the internal documents of the Church (reports, minutes of congresses), and even in official letters to the Congress. Was it spelled out to indigenous people? During the filming of “Casado’s Legacy”, in an improbable (but real) dialogue between Rene Ramirez and a policeman in Casado’s ex-factory, the ex main chief of the fight for land explained the following to the policeman in 2007<sup>28</sup>:

- (Rene): What did the company leave in Puerto Casado? Nothing... they just took profit from the people.
- (Policeman): So, they worked here until the raw material had finished, and then they left an empty land.
- (Rene) They cut all the trees.
- (Policeman) They’re clever!
- (Rene) That’s how entrepreneurs are. There’s nothing to say, because they are capitalists. They treat you as they like to treat you. People tolerated the situation for necessity.

Rene Ramirez thus seems to assume the fight against Casado S.A. was also a fight against capitalism. What about the rest of the indigenous people however? Has the Church ever offered “thanks” to indigenous people - as indigenous people did to them - for their help in the struggle against capitalism?

In their article about the consequences of the Chaco war amongst the Enhlet population of Central Chaco, Unruh and Kalisch (cf. p. 18 in this thesis) describe the way in which an alliance between the indigenous people and the Mennonites was established. According to the authors, the Enhlet found themselves trapped in between two colonising fronts: the Paraguayan soldiers on one hand and the newly arrived Mennonites on the other. In such a pressing situation, they could only choose between “Whites who kill [Paraguayan soldiers], and Whites who don’t kill [the Mennonites]” (Unruh & Kalisch 2007: 112). The final choice is easy to imagine. Their alliance with the Mennonites, however, happened without “discussing the terms of the barter”: the immigrants “helped” the Enhlet “without listening to what they had to say”, and as a consequence “the attitude of Enhlet people towards the Mennonites got crystallised in the form of submission” (Unruh & Kalisch 2007: 113). The gratitude claimed by the saviors from the saved ended up ‘silencing’ the Enhlet in front of the Mennonites (Unruh and Kalisch 2007).

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<sup>28</sup> Parts of this dialogue appear in the film.



The dialogue between the Church and indigenous people was interrupted after the fight for land. Thinking about the Church as an institution that was there in order “to help them” - an idea that was stimulated by the Church itself - Maskoy people felt betrayed when in the following decade the missionaries reduced the material help towards indigenous people. In a recent documentary made by the Salesian missionaries<sup>29</sup>, a voice-over portraying the discourse of an imagined indigenous man explicitly recognises the problem:

*(Voice over of a Paraguayan man, talking as if he was an indigenous man):* They were exploiting us [the White bosses]. Thankfully, we met the missionaries, who helped us a lot. At the beginning, they gave us everything: a house, food, work, and health care. We received everything. We were completely dependent on them. Until one day they decided to stop giving us these things. They told us that we had to make it alone, using the means that they had given to us. That we had to find our path, and learn to walk alone. We got a bit angry with them. We felt abandoned and betrayed. We thought that they didn't love us anymore; nor they wanted to help us anymore.

There is a self-reflective stance in this imagined speech of an indigenous man about his relationship with the Church. We start wondering if the missionaries are recognising their failure. But the voice-over continues, unexpectedly portraying a harmonic situation, the happy reconstruction of an interrupted relationship:

On the contrary, they wanted us to become independent. To achieve self-management. Today we know that they are real friends.

Who is saying this, outside of the imagined universe of the documentary? I have often heard Maskoy people telling the first part of the story, but not the second. They sometimes quoted the missionaries' opinion that they should become independent, but a great deal of ambiguity was left to the definition of what this independence consisted of. It is a strange performance, Salesians mimicking an imagined indigenous man's declaration of friendship, perhaps relying on the performative aspect of the utterance, or maybe just caught in a monologue.

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<sup>29</sup> The documentary was given to me by someone from Castilla who had received it from the local missionary. I have transcribed the text of the documentary, but I forgot to write down the name of the producer.

## Conclusions

What is it that lies behind the successful alliance that led to the recovery of Territory Riacho Mosquito? At least two stories are told about the fight of land<sup>30</sup>. The one narrated by the missionaries is a story about the defence of victims of human rights violations: the rights of indigenous people to land and to live in dignifying material conditions. This part of the story is narrated from inside a 'modern' paradigm (Blaser forthcoming), where the State is conceptualised as the subject that should be granting those human rights. It is not a fight of people against other people, but rather against institutions: against capitalism and its anti-humanist logic, and against a State that is protecting the economic interests of an absolute minority. In this story, that includes the working relationship between Maskoy people and Casado S.A., the Maskoy are essentially victims. The second story is the one told in the chapter by two Maskoy leaders: Juan Gonzales and Rene Ramirez. It is not, however, a narration of the fight for land in the form of "how it would have been told by Maskoy people for themselves", but rather the result of an encounter between the leaders and the ethnographer. The two versions of the fight for land - the one by the CEP and Horst, and the one by the leaders - diverge on different points. For example, Stroessner's decision to sign the final document is described as the result of national and international pressure by the former, and as a result of the intervention of shamans by the latter.

Both stories are being narrated for White people, but they nevertheless focus on different moments: on the one hand, a legal battle against the State; on the other, confrontation with representatives of the State, and the ability of indigenous people to resist the Paraguayans' power and build their future. However, two perspectives alternate with one another in the second story: that of Gonzales, and that of Ramirez. From Juan Gonzales' point of view, the salient moment of the fight is when he punches the table "in front of the General". Maybe because he so explicitly tells the story for White people, the role of shamans is underplayed in the narration. This version of the story was in fact recorded during the celebrations of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the recovery of the land, and it was told for a large public.

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<sup>30</sup> A third story is mentioned in the chapter: the one of the Casado S.A. for keeping the factory working, in the context of a gradually more and more unfavourable global market for the exportation of tannin. The closing of the factory is actually the origin of the two other fights.

It is Rene Ramirez who explained to me the role of shamans in the fight for land. He does it towards the end of my fieldwork, after almost one year of mutual knowledge. I loved walking with the Rene in the ex-factory. I liked the way in which he wandered around touching everything [see film], as if he was enacting an appropriation. He never warned me that in the re-telling of the fight for land we were going to step into another story, one based on - unusual to me - ontological premises about the existence of a spirit world. I have never been sure how to react. I was afraid about showing an exaggerated interest, as I feared that I would have interrupted the telling. Was the secrecy around the role of shamans in the fight for land a shared prescription? Or was it there to measure the passing of the time (and intimacy) between me and him? I opted for listening to him in a silent way, keeping my questions to small clarifications. I let him choose the right moment to tell me the version of the story that is usually left untold.

This other version of the fight for land, where shamans play the determinant role, comes from a different life-world, where other things appear – in the very perceptive act of seeing – in the world, as if the act of relying on a different ontology also implied the act of seeing in a different way (see chapter 3). For example, Paraguayans probably didn't see the wild animals invading the factory. And it is easy to suppose that the missionaries haven't relied on the shamans' capacity of seeing at a distance during the fight for land.

The roles of the Catholic Church and of Maskoy people have been complementary during the fight for land. The fight of the Catholic Church developed on a technical/legal level, and through national and international lobbying. Maskoy people, on the other hand, engaged in a confrontation/negotiation with politicians and representatives of Casado S.A.: they got to the centre of the power of the State, in the capital city, where decisions are taken; they got in touch with the structure of the Colorado Party, and made their first "friends" amongst Colorado politicians. The fight for land marks the interaction with the State.

In a montage style, the two stories alternate with each other in the course of the chapter, progressively leading to the chronological end of the story: the recovery of the 30.000 has. of Territory Riacho Mosquito. They interact in the written text, but only as a result of the montage, such that the readers are left with the task of matching them in their minds. That is how they developed in time: two parallel stories happening at the same time, one

influencing the other as a kind of external natural phenomenon, without ever questioning their ontological premises.

If the means used to achieve the expropriation of the land were different, we could ask how different the final aims were. The 'land' fought for by Maskoy people was probably not the same that the missionaries were imagining. I will discuss in the second chapter the idea of Territory Riacho Mosquito as a politically free territory. The reports of the Catholic Church, on the other hand, conceptualised 'land' as a capitalism-free territory, or a space from where to start building a Christian community based on the cultivation of land (CEP 1983).

The fight against Casado is also there to represent the failure of a relationship: the one between the Casado family, some Paraguayans, and Maskoy people. Rene Ramirez' personal biography is an example of this: after obtaining the trust of Casado's family, and working as a servant in their house, he engages in a fight against them because they refuse to give land to the indigenous workers. Ramirez becomes the main leader in the struggle for land whilst being Casado's housekeeper, and he stops accepting food that is offered to him in the house for the fear of being poisoned. The refusal of food - so often quoted in the autobiographical narrations of the leaders - marks the interruption of a relationship with the Casado family that had been inaugurated, at the beginning of the century, by a gift exchange between Carlos Casado and the indigenous leaders. But the expropriation of the land also marks a rupture with the Paraguayan microcosm of Puerto Casado. Juan Gonzales describes the situation immediately after the expropriation of the land as a sudden silence that wraps up the small town:

That's when the silence began in Puerto Casado. In 1987 people started the silence. The people in Casado were angry with us because we annoyed the company. They thought that because of us the land was sold, the company was dying, the work was finishing. [Interview with Juan Gonzales]

The relationship between missionaries and Maskoy always remained unbalanced in that it was never set up in terms of an 'alliance'. Similarly to how the Mennonites were described by Unruh and Kalish, missionaries saw themselves as 'saviours'. A similar attitude can be recognised between NGOs and indigenous people. Ramos condenses it in the NGOs message: "We, Whites, help you, Indians, and in turn you, Indians, must do what we, Whites, think is correct" (Ramos 1992: 5). A friend of mine, an NGO worker, was shocked

when I said that NGOs should make explicit and reflect upon their own objectives when they work/collaborate with indigenous communities. NGOs seem to be imagined by their own personnel as entities whose only objective is to help indigenous people, without any self-interested purpose. We may wonder what kind of relationship can be built inside these premises.

One of the unquestioned premises is the assumption that the ontology and the reasoning of the 'saviours' are the same as those of the 'saved' (see also De la Cadena 2007; Deger 2006). At the end of the fight for land, in Puerto Casado, the alliance between the Church and Maskoy people was wavering. And the State, embodied in the new Law 904/81, was guiding the foundation of the new communities. I shall talk about this in the second chapter.

## Chapter 2 - Prologue

### Towards an understanding of indigenous organisations and the State

In 1981 - actually anticipating other Latin American countries - a new Law was promulgated in Paraguay in order to promote indigenous rights, and especially the collective property rights to land (Prieto 1994). In 1994, at the beginning of the post-Stroessner "democratic era", a new constitution declared Paraguay a multicultural State. These events are not isolated phenomena. According to Sieder, "the decade of the 1980s witnessed an upsurge of ethnic organising and indigenous protagonism, as the transition from authoritarian rule across the continent allowed for new forms of protest and organisation." (Sieder 2002: 238) Since the 1970s, moreover, the formation of indigenous grass roots organisations was supported across the region by domestic and international NGOs and by the Catholic Church.

The articulation between indigenous organisations and the State has directly depended on the configuration of the latter. The decentralisation, associated with neoliberal 'state reform' throughout the region, initially seen as a step forward towards the establishment of democracy, proved to be conflicted at a local level in some countries (Orellana Halkyer 2000). In the case of Bolivia, for example, "the discourse of participation has not translated into effective oversight mechanisms in practice. In some cases, decentralisation has mitigated against democratisation, reinforcing local power elites, clientelist politics and unequal access to power; in others, the increased penetration of the logic of political parties into rural areas has increased the fragmentation and division of indigenous authorities" (Sieder 2002: 8). Other authors have underlined the connections between the new discourse on multiculturalism and neoliberal discourses. "New categories - human rights, ethnodevelopment, multiculturalism, cultural rights, participatory research, autonomy - originating in documents issued by international institutions, are now being articulated in official statements in the context of a new hegemonic negotiation" (De la Peña 2005: 732). The stress on collective rights put forward by indigenous organisations, though, continues to challenge democratic liberalism's focus on the individual rights of undifferentiated citizens

(Warren 2005). The solution, on the part of the State, seems to be the creation – inside the multicultural framework – of the figure of a “Tolerated Indian” that rejects the more radical political demands (Hale 2004).

The relationship between NGOs and indigenous organisations has also started to be analysed in more depth (Tilley 2002). The State fantasy of the “consented Indian”, for example, is the equivalent of the “hyperreal Indian” described by Ramos as a fantasy of Brazilian NGOs. The hyperreal Indian is in fact ordered to “die, if need be, but never surrender to greed over your lands, never succumb to the bribes of the powerful, never capitulate to corruption, always denounce injustice. The more stoic and resistant to temptation, the more deserving he will be of white solidarity.” (Rita Ramos 1992: 10).

In June 2003 I began working as an anthropologist for Pro Desarrollo del Chaco (PRODECHACO), a bi-lateral project between the European Union and the Paraguayan government. As part of the “anthropological unit”, I was in charge of indigenous organisations. The only criteria that seemed valid at that time, in order to distinguish between the different organisations, was their degree of ‘democracy’. If their representatives were elected in a general assembly, their representativeness in front of the State and civil society was granted. The main concern of the Paraguayan indigenist sector in 2003, though, was not only the interaction of indigenous organisations with the State but rather with NGOs. Nearly every indigenous organisation in Paraguay, in fact, was (and is) logistically and economically sustained by one particular NGO. PRODECHACO’s idea was to promote the independence of indigenous organisations, so that they could overcome the mediatory role of local NGOs, and have direct access to their money. The main concern, shared by some representatives of the NGOs themselves, was that local NGOs were exercising too much control over the indigenous organisations they supported.

According to PRODECHACO, indigenous organisations had to work like small NGOs: they had to write projects, present a budget to the anthropological unit, and receive the required amount of money directly in their hands. After the realisation of an “activity” and in order to be able to ask for money for new activities, they had to present an invoice for every single expenditure they had made. From the point of view of PRODECHACO, this process would have given autonomy and voice to indigenous representatives, and it would have strengthened their capability for self-determination. In order to express themselves, indigenous people had

to rest protagonism from the “indigenist” organisations, who were “stealing” their voice. To enhance the NGO-like facade, the anthropological unit rented offices for the indigenous organisations in the capital city, and bought for them computers and furniture. It is interesting to notice how the replication of the structure [in this case, the NGO’s structure] is never put into question, as if it was the only possible configuration. As if it was, for instance, a “natural outcome” of the indigenous way of doing things.

The description of indigenous organisations as small NGOs, focused on project management as a key task, had for PRODECHACO the economic development of the communities as a final aim. The role of White people was restricted to that of technicians, which is to say of experts that would provide the technical (i.e. agricultural) background to meeting the needs of the community (i.e. improving their low agricultural production). At the same time that PRODECHACO was promoting the transformation of indigenous organisations into small NGOs, some representatives of local NGOs expressed their worries about the new configuration of indigenous organisations, and they articulated their critiques in terms of the imposition of the technical over the political. They saw the danger of PRODECHACO’s ideas resulting in a weakened participation of indigenous organisations in the workings of the Paraguayan State. Two Paraguayan advisers of a pan-indigenous organisation [CPI-Chaco] began their report by saying that CPI-Chaco should have a political - rather than a technical - role at a national and international level. They also wrote that: “CPI needs a wider visibility in the organs of power not to negotiate projects, but to plan active political participation and control, over plans that will be developed in the Chaco” (CPI-Chaco, official report 2004). According to them, in the configuration of indigenous organisations as NGOs, there was a denial of the confrontation with the State. The term ‘political’, in this case, had the sense of ‘inserted in the national political life’, and wasn’t referring to any specific political party. The political role of indigenous organisations didn’t consist in creating a political party, but in taking part in the political decisions that affected the country.

When PRODECHACO finished in 2004, the majority of indigenous organisations founded by the project disappeared, and their representatives sold computers and furniture to Paraguayan people. It became quite usual to hear local NGO indigenists complaining about the negative impact of PRODECHACO on indigenous organisations. According to some of them, indigenous organisations had become opportunistic entities where people participated in order to get access to money, and whose final objectives were uncertain and confused.



Indigenous organisations, moreover, were taking over some contested features of the State. Enormous importance was given to the position of “president” or “vice-president”, and indigenous representatives would emphasize their trips around the world and their meetings with “important people”. Indigenous communities identified their own indigenous organisation with the board of directors, as if the fact of not holding a political office meant that they weren’t part of the organisation (Villagra 2008). Up to which point indigenous movements were empowered by this way of imitating the structures and functioning of the State, was a hot topic of ‘informal’ discussions in a certain group of people of the indigenist sector.

When I went back to Paraguay, in 2006, I met the coordinator of a local indigenist NGO on the bus. The same NGO, a few months before, had financed and organised an alternative kind of indigenous gathering. Instead of arranging a meeting of the “indigenous organisation”, they financed a traditional celebration that lasted three days. It was in these kind of events that different communities used to gather in pre-colonial times [the initiation ritual that is depicted in the film – where all the Maskoy communities gather together to celebrate - is a clear example of this]. According to one of the NGO members, the effect of the gathering had been to enhance the role of shamans, who were the ‘masters’ of the ceremony. I’ve never heard of any other examples where NGOs financed these kinds of gatherings. I can suppose that one of the difficulties was that of justifying these activities in front of international funding agencies, more accustomed to predictable and quantifiable results, and stable forms of organisation. These kinds of gatherings are not legible in front of the funding agencies: for example, they do not produce documents or create agendas.

A few months later, the same NGO was planning to organise a more structured ‘meeting of indigenous organisations’ in an unusual way. First of all, no economic compensation was scheduled for indigenous representatives. No money at all would then circulate during the gathering (we’ll see why in the third chapter). The second major change, was that the conference would have been organised in linguistic groups of discussion, with the result that (white) Spanish speakers would have formed a group of discussion on their own. At the end of the day, each group would have presented their conclusion with the help of translators. White people were then withdrawn from their privileged position of listeners and organisers, and would have been forced to engage in a balanced dialogue with indigenous people. The strategy, though, was put at risk by the tacit knowledge of indigenous representatives, who

were too used to saying what NGOs expected them to say. I was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting, and I had to rely on my friends' comments about it:

I asked Maria about the meeting. As she could speak Manjui, she participated to the Manjui linguistic group. She said that she noticed the tendency inside the indigenous groups to prepare a double discourse: one for the Whites and one for the group. An indigenous mediator was in fact visiting the groups and said phrases like: "there was much more water before", an opinion that was clearly functional to the discourse of NGOs. People would say "yes, of course", even if they thought that the opposite was true. At the end, every group presented to the general assembly their conclusions, and all the final conclusions included what the indigenous mediator had suggested to them, which is the discourse of NGOs. The expectations of White people completely changed the indigenous discourse. The discourse of indigenous people for White people was almost reduced to a list of necessities (Field notes: September 2007).

Writing about African statues of white men, Taussing describes the unsettling experience of seeing his power (the power of the Whites), materialised out there and made visible by the Others he was looking for (Taussig 1993: 238). In a similar way, indigenist activists recognised themselves and the State in the same project of alterity (the creation of indigenous organisations) that thought they were contributing to affirm. The discourses of indigenous organisations were suddenly too similar to the discourses of NGOs themselves. A group of Paraguayan intellectuals found themselves engaged in the problem of how to spell out and face their own power, in order to engage in a proper dialogue with indigenous people. The two "alternative meetings" previously described represent an effort in this direction. PRODECHACO's policy of technology buying and organising as many meetings as possible, seems instead to go towards an opposite one, based on the imitation of Western NGOs and democratic processes. The conscious imitation of the form of NGOs' structure and discourses on the part of indigenous representatives became clear to me when I heard one of them saying during a meeting in 2004:

I know what a specific objective is, what a development objective is, what an activity is, what a specific result is, what an indicator is [a list of concepts of the logical framework used in the NGO context], and therefore I am the person who could better represent you in the indigenous organisation.

This appropriation of NGOs and international organisations' terminology sounded like a mimetic appropriation of a form without its contents. In the meetings of CPI-Chaco, where

White people like me were thought to be only observers, indigenous representatives would in fact discuss for hours the adoption of a word instead of another without really making clear which was the difference in the meaning of the different words. In a really literal sense, the process of writing a document seemed to be more important than the content of the document itself. I will discuss in the third chapter the concept of mimesis as a modality of interaction with non-indigenous people.

These mimetic practices unsettled me as much as Taussig was unsettled by the statue of the White man. At the time, I started questioning my own position (and that of my organisation) in financing indigenous peoples' meeting. Where was the border between mimetic appropriation and imposition located? Were there alternative forms of organising on a global platform whose configuration were not undermined by the imbalance of power between NGOs and indigenous people? A friend of mine, who worked for a long time in a local NGO, re-formulated my concerns in the following way:

Conversation with Antonio in the local pub... He says that NGOs make their own interests, and that the Indians are instruments in the pursuit of their own interests. I tell him that I wouldn't see anything wrong in that, if the NGOs would be able to make clear that they are looking for allies for their own struggles. If they could set up a dialogue. Antonio agrees, but partially. He says that if a citizen needs a lawyer, and the State provides him with one, it's OK. But if the same citizen is not satisfied with the lawyer and wants to change him for another, and he can't, then his rights are being violated. (Field notes. May 2007)

One of the reasons why I chose Territory Riacho Mosquito as my fieldwork, is the fact that it's probably the only indigenous population in Paraguay that is not affiliated to any indigenous organisation. The direct interaction of Maskoy people with the State, was interesting for me in order to understand the role of NGOs in shaping the relationship between indigenous organisations and the State. The only organisation that the Maskoy ever had, the OPM, was created with funding from PRODECHACO about seven years before. It also included the community of Casanillo, located about 150 km away from Riacho Mosquito. The OPM had a really short life, and was definitely dead years before the end of PRODECHACO. After that, and probably due to the absence of NGOs in the zone, no new indigenous organisations were formed.

It is not by chance that Zanardini, an Italian missionary and anthropologist who arrived in Paraguay about 20 years ago, mentions Maskoy people in an article about indigenous people and the State after the Chaco War. In his opinion, the interaction between the two subjects has produced disastrous effects in the communities:

According to me, the presence of political parties – and especially of the dominant one [ANR] has provoked several changes in the communities: a) it generated a political ‘clientelism’ followed by economic dependency before local and national elections; b) they have bought ID cards, which means: votes; c) they divided the communities; d) they favoured a passive attitude and the expectation that Solutions will come from outside the community; e) they debilitated the social tissue of the communities<sup>31</sup> (Zanardini 2005: 293,294).

The interaction between the State and indigenous communities – as in other Latin American countries (Ramos 1992) - has been always regarded with suspicion by the NGO indigenist sector in the capital city. Like other indigenist [non-governmental] activists, in fact, Zanardini is a political opponent of the official party. According to him, there is a big divide between intellectuals, artists and academics on the one hand, and politicians on the other: “Amongst the functionaries of the State, there are serious difficulties for the understanding of the diversity of indigenous people, and the necessity in applying the correspondent laws” (Zanardini 2005: 301).

The State is seen as an external entity whose direct interaction with the communities can only be destructive. Both governmental and non-governmental indigenist institutions are then conceived as buffer institutions aimed at mediating between indigenous people and the State. The Maskoy area, precisely because of its abandonment on the part of the indigenist sector, is an interesting place from where to think about the role of the latter. Since the end of the Stroessner dictatorship, and probably since the fight for land in the 1980s, Maskoy people have appeared to locate power in the non-indigenist governmental sector of the State, and looked for a direct interaction with politicians.

While doing my fieldwork, it became clear to me that I couldn’t think about the State as an abstract entity, and separate it from the people who were embodying it. In a context where everybody was talking about the dialogue with indigenous people, I couldn’t avoid thinking

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<sup>31</sup> All the quotes from Zanardini are a personal translation.

about the dialogue Maskoy people had with politicians. The actual meaning of the word “dialogue”, moreover, had never been discussed. As Hannes Kalisch points out (Kalisch 2000), a dialogue implies a certain use of time:

An essential characteristic of dialogical processes is that they need time, both in their implementation and finalisation: it is impossible to achieve them quickly. [...] This situation is enhanced by the fight against negative identity, low self-esteem, and devalorisation of one’s own culture. In a context where dependencies have grown up in the historical process of colonisation, they have become deeply rooted, leading to negative and ‘dependentist’ expectations (Kalisch 2000: 71).

Caught into the fast rhythm of the international indigenous/indigenist movement, though, time seems to be the least available resource while working with indigenous organisations. While working for PRODECHACO, I often felt the necessity to stop and think, but I couldn’t. The situation seemed to improve drastically during my fieldwork in Territory Riacho Mosquito. I took Kalisch’s suggestion literally, but it seemed to extend so much in certain situations that I wondered if it was more than just a question of time.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I had a meeting with the community where I was planning to stay, and in that situation the community agreed to participate in the production of filmed material that would be of any interest for the people living there. Inspired by other collaborative projects that took place between anthropologists and indigenous communities over the last decade (see chapter 4), I was sure that Maskoy people would have taken advantage of my technology in order to film things of their interest. The first step was done as the community also had elected one person whose task was to guide me in the decision about what and where to film. We spent long hours sitting with Luis Mayor in the patio of his house, but no matter how much time had passed, silence was the main result of our encounter. I interpreted that silence as his waiting for my opinion about what would have been better to film. But as I was waiting for him to tell me what we should start filming, nothing was said at all. As the silence was uncomfortable, our meetings became less and less frequent, until I ended up filming on my own<sup>32</sup>. How much time did I need in order to

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<sup>32</sup> The only thing that I was explicitly requested to film by the leader was traditional dancing, for reasons I will explain later. Later on, the leaders also requested me to film their meeting with politicians in the capital city.

overcome the generations of silences and misunderstandings between White and indigenous people?

Reciprocal expectations are an intrinsic part of dialogues. The dialogue between NGOs (and the church) and indigenous people has crystallized in most cases in the form of the first suggesting to the second what they have to say, and then receiving and writing down a (self-willingly) domesticated indigenous voice. This is probably why, as NGO worker, I began dreaming about a meeting between NGOs and indigenous organisations where no one asked anything of the other, and where everyone would just tell each other what they thought about their concept of better life. Just like two friends drinking a coffee together in a bar.

In writing about the State, I am interested in encounters between indigenous people and the State that do not happen inside “legitimising places”, where being indigenous is by definition positive and empowering. An example of this could be the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) of the United Nations, described by Muehlebach as one of the leading places where pan-indigenous activism is moulding a definition of indigenous identity (Muehlebach 2001). I am rather thinking about Maskoy women selling remedies to Paraguayans in Puerto Casado, about contexts that haven’t been set up in order to perform a dialogue. As Rene Ramirez said during the public hearing in July 2008: “We are all friends here. But what happens when we go outside?” I’m interested for instance in the meetings with politicians that happen “outside”, because that’s what Maskoy people experience most of the times. And that is what the next chapter is about.

## 2. THE SENSORIAL BORDERS OF THE STATE

### Six steps towards the (de)construction of a relationship

“If you betray indigenous people once, you’ve lost their trust forever”.

*(Amada, Maskoy teacher, at the beginning of my fieldwork)*

“Morales<sup>33</sup> tells me that he doesn’t agree with what the anthropologists say: that indigenous people need self-determination and you can’t decide things on their behalf. He says that they have fallen into a well, and they need help to get out of it”.

*(Field notes, August 2008)*

“At least our lands we want to recover, our traditional places. Not to go back to how it was before, but to live better without being dependent on anyone”.<sup>34</sup>

*(Leiva 2004: 101)*

The following chapter is a description of the State as I gradually got to experience it from the community of Castilla and from the perspective of the people I lived with during fieldwork. It begins with a focus on the tensions between a part of the dominant society – which holds the political power – and indigenous people, as experienced in the capital city. It follows up with the articulation of that tension at a local level. The main argument of the chapter is that the presence of the State in Puerto Casado can be better analysed as an embodied entity, and it can be described through the use of the same categories that are

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<sup>33</sup> Ex-administrator of the Casado S.A.; he defines himself as an indigenist and wrote an ante-project of Law aimed at allowing the retirement of indigenous workers who do not possess legal documentation.

<sup>34</sup> Por lo menos las tierras queremos recuperar, nuestros lugares tradicionales, no como para volver como antes, sino para vivir mejor sin ninguna dependencia.

also used to describe the everyday relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people. At the same time, I will show how the structure of contemporary Maskoy communities has been influenced by the recent indigenist law, and how the Colorado party is trying to modify the structure of Maskoy organisation.

## 2.1 The construction of the barbaric Indian

The owner of the *Grand Hotel del Paraguay*, where my parents are staying, comes over to meet us and when I tell him I am an anthropologist we start to talk about the 'indigenous issue'. He says he is **one of those** who think that indigenous people must be integrated into national society – that is, they have to become Paraguayans. He seems very sure of what he is saying. He also tells me that he doesn't agree with the anthropologists that want the Indians to stay as they are. Then he points out a Maka woman that is selling crafts on the ground in front of the hotel and says: "Look! They decide to come to the city and they finish up like that". For some reason, he thinks that selling in the street is a bad thing. He assumes that the Maka have just arrived from the hills with feathers on their head (when in reality the Maka have been living in Asuncion for more than forty years) and they have no alternative except to sell craft in the street (he does not know that they buy half of what they sell from non-indigenous Paraguayans). He talks of indigenous people as an unformed mass that needs to be shaped. I wonder what group of people he is referring to when he told me that he is 'one of those who think like him'. (Field notes: 10th of April 2007)

In the Summer of 2007, for about four months, a group of Mbya Guaraní decided to camp in one of the main squares of the capital city, Asunción, in order to claim land and basic services. Going to the capital is often the only way to get visibility in a highly centralised State like the Paraguayan one. The newspaper articles, quite sympathetic at the beginning of the protest, changed their attitude when it became clear that the main problem was land. Osvaldo Dominguez Dipp (ODD), landowner and father of Julio Osvaldo Dominguez, Senator of the republic of Paraguay (and big landowner himself), is also the owner of *La Nacion*, the third most important newspaper in the country. He is also the president of the football team *Olimpia*, one of the most popular football clubs in Paraguay. As such, he embodies the State in its links with the most powerful economic sectors of the country. In Summer 2007, the way he spoke about the previously mentioned episode, in the columns of his newspaper, was almost grotesque. Nevertheless, his opinions probably met with the



approval of the *Grand Hotel del Paraguay*, and of the members of the ARP<sup>35</sup>. According to Dominguez Dipp, a dialogue between indigenous and non indigenous citizens is structurally impossible, and the indigenous should either be converted into proper Paraguayans (a typical indigenist/assimilationist opinion) or move deep into the forest (a purely rhetorical option):

Indigenous people should civilise themselves and end this silly idea of maintaining a backward and shrivelled culture; either live like people paying their taxes, or retreat into the woods to live with animals. There are not alternatives, and we Paraguayans shouldn't be paying taxes to maintain a decadent civilisation that isn't able to survive by itself. [...] I don't know a single Paraguayan who would like to live in an indigenous settlement (*toldería*), despite their proximity, not even for studying their filthy customs. But yes, I do know indigenous people who would like to live in Asuncion, educate themselves and step out of the woods syndrome and become a human being with access to civilisation<sup>36</sup>. [13<sup>th</sup> of September 2007 – *Diario La Nación*<sup>37</sup>]

The distinguishing element in order to become *gente* (people), in Dominguez Dipp's argument, is to pay taxes. The fact that indigenous people, according to the national Constitution, are exempted from paying taxes, automatically categorises them for ODD as subjects 'outside' of the State. It is through paying taxes, in fact, that people gain access to the (liberal) State. There is, in this reasoning, a clear obliteration of history: the way in which public resources have been obtained, managed and distributed since the birth of the State is not part of his analysis. He wants indigenous people to believe in the State and to become a productive force if they want to survive. But the whole argument is so over-rhetorical that we are left with the doubt that he might actually be focusing his thinking on something else. Two days later, he finally reveals his enemy: NGOs.

It is absolutely inconceivable that we cannot take a few army trucks and bring, willingly or not, these people back to their lands and woods, where they can continue living as animals. [...] We should find out which are the NGOs that are financing these destructive invasions, in order to submit them to the most rigorous law. [15<sup>th</sup> of September 2007 – *Diario La Nación*]

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<sup>35</sup> *Asociacion Rural de Paraguay*, is the association that joins together the big *estancieros* (landowners) of Paraguay.

<sup>36</sup> All articles translations are personal ones.

<sup>37</sup> The NGO Survival International awarded this article its nomination as the "most racist article of the year" in 2007.

It is relevant to underline that the omitted information, in the debate that took place in the Paraguayan newspapers on the following days, is the link between Dominguez Dipp, land tenure and indigenous people in Paraguay. His son, in fact, the Senator Julio Osvaldo Dominguez, is the owner of the lands that the Enxet people of the community of Yakie Axa (situated in the Chaco region) have been claiming back for many years. Their claim, supported by the national Law 904/81, has been brought to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights by a local NGO, Tierra Viva. By attacking NGOs, then, Dominguez Dipp is directly defending the economic interests of his own family.

### The roots of barbarism

I've heard from people who have seen it, the description of the atrocities inflicted by the Paraguayan army on the Chaco Indians, with the aim of defending **not the country but the dictators' cattle**. But I've also heard about the crimes committed by the Indians against the Paraguayan army, in order to steal cattle in great quantity. (Cominges 1882: 38. Emphasis added).

The first accounts of the encounter between Chaco Indians and Paraguayan citizens, as is common in many parts of Latin America, retain the narrative of a war of conquest. Two peoples are fighting for access to resources, mainly land and cattle. In an article about early indigenist policies, Bouvet analyses the correspondence between the dictator of Paraguay, Dr. Francia and the military chief of Concepcion, Don Ibañez, between 1814 and 1816 (Bouvet 1992). I choose this example for two reasons: the first is that it concerns the Guana, one of the five ethnic groups that constitute Maskoy people; the second is that Ibañez was a local landowner (*estanciero*) and a political delegate, a kind of predecessor of Julio Osvaldo Dominguez (and many others).

Ibañez's land is part of the Mbaya's historical territory. In order to resist their incursions (they refuse to submit to his rule), he gives the Guana Chevara - former slaves of the Mbaya - permission to settle on his land. He gives them cattle and land and demands physical work in exchange. In 1796 he cruelly kills 75 Mbaya warriors "as a good action". The fight against the Indians is one of the tasks that the dictator Dr Francia assigns him. Fortunately for both, the interests of the State perfectly fit with the personal ones of Ibañez and his group of peers, as local indigenous groups were attacking and robbing local

estancias. Despite this, the local *estanciero* Ibañez negotiates compensations with the State in order to accomplish his duties. The fight against the Indians, in fact, is considered a service to the Republic.

Even if he could justify his war with the Indians in terms of a war of conquest, as it is, Francia doesn't lose any opportunity to remark how barbaric the Indians are and how beneficial the war is for the future of civilisation. But when the Mbaya claim tributes from the Spaniards for settling on their territory, mimicking the conduct of the Government, its local representative Ibañez thinks that their behaviour is unreasonable. By mimicking his "civilized practices", they unsettle the opposition barbarism/civilization that is essential to the justification of violence. Two centuries later, Dominguez Dipp's discourse on the Indians is still very similar to Francia's and Ibañez'. Both Dominguez Dipp and Ibañez, moreover, beside being landowners are also deeply linked to the central Government, with the only difference that Dominguez Dipp, like the overwhelming majority of contemporary landowners, lives in the capital city.

The claims over land by indigenous people (supported by NGOs) are the most evident threat to the interests of a powerful sector of the population (and to the State they aim to build) by a minority group otherwise considered inoffensive. Once again, and even more than before, in 2007 economic interests are concealed, and the "barbarism" of the Indians is the justification for rejection and violence. This discourse states first that indigenous people do not need land but development (in the form of jobs); second, that the reason for their material poverty is their own incapability to accept the "working" ethos; and third, that the quality of the land (which is connected to the world-wide decline of natural resources) doesn't allow them to live anymore as hunter-gatherers (which is what NGOs supposedly want them to be)<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, their diversity is tolerated in the form of traditional rituals that they have the right to maintain. This situation is paralleled in the majority of Latin American countries (see Hale 2004 for a similar notion of the "Tolerated Indian"; and Sieder 2002).

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<sup>38</sup> To have an idea of how this discourse is built it is sufficient to read the articles which appear in the main newspaper of the country – ABC color – immediately before and after ODD contribution in *La Nación* (June to December 2007).

## 2.2 The dispossession and the taming of the Indians

I have shown in the previous chapter how the Paraguayan State was built since its beginnings – and for concealed economic reasons - in opposition to the “barbaric Indians”. On the other hand, the identification of indigenous people with the Paraguayan State is also problematic. We could ask for example why, all over the country, indigenous people call non-indigenous people “Paraguayans” or “Whites”, emphasising a condition – and maybe a conscious refusal – of incomplete assimilation.

According to M.A. Bartolome, what is hidden behind the barbarism assigned to the Indians is a threat to the State, in that “ethnic loyalties could overtake the loyalty to the structure of the State” [Bartolome quoted by (Zanardini 2005)]. According to this author, in fact, there is a questionable identification between the Nation and the State in contemporary Latin America, an identification that has been copied from European bourgeois revolutions without questioning it. Indigenous people are thus defined as nations inside a State that doesn’t include them (though this situation has been largely reversed by the wave of new constitutions approved in Latin America in the 1990s). As Horst drastically says, “modern indigenous identity is created and sustained as a result of native struggles with the State” (Horst 2007: 166). On the other hand, we could ask Bartolome what he means by State, and which group loyalties can be found at the origin of the Paraguayan one. A question I’ll raise again in the course of the chapter.

As with all military defeats, the incorporation of indigenous people into the State began with dispossession. In 1848, Carlos Antonio Lopez gave legal Paraguayan citizenship to the Indians, but, in exchange, dispossessed them of all their “cattle, goods, and properties” (Horst 2007: 10). This predatory moment is part of the past of indigenous people even in regions of the country - like the Chaco - where the State was absent until the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the Maskoy case, it was carried out by Carlos Casado S.A:

*Machete Vaina (first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century):* Don Jose Casado [Carlos Casado’s brother] told (indigenous) people living in Km 40 to take their cattle out of there because they weren’t the owners of the land. He ordered them to move their cattle to the community of Machete Vaina, suggesting that he had borrowed them some land there. People brought their animals from Km 40, San Isidro, Pirizal, Santa Rosa and **Cacique Michi**. Then, Cirilo Soto (an

employee of Casado S.A.), marked the animals and took them away. [...] The Indians had no papers for their cows before. And the company didn't want them to have animals" (CEP 1986: 25)<sup>39</sup>.

In the Central Chaco, the Paraguayan army had a similar role. In some of the testimonies about the Chaco War recorded by Villagra, there are glimpses of a time in which the Indians possessed goats and sheep, which were stolen during the war by Paraguayan soldiers (Villagra 2007: 287).

The dispossession of land and goods marks the passage of the Indians from 'dangerous' to 'inoffensive'. Once 'tamed', indigenous people could become the object of indigenist policies aimed to improve their lives. In 1936, the National Indigenous Patronage (NIP) was created by the dictator General Franco to "study and help indigenous people to improve their lives". To emphasize this developmental – economically integrationist – agenda, the NIP is created as an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture. In 1958, during the Stroessner dictatorship, the indigenist institution is militarised and becomes an agency of the Ministry of Defence. Its name is changed to the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DAI). According to Prieto (Prieto 1994), the DAI was founded in order to urge native groups to participate in the market economy, but also to provide food, clothing and medical assistance<sup>40</sup>.

The creation of these first indigenist institutions had no relevance for the Chaco region, where the State – as we have seen in Chapter 1 – had delegated its action to the Churches<sup>41</sup> and to foreign ranching companies. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "sixty businesses, most of which were British, had purchased 115.591 km<sup>2</sup>" in the Chaco (Kidd 1995: 5). In 1907, the *Ley de reducciones de Tribus Indigenas* promised land to any religious organisation that could successfully reduce indigenous people. As a consequence, until the Chaco war [1932-35], the only inhabitants of the Chaco were the Indians, the tannin (foreign) industries, the missionaries and the Mennonites; the State was absent (Zanardini 2005: 281).

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<sup>39</sup> This episode has been confirmed to me by one of *Cacique Michi*'s nephews.

<sup>40</sup> According to Horst, "the regime first approached Mexican anthropologists rather than scholars from neighbouring Brazil for advice on shaping its indigenist program." (Horst: 46)

<sup>41</sup> In 1898(?) Barbrooke Grubb, the first Anglican missionary to found a mission in the Chaco, was named *Comisario General del Chaco y Pacificador de los Indios* by the Paraguayan Government.

## 2.3 The arrival in Territory Riacho Mosquito of the indigenism of State: INDI

The first indigenist governmental institution with a direct and deep influence on the totality of the Chaco region, was the National Institute of the Indian (INDI), re-organised in 1981.

According to Prieto, the influence of NGO movement on the creation and organisation of INDI makes this indigenist institution more “progressive”<sup>42</sup> than the previous ones. Its foundation relies, in fact, on the *Law 904/81- Estatuto de las comunidades indigenas*, that was itself a result of the NGOs’ pressure on the State. As part of the Law, a special fund was created in order to facilitate the acquisition of land. In the NGOs’ view, the main function of INDI should have been that of facilitating the acquisition and legalisation of new and old territories for indigenous communities.

According to Chase-Sardi<sup>43</sup> (Chase-Sardi 2001: 49), there is a flow of progressive indigenism in the 1980s into the indigenism of the State<sup>44</sup>. This progressive indigenism is linked to the participation of the missionary sector in the Conference of Barbados of 1973, which put the accent on the right to self-determination of indigenous people. The same people who attended the Conference of Barbados founded immediately after the ‘Marandu Project’ (see Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2). In the project, there was a strategic alliance between important members of the army (the indigenist General Bejarano) together with the progressive indigenist sector of the country (strictly linked to the academic and missionary world). It was the pressure exercised by this new alliance that led in only a few years to the approval of the Law 904/81.

Despite the encouraging start, the final draft of the Law 904/81 did not satisfy the indigenist sector that contributed to its compilation. The right to land is stated, in fact, in the Law, but no special regulations are established in order to make it feasible. As a matter

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<sup>42</sup> I assume that Prieto uses the word “progressive” with reference to the degree of autonomy that institutions are favourable to grant for indigenous people. In the 1980s, autonomy seemed to coincide with access to land tenure.

<sup>43</sup> One of the most important Paraguayan anthropologists, who was persecuted and imprisoned by the Stroessner dictatorship.

<sup>44</sup> The indigenism of NGOs and indigenous organisations is sometimes labelled as neo-indigenism (Ramos 2001).

of fact, several indigenous groups are still fighting to obtain the land that they are supposedly entitled to under the law. Even in the case of the Maskoy struggle for land, Juan Gonzales mentions as allies two ANR members of parliament rather than any member of INDI. Moreover, in one of the episodes mentioned in Chapter 1, it is the president of INDI himself who betrays the Maskoy representatives in the negotiation with the Casado S.A. in 1986. The alliance with members of the Government proved to be much more effective than the one with the INDI, as if had no real decisional power.

It may be useful to mention another case that happened at the beginning of the 1980s. In 1980, a group of Toba people who had been working for Casado S.A. in the central Chaco, obtained a portion of land in Casanillo with the support of Colonel Centurion, who was the president of INDI at that time (the Toba were one of the groups that conformed Maskoy people). But in 1981 Centurion was quickly removed from his post for giving too much support to the indigenous fight, and the Toba removed from their lands. On that occasion, it became clear to indigenous people that the decisions of the president of INDI were submitted to those of other, more influential, political spheres (for a detailed description of the facts see Leiva 2004; Horst 2007). The location of power in specific people, and the effort to negotiate directly with the higher spheres of power, has become a recurrent strategy for Maskoy people. But if inside the parliament there is a crowd of senators and deputies to pursue as potential and powerful allies, inside the INDI the only person with some decisional power is the president, and even his power is limited.

In the 1990s, the INDI ended up being a bureaucratic machine. Despite the fact that its original aim was the acquisition of land, it proved to be perfectly able - thanks to the lack of a pertinent regulation for Law 904/81 - to obviate its origins and instead fulfil the needs of the central power of the State. The amount of money assigned to the expropriation and legalisation of land, in fact, gradually diminished over time, while that assigned to the functioning of the bureaucratic machine dramatically increased [(Chase Sardi 2001: 51); see (Ramos 2001) for the Brazilian case].

There is an interesting conceptualisation - in the everyday life of indigenism - of indigenists as "friends of the Indians". INDI is therefore described as a place where, despite the diffused hostility of the majority of the Paraguayan population, there are people who "like the Indians", and try to help them. This confusion between a precise institutional task

(what indigenists should do as a consequence of their job) and a personal and emotional involvement, is symptomatic of the confused and paternalistic role of the institution.

Since August 2008, with the new Lugo government, an indigenous (Ache) woman has been elected as president of INDI. It is the first time, since its creation, that an indigenous representative has occupied the public office of president of the INDI. An activist of the political movement (Tecojoja) that supported Lugo's election, Margherita Mbywangi owes her representativeness to her ability to negotiate with the political sector, and not to a consolidated trajectory inside the world of indigenous organisations. Her priorities, so far, are to boost the economic development in the communities and to build new infrastructure. It will be interesting to see what will happen with the titling and regularisation of land.

### **The Law 904/81 and the beginning of "modern times"**

As if to mark the ambiguous status of the Indians' citizenship, inside and outside of the State, one of the tasks of the INDI is to produce a whole set of special documents for indigenous people. Indigenous people, in fact, not only have access to a regular Identity Card (*Carnet de Identidad*), as do the rest of Paraguayan citizens, but also to an Indigenous Identity Card (*Carnet de Identidad Indígena*), specially released by the INDI. This second 'indigenous version' of the identity card gives special rights to the cardholders, and especially free access to specific resources: it is used for example inside the INDI to claim goods and money and in special facilities for indigenous people, like the "Hospital of the Indian" situated close to the capital town.

INDI was quickly transformed into a bureaucratic machine whose main aim became the creation of a register of indigenous communities. According to Villagra, the Law 904/81, upon which INDI was created, marks the beginning for indigenous people of a "modern era" (Villagra 2008: 12). The main change is that "the legal representativeness of the communities, and the State recognition, became the new elements for the legitimisation of leaderships" (Ibid.). An example of this is the release of a *Carnet de Lideres Indigenas* (Indigenous Leader Card), which is a compulsory document for all the leaders of indigenous settlements officially recognised by the State. The creation of a register of



indigenous society bears important consequences on a political level. The release of special documents of recognition, initially thought of as a facilitating mechanism for the titling of lands, makes indigenous people “legible” (Scott 1998) to the State. At the same time, it wrests power to the people who were originally the only source of legitimacy for indigenous chiefs, and ends up drawing the leaders into the State’s orbit with the aim of co-opting them.

During the time I’ve spent in the community of Castilla no functionary of the INDI has visited the community, and the only support it gave to Maskoy people was the provision of bus tickets for the leaders, so that they could travel from the community to the capital town. There wasn’t any clear economic policy on how to help improve the situation of indigenous communities (this aspect emerges clearly in ‘Casado’s Legacy’). After a two year project of renovation of the INDI (funded by the World Bank), the only clear change in the structure of the institution was the creation of an indigenous organisation whose representatives were ex-leaders, who by that time had left their communities and lived in the capital city.

### **Territorio Indigena Riacho Mosquito: historical and geographical borders**

It is time now to go back to the history of Maskoy people, and to the year of the expropriation of the land. In 1987, in fact, 30.000 hectares of land was titled under the name of “Indigenous Territory Riacho Mosquito”.

Despite having fought for the land for so long, one of Puerto casado’s nuns, Sister Rosanna, told me that the people resisted moving there. Most of them in fact feared that the Church would continue helping the people in the indigenous district of Casado, while abandoning the others to their own destiny. As a strategy to convince the people to move to the expropriated land, the Catholic Church ensured food support for the new communities, and that is how they eventually settled down.

The new settlements in Territorio Riacho Mosquito were organised into different communities. Three of the new communities (Castilla, Km 40, Machete Vaina) were

located adjacent to the old cattle-ranches and surrounding buildings. A small group of people settled down in San Juan, close to a lagoon, but the community disappeared a few years later, when the shaman-leader died. A small community (Riacho Mosquito) was founded in the proximity of an old cattle ranch (Casilda) by the Ramirez family, right in front of the Paraguayan town of Vallemi, located on the other side of the river. This was probably the place where the cacique Michi had his *toldería* at the beginning of the century. And another small community was founded in Km 39, just one kilometre away from the community of Km 40.

Other families, including some of the leaders who fought for the land, moved 220 km away where they settled down with the Toba(Maskoy) people of Casanillo. Other families moved to Redención (Concepción indigenous district), others settled down in the Mennonite colonies of the central Chaco, and others finally moved to the capital city (mainly in the suburb of Aregua). Some of them remained in Pueblito Indio, in Puerto Casado.

### Nomadic identities

Far from representing stable identifications, contemporary communities are temporary locations that are connected to a wide geographical area; much wider than the official 30.000 hectares that constitute Territory Riacho Mosquito. When Maskoy people settled down in their new Territory, each family was left free to decide in which community they wanted to live. Judging from the present situation, we can say that communities weren't constituted on the basis of purely familiar ties. If it's true that everyone has relatives in one community, it is also true that everyone has relatives in some of the other communities, and even in other departments or countries (one of my neighbours had a sister in Bolivia). From the point of view of kinship ties, communities are not homogeneous entities [the same situation is analysed by Kidd amongst the Enxet (Kidd 1999), and Villagra amongst the Angaite (Villagra forthcoming)].

The borders of the Maskoy territory are extended by kinship ties and personal movements. Inside the territory itself, people change location quite frequently if "*no se hallan mas*", which means: if for any reason they don't feel well where they are. The network that is usually "used" in order to move from one place to the other is kinship, and we have seen how

kinship ties in Castilla can reach as far as Bolivia. We could say that while kinship ties are used and reinforced in order to move, residential (community) ties are used and reinforced in order to settle down. This wider territory, however, is not experienced as homogeneous but rather conformed by a centre and a periphery.

While the settlements situated at a distance from Paraguayan society are referred to as “the centre” (*el centro*), in fact, the others have specific names (Pueblito, Asuncion), or are referred to as “in x place” (for example: in the Mennonite colony). I would argue that this differentiating denomination corresponds to a qualitative difference amongst the places themselves. The Maskoy territory is then configured as a territory with blurred limits, which consents nevertheless to the possibility of a centre. In order to clarify this concept, I will refer to the visits to Territory Riacho Mosquito of the young Maskoy people who have grown up in Asuncion. One of them once told me that - even if he preferred the capital city - he felt *tranquilo* (in harmony) only when in the indigenous territory. To explain to me what he meant by *tranquilo*, he told me that he could use old or worn out clothes without feeling odd. At the same time, however, he cyclically felt the necessity to go back to the capital city in search of opportunities and entertainment. Both places – Puerto Casado and Asuncion - had become part of his autobiography, and each of them was experienced in relationship to the other. We could define this identity as nomadic, involved in a dialectical movement between two qualitatively different geographic spaces: a periphery and a centre.

In *Landscapes of devils*, Gordillo describes the history of Argentinean Toba as marked by periodical migrations to different working places, such as sugar cane plantations and cattle ranches. According to him, even when Toba people were spending more time in the plantations, they still experienced their territory as “home” (Gordillo 2004: 119). “Home”, the bush, is a space produced by the Toba in opposition to other spaces, which are marked by different experiences:

The bush is a site of resilience that has enabled them to endure state terror, capitalist exploitation, missionary social control and state domination; a domain characterised by necessity and material hardship, a place of health and healing that counteracts illness and death; a source of non-commodified abundance; a depleted locality deprived of the forces and creatures of the past; a place of local knowledge and quietness where people counter the estrangement and despair experienced elsewhere (Gordillo 2004: 254).

The existence of a geographical space independent from the Whites – and built in opposition to them – is a ‘centre’ from where to build a sense of ‘home’. As Leiva says: “Not to go back to how it was before, but to live better without being dependent on anyone” (Leiva 2004). And this is what Gonzales said about Territory Riacho Mosquito:

Whilst in Pueblito we weren’t free. We weren’t free because we couldn’t **use** our culture.

According to Unruh and Kalisch, the Enlhet word *mesyon* refers both to a geographical space and to a way of life. This is why, for example, Enlhet people requested to be baptized when they settled down in the Mennonite missions (Unruh & Kalisch 2007: 118). We can assume that Territory Riacho Mosquito, in its quality of being State-free, allowed the creation of a new identity with respect to that experienced while living in Pueblito Indio.

### **From *tolderías* to *comunidades***

While doing my research, I noticed that people never used the terms *líder* or *comunidad* when referring to the Casado Company times, but they would rather refer to *caciques*<sup>45</sup> and *tolderías*. When they talk about the settlements in Territory Riacho Mosquito, on the other hand, they use the terms leader and community. Following Villagra’s reference to the beginning of a “modern era” in the Chaco region, we could say that Territory Riacho Mosquito was founded according to a modern pattern grounded in the new *Law 904/81-Estatuto de las Comunidades Indígenas*. In fact, we find the terms “community” and “leader” in the text of the Law, where they are used in the double register kept by the INDI: the Register of Indigenous Communities and the corresponding Register of Indigenous Leaders.

*Article 12.* The leaders (**líderes**) shall exercise the legal representation of their community (**comunidad**). The nomination of leaders shall be communicated to the institute, which shall recognise it within 30 days from the date when said communication took place, and shall enter in the National Registry of Indigenous Communities.” [Law 904/81]

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<sup>45</sup> The term *cacique* is sometimes used as the Guaraní version of the Spanish *líder*, thus giving the idea of an issue of translation (mostly in jokes). Despite this, Maskoy people used the term *cacique* when talking about Casado’s times and also when speaking to me in Spanish, marking the idea of a conceptual differentiation.

Maskoy people still use the word *toldería* (from *toldo*: hut) when they talk about the times of Casado's Company. The *toldería* was a temporary settlement, not contemplated as a political entity by the Paraguayan State, and constituted by a certain number of families and their *cacique*. Some of the families represented a stable component of the group, while others would change *toldería* depending on working opportunities (this was especially true for the ones located close to a cattle ranch). In some of the *tolderías*, where people had houses with walls and roofs, the houses could be abandoned and then occupied by new families [Antonia, personal communication]<sup>46</sup>. The size of the *toldería* was probably smaller than contemporary 'communities', consisting of about 20 families. They were usually organised around the patio of the *cacique*, but we could also imagine them as having an extended shape, like the ones located along the railway line [Angel, personal communication]. While some of the old *tolderías* had names inspired by the surrounding environment, others were called Km "X" (Km 11, or Km 86), the number after "Km" meaning the distance between Puerto Casado and the place along the rail line (Unruh & Kalisch 2007).

The permanence of *tolderías* was reliant upon the proximity of natural and economic resources. When the new 'communities' were founded, though, they were registered in the INDI as if they were stable entities, forever tied to a precise place. Despite this, far from being stable entities with a stable population, nearly all Maskoy communities were initially located elsewhere inside territory Riacho Mosquito. In the case of Castilla, for example, houses were much more dispersed than they are now and they were located close to a lagoon about one hour away (the move of the community apparently took place after a flood). San Juan was founded on the edges of a more distant lagoon, but it was abandoned after the leader's death. The actual configuration of Castilla is not so stable either in the mind of its settlers. Antonia's dream, for example, was to place all the houses in a row between the old and the new lagoon.

Even if the State requires stable, legible communities, the extension of Territory Riacho Mosquito makes the moving of the old settlements and the creation of new ones easier than in other places. According to Kidd, the foundation of new settlements and the displacement of families from one community to another, is a common way of dealing with

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<sup>46</sup> This practice is not followed now, as the use of corrugated iron for the roof makes the houses economically valuable.

situations of conflict amongst the Enxet people (Kidd 1999). Inside Territory Riacho Mosquito itself it is common for people to move to a different community. Sometimes movement is between Territory Riacho Mosquito and the Toba/Enxet communities situated in central Chaco, or between the former and Asuncion or Concepcion. In other cases – as it was the case with old *tolderías* – the same community (as a group of people) moved around the territory. This latter practice is no longer considered convenient given the fact that unstable communities – precisely because of their instability – are rarely reached by State welfare programs: an issue I will return to later in the chapter. On the other hand, the centralised bureaucracy of the State allows the creation of small communities whose only *raison d'être* is access, through their leader, to supplementary external resources. There is one, for example, in Territory Riacho Mosquito that is made up of only three families.

### *From cacique to líder*

The shift from *toldería* to *comunidad* is related to a new configuration of leadership. In fact, as much as the *cacique* is the head of the *toldería*, the *líder* is the legal representative of the *comunidad*. According to Villagra, there has been a transition - after the Law 904/81 - from the figure of the “traditional leader” to that of the “transactional” one (Villagra 2008). While the first kind of leadership was based on the personal values of extended kinship, generosity, shamanic and discursive skills, bravery etc., the second one is based on the ability to mediate between the community and external entities (the State amongst them). The same author, though, also underlines the fact that both configurations of leadership can coexist in contemporary leaders (Ibid.).

I have already mentioned the existence of an “Indigenous Leader Card”, especially released by INDI. The legitimisation on the part of the State, made through the registration of indigenous leaders and communities, far from resulting in a passive “writing down” of the information ends up producing new dynamics of power. The location of INDI in the capital city wrests, at least in part, the control of leadership from the members of the community. Once in the capital city, for instance, the leader fully represents the community even if the latter doesn't know anything about his actions and decisions. The communication between the leader and the community becomes a problem to be solved, and not something spontaneously happening in the daily exercise of leadership.

This historical transition in the configuration of power begins with the work in the cattle-ranches and tannin companies. According to Susnik, the work in the cattle-ranches implies an important conceptual change from the point of view of indigenous leadership: the world “*wisci*” (*wese* in Kidd’s spelling), once employed to identify traditional leaders, is then employed to identify cattle-ranch bosses. However, the authority of the boss is not based on the legal ownership over the land and means of production, but on his “right to say by imposing” (*derecho a decir imponiendo*) (Susnik 1977: 54). Rather than on a juridical condition, the accent is put on the relationship between the boss and his employees. Previously, the leadership of the *wisci* was based on the principle: “the leader tells the things he saw/he observes/he knows” (*cuenta el cacique las cosas que ha visto/que observa/que conoce*) (Susnik 1977: 246). In this alternative conceptualisation of power, the leader was described as a facilitator of information; the decisional power was left to his people. On the other hand, Susnik identifies the existence of intermediate configurations of power in between the leader-boss and the leader-communicator. She mentions in fact the existence of *caciques-cabecilla* (leader-ruler) who are imposing and provocative, and who base their prestige on the support of authentic followers (Susnik 1977: 247). These leaders held power for limited periods, until their people got tired of them and joined another group or changed their leader.

In Puerto Casado, the labour contracts between bosses and workers had a considerable influence on the transition to new forms of leadership. The mobility of individual families, who moved from one ranch to the other in search of work, without identifying with any particular settlement, was one of the reasons for the weakening of the old ties. When Regher visited Pueblito Livio Farina in 1980, he reported a dramatic lack of indigenous leadership:

For decades, the labour contracts between the missionaries and indigenous people have been formulated on an individual basis. The Indigenous people have learnt to cooperate and comply with the orders of the missionary institutions as individuals and not collectively. This process of individualisation weakened traditional communal cooperation, and made them lose their traditional leaders. An indigenous person elected under the new leadership rules [the ones formulated by indigenist institutions and missionaries] explained to me: “I do not like to do things in common, because indigenous people are not trustworthy. They come and go, they mess around. I prefer to have my own piece of land (Regher 1980: 9).

Exactly like in the cattle ranches, the function of leader is transferred to the new White chiefs. Ex-Anglican missionary and anthropologist, Stephen Kidd mentions how – being a priest – he was called *wese* by the local people as soon as he arrived in his Enxet community (Kidd 1992). In Pueblito, the new chief seems to have been the local priest:

Because of their constant dependency on the missionaries' charity and the scarcity of their income, lots of people suppose that the missionaries will develop some project also on the new land (Territory Riacho Mosquito). When asking indigenous people about the forthcoming settlement I received the following answers: "I don't know. I just live here. I don't know where the priest is going to build my house." – "The priest will decide how to organise the new settlement. He said that we are going to cultivate the field, and that each family is going to receive a piece of land." It is obvious that in this context of dependency there are few initiatives for self-created concepts inside the indigenous group. (Regher 1980: 8)

Despite the fact that the API<sup>47</sup>, the Salesian mission and the INDI all tried in the 1970s to create an Indigenous Council in Pueblito, the 'democratically elected' leadership of the Council was never effectively recognised by the inhabitants of the indigenous districts. In his report - assuming that the problem is the White people's influence - Regher suggests that the election of a new Council "without the participation of people who do not belong to the indigenous population" (Regher 1980), should lead to the establishment of a recognised leadership. But we could also ask up to which point the existence of an indigenous Council in Pueblito was considered useful by its inhabitants. A few years later, in fact, when Maskoy people engaged in the fight for land and the existence of a general leader was felt as necessary, Rene Ramirez was immediately elected and recognised. But when the struggle for land finished, Ramirez's leadership also tended to disappear. It would be kept alive through the years by the attitude of the Whites, who methodically invited him to represent Maskoy people in any possible official event<sup>48</sup>.

The oscillating character of indigenous leadership was frequently mistaken by the external observers as a loss of leadership. This is what Grubb, an Anglican missionary, says about the Enxet leaders:

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<sup>47</sup> Asociacion de Parcialidades Indigenas. Officially recognised by the State in 1976, it is a council of indigenous leaders that originally gathered around the Marandu Project, founded in 1974. (Renshaw 1996)

<sup>48</sup> The last of them being the Public Hearing mentioned in the prologue to Chapter 1.



Just before my arrival, the entire Enxet nation, for some reason that I was never able to uncover, clearly got disorganised. Even nowadays, amongst the most remote settlements that are only tangentially in contact with the Anglican mission, the process of disorganisation and the gradual disappearing of any leadership are clearly visible. For what I could understand, the Enxet people were once under the authority of their leaders, and they were therefore much more organised than in any moment of my stay with them [Grubb 1914 as quoted by (Villagra 2005)].

According to Villagra, we should interpret Grubb's observation as an act of blindness derived from the lack of coercive power amongst the Enxet leaders (Villagra 2005). If a leader cannot impose his will, Grubb seems to think, than he's not a leader. But we could also think that the presence of a strong indigenous leadership was not necessary in that particular moment (and Susnik's description of the *caciques-cabecilla* could confirm this interpretation). Indeed, the remark made by Susnik that the term *wisci* (leader), was used to define cattle ranch bosses in the 1960s (Susnik 1977: 151), doesn't apply to the present situation. I've never heard anyone in Riacho Mosquito calling "leader" any foreman or boss who is giving work to Maskoy people. Once settled down in Territory Riacho Mosquito, indigenous leaders started appearing again.

The attribution of leadership functions to White people is not something imposed from the latter, but something inscribed into the indigenous culture itself. In Kidd's analysis, the source of power - amongst the Enxet people - is located outside the community. The shamans gain power through contact with the malevolent and dangerous spirits that inhabit the invisible world (Kidd 1995: 6). The capacity of the shaman to get in touch with these spirits was used to protect the communities and provide them with food and other material benefits. The same process is repeated in the contact with White people (Kidd 1995: 62). Talking about a young guy from Pueblito, for example, Rene Ramirez told me that he needed to spend more time with the Whites in order to "gain strength". Indigenous leaders reappear in Territory Riacho Mosquito, when people start thinking again in terms of political independency. But their features have changed.

Rene Ramirez makes a neat distinction between *lider* and *cacique*, and always underlines the fact that he was elected general chief (*cacique*) – rather than leader - in the fight for land. According to him, the leader is someone who "shows up" in front of the authorities, and who looks for the approval of the Whites rather than that of his own people. The chief, in

turn, is a counsellor. He is sought out by the people in order for them to receive advice. He is also ready to temporarily represent his people, and then go back to his community and his daily life. His representativeness stops when his task is accomplished. He receives visits from the Whites, but looks for them only when necessary. He is more 'sought after' than an active searcher. His legitimisation comes from his counselling skills, both on a political and on a moral level. Rene Ramirez would often underline, in fact, how even Paraguayan people used to talk to him about their sentimental and family problems. He often emphasised that on one occasion, when he was a catechist, the priest asked him to explain to a big audience of Paraguayan and indigenous people how a good marriage should work. When the fight for land was over, Rene Ramirez didn't become a leader, but he decided to enter into politics on the side of the Liberal party<sup>49</sup>. In 2003, he was elected *Consejal Municipal* (City Councilman) for the Liberal party. However, when I asked him what he did during his political mandate he answered that he spent his time observing and learning. This reminded me of the point - made by Bratislava Susnik - that "the relationship between the traditional leader and the community was based on the following principle: the leader tells the things he has seen, observed, known" (already quoted in this same chapter). We may read this attitude of pure listening in front of the Paraguayans as a renunciation of dialogue. According to Ramirez, the elders taught the youths to shut up and listen in front of the Paraguayans, because Paraguayans shouted a lot and weren't prepared to listen<sup>50</sup>. Community leaders, on the other hand, chose a different path; and many of the Maskoy complained to me that Ramirez wasn't able to accomplish the task of transmitting back the information while city councilman.

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<sup>49</sup> At the origin of his affiliation to the Liberal party there is probably his encounter and personal relationship with the Liberal activist Domingo Laino.

<sup>50</sup> A similar thing happens in the film during his conversation with the policemen. Ramirez remarks at the end: "They [the Whites] don't know how to make a conversation".

## 2.4 The arrival of politicians: in the beginning was Sostoa

All the Maskoy people I have talked to, mention Tarcisio Sostoa (a member of the Parliament until the last legislature) as the first politician to appear in the Puerto Casado area. According to them, there were no politicians before. It then becomes essential to analyse who is Tarcisio Sostoa.

During Stroessner's dictatorship, when the public office of *Presidente de la Seccional Colorada* (President of the Local Colorado Party Branch) was the most powerful on a local political level, Sostoa held the office for about twenty years. His career began as *Presidente de la Asociación de Empleados* (President of the Employees' Association) of the Casado Company at the beginning of the 1970s, where he was "sticking up for the most humble people"<sup>51</sup>. A letter written in 1977, by personnel of the Casado Company, mentions Sostoa as *Presidente de la Seccional Colorada, Empleado de la Gerencia de Contraloría de la Empresa, Presidente de la Comisión Municipal Provisoria y Asesor de la Asociación de Empleados y del Sindicato de Obreros de Puerto Casado* (Abandoned Archive of the ex-Factory). As Casado's inhabitants say, Sostoa was the President of everything. Having been a trade unionist, his relationship with the Company was conflictive. However, according to some ex-workers Sostoa was using his political power to ask the Company for higher wages, rather than to secure better working conditions for its employees.

The political opposition to Sostoa, in the last period of the dictatorship, was curiously enhanced in Puerto Casado by non-political reasons. In fact, according to one of his political opponents, the political opposition to Sostoa started as a moral opposition to Sostoa's "pretensions" over the most beautiful girls. This overlapping of judgments about the private and public life of politicians finds a significant similarity with Ramirez' discourses about 'the good *cacique*'. Let's remember in fact that he used to give speeches about 'the good marriage' in the communities he visited with the local missionary.

When Maskoy people say that Sostoa was the first politician in the area, they refer to the political assemblies held in the cattle-ranches, during the internal elections of the Colorado

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with a political opponent, June 2008.

Party. Some Maskoy workers participated in the barbecue that followed the political speeches, "in order to eat" (*para comer*), even if they were not officially invited.

It was recently in 1993, after the coup of 1989, that indigenous people started voting in the departmental election. Documents of the Catholic Church mention the fact that while Maskoy people were going to vote in Puerto Casado, on a tractor driven by Father Nardon, a Colorado politician called Kiko Diaz approached the tractor and shot into the air. Kiko Diaz had also been president of the local Seccional Colorada, and he too, like Sostoa, was a member of the Parliament until the last legislation. This episode is revealing through two facts: the mediating role of the local Church in the relationship between Maskoy people and politics, at least at the beginning, and the initial antagonistic position of the Maskoy with respect to the Colorado Party. In the Departmental elections of 1993, Sostoa won a victory over the opposing party (Encuentro Nacional) by 27 votes. Due to the narrow victory, it is probably after the elections of 1993 that the Colorado party began negotiating with Maskoy people, and that Maskoy people began participating in political meetings as supporters, and not as simple observers.

The Colorado Party (officially called ANR - *Asociación Nacional Republicana*) was founded in 1887 together with its antagonist: the Liberal Party. According to Hicks, party affiliation in Paraguay has been based - since the foundation of the two main parties - on personal loyalties rather than on political principles (Hicks 1971: 92). Moreover, "to change one's party affiliation was considered little short of treasonous" by Paraguayans, and not being affiliated to any party was so uncommon that people felt uneasy to talk to someone whose political affiliation was unknown (Hicks 1971: 101).

Although Hicks talks about a "dyadic contract" - between members of the party and public citizens - I have noticed in Puerto Casado the existence of small political groups consisting of people gathering around one political candidate (these small political groups use to meet regularly on the patio of someone's house). A radio-speaker from Puerto Casado explained to me what he would do if he was to enter into politics. He said that he would first gather a group of people who would vote for him, and whose interests he would promise to support once elected, then write projects for them, and then try to have the projects approved by the municipality. Whether dyadic or collective, this client/patron relationship is common to many contexts of the Latin-American society. Once again, there is an

impressive coincidence between the Paraguayan way of doing politics and the description of the relationship between a cacique and “his people”. Let’s consider, for example, that one of the main functions of the leader is that of “providing his community with food and other material benefits” (Kidd 1995: 6).

While INDI never got to de-centralise its structure, national political parties did: through the *Seccionales* (Local Colorado Party Branches) during Stroessner’s dictatorship, and through the political division into local Governments (*departamentos*) from the early 1990s. As a consequence of the de-centralisation of the administrative structure of the State, the economic resources coming from the central government have been controlled by the local politicians (especially the Governors) who distribute them amongst their group of supporters. Maybe for the same reason, the majority of the money is not spent on infrastructure but in “services” (for example, as we will see later, to pay temporary working brigades). Even if supporters are paid in advance, when their vote is “bought”, they also expect a special treatment from “their” politicians in case they win the elections.

If we switch our attention from the relationship between citizens and politicians, to the one between politicians themselves, the personalisation of the relationship borrows its terminology from kinship ties, and takes the form of an extended family. It is as if the relationship between politicians was stronger than that between a politician and his voters. Nearly all the Mayors of Puerto Casado, since the beginning of the “democratic era” in 1989 up to the elections of 2008, are defined by the townspeople as ‘Sostoa’s sons’ (in Guaraní: *Sostoa ita’yra*). The progenitor of the kinship pyramid is of course the President. Even if struggles between “brothers” are part of political life (ANR is in fact divided into different factions), a call to unity can still be made in the name of the progenitor if the political opponent is considered too dangerous (this is what happened during the past elections, where the Colorado Party was finally defeated after about fifty years in power).

The interaction between the kinship-like Paraguayan political structure and Maskoy people raises evident problems of identification. In a context where indigenous people always define themselves in opposition to Paraguayans (see also prologue to chapter 3), the integration inside a non-indigenous kinship system was a problematic event. During my fieldwork, even if people easily declared that they belonged to a certain community, or were fans of a certain football team, it was rare that people declared any political affiliation.

On the contrary, they often criticised Paraguayans' political fanaticism. Even if some Maskoy people declared a political affiliation, I have noticed that the same people had been the candidate of opposite political parties over the years: political affiliation tended to be distributed inside the family, so as to include the biggest number of possible alliances. This behaviour was in net contrast with the one described by Hicks when he says that in Paraguayan political life "one is expected to remain always loyal to his party" (Hicks 1971: 101). In fact, stable political alliances were not pursued, and I have never heard an aspiring Maskoy politician declaring to be a Colorado Politician's son (*taɣra*). I would argue that the ongoing racism between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Puerto Casado is one of the reasons that make this identification impossible. This argument will be developed in the last section of this chapter.

### Identifications

It is difficult to say if people feel to belong more strictly to the community where they reside or to their kinship group. Depending on the broader context, they can be said to belong, first of all, to one or the other. When the mother of a man from my community died in the neighbouring community, there was immediately a conflict about her inheritance (represented by three cows and a few foils of corrugated iron). Both her community and her relatives (in fact, the closest ones were living in my community) claimed ownership over her belongings. The care that the old woman was receiving, before dying, from her own community, ended up determining the appropriation of her inheritance on the part of the latter. It has to be said, though, that her relatives from my community were not so much loved by the rest of the people. In fact, there was a kind of general agreement behind the scenes that they should be left without the inheritance.

Another common affiliation is that with national football clubs. This is a common behaviour amongst Paraguayan people, and the great majority of the population belong to either the *Cerro Porteño* or the *Olimpia* clubs. I will discuss this topic again in the third chapter. In the meanwhile, it is interesting to notice how the aesthetics of football is sometimes used to enhance community identifications:



*Figure 4:* Photo by the author.  
 Meeting of an indigenous organisation in the central Chaco in 2004.  
 We can read, on the leader's tracksuit:  
 COMMUNITY: XAMOK KASEK.  
 LEADER: MARCELINO L. FROM THE CHACO REGION

This overlap of aesthetics is not coincidental. In 1953, Susnik was writing that:

About six years ago, the Paraguayan communist leader Barthe sent his people amongst the Indians. But they refused to understand his propaganda and in Puerto Pinasco, the main leader wisely decided that indigenous people could only be members of the international football club [and not of the trade union] (Susnik 1953).

Just like football clubs, contemporary (“modern”) indigenous communities are sources of identification that are at the same time indigenous and legitimated by the Paraguayan society. Political affiliation, on the contrary, seems to escape to this mediatory role. Even if it is quite usual to see people wearing political party t-shirts, these are often distributed by politicians and used as working clothes, or in domestic situations. They are not produced by the Maskoy themselves, and their visibility is not enhanced in public situations (exception made for politicians’ visits to the communities).

## The beginning of the alliance between Maskoy people and politicians

I have mentioned that Maskoy people began to participate in the political meetings of the Colorado Party in order to benefit from food-sharing. As soon as the votes of Maskoy people became relevant on a local level, they realised that the food that was shared by the politicians was not a 'gift' but a 'right'. During a meeting in the community of Castilla, a woman underlined that they were "only eating fish and birds", as evidence that they had been forgotten by the politicians. Just after that, another woman said that without the votes of Maskoy people, there would be no Colorado politicians in power.

To understand the role of indigenous leaders in political life, we have to highlight a historical coincidence: by the time that Maskoy people started voting (after 1992), and that their vote was considered valuable by local politicians, the Law 904/81 was already effective. Which means: it was already necessary for the leaders to be recognised by INDI through the release of an 'Indigenous Leader Card'. The strengthening of the role of the leaders became functional to the ANR political strategies for one reason: to control one leader was much easier than to control a whole community. In 1954 Susnik was already writing that:

Chiefs never had a great power amongst the Chaco Indians. The chiefs' power grew after the Spanish conquest, because Spanish people used to deal with the tribes 'guides' (Susnik 1954).

According to the Paraguayans, to control the leader's opinions is to control the behaviour of the people in the community. "*Yo manejo la comunidad de 40*" ("I control the community of 40"), a politician told me once, while talking about geo-political strategies. However, it is not true that communities vote in a homogeneous way. In my experience, if the leader didn't manage to get a significant amount of resources from a particular politician, people felt perfectly free to vote for a more convenient candidate. During the last national elections, my community accepted different sort of things, mainly food, from two different political parties, and then voted according to the one they trusted more.



DVD 1 - Clip 1: Negotiation between the Mayor of Puerto Casado and the leader of a Maskoy community. The Mayor is promising food for the celebration of an initiation dance, asking in exchange the vote of Maskoy people for the a Colorado Governor (Erasmus) and a Member of Parliament (Chamorro).

As in similar contexts, in other Latin American countries, leaders are often 'bribed' by politicians in order to convince their communities to vote for them. However, community members criticise the leaders not because they receive money from politicians, but rather because leaders don't re-distribute the money within the community (as the old chiefs did). White politicians, on the other hand, try to negotiate with the leaders outside the limits of the indigenous territory, because it is cheaper to 'buy' the leader instead of the whole community. But this strategy is impeded by the fact that community members put pressure on the public authorities in order to force them to visit and negotiate within the communities.

During the last Municipal elections in Puerto Casado (October 2007), the Governor asked the leaders to meet him privately in the Paraguayan sector of Casado (and not in Pueblito). After a general meeting in Pueblito, a delegation of women went to talk to the Governor in order to ask him to meet the communities inside Pueblito itself, where all the communities from the Riacho Mosquito Territory were gathered together. At first, I couldn't really understand what was going on. A Paraguayan politician, Don Suarez, told me that he couldn't understand indigenous peoples' point of view, as it would have been too difficult for the Governor to talk to all the communities in one place. He told me that indigenous people had their representatives, and that it was their task to negotiate with politicians on the behalf of their communities. It was only a few days later that I understood what was going on: by forcing the Governor to distribute money inside the community, Maskoy women were avoiding the private bribing of the leaders, and the subsequent conflicts for the re-distribution of an uncertain quantity of money (see chapter 3). They finally forced the Governor to meet each community in a house located in the centre of Pueblito, so that distribution of money happened in a semi-public space, and each voter received an equal (and controlled) amount of money, for voting for the Colorado Party in the next elections<sup>52</sup>. The situation was clearly misinterpreted by the Paraguayan politician I was

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<sup>52</sup> Maybe for being a woman, I was aware of the tension – in my community – between some women and the leaders. I couldn't say how common these conflicts are, or if they were part of the

talking to, but I still doubt whether he was really misunderstanding the situation (in fact, he was the Governor's political enemy), or if he was just trying to distract my attention.

**Into the INDI: an encounter between the president of INDI, a Colorado member of parliament and the Maskoy leaders in 2008**

In June 2007, I accompanied the Maskoy leaders to the capital city, where they were trying to obtain an extension of the electricity supply to their communities. A deputy of the Colorado Party promised to help, and he proposed an encounter with the president of INDI in order to get a temporary exemption from the payment of the bill (see the film for further details). The main problem, in fact, was that the president of ANDE (the national electricity agency) didn't find it convenient to bring the electricity to the communities, because he feared that indigenous people wouldn't have the money to pay for the bills. The situation was even more desperate in Castilla because no one had a regular job. The brilliant strategy of the Colorado Member of Parliament, Chamorro, was that INDI would pay for the electricity on behalf of indigenous people, at least for a while. If INDI didn't have the money to pay for it (a hypothesis that, according to Chamorro, was highly pertinent), then ANDE wouldn't have sued INDI because they were both agencies of the State. After a first encounter with Chamorro, he, alongside all of the Maskoy leaders were received by the president of INDI. Everything went smoothly until the moment in which the president asked for the name of the Maskoy organisation. There was a silence, followed by the declaration of one of the leaders, saying that he had an organisation inside his community. The answer didn't satisfy the authorities, who kept asking if there was an organisation that represented the whole of the Maskoy community. The leader of Castilla explained the situation of OPM, the defunct Organisation of the Maskoy People (see the prologue to this chapter), and proposed to renew it as soon as possible. At that point, the leader of Km 39 intervened:

- *Leader from km 39*: "Deputy! I'm going to present an idea. I've consulted with my mate Angel (leader of Castilla - present in the meeting). We are going to organise ourselves and we are going to put forward one head in order to create a committee..." (the President of INDI shows his approval).

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life in the *tolderías*. However, I've often heard comments in Castilla about leaders being too powerful, and hypotheses on how to contest their power by, for example, creating sub-committees legalised by the State.

- *Deputy Chamorro*: “A committee?! Just if it includes the leaders and no one else (chorus of approval on the part of the indigenous leaders). We are going to gather the leaders, to sit them down, then we’ll bring them here (to the capital city) – we’ll pay for their ticket –we’ll create a council and in that way we’ll finally have the unity of the area where you live. We’ll be able to develop that area”.
- *Foeghel*: “Yes because... they have to be united...we need a big organisation”.
- *Leader from Castilla*: “In fact, we always thought about creating an organisation. For example, we wanted to ask ITAIPU (a State agency) for a tractor...”.

Behind Foeghel, hung a big portrait of an Indian crowned in feathers that was proudly looking over him.

[DVD 1 - Clip 2: Into the INDI]

According to the President of INDI, the unity of Maskoy people would be granted by the existence of an organisation recognised by the State. The Deputy, on the other hand, seems to emphasise the function of the leaders in the organisation, in order to strengthen their position and make them independent from their communities. His point of view is the point of view of the State, but it also resonates with the ANR political practice of centralising the decision-making power in the capital city. Chamorro’s suggestion, however, was only apparently approved by Maskoy people. Immediately after the meeting, they started looking for support amongst the NGO sector, with the idea of organising a big gathering inside Territory Riacho Mosquito.

### Shamans’ political role

Territory Riacho Mosquito seems to be perceived by its inhabitants as a space of power where Maskoy people try to balance the disempowerment that they experience in their interaction with the State, especially after the legitimisation system set up by the Law 904/81. If - during the fight for land of the 1980s - the shamans’ power was extended to the capital city, it was later on restricted to the Maskoy communities.

While editing the film, a few months after the end of the fieldwork, I suddenly realised something I hadn't noticed before. During the initiation ritual, in fact, I filmed a meeting of all the Maskoy leaders with the Mayor of Puerto Casado. During the meeting, the leaders and one of their wives were negotiating with the Mayor in order to get more food for the ritual (see film). The only person who is attending the meeting even though his is not a leader, is the shaman of Castilla. He is sitting on a chair, just behind the leaders. He seems distracted, as if he was just superficially listening to the conversation. At some point (I haven't filmed that) the shaman goes away. In the next scene, the shaman of Km 39 (an old woman) joins the group and puts her hand on the Mayor's shoulder. After that, she sits down in front of him, where the other shaman was previously sitting down. The old lady seems to be looking around with no precise intention, and the Mayor doesn't pay her any attention.

[DVD 1 – Clip 3: Shamans]

Even if it's difficult to say what was really happening on a non-visible level, I would argue that the presence of the two shamans was not accidental. If we think about the role of shamans in the fight for land, we can advance the hypothesis that – while the Mayor was talking – the shamans were “weakening” him, so as to “unlock his wáxok” and stimulate his generosity. Even if shamans do not act anymore – as they did before – by controlling the movements of the leaders in the capital town, and referring them to the local population, they still exert their power when politicians appear in their communities. My observation is coherent with Kidd's hypothesis of a revitalisation of shamanism for political purposes in the Enxet communities (Kidd 1995; see also Gordillo 2003). The location of shamanic powers inside the indigenous territory, while no longer in distant places such as the capital city, reveals Riacho Mosquito as a space that enhances power in the confrontation with the Whites. The shamans' power, in fact, for reasons I am not able to explain (maybe because of their greater knowledge of local spiritual beings – maybe because their soul has to travel for longer distances), is stronger if it is performed inside their own community. I would argue that the existence of a space where Whites are usually absent, and their power distant (the communities), creates the conditions for the strengthening of shamanic powers, traditionally forged in isolation (for a detailed description of the shamanic training amongst the Enxet people see Arenas 1981).

## The interrupted alliance

We could probably say that the liberal State, from the point of view of an inhabitant of Puerto Casado, does not exist. The State in Casado - and this description converges with Hicks' one about the functioning of the Colorado and the Liberal Parties (Hicks 1971) - is a complex system made up by kinship ties constantly sustained and recreated. As Overing and others argue about indigenous kinships, political kinship amongst Paraguayans is not given once and for all, but is constantly re-created (and extended) through acts of sharing and exchange (Overing & Rapport 2007). Let us remember that according to Maskoy people politics begins, in the Puerto Casado area, through the banquets organised by the local patriarch of the Colorado kinship system: Tarcisio Sostoa. The Maskoy seem to have considered, at least initially, an alliance with the Colorado party. But Sostoa's generosity as a leader will soon be questioned by Maskoy people, and all Colorado politicians defined as 'liars'.

The description of the alliance (or failed alliance) between Whites and indigenous people as beginning with food exchange, is a widespread topic in the central Chaco. It appears both in the Whites' accounts (Hein 1990), and in the indigenous ones. According to Luis Leiva, for example, the first contact between Maskoy and White people, happened as follows:

One day a man came to talk with the ancestors, but they all ran away except some. This man had dry bread [*galletas*<sup>53</sup>] and he gave it to those who remained. They ate *galletas* and they liked them. That was the first time they tasted *galletas*, and they called all the others and asked them to join. That's how they were tamed.<sup>54</sup> (Leiva 2004)

The definition of indigenous people as 'tamed' (*amansados*), marks their entrance into White society in a position of submission. This submission, however, is then described as the consequence of a false mechanism of reciprocity: White people didn't want to get involved in an exchange relationship, but they rather wanted 'to tame', to conquer. It is true that the first contacts between Maskoy and White people were based on fights and

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<sup>53</sup> *Galletas cuartel* are a special kind of dry bread that is meant to last for a long period of time without going mouldy. It is especially consumed in the Chaco region.

<sup>54</sup> Un día llegó un hombre para tomar conversación a nuestros antepasados, casi todos corrieron al monte y solo algunos se quedaron. Este hombre tenía galletas que se repartieron a los que se quedaron. Comieron y les gustó. Y así fue que probaron por primera vez galleta, y se les llamó a los demás y estos comieron también. De esa forma se les amansó.

robberies on the part of both. But the reference to the 'taming' of the Indians marks a very different kind of relationship, based on trickery and isolation of the Indians on the part of the Whites (the same strategy that Maskoy people adopt in order to tame wild animals).

Four years ago, I recorded a similar myth that an Ishir representative (Don Ramon) had told in Asuncion, during a meeting with politicians preceding the Constituent Assembly of 1993. In the myth, when Columbus arrived in Paraguay, indigenous people were rich and they "didn't lack any project". Then Columbus started taming the Indians. "How to tame an Indian?", asks Don Ramon during the telling of the myth. "Bring lots and lots of food", is the answer. When the food was finished, Columbus left and promised to bring more food and projects. The Indians gave him a wife, to make Columbus one of their relatives, and Columbus accepted. But then he fenced the land and kept it for his descendants, the new mixed-blood race, and left the Indians without land (MA dissertation in Visual Anthropology, University of Manchester, 2005).

A similar myth has been recorded by Villagra amongst the Angaité. This is a summary of one of the versions of the myth:

One day some Paraguayans arrived in a *canoe* on the bank of the small river. [...] Then the *valayo* left on the bank of the *alvata* some provisions: flour, *yerba mate*, and so on. But our people did not know this food, just our food: fish, palm heart, sweet potato... Then the Paraguayans left. One villager said to his people "It may be poisoned, do not eat it" and they threw away and scattered the bags [of food] on the ground. It was the case that the Paraguayans were asking our people if they could have a small piece of their land, but nobody understood them and the Paraguayans gave the provisions as a payment... But our grandparents did not know Guaraní and the *tembi'u morotí* (in Guaraní: white food) and that must have been the reason why and how they lost their land..." (Villagra, forthcoming).

In this version of the story, indigenous people refused to eat the food that was offered to them. They therefore seem to assume their fault for the dispossession of the land, enhancing their role as protagonists of the forthcoming events (Villagra, forthcoming).

In all the tales, the narrators focus their attention on the dynamics of the interchange of food, goods and land between White and indigenous people. The same attention is also dedicated by Rene Ramirez to the exchange relationship between Marcos Casado and the Maskoy chiefs (see Chapter 1). The exchange that took place in the first encounter between indigenous and non-indigenous people, evolves through the multiple exchanges that take place with the passing of time. In the relationship between ANR politicians and Maskoy people, a particular emphasis is placed on the building of a personal relationship, sometimes defined as 'friendship'. The concept of friendship is ambiguously played in the realm of politics, and political delegates present themselves as 'friend of the Indians', even when it's clear that their purpose is to gain votes.

### Contemporary mechanisms for the building of 'friendship' ties

In June 2007, Maskoy people from different communities were gathered in the metropolitan seminar of Asuncion, as part of the fight of Paraguayan people against the Moon Sect. For a few days, a red truck was collecting indigenous people from the seminar, and bringing them to '*Identificaciones*', the public institution in charge of renewing the national identity card. Many of the Maskoy gathered at the seminar, in fact, had this purpose well in mind when they travelled to Asuncion at the beginning of the fight. When I asked a Maskoy friend about the identity of the truck owner, he replied to me: politicians. About twenty days later, I saw the same truck inside territory Riacho Mosquito, in a community where they were planning to perform *Baile Flauta*, a traditional Maskoy dance lasting one week. Someone told me that '*el licenciado*' (the graduate) - and owner of the truck - was going to buy a cow for the celebration of the ritual. One week later I met 'the graduate' again in Pueblito, during a meeting with the leaders. The meeting was held by a governmental representative, who at some point asked 'the graduate' - who was sitting amongst the leaders - to present himself to the rest of the people. He replied that he was a friend of the Indians, and that he was especially interested in football<sup>55</sup>. This last sentence made the public laugh, and the meeting went on about other subjects. By that time everyone already knew that he was "doing politics" amongst the Maskoy people, and that he was hoping to promote himself as Governor for the next elections. His continual

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<sup>55</sup> During my fieldwork, a local Colorado politician organised a big football tournament for the Maskoy communities. The politician provided food, transportation and a monetary prize for the champion team. The relationship between football and politics will be discussed again in chapter 3.

reference to his 'friendship' with the Maskoy people was a bit disturbing to me, but not to the rest of the people. Some weeks later I met him in the capital city, and he asked me a few questions. As I discovered, his main concern was to ask me if the leader of Castilla was "Chamorro *itayra*" (Chamorro's son), or not yet. His purpose was in fact to propose an alliance to him, and probably an affiliation.

Seen from Puerto Casado, the State is not an abstract entity but a complex system of relationships spelled out – in some cases – as processes of kinship building. On the other hand, laws and bureaucratic practices are better described as means: paths you have to follow, just like paths in the forest, if you want to reach someone or something. Maskoy people, in fact, spend hours in everyday conversations recalling the exact location of some buildings in the capital city, and their internal structure<sup>56</sup>. This means that bureaucracy is not an automatic machine, where you insert a document and it comes out the other side, authenticated. It is rather a path where you "accompany" your document (your need), whilst dealing with helpers and antagonists (as such, it coincides with Propp's description of the structure of tales). This is a fragment of my field notes about one of my first experiences in the matter:

[Antonia's I.D. card had expired about six months before, and she got a new one. But in the interval of time between the expiry of her old ID, and her request for the new one, her old ID number had been assigned to another person. As she is a teacher, and she receives a salary from the State, her salary got blocked because the ID number on the contract did not coincide anymore with her new ID number. It is four months that Antonia keeps travelling to the capital in order to solve her problem, but the situation is still blocked.] We are in Castilla, and Antonia tells me that she is going to resign her job, because she will never receive a salary again. I decide to go with her to the capital city, and try to help. We meet in the early morning in front of the Ministry of Education, and we explain our problem to some functionary on the second floor. All the papers they had requested in order to do the ID number transfer, had been handed in a few months before. The functionary on the second floor sends us to some other functionary on the first floor, who sends us to the third floor, until it gets clear that no one has a clue as to where the documents are and who is in charge of that. The situation is so ridiculous that – at least at the beginning – I feel like laughing. But when I see Antonia crying, after about four hours of useless wandering, I start

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<sup>56</sup> A popular one is the building called *Facundo*, where people hand in the documents in order to get their retirement. Maskoy people who succeeded in the 'expedition', however, can be counted on one hand.



crying too, right in the middle of the hallway. It was at that point, that a man asks me if he could be useful in any way. I explain the situation, and he disappears. When he comes back, he leads us towards one of the offices I had already been to. As if by magic, a functionary looks in the correct drawer and finds three copies of the same (missing) documents. After that, our saviour gives us the name of another functionary, located in another building, who could “help us to get Antonia’s missed salaries”. One week later, Antonia withdrew the full amount of her salary for the past four months. At the end of our adventure, we possess a list of names of “friendly functionaries” that could help us just in case, in the future. We know their names, and where their offices are. Antonia calls me “her lawyer” and we know that if I wasn’t so clearly White and European, we would have never solved the situation. That’s how it is. That’s why Maskoy people need White lawyers.

As I learnt myself, personal relationships do matter. If we compare this episode with the fight for land of the 1980s, we can understand why the role of shamans is so relevant in dealing with the State. Shamans, in fact, can intervene in the encounter between White and indigenous people, balancing the distribution of power in a situation otherwise extremely difficult to face.

### **The State as food supplier**

With the foundation of DAI, the first official indigenist institution of Paraguay, “indigenous people began to visit the capital to ask the DAI for clothing, food, and medical assistance. (Horst 2007: 43)<sup>57</sup>. According to Horst, even if the director of DAI tried to turn indigenous people “into more active consumers and producers” - through the implementation of development projects - his strategy failed (Ibid.: 45). In short, “indigenous people responded cautiously to the regime’s integration plan. They rejected the state’s development projects but many accepted food, medicine and tools from the government” (Ibid.: 64).

What Horst says about the DAI, could be repeated for all the indigenist institutions that came after it. His observation can be related to the more popular idea that “indigenous people just want to eat, they do not want to work”, a widespread stereotype in Paraguay.

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<sup>57</sup> Horst bases his analysis on the relationship between the DAI and the indigenous communities of the Oriental part of the country, mainly the Ache.

On the other hand, we can see the exchange relationship with the State as an evolution of the first relationships with the Whites. It is in fact significant that this relationship is spelled out with idioms of 'food', 'care', and 'trust'. These same idioms can be used to interpret development projects. In fact, we can wonder if the failure of some of the projects has to do with the framework of relationships that surrounds them, and not only with the hostile climatic conditions of the Chaco region.

An example of a sustainable, but failed, project is the '*Proyecto Padre Ayerra*' between the Maskoy community of Castilla and the Catholic parsonage of the Chaco. The project began in 2000, and was evaluated in 2002 during a meeting between NGOs, Church representatives and Riacho Mosquito settlers. In the report, the comments of the Whites and of the Maskoy are not clearly separated, but it's nevertheless easy to imagine who is saying what<sup>58</sup>. The most frequently discussed problem is the lack of responsibility on the part of leaders, who are supposed to take charge of the Project and administrate it inside the community. It is probably the missionary who complains about the fact that the beneficiaries ask him – and not the leader - to solve their problems. He also adds that "the community itself – rather than Paraguayan authorities - has to sanction irregularities". The lack of interest on the part of the leaders is associated with their attitude of "waiting for help from outside the community". It is also stated that "many leaders pursue the easy life behind the politicians", with no intention of "building anything in their communities". And it concludes with the following admonition: "Diminish hope in politicians, and better administrate the human capital".

If we read the Project as inscribed inside the relationships between missionaries, leaders, communities and politicians, we can interpret the failure of the project as something more complex than the indigenous incapacity to make long term plans. Twenty years before, in a report about the situation in Pueblito, Regher wrote:

Because of the collective de-culturation and the lack of common action, there is the high risk that the projects of the Salesian mission will be confused with 'working under a boss', enhancing negative models of reactions to demanding bosses. This could represent a failure for any developing project proposed by the mission, especially if the group, and even more

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<sup>58</sup> By coincidence, I personally know all the participants at the meeting. I found the text of the evaluation in the school of Castilla.

the leaders, do not get involved in the making of the project since its beginning. (Regher 1980: 4)

Let's analyse now why the leaders seem indifferent to the project. First of all, we need to underline the ongoing conflict of power between missionaries and Maskoy leaders. More than once, in fact, I've heard Maskoy people saying that the missionary "acts like an indigenous chief" (*quiere ser cacique*), even if he's not. And second, the role that the missionaries want to assign to the leader is a projection of their own role of assertive leaders and project administrators, something that the leaders seem to refuse.

Let's go back now to the relationship between the Maskoy and the State. The food exchange relationship with politicians is inscribed in the past of the first encounters with white explorers, the work in cattle-ranches, and Maskoy ideas about the role of sharing in building human relationships. Given this context, the configuration of the State as food and money supplier is the materialisation of the State as ideally re-enhancing the broken exchange relationship between Whites and Paraguayans. As in Don Ramon's myth, it's the continuation of an un-concluded barter which was never fulfilled. The role of the State as supplier of food and other material goods is not only an 'imagination' of indigenous people; as I will show, it is the actual configuration that the State has taken in Puerto Casado and Riacho Mosquito.

Since 2005, the SAS (Secretary of Social Action - *Secretaria de Accion Social*) of the Paraguayan Government, under Nicanor Duarte Frutos' presidency, has engaged in a "poverty reduction strategy". As a consequence of the program, each family receives a monthly support of 200.000 Gs (app. £20) that should be used for the education and maintenance of children. In theory, if families don't send their children to school, they will be withdrawn from the project. In practice, the subsidy is mostly used to buy food that people share within the household<sup>59</sup>. According to the SAS representative, the strategy consists in a 'monetary direct transfer' (*transferencia monetaria directa*) – this is the term she was trying to impose – aimed at inducing poor people to send their children to school, so that families could increase the possibility of getting a better job in the forthcoming generations. Despite her efforts, local population continued defining it as 'the subsidy'.

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<sup>59</sup> A fraction of the Paraguayan population of Puerto Casado, the poorest families, is also receiving the subsidy.

Seen from Puerto Casado, the whole process looked like the legalised version of the illegal monetary transactions that usually take place just before political elections. The functionaries of the SAS, in fact, arrived every month by plane, with cash that they distributed amongst the population. One representative per family would then queue in the sports-centre of the local parish and receive 200.000 Gs in their hands. In Puerto Casado people referred to the subsidy as “the money received from Nicanor (the President)”, and they strongly believed that if Nicanor wasn’t elected anymore, they would stop receiving the money. The subsidy was seen as the product of Nicanor’s generosity, and the President himself visited Puerto Casado to announce the beginning of the poverty-reduction strategy about two years ago.

If ‘the subsidy’ is the public money source, the CEN (National Emergency Committee) is the official source of food (see DVD-3: ‘Casado’s Legacy’). Each four or five months, independently from any specific emergency, the CEN sends food to the Maskoy communities. Apart from the CEN, politicians provide the communities with money and food in the run up to elections. It is particularly clear in the case of the CEN, that the State conceptualises the transaction in terms of help. On the other hand, indigenous people tend to define it in terms of ‘rights’ or ‘devolution’. While I was visiting a local radio station in Mariscal Estigarribia (central Chaco), one of the radio workers told me that indigenous people asked for food in the houses of Paraguayans as if “it was their right to ask”. His opinion, for instance, was that – as Paraguayans were helping them for humanitarian reasons – indigenous people shouldn’t ask in such an assertive way<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> It is a shared opinion in Paraguay that indigenous people “do not want to work”. One of the arguments is that they do not cultivate their land. Apart from obvious ecological reasons (the Chaco region is crossed by periodical droughts), the fact that traditional ceremonies are not performed anymore could be directly linked to a decline in cultivations. This link had been already outlined by Susnik and Chase-Sardi in the case of Nivacle people. The two anthropologists write in fact that “The Nivacle possessed a flourishing agriculture due to the preparation of alcoholic beverages for initiation dances and leadership ceremonies. However, the missionaries prohibited the ceremonies because of the nakedness of beautiful girls in front of the leader and the bad behaviour of the young boys. Once the incentive for cultivating disappeared, agriculture was dismissed and in a few years only some elders were cultivating small parcels of land”. (Susnik and Chase-Sardi 1995: 261)

## 2.5 Other embodiments: the artefacts of the State

In October 2006, just before municipal elections, Maskoy people decided to close the gate which led to Pueblito (See Fig. 2 – Ch. 1). “We can go and vote with our own legs”, the leader of Castilla told me. That was after the Governor had been distributing money to the voters. In previous years, Paraguayan politicians used to enter Pueblito with trucks and bring them to vote a few blocks away<sup>61</sup>. The decision of the people to close the gates meant, at least to me, that the practice was perceived as violent and disrespectful. The trucks’ movement was connected to another – nearly invisible but crucial – movement: that of ID cards. The ID cards collection had begun in Castilla a few months before:

Celestina tells me that the politicians of List 8 arrived in Castilla, convincing her to accept a blanket and a mosquito net in exchange for her ID card. She soon regretted it, as she felt that she was ‘selling’ her ID card, and she therefore resented the idea that they were going to withhold it. She then decided to give the blanket and the mosquito net back to the politicians. (Field notes – November 2006)

The act of withholding ID cards is a strategy used by politicians in order to prevent people from accepting ‘things’ from different political parties. On the day of the elections, each political party gathers together their group of people and returns them the ID cards just before the vote. In some cases, they physically accompany people inside the polling station to vote. The symbolic power of ID cards — initially linked to their guaranteeing the holders’ right to citizenship — gets increased by the use that politicians make of them just before the elections. They also confirm the superiority (in the sense of an allocation of power) of the Paraguayan citizenship compared to the “indigenist” one: there are no ‘practices of power’ linked to the identity cards released by INDI. The power located in ID cards became clear to me through a friend’s dream. In the dream, the deputy Chamorro visits her as she is holding hundreds of ID cards in her house:

Juana tells me that a little time ago she dreamt about Chamorro (a member of the parliament). In the dream, she was resting at home when Chamorro paid her a visit. He told her that he had been trying to contact her for three days, because she was really important

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<sup>61</sup> It happened again in the general election of June 2008. Maskoy people were collected in trucks by the Colorado Party, then lined up in front of the polling station, and led inside the station in order to vote. As I could appreciate, they were voting in queues headed by one of Chamorro’s political relatives. I was filming for a few minutes, and then stopped as I saw the people glancing down.

for him. Then the dream ended. The following day, the TV news explained that Chamorro had decided to stand as a candidate for the forthcoming elections. After telling me the dream, she confesses that she is holding about 230 ID cards of other Maskoy people in her house. Payment is 50.000 Gs in exchange for their ID cards. In one month there will be new elections. It is clear that by holding all those ID cards she possesses a lot of power vis-à-vis Chamorro. However, she seems bothered that in the real life Chamorro never spoke to her and always used intermediaries. (Field notes – February 2007)

The power coming from ID cards is a secret and ambiguous one, and its ambiguity is underlined by the fact that they are kept hidden (see Chapter 3 on the link between legitimate and visible). ID cards are maybe the most prescient embodiment of the impersonal State in Territory Riacho Mosquito. But apart from their secrecy and ambiguity, they can also be described as dangerous. While I was in Puerto Casado, in fact, some news was spread on TV about a trial where an indigenous man had been incriminated for the kidnapping of Cecilia Cubas, daughter of a former Paraguayan President. At the heart of the accusation was the finding that his ID card had been used in the purchase of the house where the dead body of Cecilia Cubas was found<sup>62</sup>. The issue generated a kind of paranoia and Maskoy people were commenting about the news a lot. Rene Ramirez told me that a few years before a man had knocked at his door in Pueblito, asking for his sister's ID card, but he (fortunately) refused to give it away. There was the general feeling that ID cards could be a trap for indigenous people, and the news renewed anxious feelings about their danger. Rene's daughter, whose old ID number had been given to another Paraguayan citizen (like in Antonia's case), became highly concerned about knowing who that person was, but the public functionaries refused, in the end, to tell her.

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<sup>62</sup> It was later on discovered, though, that the incriminated indigenous man had pawned his ID card in a local shop, in exchange for food.

## 2.6 The sensorial borders of the nation

### Victims?

I have tried to show in the previous sections, how the State – as experienced from Territory Riacho Mosquito – cannot be analysed independently from its embodiment in functionaries and politicians. As a consequence of that, the relationship with the State is subject to the same barriers that lead (or impede) the communication between Paraguayans and Maskoy people in Puerto Casado. In talking about this relationship, I would rather not use the term “racism”, because it’s neither used nor recognised by the people I’ve been talking with. The word “racism”, moreover, is charged with a victimisation that is more pertinent to the Whites’ point of view than to the indigenous one. Instead of talking about racism, Maskoy people would rather talk about respect and communication skills (see – in the film – the conversation between Rene Ramirez and the policemen).

Talking about the relationship between indigenous people and academics in Brazil, Carneiro da Cunha observes that “our [non-indigenous] historiography renders the events as their [indigenous peoples’] defeat: their narrative renders the same events as their labour of domesticating, of pacifying us together with our germs and commodities” (Carneiro da Cunha: xi). Far from being restricted to the academic world, there is a general tendency amongst public opinion, including the indigenist sector, to victimize indigenous people (Root 1997). On the other hand, during my fieldwork, I have come across many contexts in which indigenous people simply did not conceptualise themselves as victims even though, on occasions, they may have taken on the role as a strategy in their struggles for land and resources.

My first example is school. In Puerto Casado, Paraguayan teachers used to say that Maskoy people did not speak at school, even when they were required to. I was also told that they have problems with the Guaraní language (despite the fact that it was their mother tongue) and that in general they are never as good as Paraguayan students. Yet, when we were discussing it, Maskoy people would never confirm to what Paraguayan teachers had told me. A Maskoy friend, who is now in her thirties, told me that when she was at school she was constantly afraid of the way in which Paraguayans shouted: as if they were going to

“eat” her. She spoke to her father, Rene Ramirez, and he explained to her that Paraguayans shout because their blood is stronger than the indigenous one. But she didn’t have to worry because they weren’t as good at fighting as at shouting. Since that moment, she started fighting with her classmates whenever she had a problem, without caring about the volume of their voice. The silence that Paraguayan teachers interpreted as fear or timidity, was re-interpreted by my friend as the reaction to a bad communicative habit, which prevented dialogue because of its own inadequacy. Instead of replying verbally, my friend would learn to react physically when she thought that a reaction was necessary. There is a subtle difference between keeping the silence because of fear, and fearing Paraguayans because of their inappropriate behaviour. In the second case, silence is kept not because of a recognised supremacy, but because the rules of dialogue seem to be violated by the interlocutor.

The second example concerns the visit, in June 2007, of a group of people who were part of an international NGO. During a meeting in Castilla, one of the teachers told the story of how she managed to go to the University thanks to the efforts of her family and to her own strong will. After that, one of the NGO representatives, who had been living in Puerto Casado for several years, remembered another episode linked to the same person. He narrated to the audience how the teacher, who was working in Casado’s hospital as a nurse, was rejected by a Paraguayan patient who didn’t want her to touch him because she was an Indian. The story sounded a bit out of place, and the teacher-nurse didn’t say anything but kept her silence until someone changed topic. The NGO representative’s speech, mainly aimed at distinguishing him from racist Paraguayans, didn’t resonate with the teacher’s one aimed at showing her courage and strength. Her silence after the speech shouldn’t be interpreted as a moment of pain for the racism of Paraguayans (not only, at least), but rather as a denial of the dialogue with the NGO representative. As Ramirez would say: “Paraguayans don’t know how to engage in a dialogue”.

Let’s remember here what Rene Ramirez said about the elders: that they taught the young men to shut up in front of Paraguayans, because they “always pretend they are right”. The voice of indigenous people is not silenced in a metaphorical, but in a literal way. But Maskoys’ silence, sometimes interpreted as a sign of submission, should rather be interpreted as the recognition of an impossible dialogue.



On other occasions, Paraguayan people's reactions that I would interpret as 'racist', were rather described by Maskoy people as being the result of an angry behaviour. 'To be angry' is a highly criticised behaviour, and it is usually attributed to Paraguayan people. As Villagra underlines, borrowing the expression from Kidd, Paraguayan soldiers during the Chaco war were intrinsically defined as angry (Villagra 2005). In Castilla, reminding the *wakok* mentioned by Kidd (Kidd 1999), people say in Guaraní *she py'a riri* (my stomach is trembling), to indicate fear, and they usually try to avoid angry people by ignoring them, which operates as a sign of reproach. Instead of talking about racism, accentuating the Whites' rejection of indigenous people, Maskoy people emphasise the Whites' improper behaviour in order to justify their own silence. Silence is thus the answer to angry behaviour, often manifested through shouting in inappropriate situations.

### Maskoy barriers: voice

The following extract from my field-notes, is the fragment of a conversation I had with a functionary of the SAS (Secretaría de Acción Social) who was in charge of the "poverty reduction strategy" program.

Cecilia tells me that it's very important for her to learn from indigenous people. She explains that she went to Chile to an international meeting on 'how to promote health in indigenous communities'. She brought a Maskoy representative along with her to the meeting. While she was there, she had the idea of gathering together all the shamans so that they could teach the young people about traditional medicines<sup>63</sup>. [...] She says she is angered when people use the money of the subsidy to get drunk, and threatens to abolish it if they continue drinking. In order to solve the situation, she is going to organise a meeting in the community of X, where the leader is known for selling rum. "With indigenous people you have to be strict and order", Cecilia explains, "It is useless to talk and make them reason. You have to speak loudly (*hablar fuerte*)". (Field Notes – August 2007)

Cecilia's discussion begins with an open reference to indigenous people's wisdom, their culture, and she even imagines an improbable meeting of shamans, transmitting their

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<sup>63</sup> A few years before, I was developing a similar project with PRODECHACO, when one of the indigenous health promoters told me that it was a ridiculous idea to gather all the shamans together, because they would easily kill each other.

knowledge to the younger generation. Many Whites, in fact, use their respect for shamans to show respect for indigenous culture, in open antagonism to the rejection of shamanism that belonged to religious organisations. She thinks about herself as an indigenous rights supporter, and chose Rene Ramirez as her personal counsellor in order to show her openness towards indigenous ways of thinking. However, her assertion that “with indigenous people you have to be strict and order. It’s useless to talk and make them reason”, would be hardly accepted by Maskoy people. The “assertive-coercive leader”, as in the case of the missionaries, continues to be a false myth of the Whites, maybe a mirror of what they’ve always dreamt about, being ahead of the Indians. The second assumption, that you have to “speak loudly” if you want people to respect you, is in clear contrast with Maskoys’ own point of view. In fact, a Maskoy friend told me that when Cecilia visited the communities for the first time people were hiding in their houses because she was “shouting too loud” (*critando muy fuerte*). The second time, Ramirez agreed to accompany her in Territory Riacho Mosquito in order to convince people to attend the meeting.

There is common agreement, amongst Maskoy people, to the fact that Paraguayan people ‘shout’. Maskoy people do shout too, but their ‘shouting’ is related to the condition of drunkenness. Drunken men’s shouting is tolerated, only because they are thought to lose control over themselves (see also Kidd 1999). Paraguayans, on the other hand, shout even when sober. ‘Shouting men’, for example, are a typical element of political speeches. In the meetings of the Colorado party, young activists show up in front of older ones, and they engage in loud rhetorical speeches in order to heat the atmosphere. The ability to shout is particularly helpful in public situations.

[DVD 1 – Clip 4: Subsidy Speech]:

*Maskoy people are discussing the situation, just before the distribution of the subsidy on the part of the S.A.S. A Paraguayan man arrives, attracted by my camera, accompanied by a woman. She tells me that he’s going to give a speech. The man’s tone of the voice is quiet at the beginning, but it gradually rises up in volume until he starts shouting. At the end of the speech, I look around with my camera. But all the Maskoy people are gone.*

In Puerto Casado, on Sundays, the houses where the music doesn’t play are thought to be sad houses. Paraguayans and Maskoy people have a common opinion about music: it makes you happy (*ovy’a bagna*). The music - trapped during Maskoy rituals in a complicated

set of rules that limit its performance<sup>64</sup> - flows freely from the hi-fi sound systems of Paraguayan families. In Pueblito, however, Paraguayan music is played not only on Sundays, but for the whole week. In a mimetic excess, loud music is obsessively played in those houses that are sufficiently endowed with young men and technology. Yet, it is Paraguayans who shout, and these young indigenous men who are 'lost in drunkenness and bad behaviours'.

Shouting, moreover, is frequently related to anger. While talking about the role of shamans in the fight for land, Juan Gonzales described to me how Rene Ramirez was thrown out of a General's office because the General had an excess of anger. In the first chapter, I have analysed the role of the shamans in acting upon the Whites' anger by weakening their *wakoké* (Kidd 1999).

### Paraguayan barriers: touch/smell

My first example is related to the time when I was working in PRODECHACO in 2004 (see Blaser forthcoming for a historical account of the project). The Paraguayan technicians of the Ministry of Agriculture used to sleep in a housing development located in the Central Chaco. One of the houses was a one-room building with no air conditioning and a few rows of bunk-beds: it was the house of the Indians. As I was working with a young Toba girl for a period, I went with her to the housing development in order to spend the night there. Even if I knew that indigenous people had their own house, I didn't want the girl to sleep alone and I proposed to her to sleep in the same room as myself, in one of the houses reserved for Paraguayan technicians. When the guard of the centre realised what I was doing, he asked me to bring back the girl to the Indians' house. As I refused, he explained to me that if the Indian girl slept in one of the beds, Paraguayan technicians would have got angry with him. He told me that they wouldn't have used that bed anymore. In the meanwhile, the young girl got angry with me and locked herself into the Indians' house, probably ashamed and angry about what was happening. The Paraguayan technicians of the Ministry of Agriculture who were contributing to "help developing" the

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<sup>64</sup> Musicians say, for example, that they can't start playing the music of *baile flauta* if they can't continue playing for a fixed period of eight days. According to the elders, to play in de-contextualised ways can provoke illnesses. These prescriptions need to be linked to Maskoy ideas about the origin of the music (see film).

Indians, were rejecting at the same time the idea of any (even mediated) physical contact with them. This attitude was masked by an apparently friendly relationship, where the technicians made jokes with indigenous people and laughed with them.

The idea of physical contagion is a key concept for the understanding of the way in which Paraguayan people build a sensorial barrier in order to distance themselves from the Indians. I experienced again the same attitude toward indigenous people while living with a Paraguayan family in Puerto Casado. An indigenous man used to do manual work for the owner of the house, Don Mereles, and he received food in exchange. Don Mereles is also a politician, and he declares himself a friend of the Indians.

A Maskoy man is cleaning the patio of my house. He is paid with food, that is usually a portion from the family lunch. Yesterday, I saw Don Mereles' daughter telling the man that his food was ready. Then the family and I gathered together to eat. We finished lunch and food was left in the pot, so I offered to bring it to the man myself. Don Mereles' son told me to bring 'the plate of the Indian' from the store. In the store, I find the plate and spoon amongst dirty boots and bicycles, as if the fact of keeping them in the kitchen could have contaminated them. (Field notes – February 2007)

The Whites' avoidance of physical contact doesn't go unnoticed on the part of Maskoy people. The great attention devoted by Maskoy people to the sharing of food (and plates and spoons) and *terere* (and straws) with the Whites, is probably inscribed inside their recognition of the Whites' denial of contact.

## Conclusions

The relationship between Maskoy people and the State has been embodied along the chapter through an analysis of their relationship with governmental functionaries and Colorado politicians. In the beginning, politicians seemed to fulfil the promise of food and material goods (money amongst them) that the Whites had initially promised, but they gradually got to be seen as liars. This tension does not prevent politicians – still nowadays – to perform their relationship through idioms of friendship and even kinship. Despite this, sensorial barriers are enacted in the encounter and they contribute to mark a difference between the two groups. The fact that shouting is an important feature of the political

practice amongst Colorado politicians, for instance, is a behaviour generally condemned in Maskoy communities, where it is associated to anger and incorrect behaviour.

We have to distinguish, however, between two different tendencies inside the State: a “neoliberal” one that sees as a pre-condition for the incorporation of indigenous people their full integration into the national economy (the payment of taxes is an essential condition); and a “provider” one that focuses on the role of the State as a distributor of food, basic goods and money. The State materialises in Puerto Casado in this second configuration, appearing as a response to the interrupted exchange between White and Maskoy people.

Even if Maskoy people have been participating in politics for at least two decades, they still consider the State as an external entity. The interaction with the Paraguayan society and with the State is experienced through the crossing of sensorial barriers. These barriers are never spelled out in the encounter, but they nevertheless work as implicit mechanisms which keep the borders neatly defined. The State, then, remains an external entity which is nevertheless imitated by indigenous organisations (see prologue to this chapter). I leave the concept of “imitation” unexplored further here, but I will analyse it again in the third chapter.

Finally, I would like to outline the ongoing link between shamanic and political practice. When talking about the Enxet narratives on the role of shamans in the Chaco war, Kidd writes that “history is being reinvented and transformed into myth” (Kidd p.59). On the other hand, I have shown that shamans still act, like they did during the struggle for land, so as to weaken politicians in their interactions with the Maskoy. Even if they do not act anymore – as they did before – by controlling the movements of the leaders in the capital town, they still exert their power when politicians are present inside the communities. Territory Riacho Mosquito, with its communities and forests, can therefore be described as a ‘space of power’ where the unbalance between indigenous and non-indigenous people is reconfigured through the action of shamans.

## Chapter 3 – Prologue

### **Beyond resistance: considerations on the transformative power of mimesis**

Very little of what really matters is visible; the essential takes place on another stage.  
(Viveiros de Castro, talking about the Arawete 1992: 2)

In this prologue I will question the assumption - described in the introduction - that indigenous people look Western in the eyes of an external observer because they are in process of 'losing their culture'. In order to achieve this, I first have to question my own epistemological assumptions about the way in which knowledge is built, and 'Otherness' recognised. In particular, I will discuss the notion of 'visualism' and I will argue that the use of the mimetic faculty is linked to a particular - non-visualist - ontology of vision (section 1). In section 2, I analyse the practices of vision that have contributed to the affirmation of visualist tendencies inside a widespread tradition of Western thought, and finally (section 3), I will distinguish mimetic from syncretic practices by underlining that the mimetic faculty is based on the delimitation of clear borders between two different collective subjects (in my case: Maskoy and White people).



Let us look at this picture (see previous page). The photograph has been taken in 1967/1968 by Susnik, and it portrays an Ishir indigenous man dressed up as a football player. There are at least two ways of interpreting it. The first one is to think that he values our culture more than his, and that is why he is dressed up as a football player, preferring football to other 'traditional' games. In other words, he is on the way to assimilation. This is a very common way of interpreting indigenous communities in Paraguay, being in fact quite frequent to hear phrases along the lines of "indigenous people are losing their culture". The second interpretation leads to the opposite conclusion: the person in front of us is dressing like a White football player precisely because he does not want to become a White person. He does not want to be assimilated. He dresses like White men do, but consciously maintains the border between him and them. He is engaging in a mimetic transformation, a temporary adoption of the Whites' outer form framed inside the ritual context of the football match, which can nonetheless be dismissed under changing conditions. In both cases he is imitating White people, but in the second case he is doing it such that he engages with the mimetic faculty in ways that are related to the existence of a spiritual world.

Through the description of the mimetic faculty as a 'way of knowing', it is possible to grasp a different understanding of the colonial encounter. According to Taussig, in fact, "the mimetic faculty and colonial histories are inseparable in modern history" (Taussig 1993: 250). The colonial nature of the mimetic encounter is revealed by the fact that what is represented in the mimetic act calls into question the 'colonial' observer:

To become aware of the West in the eyes and handiwork of its Others, [...] is to abandon border logistics and enter into the "second contact" era of the borderland where "us" and "them" lose their polarity and swim in and out of focus. (Taussig 1993: 246)

Taussig's concept of the mimetic faculty has been appropriated by Stoller in order to analyse the Hauka cult in West Africa (Stoller 1995). According to Stoller, the mediums of the Hauka cults embody colonial authorities as a strategy aimed at mastering the colonial power. This practice, however, is not the product of colonialism; prior to the arrival of the French, the bodies of the mediums were possessed by the spirits of ancestors that already occupied the Songhay region (Stoller 1995: 43). However, I would argue that the trance-mediated embodiment of the colonial Other described by Stoller is different from the

Amerindian way of possessing the Other through mimesis. But some premises need to be outlined before analysing this point.

### **Resistance?**

The relationship between colonised and colonizer in Latin America – probably because so strikingly unbalanced in terms of power - has been analysed for decades in terms of acculturation versus resistance. Trying to overcome this distinction, Carneiro da Cunha summarizes a certain school of thought inaugurated by Levi-Strauss talking about an Amerindian “regimentation of alterity for the production of identity, assimilating one’s enemy as a mode of reproduction. While the logic of the West lies in the primacy of distinctions, Amazonian logic lies on the primacy of appropriation, of encompassment, cannibalism being one of its manifestations” (Carneiro da Cunha 2007: xii).

While I think that Carneiro da Cunha’s point is really important, I think that something more has to be said about the modalities of appropriation. In her preface, for instance, there is no reference to syncretism as an analytical category, despite the fact that this same category is quite diffuse in the study of Latin American indigenous practices and goes beyond the distinction between acculturation and resistance (I am thinking, for example, about the study of religious practices amongst the Maya population). In syncretism, different practices are melted down together in order to create a new practice, where borders and belongings are blurred. I would argue that the use of the category of mimesis works better in contexts, like the Maskoy one, where the borders between Whites and indigenous people are usually so clearly traced: never erased, but rather kept and crossed at the same time.

“The Cuna strategy of survival over four centuries of Western European and U.S. colonialism in the Caribbean”, writes Taussig “in my opinion owes everything to the politics of mimesis and alterity” (Taussig 1993: 137). “It is a constant, traditional feature of Cuna social and cultural life to transform the new into the old, incorporating rather than rejecting. [...] the issue is not so much staying the same, but maintaining sameness through alterity” (Taussig 1993: 129). What Taussig defines in this chapter as a strategy, could be



better defined in ontological terms as a way of relating to Otherness based on a non-modern (Blaser forthcoming) or non-Western (Viveiros de Castro 1998) regime of truth.

According to Pitarch, the peculiarity in the notion of person in Amerindian indigenous cultures is its ability to mimic. This ability is sustained by a clear distinction between what is indigenous and what is not. In the case of *Cancuqueros*, the person him/herself is made up of personifications of the Other that coexist in his/her soul:

There is not a proper syncretism, a blending. Even if it is true that people from Cancuc use cultural forms that are both Amerindian and European, they do it juxtaposing one with the other, looking for a situation of contrast so that differences are kept clear. [...] More than a lived condition, the personal or collective identification with the Spanish world is found on the side of simulation. [...] of ephemeral identifications whose enduring feature seems to be the change. (Pitarch Ramon 1996: 255-57 - my translation).

The indigenous population of Alto de Chiapas bears “a capacity to alternate their personal and ethnic poles of identification, [...] by using both without confusing them, and by being both without confusing themselves. [...] Maybe, this conceptualisation of person was born amongst nomadic hunters’ cultures, but it was perpetuated thanks to its capacity to coexist with the new conditions that sedentary agricultural life, European colonial Government and capitalist relationships imposed” (Pitarch Ramon 1996: 258).

A similar theoretical posture – that identifies through their capacity to incorporate the Other a distinctive characteristic of Amerindian people - has been adopted by a group of contemporary Brazilian anthropologists. Instead of mimesis however, Viveiros de Castro talks about cannibalism. According to him, amongst the Arawete “becoming is prior to Being”, and “to remain identical with themselves, they must be capable of introjecting and domesticating difference, by means of devices that put difference to the service of identity” (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 4).

The colonial Other is not simply – in these analyses – a dangerous antagonist whose interaction with the colonised subjects brings acculturation and assimilation, leading directly to the destruction of Amerindian cultures. The interaction with the colonial Other

is rather functional as a social and personal mode of reproduction that mimics/cannibalizes differences, in order to remain the same.

If the concept of cannibalism focuses on the material appropriation of the Other, the concept of mimesis analysed by Taussig focuses on the appropriation of the outer form of something as one of the elements of that material appropriation, outlining a dialectical relationship between an inside and an outside. He defines the mimetic faculty as “the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other” (Taussig 1993: xiii). It does not imply a purely visual imitation of the Other, but a sensual yielding into it.

Even if the concept of mimesis can be extended to include non-visual practices, such as the imitation of a sound, I will focus here on the appropriation of the outer form of something as a way of relating to it. My concern, then, is to show how the use of the mimetic faculty is related to a particular ontology of vision that considers the existence of a spiritual world.

The belief in a spiritual world is also underlined by De la Cadena when she argues for a pluralisation of politics as a “proposal to negotiate with the voices that, inhabiting the shadows of politics, want to represent non-humans, what we call nature and reserve for science to represent” (De la Cadena 2007). She quotes the example of an indigenous peasant who protests, along with other people, against the prospective exploration and exploitation of a local mountain because “the mountain could kill the people”. The belief in the mountain as a sentient being, according to her, needs to be seriously taken into account in the political debate, and not seen as merely a metaphor or a symbol. In the same way, I propose to take seriously my (our?) incapacity to believe in a spiritual world, which can be considered the result of a historical process.

During my stay with Maskoy people, whilst I could share most of their opinions and behaviours, the value of truth – and in general the role - we attribute to vision, remained until the end a position of radical difference. I have indeed never been able to see a spirit, and I have never adopted any explanation involving shamanic practices - that take place in a domain invisible to most of the people - in my own interpretation of the events happening around us.

A few years ago, I was watching an inter-ethnic football match in an indigenous community, in which one of the teams lost. One week later, one of the football players described to me what really happened during the football match (i.e. what I could not see). The shaman of the local community, in the form of one of his spirits, attacked the visiting football players during the match, and they had to be defended in a spiritual – and invisible – duel by a shaman of the community where they came from. In order to fully understand this episode, we shall ask which are the ontological premises of the existence of a spiritual world.

### 1. The ontological difference

As I said in the prologue to the first chapter, I hardly heard any stories during my fieldwork in Castilla; but there are two exceptions to this. I have described the first one at the beginning of the thesis, and I am going to tell the second now. I was told this story by Antonia, who knew I liked the “things of the past”. We decided that she was going to tell the story to Rumi, her daughter, while I was going to film it. She called it “*historia*”, in Spanish, and she clearly gave it a particular relevance:

- *Antonia*: Rumi [her daughter]! Have you seen that big bird? Over there, where the small river is. You’ve seen it already. That bird is called Red Scarf.

- *Rumi*: I’ve seen that!

- *Antonia*: That is... our grandmother was teaching us that they used to be two people before.

- *Rumi*: He!!

- *Antonia*: Two people. Two young boys. They went hunting in the wood. Then it got dark, it was late afternoon already, and they got lost. They lost their way. As it was night, they climbed a tree. Up to the top of the tree. And then they couldn’t get down. Those birds. No, they weren’t birds. They were two young boys. And then their hands disappeared and they had feathers. They didn’t understand what was happening to them. And then they could fly. That’s what happened. If you notice, they always fly in pairs. Now you have to be afraid to go to the top of the trees in the afternoon. You don’t have to do it anymore. [*Rumi goes away*] Grandmother was afraid of that, before. She said we didn’t have to eat them because they were people. They were people that got transformed into birds. [*She laughs.*]

- *Me*: Do you think this really happened, before?

- *Antonia*: [She shrugs her shoulders] It could be. I believed my mother. Because she loved birds. That bird, especially. Her father and mother told her the story. [...] When we were children we were afraid to go on the top of the trees in the late afternoon [*they were afraid of being transformed into birds*].

The story takes place in an animist, transformational world. According to Descola, the relationship between humans and non-humans in animist ontologies is based on a similarity of interiorities and a difference of physicalities. In naturalism (modern ontologies), on the other hand, the same relationship is based on a difference of interiorities (not all beings are sentient) and a similarity of physicalities (continuity of matter) (Descola 2005: 323 - my translation).

In animist ontologies, things are not always what they appear to be, because a “discontinuity of forms can result in a heterogeneity of points of view” (Descola 2005: 323). According to the perspectival model described for Amerindian people by Viveiros de Castro, in fact, the appearance of things depends on the embeddedness of sight in a particular body:

Humans, in normal conditions, see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (prey), while animals (prey) see humans as spirits or animals (predators). Moreover, animals and spirits see themselves as humans (Viveiros de Castro 1994 - my translation).

The Amerindian conceptualisation of vision depends upon shamanic practices. If the subject of Western philosophical tradition, in fact, is immobilised – as Descartes’ philosophy argues – in the single person’s point of view, the shamanic vision is characterised by its ability to transform into other bodies, thus obtaining other points of view [Willerslev, personal communication]. Descola describes this metamorphosis in the following terms:

Metamorphosis is not an act of revealing or disguising, but the final stage of a relationship where each sentient being, by modifying the perspective imposed by his/her original

physicality, sticks to the perspective under which he/she thinks the other sees him/herself.  
(Descola 2005: 195 - my translation)

Vilaça defines this as “the central dimension of Amazonian corporality, its unstable and transformational character” (Vilaça 2005). The idea that different bodies actually see in different ways, and that a body can transform if it start seeing from other perspectives (through, for example, shamanic disembodying practices), is at the root of what Ewart calls “the deceptive nature of appearances” of a “highly transformational world” (Ewart 2006).

In naturalist ontologies, on the other hand, a greater value of truth is attributed to vision: a bird is an animal, from whatever perspective you look at it. Reality is something ‘out there’ that can be used as a starting point in order to judge and interpret the world. This attitude has been termed ‘visualism’ in the contemporary anthropological debate.

In *Time and the Other*, Fabian describes visualism as an intrinsic tendency of the anthropological discipline (Fabian 1983). According to Grasseni, his definition of visualism includes two aspects: “a cultural, ideological bias towards vision as the noble sense”; and the idea that “to visualise a culture or society almost becomes synonymous with understanding it” (which also means that there is an impulse in visualism to visualise things) (Grasseni 2007: 4). Historically, this visual bias has been inscribed in a hierarchical relationship where the observer knows more than the observed.

It is possible to identify the origin of visualism in a certain Western tradition rooted in ancient Greek philosophy. According to Plato, in order to get to the essence of things, our vision of the world needs to be purified from its contamination by other senses. The idea of “rationally knowable in itself” that can be separated from the “mere appearance” entangled in the “sense-experience” (Husserl 1970: 345), is what gave birth to modern science. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Galileo formulated his project of the “mathematisation of nature”, where the notion of the real (and truth) comes to coincide with the spatio-temporal world as conceived by physics:

[According to Galileo] it must be possible to construct ex-datis, and therefore to determine objectively, all events in the sphere of the plena. The whole of infinite nature, taken as a concrete universe of causality – for this was inherent in that strange conception – became a peculiarly applied mathematics (Husserl 1970: 37).

According to Russell, scientific theory has not been circumscribed to the academic context but it has moulded the common sense of Western history. According to him, "the modern world, for what concerns its *forma mentis*, begins in the 17<sup>th</sup> century" (Russell 1982: 512 – my translation). This new *forma mentis* is organised around two assumptions: the withdrawal of the category of the 'final cause' from any scientific explanation [and its substitution with cause], and "the nearly complete disappearing of any traces of animism from the laws of physics" (Russell 1982: 514 - my translation). The theoretical fundamentals for a rejection of the spirit world are created.

When the first Anglican missionaries arrived in Paraguay at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of their main concerns was to demonstrate, by making the invisible visible in a given set of conditions, that there was no need to appeal to an invisible world in order to explain the shamans' healing practices:

[...] this reminds me of an interview I had with another wizard. Curious to know how they actually did their tricks, I feigned having a pain in my arm, and sent for old "Red head". Believing me to be in earnest, he proceeded to spit upon and then suck my arm. After a time he produced three small fish-bones, and, showing them to me and those around, asserted that these were the cause of my trouble, adding that they had been caused to enter there by some unfriendly wizard who disliked me. [...] taking him rather unawares, I examined his mouth. He did not seem to realise at first what I was after; but as I pulled out a few more fish-bones, his face lowered, and began to wear a threatening look. I simply showed the bones to the onlookers, and this, with a look, conveyed all that was required (Grubb 1914: 153)<sup>65</sup>.

According to Grubb, shamans are impostors. And non-shamans believe in the existence of spirits just because their knowledge is based on false assumptions. The reason being, as Grubb explains, that they do not really see spirits, but they rather experience them:

Although all Indians believe firmly in the existence of these spirits, and although they hold that they can be seen by man, yet I have never met an Indian who, on being closely questioned, has seriously professed to have seen one. But it is quite common to hear them assert that they have heard them, and felt that they were near (Grubb 1914: 119).

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<sup>65</sup> While missionaries were de-legitimising the shaman's world by making it visible, the shamans were using the same strategy, this time to incorporate the missionaries' world. A Maskoy friend told me that her (shaman) grandmother used to greet Christ every time she was passing in front of the church, as he would, according to her, be sitting there every day.

That Grubb was probably biased in his observations, and that he used this argument – the one he considered more valid – in order to disqualify indigenous knowledge, is suggested by the fact that Maskoy people do see spirits, and with a certain frequency. I am not referring here to a state of trance, because people see spirits in non-altered states of mind. I was myself caught in Grubb's way of reasoning, though, this focusing on the act of seeing a spirit, whilst asking about spirits to the shaman of Castilla (see *Casado's Legacy*):

- *Me*: Have you ever seen any spirit from the wood?

- *Escalante*: I've seen. I've seen the spirit of a plant. He made me feel him. But I wasn't scared. He was going to take care of me. If you are scared he doesn't come anymore. He goes away.

- *Me*: [*I don't feel comfortable with his explanation. What I am really curious to know is if he has actually seen the spirit or not. The description of his relationship with the spirit should come later, in my understanding of things.*] But what have you seen?

- *Escalante*: I've seen it all. He was a child [*he shows me his height with the hand*].

Even if Escalante specifies that the spirit made him “feel” his presence (*onbenbanduka*, in Guarani), and that they engaged in a relationship, my main concern rests on the issue of whether he has seen the spirit or not. But the unsettling question is not whether indigenous people see the spirits or not, but whether the reason why we do not see the spirits is simply because we do not believe in them. According to Elkins, for example, the pretension that vision is a detached and objective sense is a false and falsifying premise:

Seeing is irrational, inconsistent, and undependable. It is immensely troubled, cousin to blindness and sexuality, and caught up in the threads of the unconscious. [...] It is entangled in the passions – jealousy, violence, possessiveness; and it is soaked in affect – in pleasure and displeasure, and in pain. Ultimately, seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism” (Elkins 1997: 11,12).

Different anthropologists have argued that Amerindian ontologies are based on an alternative ranking of the senses, not based on the privilege of vision (Classen 1990; Seeger 1987). As we have previously analysed, though, it is not really a bias towards vision that is ascribed to visualism, but towards that kind of vision that is associated with the empirical method. That is, a quantifying and predictable vision which mathematizes nature (Ingold 2004).

According to Willerslev, for instance, vision is not intrinsically inscribed into a visualist project of objectification and control of the world but it has instead an important task,

because it is the only sense that is capable of maintaining the distance between observer and observed. Yukaghir hunters need to see like an elk in order to seduce their prey, and like a hunter in order to kill it. They “move between perspectives, not surrendering to the perspective of a single viewpoint”. But this mimetic movement is dangerous in that the transformation could be irreversible. Keeping the distance between the prey and the hunter (as the hunter sees himself seeing), vision is the sense that prevents the latter from transforming into an elk.

I would argue that a similar “distancing effect” is used in the shamanic practice of visualising the objects that cause their patients’ pains, so fiercely opposed by Grubb for being a “trick”.

## **2. Visualist versus non-visualist practices of vision**

Visualism is not intrinsic to sight, but it is the result of practices of vision that belong to the “project of modernity” (Blaser, forthcoming). According to Latour, the empirical style that we currently use to establish truth in science, was founded by Boyle in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was based in its origins on the realisation of an experiment in a laboratory, under the presence of witnesses that can testify [because they see] the “existence of something, the matter of fact, even though they do not know its real ontological nature” (Latour 1990: 48). One of the consequences of this method is that truth is not the result of reasoning, but rather of an experience. In order to be considered true (in the sense of really being out there), things have to be visible and reproducible in a given set of conditions. A spiritual, invisible world clearly escapes these conditions.

Apart from the empirical method, another activity is closely related to visualism: that of collecting. In an article about the Naturalist’s eye in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bleichmar writes that:

[...] naturalists considered visual skill the defining trait of their practice and the basis of their method. Collecting and classifying, the twin obsessions of eighteenth-century natural history, were predicated on the ability of the trained eye to assess, possess and order (Bleichmar 2007: 168).

The collecting of objects prior to their observation was in that epoch a necessary part of the knowledge process. As much as collecting plants was necessary for the naturalist in



order to quantify and predict, photography became part of the anthropometric project of measuring the human body. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe “some notable attempts were made to link photography and anthropometry”, which led to “the measurement of the living human body with a view to determining its average dimensions at different ages and in different races or classes” (Ryan 1997: 149). An objective measurement of the physical features of a person was the mechanism used in order to gain essential knowledge about her/his character. To observe, to control and to measure, were all actions inscribed in the same paradigm of truth, where vision had a prominent role.

Collecting “parts of Indians” (indigenous artefacts) has become a common contemporary practice. In *The Commodification of the Indian*, Ramos enumerates the “parts” of indigenous society that are experiencing an increasing demand on the part of non-indigenous society. Apart from tangible properties such as natural products and resources (that are the object of bio-piracy), she also mentions photographs, paintings, films, art forms and genes (Ramos 1992). These collecting practices give the sense of being in contact - knowing - indigenous culture, without having to deal with indigenous people in flesh and blood. As Ramos writes: “While it is important to maintain the appearance of cultural authenticity, it is equally desirable to keep real Indians at a distance, particularly from the profits made on their aesthetic ideas. One thus benefits from their image, metonymically transfigured in a piece of craftsmanship, without having to deal with their real selves and their real demands” (Ramos 2000: 11). The collecting practice is linked to a denial of the actual relationship.

Heidegger’s philosophy brings together what we have said until now and the relationship between people and the environment conceptualised by “naturalism”. According to him, there has been a radical shift in the way technology shaped the relationship with the world. Like Latour, he locates the cognitive origin of contemporary technology at the birth of modern physical science in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Before that, technology was not conceptualised as the creative practice of an autonomous subject, but as the act of “bringing something into appearance”, “a way of revealing”. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the essence of technology changed and became “enframing”, demanding nature to be “orderable as a standing reserve” (Heidegger 1977: 17). Things are therefore conceptualised independently from their wider network of relationships.

We might consider, again, the relationship between visualism and collecting. In a Chapter called "Spirit of the Mime, Spirit of the Gift" (Taussig 1993), Taussig underlines the profound links between the mimetic faculty on the one hand, and non-market forms of exchange and the absence of chiefs, on the other. Through the use of the mimetic faculty, the other is experienced in a sensuous way, but not necessarily appropriated. Let us remember Cominglez's description, in the first chapter, of his encounter with the Maskoy towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: People would take his things (but later give them back), drink his wine, and listen to his music. Rather than "taking possession" of him (and his things) however, they "yield into him" and then let him go, without retaining anything from him (from a material point of view). Visualism, on the other hand, is associated with an enduring, property-like appropriation, exemplified in the acts of collecting and ordering:

Unlike the mimeticized world, this [our] disenchanted one is home to a self-enclosed and somewhat paranoid, possessive, individualised sense of self severed from and dominant over a dead and non-spiritualised nature; a self built anti-mimetically on the notion of work as an instrumental relation to the world within a system wherein that self ideally incorporates into itself wealth, property, citizenship and of course sense-data, all necessarily quantifiable so as to pass muster at the gates of new definitions of Truth as Accountability (Taussig 1993: 97).

I am elucidating a link between visualising, collecting, and controlling (or, using Heidegger's terminology, 'enframing'). The Maskoy's focus on the autonomy of the person (Kidd 1999, see Chapter 1) seems antithetic to these practices of possession. I will clarify my point by mentioning the Maskoy's attitude toward domestic animals:

I told Antonia that I may need the horse on Sunday, to go back to Puerto Casado, but she replied that she's not sure that the horse 'will be back on time'. I asked 'Back from where?' and she said 'From the wood' [*del monte*]. I tried to enquire if it's possible to go and look for the horse in the wood, but apparently it isn't. Antonia says that horse will come back to Castilla when he'll decide to. Her attitude with the horse is the same that people have with goats and cows. Fifteen days ago a jaguar killed an ox from km 40 [a neighbouring community] because he was 'wandering alone' in the wood. It seems odd to me to leave animals free to go where they want even if it's dangerous for them. Animals cost money (Fieldwork notes).

Animals were not possessed, in Castilla, in the sense of being kept under control. Even goats, that were kept in a fence, had the fence open so that they could go out when they

wanted to. In order to analyse the possible connection between ways of seeing and wandering animals<sup>66</sup>, let us think about the Naturalists' collections of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One of the premises of collecting and classifying plants seems to be that they are not sentient beings, and can therefore be collected without a purpose; even though they are often gathered by indigenous 'doctors' for healing reasons.

Moreover, I think it is possible to connect the Maskoy's ideas of autonomy of all sentient beings, the scarcity of practices linked to 'visualising, classifying and controlling', and the lack of visual reminders of collective memories. I will refer, as an example, to the massacre – described in Chapter 1 - that took place in Castilla in the '50s. According to the leader and to another member of the community, there is a tree marking the place where the massacre took place. The location of the tree is known by these two people, but unknown to the majority of the villagers. When I visited the place with the leader, it looked just like any other place in the community. No marks were left to visualise a difference, nor a reminder of any sort. And yet, the massacre was not a "contested memory", but rather one that was openly shared. The only monument in Territory Riacho Mosquito, was built by the missionaries in the 1980s<sup>67</sup>. Neither objects are collected, nor is there an impulse – a project – to visualise memories.

Other practices may find in this way an explanation. The objects that belonged to the elders – once buried with them when they died– are still known to be buried in certain places (see Chapter 2), but they are voluntarily left under the ground, and never removed to be permanently exposed in public. The Museum of Indigenous Culture that was set up by the local missionary, also had an unfortunate destiny, and was abandoned by the missionary himself after a few years. In fact, people would generally refuse to give him their artefacts, because they thought they were more useful in their houses.

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<sup>66</sup> The relationship with animals would probably deserve a chapter on its own, but I will just use this particular aspect of the relationship for the development of the argument.

<sup>67</sup> The monument, located in Pueblito, is an old big pan – framed up in cement - that was used to cook the common food in Casado's times.

### 3. Mimetic borders

While it would be problematic to ascribe visualism to the whole tradition of modernity, it is useful to identify it as a tendency sustained by practices of visualising and collecting. In this case, the concept of visualism is also useful in order to understand its opposite, mimesis. The last section is then to ask if there are contrasting ways of defining and sustaining the borders between self and Other that correspond to different ontologies of vision.

According to Poole, the focus on skin colour in the conceptualisation of difference in Latin America is a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stress on physical features, such as the colour of the skin, in order to mark cultural difference, is in fact a historical product rather than a natural tendency of humanity. There was in fact a “general absence of a visual language for describing South American bodies in 18<sup>th</sup> century France” (Poole 1997: 23). This attention to physical observable features – that evolved in the concept of race - is a late phenomenon that resulted from the encounter between Western visualism, the technical reproducibility of representations, and deterministic theories about the environment. The circulation of photographs, according to Poole, played a determining role in this process, in the same way that the vacuum air pump played a determining role in the affirmation and diffusion of the empirical method (Latour 1990). This focus on external features in order to define borders is in contrast to how the Maskoy define the borders between indigenous and White people.

During my fieldwork, every night at six-thirty, I watched the soap-opera “*La Espada y la Rosa*” (the Colombian version of *Zorro*), on the patio of a house in the Maskoy community where I was living. Half of the community gathered there every night in order to watch television. One of the protagonists of the soap-opera was a Mexican Indian girl, Jumalay. Usually dressed up with feathers and a leather mini-skirt, I had never had any doubt about her indigenous identity. One night however, I realised that my assumptions were not shared by the rest of the people watching:

We were watching *La Espada y la Rosa* when Jumalay, explaining her rage for the governor, said: “The Whites killed my parents [or something similar]”. It was at that point that someone from the public exclaimed: “She’s an Indian!!”. There was a whispering around, until everyone seemed to agree. Yes, she was an Indian (Fieldwork notes).

It is only when Jumalay defines her others as “Whites” that the Maskoy people who were watching the programme with me could identify with her. They were unable however to recognise the feathers as clear signs of identification, even though it is a recurrent joke in the community that it is the way that White people use to identify Indians. It is important to understand that “White” does not refer to skin colour - the average Paraguayan is in fact as dark as indigenous people themselves - but to those people who have grown up outside indigenous communities and are not related to indigenous people through family ties. The identification between Jumalay and the Maskoy audience was given by the action of conceptualising oneself as different from a collective subject called “the Whites”. This is probably why some Maskoy people also identified themselves with a group of gypsies that were the protagonists of a Chilean soap-opera (in Italy, Gypsy people differentiate themselves from non-gypsies, calling them *gagi*)<sup>68</sup>.

It is thus not a visual sign that marks the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous people, but a common identification as different from the Whites. It is a non-visual border that marks the difference. This same conclusion has been elicited at the end of the second chapter. I have in fact described there how Maskoy people differentiate themselves from Paraguayans through acoustic signs (Paraguayans shout) and emotional attitudes (Paraguayans easily get angry). Following a visualist tendency, on the other hand, Paraguayans’ rely on the existence of visual signs to mark the difference with indigenous people: Maskoy people are in fact dirty and they wear worn out clothes.

### Mimesis

Through the analysis of hunting activity, a connection is established between mimesis and perspectivism (Willerslev 2007). In order to catch the elk, the hunter has to become like it. But the disguise is not only an outer coverage, a form without significance with respect to the content. As the hunter dresses like an elk, he is actually **becoming** an animal. Moreover, he is in constant danger of crossing the border between humans and non-humans, which would imply losing his condition of humanity. He is willing to undergo a transformation, but only up to a certain point. According to Willerslev, it is the ability of

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<sup>68</sup> A Maskoy friend of mine repeatedly tried to make me confess that I was a Gypsy, because I seemed to identify with indigenous people more than with White people.

sight that maintains the distance between object and subject and inhibits the transformation.

The hunter's belief that he could transform into an elk needs a non-visualist premise: that 'things out there' are not stable entities, but they risk – under certain conditions – becoming something else. Things as they appear can in fact correspond to different entities (a dog could be a person, and vice versa). Transformation can however be controlled through the deployment of specific practices, and only sometimes lead to madness. While hunting, the hunter becomes his Other (the animal), but he is able to go back to his original condition of being human.

The adoption of the external characteristics of something while maintaining a distinctive internal dimension, as the Yukaghir hunter does, can be perpetuated in other contexts. We have seen, at the beginning of the prologue, how Pitarch hypothesizes a perpetuation of mimesis amongst Cancuqueros. According to him, this would be due to its "ability to coexist with conditions of political and economic marginalisation". Following a similar path, Sanga presents the idea of a continuity between modern "marginal" people and ancient groups of hunter-gatherers. Having been incorporated into the dominant, sedentary society, they maintained characteristics typical of their hunter-gatherer society (Sanga 1990). The historical transformation of mimetic strategies into contemporary society is evident in the following example. Aside from crocodile hunting expeditions, I have no other information about Maskoy's hunting activity. Instead, I will make reference to a different context of interaction with the Other: the city.

Fernando [the guy who's helping me with the translation] comes to visit me with a friend. The friend seems to be smart, and helps me with some translation. He's maybe too smart, though, and sometimes it comes out that he's just inventing. When I ask him where he is from, he says that he comes from the capital city. His parents went there 25 years ago, when the tannin factory of Casado began dismissing the workers. "I am an Indian (indígena)", he tells me, "but in the capital city we [his family] are Paraguayans, we live like them. There are no differences anymore between us and them. We eat like them, we listen to their music, we dress like them and we live in houses like theirs. My brothers even got married with Paraguayans". And yet, I wonder, when he visits his relatives in Puerto Casado, if he becomes indigenous again. (Field notes – 11<sup>th</sup> June).

I get a sense of excess from Fernando's friend's description of how he becomes Paraguayan in the capital city. On one hand, there is an overwhelming adoption of everything that is considered to be Paraguayan. At the same time, there is the clear consciousness of a border, a line that divides 'us' and 'them', allowing at the same time its transgression. It is as if the fact of becoming Paraguayan is at the same time hiding some kind of alternative interiority.

An interesting parallel can be drawn with the Guarayo ethnic group living in Puerto Casado. Having arrived in Puerto Casado after the opening of the tannin factory, the Guarayos chose to settle down in the Paraguayan part of the town and hide their indigenous origin. Nowadays, they are married with Paraguayans and they define themselves as Paraguayans. And yet, people secretly know and gossip that they are indigenous people, whilst their relatives who live in the central Chaco – and who visit them once in a while – consider themselves, and are considered by the surrounding society, to be indigenous people.

The assimilation of Paraguayan practices does not happen in a syncretised way: it is either a complete adoption, or a temporary and ritualised one. In the following chapter, I will focus on the mimetic incorporation of the Other in the ceremonial space of the 'party'.

## **Chapter 3 - The passion for civilization**

### **Football and volleyball as mimetic practices**

In this chapter I will trace the genealogies that led to the modern practices of volleyball and football in Maskoy communities. In particular, I will argue that volleyball and football matches open a space of visibility that, apart from enhancing conviviality, remove valuable objects from the negative values associated with a potential to conceal. The betting that takes place in these games, for instance, makes it possible for indigenous people to make money that has come into their hands in a publicly visible way, thus removing the danger that money poses when people can still think it is being concealed privately.

#### **3.1 Party time and mimetic transformations**

Since the establishment of the first cattle ranches and tannin industries, the proximity to - and involvement with - White people had a huge influence on the way Maskoy people organized their settlements and their activities. One of the main differences concerned the way in which 'partying together' became organized.

According to different observers, big gatherings of people were organized until recently around traditional dances linked to female and male initiations, and to periods of abundance of food. These gatherings involved people from different settlements but who shared a common identity (Delporte 1992; Imaz & Franco 2007; Pittini 1924). According to Susnik, it is legitimate to argue for the existence of big communities of about two hundred inhabitants in pre-Columbian times. With the arrival of the Whites in neighboring territories, these communities were dispersed but would continue to gather in cyclical ceremonies (Susnik 1954). This interpretation is sustained by Leiva's book on the origin of



his people, where he often refers to the dispersal of his people after a long period of common residence:

They were all living inside Carlos Casado's property, 120 kilometres from Puerto Casado, towards the north. We called this place *Paiseacmoc Vemac*, that in Spanish means 'Valley of the Tribe' (*Valle de la Tribu*). Two hundred and sixty families lived in this place (Leiva 2004).

The cyclical gathering of people from different settlements has been used to explain the perpetuation of a common language amongst groups of people who otherwise lived separated from one another (Villagra, personal communication).

According to Pittini, the name of the celebrations corresponded to the name of the songs that accompanied them. Talking about the Enxet, he mentions the *yanmana* (female initiation ritual), the *guainka* (male initiation ritual) and the *keqya* (happiness for the potatoes harvest and other favorable circumstances) (Pittini 1924: 56-58).

When Maskoy people began working in the ranching farms that were established all around the indigenous territory, the big ceremonial gatherings apparently began to diminish. According to Susnik, the only traditional dance that was still performed during the cattle ranching period was the female initiation dance (the *yanmana*), which Susnik explains, was done by women because they were in general "more attached to the traditional way of doing things" (Susnik 1977: 227). The *yanmana* was not performed in the cattle ranches themselves however, but in the surrounding indigenous settlements (*tolderías*).

Susnik's observations were confirmed during my fieldwork. In the Puerto Casado area, in fact, initiation dances were held at a certain distance from the town. Maskoy people mention a place eleven kilometers away and a place close to Puerto Sastre as being the centers where the initiation dances took place. Delporte, who did his investigation amongst Maskoy people about twenty years ago, additionally mentions Machete Vaina and Cerro Nhandu. According to him, the elected place had to be situated far from the Whites' gaze but "close to source of abundance", and in places with an important indigenous population (Delporte 1992).

One of the reasons why it was necessary to keep this distance from the Whites was the antagonism with the missionaries. Another reason, more often for the Maskoy themselves, was the mockery of White people attending the rituals. As Maskoy people say, ceremonies are “delicate” (*delicado*), and the laughing of the Whites is a disturbing element:

For us, initiation dances are important, that’s why we don’t like when White people come and laugh. (Interview quoted in Delporte 1992: 17)

This mocking attitude has been encapsulated in the way in which Maskoy people now refer to the masked men of the rituals. Amongst the Ishir, in fact, they are called “the clowns” (*los payasos*), while in Riacho Mosquito they are called “*los kamba*” (in Guaraní “the black men”, probably referred to the color of the painting). The initiated girl, in turn, is called “the Queen” (*la Reina*). This denomination probably comes from the election of “the Queen of Carnival” that was held every year in Puerto Casado until quite recently. I do not have the impression, however, that these terms are perceived as denigrating by the Maskoy people who have adopted them. From their point of view, they are probably just “translations” (from the traditional languages to Guaraní). This is a powerful insight into the context in which the transition from the Maskoy to the Guaraní language took place.

During the celebration of the Day of the Indian in Puerto Casado, I myself have seen a Maskoy man being laughed at by a group of Paraguayan school children:

[DVD 1 - Clip 5: Day of the Indian].

If initiation ceremonies were held in isolated places, other dances were performed at the cattle ranches. In fact, the only traditional dance performed in the presence of the Whites, was the *choqueo* (or *choqueada*; or *choco* in Delporte’s spelling; or *pachanga*<sup>69</sup> in its contemporary Maskoy denomination). The *choqueo* consists of a circle of men dancing around a singer with a water drum [see film]. The musician was traditionally a shaman, and the singing was acquired as part of the shamanic training. Nowadays, though, not all the singers are shamans, and some of them learn the songs through listening to other people’s singing. The circle of dancers is initially a purely male one, but women go in and out of the

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<sup>69</sup> Like “*kamba*” and “*reina*”, the use of the word “*pachanga*” to indicate the *choqueo* also has a mocking tone, as the term designates a very popular kind of dancing.

circle, taking care to enter on their partner's (or aspirant partner) side<sup>70</sup>. The *choqueo* is performed as part of the largest celebrations [except for *baile flauta*], but it can also be performed alone. Different to the initiation dances, which last about 8 days, the *choqueo* lasts about 12 hours, from the evening until early morning of the following day.

It is interesting to note that Gordillo mentions the *choqueo* as an inter-ethnic dance that was performed by indigenous people from the Argentinean Chaco that gathered every year to work in the sugar cane plantations of San Martín de Tabacal (Argentina). Even if he does not refer to the dance as *choqueo* we can recognise it as such in the description: "men danced in a large circle holding each other's waists, and women surrounded them and picked a partner to spend the night with". "As sunset approached, young men began decorating their bodies for the dancing that, banned at the mission station, they performed every evening with other aborigines." (Gordillo 2004: 119). In this case, though, the dancing strengthened a common indigenous identity, and people decorated their bodies with "indigenous" adornments.

According to Leiva, the *choqueo* (that he calls *manañ* in Toba-Maskoy) is performed by the majority of Chaco tribes (*tribus*), even if, according to the elders of his community, the Sanapaná, Nivacle and Maka are the real "authors and owners" of the dance (Leiva 2004).

During the cattle ranching period, performance of the *choqueo* took place during non-working time, beginning at lunch-time on Saturday and lasting until Monday morning, when the workers had to go back to work (Delporte 1992). In the areas where Catholic missions were established however, the missionaries decided to set limits to the dancing, as the workers would have been "too tired to work properly on Monday morning" (Delporte 1992). They thus decided to allow the dancing from Saturday afternoon until Sunday lunch-time. In this way, the workers could sleep properly on Sunday night and work efficiently the following day. The civilizing project of the missionaries, as we saw in chapter 1, focused on work as a redemptive activity. Working and partying were seen as antithetical activities, and the latter had to be entirely subordinate to the first.

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<sup>70</sup> According to Villagra, the *choqueo* that was performed in the cattle ranches allowed a non-violent and regulated interaction between White men and young indigenous women (personal communication). Lots of people, though, refer to the *choqueo* as a situation characterised by the lack of control.



Figure 6: [Original Caption]: 'Cattle ranch worker', adapted to the work in Creole cattle ranches. Sanapana. Cattle-ranch *Sta. Juanita*. Photo by Susnik. 1962  
[Courtesy of the Andres Barbero Museum]



Figure 7: [Original Caption]: Cattle Ranch Workers with ancient Sanapana dancing. Cattle ranch *Sta. Juanita*. Photo by Susnik. 1962. [Courtesy of the Andres Barbero Museum]

## The adoption of football and volleyball games in the Maskoy communities

The introduction of football and volleyball amongst the Maskoy people is probably contemporary to the involvement of Maskoy people in the cattle ranching industry. In the 1950s, Bratislava Susnik took pictures of a football game in the Enxet territory (the photos are kept in the archive of the A. Barbero museum). According to the anthropologist, football was initially encouraged by the Catholic missionaries as part of “the Salesian method”:

Father Bruno Stella, the Salesian priest of Puerto Casado, identifies the difficulties of his missionary work in the instability of the Indians. [...] Father Stella is convinced about the success of his enterprise, but he's forgetting that the indigenous people living along the Paraguay River are being influenced by White people working in the factories and docks. He won't be able to solve this problem **through the Salesian method of football, cinema and singing**. (Susnik 1954 - personal emphasis)

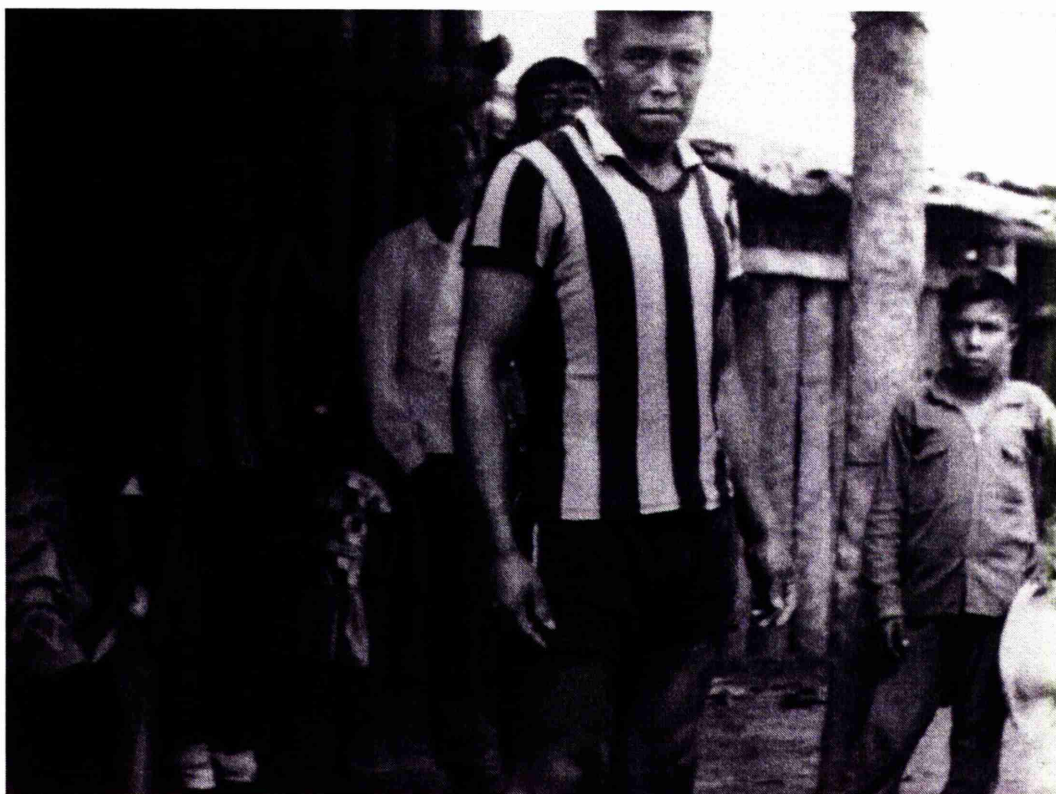
We can assume that these activities were preferred to the *choqueo* because of the strong association of the latter with alcohol consumption. Susnik writes, for instance, that:

The Salesian missionaries keep young people busy – indigenous and non-indigenous – through football, in order to prevent them from the possibility of committing sin (Susnik 1954).

I have already mentioned in the second chapter how Susnik reports the decision of an indigenous leader, who encourages his people to become members of the international football club rather than members of the trade union (Susnik 1953). In this case, the adoption of football was considered a strategic – and possibly neutral - mechanism of alliance with the Paraguayan society. The missionaries' ‘Salesian method’ was not unilaterally imposed; rather, it probably converged with indigenous people's mimetic strategies of contact. For example, the performance of football and volleyball became part of a mimetic strategy through which indigenous settlements were made to ‘look like’ the Paraguayan ones. Furthermore, the uniform of the football player was immediately adopted in indigenous settlements, and particular care was placed on the accuracy of the uniform on the part of the players.



A similar point has been made by Rollason about football in Panapompom (Papua New Guinea). According to him, football is “neither a way of resisting or of being subjugated, but a way of defining a sort of activity as being visibly similar to instances of the game played elsewhere” (Rollason 2008: 70)<sup>71</sup>. Focusing on the outstanding importance of wearing strips for indigenous football players, he suggests that “football **was** the football strip for Panapompom people” (Rollason 2008: 69). The Maskoy people give a similar degree of attention to football matches, and strips are likewise considered an essential feature of the game. We can compare Rollason’s analysis about football with the Maskoy approach to body paintings during female initiation rituals. In both cases we find a similar attention to the accuracy of the replica.



*Figure 8:* [Original Caption]: ‘Alojo’ and other football players. Pto Diana. Alto Paraguay. 1968/69  
[Courtesy of the Andres Barbero Museum]

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<sup>71</sup> Even if Rollason’s conclusions are quite distant from mine, we nevertheless share a similar point of departure.

## Mimetic transformations

In the previous section I have mentioned the presence of masked men during the initiation ritual. The masked men of the initiation dances are usually identified in anthropological literature with spirits of the wood<sup>72</sup>, even if no Maskoy person has ever verified this information for me (cf. Escobar 1993). This interpretation was, however, confirmed during my fieldwork by the fact that people provided the masked men of the initiation ritual with names of animals and vegetables (*el nhandu*, *el zapallo*).



Figure 9: Kamba (in the centre) during an initiation ritual in 2007. Photo by the author.



Figure 10: Kamba during an initiation ritual in 2007. Photo by the author.

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<sup>72</sup> Susnik calls them *sowalac* or *cewalac*, and defines them as “espíritu amorfo perseguidor”.

I am not concerned with engaging in a symbolic analysis of the initiation ritual, but rather with focusing on the very act of disguising that occurs in these rituals. I take this lack of attention towards the meanings of the disguises from Maskoy people themselves. Maskoy people did not seem to attribute a great importance to the symbolic meanings of the masked men. They instead focused their attention and conversations on the exact shapes of the paintings and the movements that took place during the ritual (for a similar point see Forge 1970). The “sense” of the painting seemed to rest on the surface of things, to be enclosed in the form, and not in the content<sup>73</sup>.

In June 2008 I presented a documentary about the female initiation dancing in a conference organized by the AIP<sup>74</sup> (Asociación Indigenista de Paraguay) in the capital city. Four Maskoy representatives were there to discuss the documentary. After the screening, a Paraguayan woman asked for the meaning of the red spots on the girl’s face. The leader of Castilla answered that they were made with lipstick. Not happy with the answer, the woman insisted on her question about the meaning of the red spots, until the leader got nervous and asked her if she had never seen a lipstick in her life. As I had similar discussions with Maskoy people on other occasions, I doubt that the problem was merely about translation.

Through the body painting, the individual gets transformed into his Other independently from any indexical reference to a verbal meaning. And it is precisely for this reason that an enormous importance is attributed to the precision of the sign. Like the Yukaghir hunters described in the prologue, the painted men engage in a mimetic transformation into the Other through the adoption of its outer form. This transformative moment is caught in the film when a boy who is being painted exclaims: “I’m all trembling. [repeats] I’m all trembling. It’s the first time I get painted”. Even if the boy who is speaking lives in close contact with the Paraguayan town of Vallemi, and even if the young generation is described

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<sup>73</sup> Ticio Escobar, a Paraguayan critic of art, wrote a book about an Ishir ritual in Upper Paraguay. In the introduction to the book, he writes: “It is through the representation itself that the truth of the represented is better explained. [...] The Other refuses with his forms my forms, and sustains and responds to my gaze. [...] We can just “name” its figures.” (Escobar, T. 1999. *La Maldición de Nemur. Acerca del Arte, el Mito y el Ritual de los Indígenas Ishir del Gran Chaco Paraguayo*. Asunción: Museo del Barro.) His posture probably reflects his own encounter with indigenous people during fieldwork.

<sup>74</sup> The AIP, a philanthropic association, was founded by General Belaieff in 1942. During the 1970s and the 1980s, it supported and financed several projects aimed at securing land for indigenous people (Renshaw 1996 : 243 ).



as “wanting to be Paraguayan”, the transformative power of the disguise is nevertheless acting upon him. The importance of the correct imitation of the outer form of something in order to enhance a transformation could then be at the origin of the Maskoy leaders’ obsession with the recording of the exact form of body painting. One of Juan Gonzales’ ideas was indeed to create a book with the drawings of the different kamba body paintings, fearing that the following generation would forget them.

The link between the hunting activity and the mimetic appropriation of the Other can be used to explain the fact that only men get disguised during the rituals. We have seen that the Others embodied in the initiation rituals are spirits from the wood. In contrast to the initiation rituals, the embodied Others of the *choqueo* are the Paraguayan cowboys that work in the cattle ranches. In fact, it would be difficult to explain otherwise the careful adoption of the cowboy outfit during the dancing. Moreover, I have mentioned in the first chapter that the work as *estanciero* (cattle ranch worker) was the most appreciated one amongst Maskoy people when Susnik did her fieldwork in the 1950s, and it still is the case in the memory of the elders. We could then ask if it is by chance that the most valued of the Whites’ jobs is also the only one that implies the adoption of a special outfit.

As in the case of initiation rituals, women were excluded from mimetic practices during the *choqueo*. In the same period – the 1950s - in which Bratislava Susnik took the pictures of the *choqueada* in cattle ranches, she also took pictures of indigenous women. This time, though, she portrays them in a line:



Figure 11: [Original Caption]: Group of women in the *Sta. Juanita* cattle ranch. Sanapana. 1962. Photo by Susnik. 1962. [Courtesy of the Andres Barbero Museum]

The women are wearing urban Paraguayan clothes, but more than a mimetic appropriation of the Other, Susnik's picture reminds some missionary project of civilization. In an article about the photographs taken by the missionaries of the Anglican mission themselves, Giordano underlines how they used the photographic register as a way to make visible and register the evolution of the Indians: from naked to dressed, from barbaric to baptized. The photographic image becomes an instrument of "affirmation, domination and transformation" (Giordano 2006: 183). The edge between imposition and appropriation is in this case more confused, and I might argue that it is the existence of a ritualized context (the *choqueo*, in the men's case) that marks the difference.

Driven by a visualist tendency, Susnik associates the use of traditional dresses on the part of indigenous women with a sign of preserved identity:

These units [the *tolderías*] conserve at a superficial level their traditional culture, and men are gradually adapting to the mentality of Paraguayan mestizos; women are an exception: they keep following the tradition, apart from some really colourful dress they wear when they approach a family of Paraguayan settlers (*colonos*).” (Susnik 1954 - my translation)

It is Susnik herself, on the other hand, who underlines an unusual passion on the part of indigenous people for the objects that are “signs of civilisation”:

The “symbols” of civilization are something special for indigenous people: the white shirt, the red dresses, the combs, the mirrors, the bracelets, the belts, etc. All these objects, that the Indians consider the symbols of civilization, and the external attributes of their own “humanhood”, represent for them a true passion. (Susnik 1954 – my translation)

It is suspicious that all the objects mentioned by Susnik as symbols of civilization are adornments of the body. I have already mentioned in the first chapter – when talking about the work in the factory - the centrality of the body in the construction and conceptualization of the relationship with the social environment. Talking about the Amazonian Wari, Vilaça writes that “the body is not merely the location where social identity is expressed but the substrate where it is fabricated” (Vilaça 2007: 175). Maskoy people’s “passion for the symbols of civilization” can also be interpreted as an appropriation of the Whites’ objects aimed at using them as a “motor of a body process”, since “clothing is the indigenous way of being white” (Vilaça 2007: 175). The appropriation

of the external form of something - in this case, of the Whites' adornments of the body - is one of the ways in which the mimetic faculty works to enhance a process of knowledge and transformation. As I have analyzed in the case of Baile Kunha paintings, it is not the meaning of the form that matters, but rather the form itself.

Talking about the adoption of Western clothes on the part of the Wari, Vilaça states that "the process of contact with whites is conceived through the prism of shamanism. Just as shamans are simultaneously human and animal, the Wari today possess a double identity: they are both Wari and White" (Vilaça 2007: 170). The parallel with shamanism is important in that it is through the experience of shamanic practices that a certain ontology of vision is built: that which does not necessarily rely on the appearance<sup>75</sup> of something in order to define the truth of its interiority (an animal could be a spirit; a person could be an animal), and at the same time allows the body the possibility to temporarily transform into something else.

To make clear the scale of this transformation, I will refer to something that happened to a friend's brother. My friend is a well-educated indigenous woman from central Chaco. Her brother used to go hunting in the woods with his jeep, and he used to keep a thermo-box in the back of his car to keep cool the meat of the animals he hunted. One day, he killed a deer and cut it in pieces and put it in the thermo-box. When he opened the box after a while, however, he realised he had killed a man and not a deer, as the pieces of meat that were in box corresponded to parts of the human body. The pieces had transformed while in the box. He decided not to go hunting for a while.

The mimetic appropriation, however, because it is performed inside borders, does not involve a permanent adoption. These borders are often represented by a social/ritual context. We might assume that the shamanic transformation is a particularly dangerous one in that it happens when the shaman is alone in the woods. A similar case can be attributed to the hunter who is alone with his prey, and cases of craziness, of not-return, are in fact reported amongst the Yukaghir hunters (Willerslev, personal communication). The (possibility of) contingency in the mimetic appropriation of the outer form of something is

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<sup>75</sup> I mean here by "appearance" all that can be perceived of something by a person: its form, smell, consistency.

testified by what happened in the Chaco region: the wearing of the cowboy outfit in the *choqueo* was in fact abandoned with the end of the work in Paraguayan cattle ranches.

### Contemporary mimesis

As already mentioned, after the recovery of part of their land, Maskoy people settled down in a new configuration, the “indigenous community”. At the centre of the community, a football and volleyball playing ground was gradually included<sup>76</sup>, together with a school and a health centre.



Figure 12: Volleyball ground in Castilla in 2007. Photo by the author.

I once asked some non-indigenous truck drivers - who used to travel around the central Chaco - if indigenous people played football and volleyball in the same way as the Whites do. They answered that yes, they do play in the same way (meaning the external appearance of the game), but with the remarkable difference that Paraguayans do not play as much as the indigenous people. They explained to me that every time they visited an indigenous community, people were playing football and volleyball, as if that was their only activity<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> At the beginning, Castilla was made up of dispersed houses not clearly gathered around a centre.

<sup>77</sup> The underlying assumption was probably that Maskoy people had more time because they did not work [see introductory quote in chapter 1]. What is relevant to my argument however, is the visibility of football and volleyball as a first impression of indigenous communities.

The visual similarity of indigenous football to its non-indigenous counterparts fails. The difference in indigenous practice is revealed in the excess of something invisible: duration. The excess of time allocated to what are considered to be “spare time activities” is left to mark the (invisible) difference between indigenous and non-indigenous people<sup>78</sup>. According to Sanga, the theme of the “excess” often appears in anthropological literature about hunter-gatherers societies, mainly in the form of “alimentary excess” (Sanga 1990: 16). In our case, it testifies to the fact that Paraguayan sports activities are performed not only to fool the gaze of Paraguayans, or to be how Paraguayan people or missionaries want indigenous people to be, but to accomplish other tasks inside the communities.

In the community of Castilla, where I was staying, people play football and volleyball almost every afternoon from Monday to Friday - starting at about five – and the whole day during the weekend, leaving a break at lunch time. This time structure does not depend on work (few people have jobs at the moment), but on the school schedule: Monday to Friday, from eight to five. The fact that in Maskoy communities these two sports seem to occupy all the time that is not occupied by “work”, impedes their conceptualization as “sports”, as conceived in a urban environment. An additional detail gives a different perception on the performance of these two activities: people of all ages participate in them, provided they are still strong enough to play.

Sport activities are not just a formal reproduction of the Other. As initiation rituals, they are part of the construction of a communal identity and an every-day negotiated sociality. In fact, the whole community gathers nearly every day in the central plaza in order to play together. Both “community” and “football” are recent configurations, and we can think of football and volleyball grounds as spaces to enhance a new form of communal identity. There is in fact an interesting overlap of aesthetics between sports and community, with the leaders sometimes wearing football caps or tracksuits embroidered with the name of their respective community, as Paraguayans do with football teams. Just like football, communities allow the creation of a common identity that is not based on kinship ties. [See Figure 4, Chapter 2]

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<sup>78</sup> Quantitative excess is also present in the wearing of football T-shirts in all sorts of different contexts, including, for example, a Catholic mass.

Up to this point, I have argued that it is possible to trace a genealogy of football and volleyball as transformations of the space-time dedicated to partying. In particular, I have emphasized a similitude between the act of disguising of Kamba dancers, cowboys in cattle ranches, and football players. It is important to underline however that even if Paraguayans are imitated and incorporated in football and volleyball grounds, the borders between them and Maskoy people are kept in other invisible ways. We have seen in the second chapter how one of the main outlined differences between Maskoy and Paraguayan people, from a Maskoy point of view, is the fact that Paraguayans get easily angry. Significantly, matches are characterized by a complete absence of aggressiveness on the sports ground. On the contrary, people show a great control of their emotions. Even when one team wins the match, people are supposed to walk away silently, without showing any sign of enthusiasm.

[DVD 1 - Clip 6: Football. + Clip 7: Volleyball]

Football and volleyball games are not just about 'being Paraguayan' or 'enhancing sociality' however. Another practice, apart from traditional dances, has converged into football and volleyball games: gambling.

### 3.2 The hidden side of the coin: football and volleyball as gambling activities

One of the main differences between the Paraguayan games and the indigenous ones is the intense gambling activity that goes on around them. While Paraguayans in fact play for beer (the winning team buys beer for the losing one), indigenous people all over the Chaco region bet particular objects through a fairly complex gambling system. Each player from one side has a betting opponent (his/her *contrario*) on the other side. The bets between the two opponents are usually equivalent (hair tie with hair tie, clothes with clothes, money with money). If the two opponents play without betting, which can happen, they are said to play "*rei*" (uselessly, without purpose).

Gambling was a common activity amongst Chaco indigenous groups in pre-colonial and colonial times<sup>79</sup>. One of the most popular games involving betting was *sekes* [a game where

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<sup>79</sup> In *Stone Age Economics* Sahlins mentions that "Hazda men seem much more concerned with games of chance than with chances of game" (Sahlins: 27). According to Sanga, the gambling performed in hunter-gatherers societies could be related to the idea that it is wrong for one



two opponents have to move a stick from a start point to an end point by throwing small stones]. According to Martinez-Crovetto, the Toba would bet their most precious possessions - horses, goats, sheep, rifles and clothes - while playing *sekes* (Martinez-Crovetto 1989). The same opinion is given by Susnik, who writes that “the Lengua are passionate players. They bet in fact with highly valuable items, such as blankets and knives” (Susnik 1977: 229). Later on, *sekes* was largely replaced by Paraguayan card games like *maca'i* or *escoba siete*, but the betting system was maintained.

The gambling associated with card games was criticized by the missionaries. In Castilla, a woman told me that the local missionary severely reproached her in public, accusing her of not being a good mother, the reason being that she liked betting with cards during the weekends. Some Paraguayan people think that indigenous people should not “play with money” because they are poor, and they should use their money in a proper – rational - way [i.e. to buy food]. It is thus possible to argue that the concentration of the gambling activity in football and volleyball matches is linked to the Whites’ approval of these activities. The betting system, traditionally performed in *sekes*, has been mimetised behind the benevolent façade of activities accepted by the surrounding society.

The purpose of the betting activity that goes on around football and volleyball in the Chaco has already been analyzed by two anthropologists, Kidd and Grant.

According to Kidd, the gambling activity is a leveling mechanism because it “permits a limited amount of redistribution of available cash”. The same author, nevertheless, also writes that “it is normal to allow the losers an opportunity to recover their losses” (Kidd 1999). The fact that the gambling activity is configured in antagonist couples, moreover, limits the redistribution of things and money to people sharing a similar economic condition, at least in that moment (antagonist betting couples usually bet with the same: money against money, ornaments against ornaments, and nothing against nothing). The fact that one’s own antagonist (*contrario*) is usually someone with the same economic condition casts doubt as to whether this practice can be considered a leveling mechanism.

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individual to accumulate things in excess because they could become lazy and lose astuteness (Sanga 1990).

Starting from a different perspective, Grant focuses on the sociability - enhanced through the exchange of things - which takes place through betting. She focuses her attention on the gambling of clothes that happens amongst women in a Nivacle community: “what goes on during volley and football matches, is the creation of sociality through acts of mutuality<sup>80</sup>. [...] Rather than regarding gambling as competitive exchange between two teams, a more fruitful approach would be to consider the whole process of play as a series of repetitive acts of mutuality between female kin<sup>81</sup>” (Grant 2006: 268). According to her, the act of betting could be equated to an act of exchange where similarity is created through the act of sharing the same things over and over again.

I agree with Grant when she says that football and volleyball games are not strategies to cope with competitiveness and aggressiveness, but contexts in which sociability and conviviality are enhanced amongst people [Film fragment]. In this sense, it can be related to the performing of traditional celebrations. As in traditional rituals, moreover, the victory of one team is never expressed through visible acts of triumph, but rather ignored as if it was a secondary event<sup>82</sup>.

The possibility of defining betting as an act of mutuality is, however, nuanced by a couple of aspects. First, even if they try not to show it during the match, people get upset when they lose and are not particularly happy to see someone with their lost possessions. For this reason, in Castilla, women always try to bet with their worst clothes. Second, the gambled items do not necessary remain inside the community. Third, Grant’s analysis focuses on the circulation of clothes in the community, which enables her to say that through gambling women “become increasingly similar [...] through wearing each others’ clothes” (Grant 2006: 300). However, because the Castilla women bet with money rather than clothes, it becomes more difficult to apply Grant’s interpretation. The use of money in this case requires a deeper analysis.

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<sup>80</sup> She uses the term mutuality (i.e. sharing) - instead of reciprocity - to underline the fact that there is “no expectation of return on the part of the receiver”.

<sup>81</sup> She limits her analysis to volleyball games amongst women.

<sup>82</sup> Is the absence of aggressiveness during the match a way to keep the borders with Paraguayans? Let us remember, in fact, that Paraguayan people are mostly defined for being aggressive.



### Foot and volleyball matches as “spaces of visibility”

Through the act of betting, different things are made present and visible at the centre of the community. According to Susnik, in the 1950s people used to bet precious objects like blankets and knives. According to Grant, contemporary Nivakche women bet with skirts, whilst men bet with money. In the case of an Enxet/Maskoy community from the central Chaco, Kidd mentions money, clothes and ornaments.

In Maskoy communities, bets that are made on football (a sport played mostly by men) are made with money, whilst in the case of volleyball (which is played by both men and women) bets are made with money, clothes and ornaments. The different things are not equivalent however. As soon as money is available in the communities, as if grounded in a sense of “moral duty”, all the bets are inevitably made with money. We may ask, then, why money.

### 3.3 The nature of money

At the beginning of my field-work I was living in the Maskoy community of Karanda'y Pucu. Over the course of a few days, nearly all the men of the community were logging for a Paraguayan man who was buying the logs to produce coal. When the work was finished, the boss paid the indigenous workers with money. Following a retribution-for-work logic, the money was equally distributed amongst all the men who worked in the logging activity. People were not happy however. They complained that money had not been fairly distributed, and that the amount of money received by each of the workers was too small. They also claimed that the community, and not only the workers, owned the land where the logs were extracted. The second time they worked for the Paraguayan boss, the community thus asked him if he could pay them with food instead of money (rice, yerba mate and wheat flour). As it often happens with food, it was equally distributed amongst all the families of the community, independently from the amount of work they had done. Things seemed to work better.

On a different occasion, the people of Castilla were logging for a Paraguayan man from the capital city. The boss arranged the deal such that each man would work on his own, and he would be paid according to the length of his logs. Whilst seemingly being fair, these conditions proved difficult to meet. As everyone was helping each other a lot, it became really difficult to decide who was cutting what. When the boss visited the community for the second time, new conditions were set so that the community had to be paid with food instead of money, and the food would be equally distributed amongst all the families.

As mentioned in chapter 1, food and money had two different ontological statuses during the time of work in the cattle ranches. Whilst money was conceived as a private transaction between a boss and the worker, food was rather conceptualised as a moral obligation of the boss towards the worker's family (Susnik 1977). As it was based on a personal relationship, the quantity of food received was directly dependent on the generosity of the boss rather than on fixed and impersonal rules. What happens in contemporary Maskoy communities follows a similar pattern. Whilst money is seen to be owed to the actual workers - those who put their own effort in the activity - food is a universal right, shared by the whole of the community.

Several anthropological studies have criticised the false myth of the neutrality of money (see Maurer 2006 for an overview). In some cases, different currencies are kept separate and are strictly used in different contexts. The convertibility of one value into another is not a strict mathematical calculation. Instead, it becomes a means by which moral borders are maintained through their use in different circuits (Pine 2002). In the Maskoy communities, even if it may be possible to calculate the convertibility of food with money, they belong to two different circuits of meanings. While food has to be shared amongst each member of the community, money does not have to be. The re-distributive principle that operates with food does not seem to apply to money. Whilst food can be found or reciprocated, money is earned or inherited. Money is the compensation of a worker for a certain number of working hours. Money is rarely given to those who do not deserve it.

This form of differentiation, though, seems to apply to transactions happening between a boss and his/her workers. According to Kidd, as soon as someone is known to have lots of money, the members of the community exert pressure on him/her by asking for loans that

will never be repaid (Kidd 1999). It is probably because of this, that the hiding of money is a common habit. Maskoy teachers, for example, are the only people in communities to receive a regular salary from the State, and yet never get to touch their money. Their salary is withdrawn in the capital city by relatives of shop owners from Puerto Casado, and the Maskoy teachers buy food and clothes from the local shops, for an amount of money per month equivalent to that of their salary<sup>83</sup>.

The distribution of jobs and money inside Maskoy communities is often an inexplicable thing for Paraguayan people. When people from km 40 decided to sell Casado's disused railway tracks, Don S. acted as their intermediary with a buyer in the capital city. Trying to explain to me what went wrong in the transaction, he told me that the revenues were equally distributed amongst all the families of the community of *Kilometro Cuarenta*, even those whose members had not directly worked in the dislocation of the tracks. For this reason, the amount of money per person was much smaller than what they had expected. In this case, probably because the tracks were considered to be owned by the whole community, money was distributed, like food, amongst all its members.

The sharing of money independently from the amount of work realised by each member of the group, in the case of collective activities, bears similarities with meat sharing during a collective hunting expedition. I was myself witness to a crocodile-hunting expedition around the community of Castilla. The hunting group was composed of ten people, but three of us were just watching and not hunting, mainly because of our lack of hunting skills (me, for obvious reasons, and two boys because they were too young and were still learning). Despite this, the seven hunted crocodiles were equally shared amongst the ten participants, no matter who did what. When I asked why, they told me that because "we were there" we deserved our part. The principle of "who works more deserves more" was not in use, because people needed each other's help anyway, and each person worked according to his own physical/knowledge skills.

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<sup>83</sup> It is interesting to note that the role of shop-owners as intermediary, and even more their role as creditors in the subsidy, enhanced their profit and created a local high-middle class even if it was really small.

### A case study: the birth of *comisiones vecinales*

When the new mayor of Puerto Casado was elected in October 2007, one of the first things he did was to urge the different urban districts of the Municipality of Puerto Casado to form *comisiones vecinales* (local committees). The main function of the local committees was to organise shifts of collective work amongst the local population (i.e. cleaning the streets) and to pay the workers with the money that the Municipality had assigned to them. *Comisiones vecinales* in Territorio Riacho Mosquito were hybrid configurations, developed for urban districts but also applied to the indigenous communities. They were the product of the sometimes-irrational duplicating effect of bureaucracy of any given official planning. Local committees also caused the creation of a second leadership inside the communities: that of the president of the committee (everything in Paraguay seems to have a president).

Francisca, the president of the local committee of Pueblito, was a Maskoy woman married to a Paraguayan man. One of the signs of her “being different” was that she had a few cows in the community of Machete Vaina. The first amount of money she received from the Municipality was given to her privately by the Mayor, and this provoked the first negative comments from Pueblito settlers. These negative perceptions stemmed from the issue that the money was apparently used without consulting the rest of the people. The biggest tensions however, came from her way of organising the job and money distribution, as she went against what was considered to be “the indigenous way of doing things”.

In Pueblito there was a big discussion about the working teams organised by the local committee. People were saying that Francisca cannot act as a Paraguayan, which is to say: give work to some people, and exclude others. They accused Francisca of wanting to become Paraguayan. In order to give work to all the families, people proposed to organise a rotating system (Field notes).

In Pueblito, the main problem was that everyone was eligible for work and receiving the money of the Municipality, but the size of the community/urban district [about 80 families] made the situation difficult to handle. In Castilla [38 families] however, this problem was not even considered. The president of the local committee was the ex-leader of the community (who had been destitute at the time of the cattle project), and when the Mayor left 1.000.000 Gs to the committee, the settlers unanimously decided that they would use

the money to buy food, tobacco and soap. The goods were equally distributed amongst all the families of Castilla the day before the realisation of the communal work. At nine o'clock in the morning someone rang the bell "like in Casado's time", and people gathered together in order to clean the "central square" (the open field in the middle of the community). There was a playful atmosphere that gave the impression of a burlesque imitation of a working day. The time of rest was more or less the same duration as the time of work, but everything was organised as a "working day". People asked me to film, so that they could show the people of Km 39 and Km 40 how well they worked, and they gossiped that people from Km 40 had bought rum with the money of the Municipality.

The performative aspect of the situation was accentuated by the fact that people used to clean the square independently of any reward, just as routine communal work (it is the task of the leader to organise these kinds of tasks). The fact of doing it in order to "deserve" the money of the Municipality (that was used to buy food) was taken as an indulgence of the Whites' way of thinking. It was part of a discipline based on the idea that you need to work if you want money (and food). In the discussions around the functioning of *comisiones vecinales*, two forms of logic – that of the Whites' and that of the indigenous people – were clearly identified. People accepted, and behaved according to, the Whites' logic, in performing "work" in order to "deserve" the money. But they consciously adopted the indigenous logic concerning the repartition of work. The line that divided "us" and "them", as in other cases, was functional to the temporary adoption of an antagonist logic that could be dismissed in changing contexts because of their conceptualisation of "not ours".

### **The materiality of money**

The ambiguous status of money, in particular its potential danger, became clear to me on two occasions. The first was a meeting with an official representative of the SAS [Secretariat of Social Action] who was promoting the creation of a cooperative shop in Pueblito Indio. All the Maskoy leaders were invited to the meeting in order to elect the treasurer of the cooperative. The SAS representative had decided to offer the position to Rene Ramirez, because she considered him a highly respected member of the community. One by one, the leaders gave their support to the election of Rene Ramirez, but they also remarked that it was a very dangerous and delicate position. "The temptation is big" (*la tentación es grande*), said the vice-leader of Castilla. "Really dangerous, money is a big

temptation” (*muy peligroso, tentación memete la plata*), said the leader of Pueblito. When it came to Rene Ramirez, he finally rejected the offer arguing that the responsibility would have been too great.

According to Kidd, “outside influences and temptations can lead even those with the strongest wáxoks to behave in ways that they later regret. [...] the Enxet [...] strive on a day-to-day basis to live tranquilly” (Kidd 1999: 266). We can recognize in the leaders’ use of the word “temptation” a relevant category of Enxet thought. Money is then conceptualized as “tempting” as it could endanger the tranquillity of community life.

Cooperative stores – like private shops – are often a failure in indigenous communities. Analysing the bankruptcy of a few cooperatives in a nearby Ishir community, Blaser argues that it originated in the loans that the indigenous treasurers of the cooperative granted to their next of kin. It was in fact considered unacceptable for the workers of the cooperative store, to refuse food to their kin. This can explain why there are no shops in any Maskoy community, even if teachers have the possibility to buy and sell food. Antonia, the teacher of Castilla, opened a small grocery shop in her house a few years ago, but she had to shut it down because of people’s gossip in the community. People started complaining that she was raising the prices in order to increase her benefit (even if, according to her, that was not true) and she decide to lead a peaceful life and stop the business.

But the concern of the Maskoy leaders with the cooperative in Pueblito was not only a matter of restricting loans in the communities. Their thoughts were focused on the very materiality of money, and its capacity to generate desires of possession. This emerges in my second example.

The negative value attached to money became evident to me while filming during fieldwork. As I was interested in the circulation of money within the community, I was trying to film the money bets involved in the football and volleyball games, but with little success. As soon as I approached the money with my camera, it quickly disappeared, and people tended to get a bit nervous. I was not sure about my personal interpretation of the events, about mistaking my uneasiness with theirs, until the visit by the Mayor of Puerto

Casado to the community I was living in at that time, which changed my awareness of things.

It was a few months before the internal elections of the Colorado Party, and the Mayor was there to promote some of the candidates. When the leader asked for money to distribute to the members of the community, “so that they could bet during the foot and volleyball matches”, the Mayor took some money out of his pocket and gave it to the leader in front of the whole community. The money was then distributed amongst all its adult members. I thought the occasion had finally come to film money, and at some point I even attempted a close-up shot of this. At that point Antonia, who was sitting next to the money, shouted “Money! No! No! No!”, and with a nervous laugh stood up and ran away. To calm the situation, I made jokes about her second identity as a Colorado politician and I moved back to provide some distance.

[DVD 1 – Clip 8: Money no!]

It would be possible to argue that money coming from politicians is valued differently than money coming from other sources (i.e. money earned at work); but the tempting nature of money seems to act independently from its sources of origin. The disruptive power of money also emerged in fact when talking about shamans. Shamans are potentially dangerous people, as they can use their power in positive (to heal) or negative ways (to provoke illness). And this is why the majority of shamans live far from the centre of the community, at least in recent times. According to different conversations I had, the biggest danger posed by shamans is when they become envious about something. If they see something they like but cannot have it, for example, they could provoke illnesses in the owner of the desired things. This is particularly true for money, and the power of money to induce desire in people is recognised by many. “If the shaman sees that a person has got money” – someone from Castilla told me – “and she/he wants it, then that person is going to be in trouble”. Money acts on people, provoking uncontrolled desires.

Like all dangerous things, the desire to touch money often emerges as a negative feature in people’s narratives. An example of this is the selling of the cows that took place as part of a community project in Castilla [see also Chapter 2]. The *Vicariato Apostolico*, after a round of consultations, had decided in 2001 to give one milking cow to each family of the

community of Castilla, and a couple of bulls to grant their reproduction. The idea was that each newborn would be given to the remaining communities. To maintain control of the situation, the local priest retained the property documents of the cows, so that they could not be sold legally. By the time I arrived in the community of Castilla, however, there was just one surviving cow that died a few months after I arrived having been bitten by a snake whilst wandering in the forest. Most of the cows had been sold without their legal documents for a ridiculous price. Some of them were sold to finance a ritual dance (*Baile Kuña*), and others to send children to a full time secondary school. As the old leader tried to prevent the people from selling their cows, he was accused of appropriating donations for the community and removed from his position. The “project stakeholders” knew that their actions would be reproached by Church representatives, who would discontinue their support. Despite this, they had no qualms about selling the cattle. Someone complained to me that the cows had been “abandoned” in the community by the priests, without any clear instruction on how to deal with them. The Maskoy director of the school had her own opinion however, and she told me that the majority of the people sold their cows for a precise reason: they wanted to touch money. The sensorial act of touching the Whites’ money can be described as a mimetic activity itself, and we can for example compare it to Cominglez’s description of the sharing of the wine or the “stealing” of his possessions as soon as he arrives in an indigenous settlement (see chapter 1 for a description of both episodes).

The materiality of money keeps demanding attention. It is true, in fact, that we can associate the negative value of money with its use in politics, but the desire of touching money that is evoked in the explanation about the selling of the cows seems to refer to an intrinsic tempting nature, a power that money holds in itself.

In the prologue to the second chapter, I have analysed how NGOs also identified money to be one of reasons for the failure of indigenous organisations. One possible solution was to hide money transactions in the relationship between NGOs and the organisations. NGOs would have functioned as buffer institutions that aimed at regulating the access of indigenous representatives to money<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> In the same way that INDI had to work as a buffer institution in the relationship between indigenous people and the State.



Other aspects of its very materiality have to be kept in mind however: its size, durability, and the possibility of hiding it.

### Hiding money

In Puerto Casado, the political debate was focused on the quantity of money given, stolen and received by politicians. The fact that it was nearly impossible to get access to governmental budgets and expenses, made the gossip around money even more imaginative. Don S., a Paraguayan man from Puerto Casado in his forties, used to complain to me that before getting into politics he was a quite wealthy man, but he could never recover from the monetary loss he had suffered during the electoral campaign six years ago. Even though he had been elected *consejal departamental* (regional counsellor), he was “too honest” to recover the money he had previously invested. The regular salary of a *consejal departamental* was not enough to cover the losses of the pre-electoral campaign, and he finished his mandate poorer than he was before. He did not give up however, and he thought that if he had been elected a second time he would have managed to succeed. He used to think about politics in terms of an economic investment:

Don S. calculates that in order to become Governor you need 500.000 millions of Guaranies. It means 400.000 Gs per inhabitant in order to buy the vote. But once you have been elected Governor, you would earn 9.000.000 Gs per month and you could find some foreign investor to make more money. (Field notes)

His calculations used to take into account the differences between indigenous people and Paraguayans, as the vote of the latter is considered to be more expensive:

When I tell him that the Maskoy were bought with 50.000 Gs, he answers that even if the Indians were happy with that amount of money, the Paraguayans would probably demand much more. His wife added that you could even buy the vote of the Indians with food.

The Governor of Alto Paraguay, Erasmo, was particularly famous for his apparitions linked to money-giving. He was often spotted in some corner of Puerto Casado giving out money to potential voters. As his visits to Casado were so publicly linked to the distribution of money, he would usually secretly leave one day before the date he said he would in order to escape excessive money requests.

This informal money giving was reproduced even in cases of open political and economical support by a group of people. I shall explain myself better. When the indigenous and non-indigenous population of Casado decided to march to the capital town in order to expropriate 50.000 has. of land from the Moon Sect, they were supported by members of the Colorado party. Apart from declaring their support to the claim, the Colorado Party helped the people obtain money and food in order to “resist” in the capital city. The money of the Colorado politicians was received by the Paraguayan leaders in cash and in private meetings, but never in public events.

There is a meeting in the metropolitan seminar. While we wait for people to come, the president of the pro-land committee says that the director of ITAIPU [the national hydroelectric dam] gave him 2.000.000 Gs. He takes the money out of his pocket and counts it for a while. Rene, at his side, is also mouthing while he counts the money. Then, before finishing, Francisco put the money back in his pocket. He says that he’s going to use the money to buy meat for the people. At the end of the meeting, his secretary tells me that the director of ITAIPU gave blankets to the people. He doesn’t mention the money anymore. (Fieldnotes – July 2007]

As a general rule, politicians prefer to give money to a few leaders rather than to many people. The leaders are supposed to redistribute the money, but little control can be exerted on their behaviour. On the contrary, the secrecy of the transaction seems functional to the creation of tension between the leaders and their bases. The fact that politicians publicly declare (or spread the word) that they have given money to some leader without saying the exact amount, allows a chain of gossip and mistrust. The great disparity of money between politicians and ordinary people creates a situation in which any politician is considered capable of corrupting any citizen if they wanted to. When some of the families decided to leave the capital city and go back to Puerto Casado after the march, for example, they were immediately labelled as having “been bought” by the Moon Sect. People would start “seeing” members of these families passing large banknotes to one another; these sudden appearances of money demonstrated their bad intentions.

Maskoy people are usually left on the margins of big monetary transactions. In the case of the march to the capital city, for example, they held no positions of leadership. In a paradoxical way, they have learned that in order to be respected by the Paraguayans and not be treated as the dupes of the situation, they need to get money from politicians.

During the last national elections, in 2008, Maskoy people's struggle for dignity in Puerto Casado was about receiving the same quantity of money as Paraguayans did.

With the passing of time, I learnt to disappear with my camera whenever I sensed some money transaction was going to happen between Maskoy representatives and politicians, especially at the end of a political meeting between leaders and politicians in the capital city. Towards the end of my fieldwork I managed to convince local politicians that I was filming without any journalistic purpose, and people were so used to my presence that I was finally able to film some distribution of money [see film]. In some way, I got caught up in my own obsession to film what had to be kept invisible: money. As if to unveil the optical unconscious (Taussig 1993), not of individuals, but of society, I wanted to film money and overcome the ambiguousness of its presence.

Money is trapped in a contradiction. On one hand, because of its tempting nature, it needs to be kept invisible, hidden from the eyes of the majority. On the other hand, it is precisely this invisibility that makes money dangerous, and its effects uncontrollable. I would argue that both the pressure exerted over politicians to distribute the money in the central plaza of the community (as analysed in chapter 2), and the circulation of money in football and volley games, are mechanisms that Maskoy people have adopted in order to socialise money and reduce its negative power.

We should try to analyse why there is an obligation to bet with money (when money is available), and why is money considered the most precious possession. A possible answer could be given by looking once again at the political context. During the last elections in Puerto Casado, as I have just noted, the struggle for dignity of Maskoy people was mostly based on obtaining the same quantity of money that Paraguayans received. Maskoy people were aware that if they accepted food in return for their votes this would confirm Paraguayan stereotypes that depicted them as ignorant and animal-like because 'they contented themselves with food'.

### 3.4 The betting system as strategy of visibilisation

Let us go back to the Mayor and his money distribution practices. In the summer of 2007, the Mayor was promoting the Governor and a Colorado deputy for the internal elections of the Colorado party. Apart from giving money to the leaders in the communities, he was also giving smaller quantities of money to particular individuals who dared to ask him, but only if no one else was around (except for me, as I was on the back of his car). What is relevant for my argument is that as soon as the Mayor visited the communities, and was distributing money, football matches began to be organised. I will describe, once again, what happened in the community of Castilla (this episode is also present in the film).

September 2007. The Mayor “visited” the community of Castilla and then left for the next community. Once the Mayor had left, people started discussing about what to do with the money. He had left 150.000 Gs for the women and 150.000 Gs for men. The women decided to change a banknote of 50.000 Gs into 1.000 Gs, in order to distribute one bank note each and play volley. They then discussed what to do with the rest of the money (100.000 Gs), and finally decided to buy food. One of the women expressed the concern that the men too would have taken profit from the food. Her concern was shared by all the women, who agreed to ask men for 100.000 Gs, and buy food all together. The plan was frustrated by the fact that men had already started playing football, betting more than 50.000 Gs, and the situation was left suspended.

I would like to focus the attention here towards the “visibility” of activities connected to volleyball and football matches, and their ability to invoke the presence of things. The matches, in fact, are performed in the central plaza, and the bets are visible to everybody.

The idea that visibility can be associated with a specific place, where it holds a positive value in itself, has been analyzed by Ewart with respect to the Paraná people of central Brasil. According to the anthropologist, the concept of ‘visibility’ is associated with that of ‘social availability’ and “activities that are visible to all, are considered to be really beautiful” (Ewart 2006 - paper for the Ethnicity and Identity Seminar, Oxford). It is the centre of the community, in particular, where the visibility of something is enhanced and valued. Invisibility, on the other side, is related to a-sociality. On an ontological level, “the invisible domain is considered to be the domain of witches, and non-humans”. On a mundane one,

on the other hand, there is a tendency to hide things (especially food) in order to prevent them from being shared.

Ewart's analysis is inspiring with respect to the Maskoy context for several reasons: particular care is taken in the community to keep the central square clean and beautiful [see also (Grant 2006) for this point]; all community events happen there; and evil spirits never appear in the central plaza, but always on the periphery of the community or in the woods. It is worth mentioning, moreover, that both the masked men and the initiated girl of *Baile Kuña* get dressed in a temporary house that is built on the periphery of the central plaza (it used to be in the woods). What is made visible to everybody is the performance in the centre of the community where they appear as already transformed. The centre is then configured as a space where people see what ought to be seen.

Let us remember the efforts of Maskoy people to force politicians to distribute money in the centre of the community, where transactions are visible for everybody. Let us also remember the tendency – common to politicians and Maskoy people – to hide money, to avoid bringing it to the community. On the other hand, the gambling that happens in football and volleyball games keeps money in a state of public visibility. The positive value associated with the visibility of money has thus to be understood in relation to anti-social practices and desires which are associated with its concealability. The centre of the community works as a space of visibilisation (and materialisation, which involve the possibility of touching) of objects of desire.

Even considering the uselessness of asking someone, in a society where betting is a collectively shared practice, why they bet (switching from an etic to an emic perspective), I think it is still legitimate to consider why people are willing to lose their most precious possessions. In other words: what is that they gain through the very act of doing it.

According to Carsten, Malay women have the ability to “purify” money and that is why money is handed on to them by men. Men earn money in activities associated to inequality and competition, whilst women's activities are framed inside the morally positive values of the Malay house, Malay kinship and Malay community (Carsten 1989). The purification of money (its “laundering”) through its incorporation in a ritual context is also described by

Toren with respect to a Fijian population (Toren 1989). In both these cases, money is considered threatening because it is not creative of social ties, but rather disrupting of them (for example, through competitiveness). By making money visible and touchable during football and volleyball matches, people partially satisfy a desire for money that is considered equally dangerous for the maintenance of peaceful relationships. This is not only the case between kin but also between indigenous people and white people, as we have seen in the case of the missionaries' cows.

In the prologue, I have defined 'visualism' as a ranking of the sense which privileges sight as the organ of truth. In this case, on the other hand, the value accorded to 'the visual' is rather interpreted as enabling sociality. As Ingold has pointed out, it is not just a predominance of vision which characterises a certain 'modern project of objectification', but a predominance of that kind of vision which is supported by a rationalising gaze:

Evidently, the primacy of vision cannot be held to account for the objectification of the world. Rather the reverse; it is through its co-option in the service of a peculiarly modern project of objectification that vision has been reduced to a faculty of pure, disinterested reflection, whose role is merely to deliver up "things" to a transcendent consciousness (Ingold 2004: 253).

The kind of vision that is enhanced in the centre of the communities, is a vision that is not detached from the other senses, it is not privileged, but rather entangled in the practice of touching and sharing, that Taussig saw as intrinsically linked to the mimetic faculty. Through the football and volleyball games, money is sensually experienced in its materiality. It is both seen and touched. It is temporarily pooled inside the social and visible space of the central square. And this social immersion in money's materiality is done in a context where money is subtracted from its rational (non-constitutive of kinship) use in working relationships. At the same time, it is subtracted from the missionaries' rationalizing gaze. The fact that it is visually overtaken by the performance of sports, in fact, conceals it to the eyes of people external to the community.

At the same time, circulating through the betting system, money is subtracted from the market logic: it is through playing well and being lucky that people 'earn money'.

It is interesting here to contrast the missionaries' ideas about the immorality of gambling on the one hand, and its morally positive evaluation inside Maskoy communities, on the other. It is part of the missionaries' task in fact to teach indigenous people the proper use of money, as if an improper use could damage the symbolic universe in which money is embedded. At the same time, by betting whilst playing football, Maskoy people create a contradictory situation for the missionaries.

The fact that Maskoy people gamble with money is often described as a "funny thing" on the part of Paraguayans (Paraguayans, in fact, usually gamble with beer). This "laugh" is symptomatic of a conceptualisation of money as belonging to a different context: that of working relationships and market exchange. At the same time, the concealment of money from Paraguayans' gaze is part of the construction of indigenous identity as "poor people", an identity both rejected and assumed as part of the relationship with White people. As Antonia, the teacher of Castilla, told me once: it is better for indigenous people not to show their money, or Paraguayans will mock them when they say they are poor.

### Conclusions

A highly complicated network of meanings is interwoven in Castilla's football and volleyball matches. The mimetic (or globalising, if we want to follow Rollason's suggestion) power of football is at the same time strengthening alliances with the surrounding society, and "cannibalising" the Other through the temporary adoption of its outer form. Contemporary to this, other mimetic activities go on during the matches: highly valued objects of desire are made visible and socialised in the public space of the central plaza. We can consider money, in fact, one of the possessions par excellence of White people.

I can now return to the basic questions that this chapter has posed. How can we fit, in this description of the events, the missionaries' own efforts of civilising Maskoy people through the Salesian method of cinema, football and singing? I have argued throughout that the centrality of football and volleyball matches in the Maskoy communities is not an index of "lost identity". At the same time, however, we cannot argue that Maskoy people have adopted these activities only because of the missionaries' imposition; in fact, as we have seen, they have adopted them for a variety of reasons. According to Albert, "it is time to

get rid of the notion of *resistance*, first of all because it seems to confer reality to its opposite, the assumption of a supposed *cultural submission*” (Albert 2002: 15 - my translation). Challenging the notion of resistance, mimesis opens a space of encounter which allows transformation. I have argued that precisely because of the visualist bias of modern culture, the mimetic faculty<sup>85</sup> is enhanced in the encounter between indigenous and non-indigenous people, becoming a central category of analysis.

What is sometimes interpreted as a “loss of identity” on the part of dominant society in Paraguay, can thus be interpreted as the outcome of a mimetic strategy that finds in Amerindian ontologies its theoretical justification<sup>86</sup>.

The definition of mimetic faculty as a peculiar ‘way of knowing’, as has been used in this chapter, is an articulation of Taussig’s more comprehensive definition (Taussig 1993). I assumed in fact that the mimetic (and embodied) copy of the Other is performed in contexts where borders are kept, even if on a different level (the ritual/playing ground; sensorial borders). In this way, it is at least possible to think that the transformation can be controlled.

Apparently a copy of the Paraguayan ones, the centre (the main plaza) of indigenous communities are spaces where indigenous identity is transformed, and the Other domesticated, whilst fooling the modern gaze and its ‘visualist tendencies’. However, in a paradoxical way, the mimesis of Paraguayans ends up in the latter’s reproach of the mimetic act: Why is it that indigenous people have so much time to play? Why is it that they do not work?

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<sup>85</sup> I am referring here in particular to that specific aspect of the mimetic faculty which is performed through the copying of the outer form of something.

<sup>86</sup> The so-called ‘inauthentic’ indigenous culture can also be interpreted in light of the use of the mimetic faculty. In effect, indigenous people are mimicking the modern desire of savagery in the Other.



## Chapter 4 – Prologue

### The quest for collaboration

When I arrived in Paraguay in June 2007 my aim was to set up a collaborative film project with Maskoy communities. In doing that, I was inspired by projects such as the Brazilian “Video in the Villages” (Aufderheide 1995) and the Kayapo Video Project (Turner 2006). In particular, I was interested in the empowering aspect of the process, as Turner explained that “one of the purposes of the Project was to develop the Kayapo’s ability to objectify their own culture and their response to coexistence with the alien national culture in terms they could control, employing their own categories of representation and construction of social reality” (Turner 2006: 20). The same point has been made by Ginsburg with respect to the Australian Aboriginal context (Ginsburg 1991). The adoption of video technology by indigenous people was finally recognised worldwide in 2001-2002, when ‘Atanarjuat’, a film by the Inuit Igloolik Isuma Productions, won several prizes in international film festivals (Bessire 2003).

In my case the collaborative project ended up being an unaccomplished task. In the prologue to the second chapter I mentioned how I underestimated the difficulties of engaging in a balanced dialogue with my Maskoy collaborators. Even though I never imposed the filmmaking process in the community, allowing the settlers themselves to decide about supporting my project in a communal meeting, the following events were not exactly as I anticipated. The video project never became “collaborative”, meaning that people never assumed - as in the Kayapo case - the decisions over what and how to film. The leader of the community was the only exception, as he saw an opportunity to produce an alternative video about traditional dancing to that of the local priest, who is a passionate filmmaker. The following is a brief overview of what my project ended up becoming.

One of the first steps in the collaborative process was initially facilitated by a fortunate coincidence. In October 2007 a friend informed me that CEFREC<sup>87</sup>, a Bolivian NGO, was organising a workshop in Filadelfia, a small town located in the Paraguayan central Chaco.

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<sup>87</sup> <http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/eng/rose/cefrec.htm#open>

The aim of the workshop was to teach indigenous people how to use a camera, and the instructors were professional indigenous filmmakers from different South America countries. I went to Filadelfia and asked the Paraguayan organisers if a Maskoy representative could participate in the event and received a positive response. I then organised a meeting in Castilla in order to discuss the topic. Representatives from other communities were also invited, and as a result a young man (E) from the neighbouring community was chosen to attend the workshop.

In October 2007, I accompanied E. to Filadelfia. Even though the workshop was restricted to indigenous people, I asked if I could participate in it. The Bolivian instructors were particularly diffident about my role as anthropologist, and they immediately questioned me: "Have you come here to observe and study us?". The relationship between indigenous people and anthropologists was clearly tense in Bolivia. However, I am happy to say that after fifteen days this issue was resolved and although I am not able to convey the amazing experience of those fifteen days, I will just say that E. was very talented. The leader of the community asked us to film a ritual (*Baile Kuña*) in one of the Maskoy communities in January 2008, but E. unfortunately decided to enrol in the army and disappeared from territory Riacho Mosquito for more than one year.

After E. left, another young man from Pueblito asked me if I could teach him to use the camera and I did it with dedication. My teaching wasn't successful enough and M. was quite distracted as the use of the camera enhanced the attraction of his female coevals, which contributed to drawing our collaboration to a close. Nevertheless, M. was really interested in holding a radio programme about "indigenous culture" on Puerto Casado parish radio. In order to make interviews, I bought him a voice recorder, but he also used it with a creative twist. His father, an ex-factory worker, was one of the few indigenous men to receive a regular pension from the State. Everyone in town knew, however, that the State functionary in charge of distributing the pension was retaining a part of the money every month. M. secretly recorded a Paraguayan shop owner gossiping about the fact with his father. He then visited the guilty State functionary and made her listen to the shop owner's opinions about her. She initially insulted M. and told him to disappear from Puerto Casado, but finally agreed to handover the correct amount of money every month. The use of technology was taking paths I had never suspected, but in this case the camera was too visible to serve its function.

To enhance the collaborative aspect of the film making, I screened sections of my footage in Castilla and also left DVD copies. When I screened *Baile Kuña* (filmed in January 2007), in the community where it was shot, some women came and thanked me for filming the ritual. The audience looked very happy, and I felt really motivated for the first time about what I was doing [I have included in the thesis, for reasons of documentation, a non-edited version of the ritual: see DVD 2]. After the screening, some people suggested that I film closer to the dancers, probably to have a better view of *kambas'* movements and their body painting and adornments. In fact people invested a lot of attention on these features, and watched the same two hour video several times without getting bored. For this reason, when I filmed *Baile Kuña* again in September 2007, I filmed closer to people and I finally edited a version of the video for the community with lots of details and dancing, but no explanations. This was my most successful film in the Maskoy communities.

When I went back to Castilla, in June 2008, I also screened a first draft of *Casado's Legacy* [DVD 3], but people didn't manifest a great interest. Even the encounters with politicians, which were considered interesting immediately after the filming, didn't seem to interest the people one year later. The only moments that seemed to engage the audience were the humorous ones: when the child says that he is feeding his little bird with meat; when a woman from Castilla argues that they shouldn't buy food with the money left by the major, as the men would have profited without collaborating; when a woman hits the *kamba* during a ritual; and when another woman says "you shut up, you're not women" to the children, just before painting the Queen. In all these situations, that were also funny to me, people would laugh loudly. Where as children really appreciated the eel hunting scene, maybe because they had never seen their mothers hunting before.

In August 2008 I proposed to screen a short version of the video of *Baile Kuña* (the one filmed in September 2007) in the capital city and people from my community enthusiastically agreed. When the Maskoy representatives arrived in the capital city, however, there was a discussion in my house about the legitimacy of showing the ritual to the Paraguayan audience. According to the elders, it is dangerous to play certain music outside the ritual space-time of a ceremony. The issue was resolved by saying that the video was showing an image (*ta'anga* in Guaraní) of the singing, and not the proper singing itself.

The world *ta'anga* is used by Maskoy people to refer to photographs, but also to spirits (*bicho ta'anga*) that look like proper wild animals. Moreover, the same word is used by children to name the clay or wood (*kuña ta'anga*<sup>88</sup>: the image of a woman) figurines that they play with. The meaning of the word “image” is not restricted to the external appearance of something, but to its materiality. It does not refer, for example, to the content of the photograph, but to the photograph and the content together. Similarly the film, in its materiality, was an image of the ritual, even though in substance it was not the ritual itself. Therefore it was possible to screen it in the capital city. To which substance were Maskoy people referring? I can infer it was the link with the spiritual world that wasn't working as the singing was not evoking the presence of any spiritual being. It was pure, empty, form.

During the ritual of September 2007 (see *Casado's Legacy*), the visit of the secretary of education of the local government created a similar problem inside the community. (I have already mentioned his visit in the prologue to the first chapter.) After showing his initial surprise for the unique event, the secretary proposed to repeat the ritual a week later on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September during the visit of the Minister of Education. The following day, the topic was discussed in the community of Castilla. It was a critical decision because the elders had always emphasised that rituals are delicate (*belicado* in Maskoy Guarani), and that they could harm the people if performed partially or incorrectly. Despite this, people suggested to dress up one single man as *kamba*, and make him dance in front of the Minister. Also in this case, the *kamba* was probably conceived – as in the film - only an image of the real *kamba*.

Other issues appeared to be problematic during the filming of the ritual. I was concerned, for example, with the fact that women and children weren't normally allowed to be present during the painting of the *kamba*<sup>89</sup>. My presence as filmmaker on the other hand, allowed them to see the whole process during the screening. But no one, apart from me, seemed to be bothered by this. Conversely, people even pushed me to film the moment of the painting and really enjoyed that part of the documentary. The leader of Machete Vaina, for example, one of the men who is painted in the film, screened the video several times in his community.

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<sup>88</sup> This is the expression they use in the film.

<sup>89</sup> Deger describes a situation, amongst Australian aborigines, where rituals weren't filmed because not everyone was allowed to see them.

The problems I faced during the film-making process are very much related to the ones analysed in the Faris-Turner debate (Boyer 2006). At the centre of the debate is the discussion about the consequences of the promotion and adoption of video technology in indigenous communities. According to Turner, as Boyer points out, the absence of video cameras in indigenous communities is an historical issue: video technology is not present in indigenous societies because people didn't have the necessary skills in order to invent it. But as with any other technology, they are perfectly able to use it in order to empower themselves. On the other hand, Faris argues that anthropologists' enthusiasm about the use of cameras in indigenous communities, is motivated by the formers' desire to 'consume the Other'. The fact that images are produced by the natives is only apparently empowering, because their images are produced once again for the anthropologist's gaze. The vulnerability of the natives, and their impossibility to escape to the Western eye, are to focus of Faris critique. He argues in fact in his article that "there has never been, to my knowledge, a film of them by them (or by us) for them" (Faris 1992: 174). Faris's analysis, though, does not contemplate the possibility of making videos for White people, while challenging at the same time their interpretations. A further criticism is offered by Weiner (Weiner 1997), who writes that "the promoter of indigenous video insist that such people should have the power to produce their own images of their own society and culture. The implication, of course, is that this culture and society already exist as knowable entities" (Ibid.: 204). On the contrary, as Weiner emphasises, filming is an act itself constitutive of reality, and a particular (non-native) ontology is deployed in this construction of the world. In particular, he raises the issue of the dichotomy between making visible and concealing as part of a metaphysic of representation, and he asks how this dichotomy can be performed in films. In his words: "What Ginsburg and others fail to do, is distinguish between the representation of relations and a relation to representative praxis (Ibid.: 202).

Even if I agree with Boyer that Weiner and Faris' positions imply a portrayal of indigenous people as passive receivers, I think it's important to consider their concerns about the modality of the empowering process. Let's think, for example, about Poole's analysis of the way by which the circulation of photographs enhanced the conceptualisation of the Other's difference in terms of skin colour. Culture's visible features seem to be emphasised by the use of video technology. If Viveiros de Castro is right when he writes that "[amongst the Arawete] very little of what really matters is visible; the essential takes place on another stage" (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 2), how can we use filmed images to portray indigenous lifeworlds? In 'Shimmering screens', Deger describes her collaboration with an Aboriginal

filmmaker, Bangana, in the making of a film about aboriginal society (Deger 2006). Bangana's desire is precisely that of evoking, through the film, an experience of the sacred – invisible – world in the viewers. He does it by focusing on a sacred river, and taking advantage of the aesthetic qualities of 'shimmering' water, an idiom (shimmering) frequently used in order to describe the sacra (Ibid.: 190-191). "It is precisely the invisible significances and connections that Gularri [the film] mimetically evokes that give it depth and resonance" (Ibid.: 189). The allusive, ambiguous character of images is used in the film to call into presence 'the invisible' without forcing its visibility.

It is interesting to notice how Deger's collaborative process achieved the opposite of my own: the Maskoy leaders gathered in my house in August 2008 decided that the film was just an image (*ta'anga*), a disembodied form which had lost its links with the sacred. The film was reduced to a portrayal of a playful atmosphere, and a register of figures and movements. It wasn't thought to enhance a sacred presence. Different authors have underlined how the act of seeing is a sensual act, which calls into question a bodily reaction (MacDougall 2006). In the leaders' view, however, the act of seeing a boy being painted didn't bear the same intensity of being painted in a certain ritual context. It didn't enhance a transformation. Just like the singing that takes place in a film, it didn't imply the calling into presence of spiritual beings.

It is clear, however, that it's not possible to give a unique answer to the ontological dilemma about the possibility of visualising the spiritual world, precisely because there is not one universally shared ontology. Also for this reason, it's not possible to identify in the use of video technology the best empowering media for any context. Hugh-Jones has recently suggested that the appropriation of print technology (books) rather than videos (or other media), on the part of some Amazonian groups, depends on the way in which knowledge is locally performed (CLACS seminar, University of Manchester, February 2008). Following this argument, we could say that video media can be an empowering tool in certain contexts, and not in others.

During the filming of the Maskoy ritual, even though I was holding the camera, the 'objects' of my filming began getting control over the situation. It is true, for instance, that people gradually started to guide me as to what and when to film. I remember, for example, that while the *kamba* were playing football, I was exhausted and trying to rest in my

hammock. Nevertheless I was awoken and gently forced to go and film because the people really liked the scene. It was a really innovative moment, as it was the first time that the *kamba* had played football.

The video of *Baile Kuña* was screened at the AIP (Asociación Indigenista de Paraguay; cf. Chapter 3) on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June of 2008 [the video, with Spanish subtitles, has been enclosed in the thesis for reasons of documentation. See: 'Baile Kuña\_September 2007' in DVD 1]. Together with me and one of the lawyers who fought with the Maskoy during the struggle for land of the 1980s four Maskoy representatives presented the film. After the screening, the president of AIP, the host of the event, publically asked me for a copy of the material. A moment of silence was broken by Angel Martinez, the leader of Castilla, who took control of the situation and answered for me. He explained that just as I had asked permission before filming, he too had to ask them (and not me) for permission in order to have a copy of it. The film was not mine anymore. Angel's response re-established a balance that had been endangered by the presenter's attitude, but his answer opened a controversial debate, and people articulated a set of different concerns about the issue: that the leader didn't respect my agency in the work, and that the indigenist "friends" of the Maskoy should be granted access to the material without having to ask permission. On the other hand, I interpreted Angel's reaction as contextual to that moment. In fact, the president of AIP was treating me as the protagonist of the night, therefore reducing the Maskoy representatives to a kind of decorative element.

Nevertheless, I have finally decided to include the less collaborative of my footage, as my aim is not to analyse the use of video on the part of Maskoy people, but to transmit my own insight about the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Puerto Casado. When I screened the first draft of the film to some friends and colleagues, I was surprised with the reactions to the film. Some interpreted Maskoy people as "beggars". They were particularly impressed by the scene when people from Castilla are "bullying" the Mayor in order to receive more money. Someone suggested that it was probably the contrast between the poor clothes of the Maskoy against the well-dressed Mayor that contributed to the impression of begging. However another colleague proposed that the remissive body language of the Maskoy also exaggerated this impression. Despite my will, the images of the film conjure an image of Maskoy people as victims. I hope that at this

point the written part of the thesis will be able to influence the White spectator's gaze, and show agency where others might see submission.



## Chapter 4 – Casado’s Legacy

### [DVD 3]

#### Summary of the content:

For 100 years Maskoy people worked in Carlos Casado’s tannin factory. The factory, which had been founded on their land, based its production on the exploitation of local natural resources. After exploiting the territory, the company closed the factory and sold the land. For Maskoy people who fought against the company to repossess their former territory, Casado’s legacy is a land without food. On this land, they have to rebuild their life, and in doing so, have to come to terms with their past and their dreams.

#### Notes:

The material used in the film was shot from December 2006 to September 2007, and then again from June 2008 to July 2008. Even if the content of the film wasn’t planned from the beginning, I have always focused my shooting on the moments of interaction between Maskoy and Paraguayan people. During my second visit to Castilla, in June 2008, I asked the same question to different settlers, a question that took me one year, despite its simplicity, to formulate: “Why is it that Maskoy people need to ask politicians for food, in order to perform their rituals?”. The majority of the people, however, seemed to assume that people asked politicians for food because it was their task to provide food for the rituals (in a kind of circular reasoning). The only people who gave an alternative and articulated answer were Escalante and his wife Vicenta, and I have included it in the film [the child who appears during the interview is actually the same child who appears in the first interview with Escalante included in the film, even if she is one year older]. At that point, the idiom of ‘food’ became the lens through which to analyse the consequences of the work in the factory, and the relationship with politicians.

## Conclusions

Unruh and Kalisch are two intellectuals who have been writing over the last decade about the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Paraguay. In order to better understand their location inside the national context, I will give a brief description of them made by another Paraguayan who was living for a while in the central Chaco:

Of German origins, Hannes Kalisch is a member of an Enlhet indigenous community located in the Paraguayan Chaco. Since this group adopted him many years ago and he adopted their way of life, he has been committed to the systematisation of the Enlhet traditional knowledge. Together with his Enlhet father [Ernesto Unruh], he writes analytically about traditional knowledge and the impact of unreflective external intervention.<sup>90</sup>

Even if the description is focused on Kalisch, we get enough information in order to know that the two thinkers are living in the same indigenous community, where Unruh adopted Kalisch as his own son.

In article written by him alone (he usually writes with his father), Kalisch argues that the Enlhet youth is building a “negative identity”, based on a refusal of the old way of being indigenous without appropriating any new one (Kalisch 2000: 37). According to him in fact the Whites have chosen to act as if they were the only holders of truth in setting up the relationship with indigenous people<sup>91</sup>. The belief in a unique truth about the best way of living was unfamiliar to the Enlhet people prior to the arrival of the Whites. Their notion of truth was rather contextual to a specific moment and a specific social and spatial configuration (Kalisch 2000: 75). A similar point was made by Viveiros de Castro when he said that for Amerindian people bodies are not considered to be the same for all human beings, but rather distinguishable in their needs and reactions (quoted by Vilaça 2005). The

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<sup>90</sup> <http://pioneersofchange.net/library/articles/Indigenous%20knowledge.doc>

<sup>91</sup> During the meeting of Barbados II in 1979 indigenous people were accusing their supporters of wanting to speak for them (Hale 1997: 577). At the roots of this behaviour there was probably the assumption, on the part of the supporters, of non-indigenous people's holding the truth for indigenous people.

problem facing Unruh and Kalisch is then to find a way not only to revert indigenous people's self-denigration but also to challenge the Whites' assumption that they are the 'only holders of truth'.

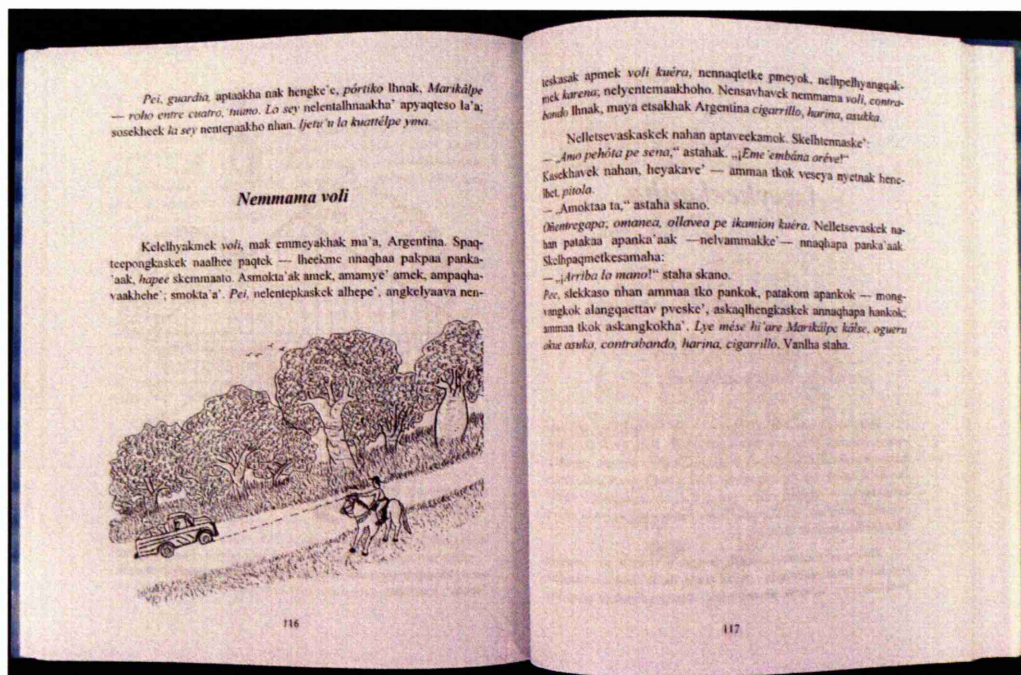
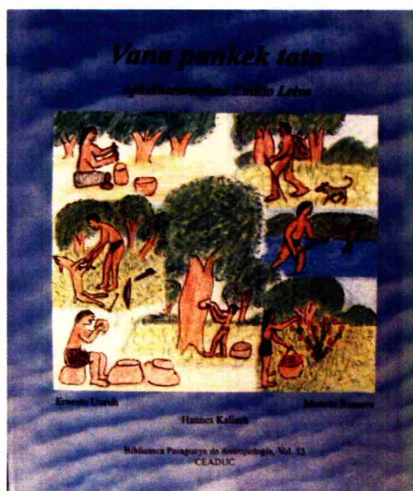
In April 2007, I attended a conference in Asuncion organised by the AIP (Asociación Indigenista del Paraguay: see prologue to chapter 4). The conference was organised to present a book written by Unruh, Kalisch and Romero, three members of the *Nengvaanemquescoma Nempaywaam Enlhet* working group that they had founded a few years before (Unruh et al. 2006). Kalisch and two other Enlhet members of the working group attended the conference in order to present the book.

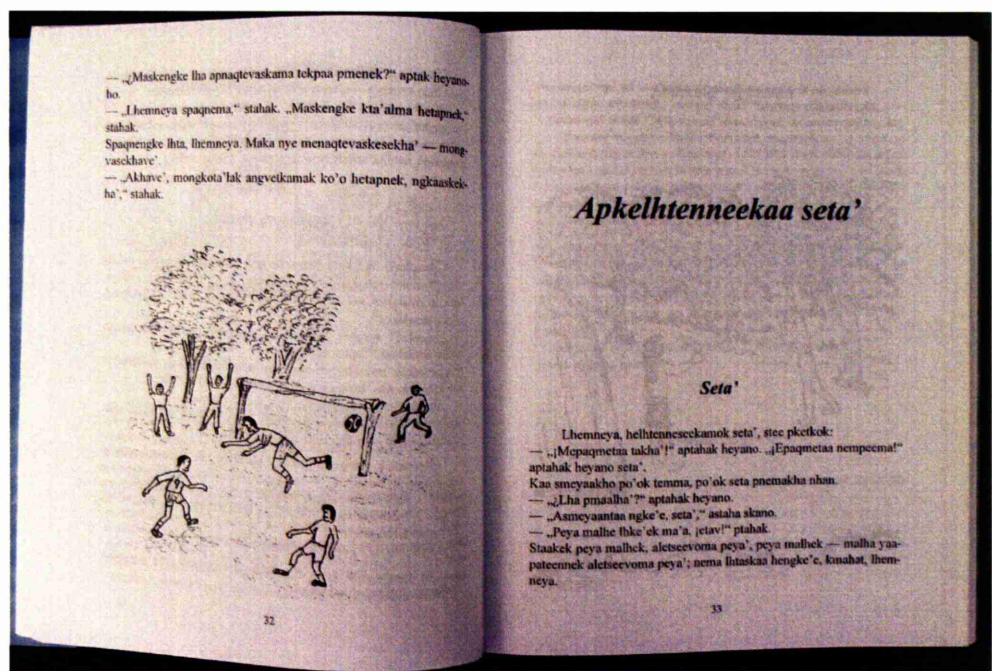
At the beginning of the conference, the president of the AIP took the microphone and started introducing the guests. Undoubtedly the heir of an old indigenist Latin American tradition, he recited a list of studies and publications by Hannes Kalish, formally a linguist, and then added:

...and here he came with his two Indians. And judging from their appearance [they are quite chubby], he gives them lots of food. [Half of the public laughs] [...] [And then, to Kalisch] Congratulations!

After the presentation, Kalisch took the microphone and introduced with a quiet tone the two Enlhet men. He emphasised that they all work together in the same community, where they have founded a working group on the study of Enlhet history. He added that after a long time living in the Enlhet community (about ten years), he started thinking in the local language, and he would like to consider himself an Enlhet person. In what seemed to me "indigenous style", he apparently decided not to confront the presenter, but to answer indirectly. He then introduced the book and said that it contained the memories of one of the last Guana speakers (a language of the Maskoy linguistic family) who had unfortunately recently died. He and the other two members of the working group went on talking about Guana people for a while. The room – a big hall in an ancient building – was packed with people. When he finished speaking, we all rushed outside of the hall in order to buy the book.

I was part of the crowd, and I bought the book. But I soon realised that there was something unsettling in it:





Apart from a few words, the rest of the book is in Guana. There is no translation of any kind, and images are the only legible element of the book.

This is not the first book I've come across in my life that has been written in a foreign language. So why is it so unsettling? As Kalisch has noticed it is the norm in Paraguay that indigenous people have to translate themselves if they want to communicate with the Whites. Communication is always performed by indigenous people in a context where the Other is stronger, because he dominates the language of exchange (Kalisch 2000). White people need little time and skills to believe that “they know indigenous culture”, because indigenous culture is always explained to them in familiar categories. An example of this could be the expression: “indigenous people respect nature”, where the world ‘respect’ gives an impression of familiarity, of shared meanings.

Relying on an analytical use of the mimetic faculty, I will reformulate the situation of encounter between indigenous and non-indigenous people. When a white person meets an indigenous person, she is usually in a situation where the ‘form’ of the Other is different (the external features, the way of dressing), while the content is familiar (the shared language is usually the one of the White interlocutor). What happens with the book *Vana Panek Tata* is exactly the opposite: the form (the book) is familiar, but not the content (the



Guana language). From a white person's point of view, the book is non-sensical. It is made for Paraguayan people, even presented to them in a conference, but it's written in a language unknown to the absolute majority of the audience. It's an un-kept promise of understanding, of domestication of meanings. I've already discussed in the third chapter the mimetic appropriation of the 'external form' of football on the part of Maskoy people. A white person playing in the Maskoy team could be unsettled by the avoidance of aggressiveness on the playing ground<sup>92</sup>. But the situation in this case is even stronger: the book has been presented to the audience as if it had been created for them. In order to have access to the content of the book, however, the reader would need to engage in a relationship with a Guana speaking person (and there are few and they are all elders, Kalisch says), or with the *Nengvaanemquesama Nempayvaam Enlhet* working group itself. Both solutions seemed a bit time demanding to me.

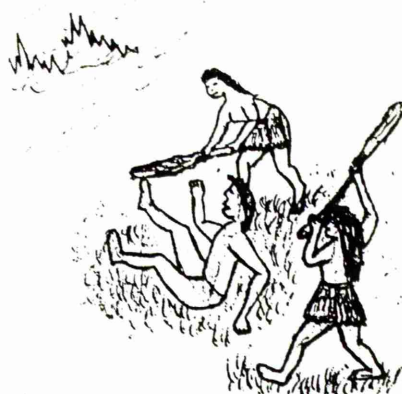
A few months later, I was sitting in the patio of a friend's house in Paraguay, when an Italian anthropology professor – who was a friend of hers – joined us in the conversation. We began talking about the conference I have just described, and we ended up confessing to each other that we had all bought the book (even if I was the only one who had actually attended the conference). Not one of us will probably ever be able to read the book. But we all have it.

*Vana Pankek Tata* – despite its reproducibility – is a magic book. Just like the Cuna's curing figurines – wooden figurines that represent White characters – described by Taussig, its magic relies on both imitation and contact (Taussig 1993: 6). Like Cuna's curing figurines, the outer form of the object imitates the Whites' world, while the substance – in the case of the figurines, the specific wood that is used in order to make them – is indigenous. We could even wonder if also in our case "the magically important thing is the spirit of the wood, not its carved outer form" (Taussig 1993: 136): the Guana language, and not the materiality of the book. But magical for whom? We are not shamans gaining access to a spiritual world by holding the book in our hands. From our point of view, it is the form which is familiar and the content alien. And yet, we bought it. What can we do with this book?

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<sup>92</sup> As it happened, for example, to my boyfriend.

The book leads us into a confrontation with the attitudes we unconsciously adopt when we approach indigenous people. The drawings are all we can try to interpret.



But instead of deciphering them, relying on a quick reading of domesticated concepts placed there to support the visual, we are silenced. The twist is achieved: it is not indigenous people anymore who are silenced by the arrogance of the Whites, but the Whites who are silenced by the opacity of their Other. It is this opacity that the Moon Sect's lawyer that I have quoted in the introduction was not able to see anymore, expressing his opinion that 'Maskoy people had lost their culture'.

I've started this thesis by situating it inside the space of encounter between Maskoy and White people. In the course of the thesis, however, I have rather been describing borders instead of spaces. Places and institutions were in fact always possessed: indigenous communities, Paraguayan politics, Whites' working places, and Maskoy interpretations. The reason behind the sharpness of these distinctions is the colonial matrix of the encounter. As Horst stated with regard to the State, contemporary indigenous identity in Puerto Casado was born and recreated in opposition to the Whites. On the other hand, the way in which these borders were crossed seemed to be different between Maskoy and White people.

Throughout the thesis, I have been outlining a difference between Maskoy and Whites' ontological systems. The use of the term ontology serves the purpose of stressing a radical difference that cannot be reduced to what is commonly ascribed to 'culture', such as different tastes, clothes and ritual practices. The ontological divide, in the contexts analysed in the thesis, can be ascribed to a 'shamanic ontology' based on the existence of a spiritual

world and on a transformative relationship between body and spirit. This way of experiencing the world influences not only the relationship with 'nature', as it is commonly assumed, but also with politics and the State. On the other hand, it is also true that idioms like 'kinship' and 'food exchange', do not only reflect Maskoy's interpretations of reality, but they reflect politics at a local level as described from the point of view of a non-indigenous perspective: they are shared relational idioms. The ontological divide, thus, does not imply absolute incommunicability.

A peculiar modality of encounter, the concept and practice of the mimetic faculty allows the crossing of borders while at the same time emphasising them. In this sense, it is different from what is usually termed 'syncretism'. As argued in chapter 3, it allows thinking beyond the categories of resistance and acculturation, without renouncing to the definition of differences. Not all the contexts of interaction, however, have been explored through their articulation of borders and mimetic practices. I have briefly mentioned in the prologue to the second chapter, for example, the accuracy of indigenous organisations for structures, statutes and definitions. An accuracy that has often provoked my perplexity in the past. An analysis based on the concept of mimesis as mechanism of appropriation could help to reformulate the interaction between indigenous organisations, NGOs and the State. Moreover, despite the second chapter argues for the conceptualisation – on the part of Maskoy people – of a separation between them and the State, Margarita Mbywangi (an Ache woman) is now the president of INDI, a governmental institution.

Another element, to conclude, is missing from the analysis: time. Is *Vana Paneke Tata* a mechanism to slow down the passing of time that is necessary in contemporary Paraguay to engage in a dialogue with indigenous people?



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