América Crítica

América Crítica 4(1), 25–34, 2020, ISSN: 2532-6724, doi: 10.13125/americacritica/3999

When histories and ontologies compose multiples worlds. The past among the Toba people of the Argentinean Chaco

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Received: 31/01/2020
Accepted: 26/02/2020

Abstract —For the Toba people (Qom), an indigenous group of the Argentinean Chaco, the world is composed of a great diversity of entities (human and non-human) that communicate with one another. The ability of communication is rooted in a so distant past. In this paper, we will focus on some stories we were told by elders of Central Chaco. These stories refer to key moments of the conquest, colonization, and current indigenous claims. We are interested in the articulation between historicity and ontology, by showing the reconstruction that the Qom people make of their past is rooted in the idea that society and human history cannot be understood aside from some non-human agencies — *anthropology; history; ethnology; ontology.*

Resumen—Para el pueblo Toba (Qom), un grupo indígena del Chaco argentino, el mundo está compuesto por una gran diversidad de entidades (humanas y no humanas) que se comunican entre sí. La capacidad de comunicación tiene sus raíces en un pasado lejano. En este artículo nos centraremos en algunas historias que nos contaron los ancianos del Chaco Central. Estas historias se refieren a momentos clave de la conquista, la colonización y las reivindicaciones indígenas actuales. Nos interesa la articulación entre la historicidad y la ontología, mostrando cómo la reconstrucción que el pueblo Qom hace de su pasado está enraizada en la idea de que la sociedad y la historia humana no pueden ser entendidas como separadas de algunas agencias no humanas. — *antropología, historia; etnología; ontología.*

Introduction

In the present article, we intend to mingle the Toba (Qom) notions of agency and person with the concern for temporality and the past. From this point of view, an ontological approach could nurture the debates about the ways in which an indigenous group experiences and narrates past events and defines the active agents of change. The ascription of abilities similar to one's own to non-human entities, together with the kind of relationships that the Qom people establish with them lead us, at least, to question our own categories of agency, person, and history upon noticing the limits of these concepts when confronted with different ontological principles that are not governed by the Great Divide. Our selection of stories intends to account for the fact that, in the Chaco region,[1] historicity and agency are human and more-than-human issues.

Over the past decades, some branches of French, Brazilian, English, and American anthropology have become interested in ontologies in an attempt to assert the diversity of ways of composing the world (worlding, *mondier*).[2] The so-called ontological turn in anthropology is inspired, among other things, in Amerindian ontologies such as perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1996) and animism (Descola 1986, 2005).[3] Although this turn comprises a diversity of defini-

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[1] The Gran Chaco is the third greatest biogeographic and morphostructural region in Latin America after the Amazon and the South American Savannah System, and the second in terms of area covered by forests after the Amazon and Pacific tropical rainforests in Colombia and Ecuador. Its more than 1,000,000 km 2 stretch along four countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil) being the area in Argentina the largest (Morello, Rodríguez, and Silva 2009). The Qom or Toba belong – together with other Chaco groups such as the Pilagá and the Mocoví – to the Guaicuruan linguistic family, and constitute one of the largest indigenous societies in the Gran Chaco.

[2] See Descola (2005, 2014), Latour (2012), Holbraad (2007, 2010), Kohn (2015), Keck, Regehr and Walentowits (2015), Horton, among others.

[3] It is not our intention to delve into the differences between the authors grouped under this turn. We are aware of the heated debates between anthropologists of the English, French, and American tradition and even between three of the pillars of this turn: Descola, Ingold, and Viveiros de Castro (see Viveiros de Castro 2009; Descola and Ingold 2014; Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish 2016). The English tradition, greatly influenced by the developments of Viveiros de Castro, emphasizes the methodologi-

tions of ontology, ontological anthropology has a renewed outlook on the relationship between empirical evidence and concepts and on the idea about the existence of a single identical external reality to be represented differently by each culture.[4]

The questioning of the universality of categories and concepts that are at the core of Euro-American thought led most branches of the ontological turn to cast doubt on notions such as politics, agency, and subject. The approaches to ontological conflicts have concentrated mainly on the territorial disputes and misunderstandings that arise when indigenous peoples put forward claims and negotiations to governments and non-governmental organizations (Blaser 2009; Schavelzon 2012; Di Giminiani 2013). However, the 'misunderstandings' or 'uncontrolled equivocations' in the sense given by Blaser to the expression of Viveiros De Castro (2004) also occur in other scenarios where, for example, the indigenous narratives of the past question the supremacy of the historiographic narrative or history of historians' (Lévi-Strauss 1962). This is the theme we have chosen to concentrate on in the present article. Specifically, we try to address the question of agency and temporality by asking ourselves what subjects the Qom people consider that have had an influence on their historical development, from the Conquest of Chaco to the present day, through specific actions and the changes entailed by them. In order to do so, we have selected a series of stories that some adults and elderly Toba people from central Formosa told us, stories which are part of a wider corpus of oral narratives recorded by us.

Lévi-Strauss's reflections on Amerindian history gave rise to quite different readings: some question the formal synchronic analyses of structuralism in order to rethink historical and political action (Hill 1988) while others distance themselves from African-English approaches to time in order to rethink the regimes of historicity developed by the Amerindian peoples themselves. (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007) Research on History-histories, temporality, myth-history, and historicity in native terms began to proliferate in Amerindian anthropology in the 1990s. In particular, the dossier published in *L'Homme* (1993), edited by Philippe Descola and Anne Christine Taylor, is dedicated to the Amazonia, and compiles articles by the most outstanding Americanists who, in Europe, renewed the studies on indigenous societies with great "dynamism" and "theoretical inventiveness" (Descola and Taylor 1993: 22).[5] In the introduction, Descola and Taylor highlight some categories and domains disregarded until then, among which we find the issue of change, no longer thought "from the point of view of ethnocide or acculturation, but from the construction of original forms of ethnicity and political expression" (1993: 21). Particularly, one of the main points of the dossier titled History, histories gathers articles that deal with the incidence of history in the relationship of the indigenous groups with the social and natural environment (1993: 24). This special issue of *L'Homme* accounts for the renewal of Amerindian ethnographic studies and the new approaches to historicity, trans-formation, the relationships between the indigenous peoples and the States, and political economy.

In the Gran Chaco, the anthropological studies that dealt with the issue of history were interested in analysing the influence of capitalism on the indigenous peoples[6] or the history of the interethnic relationships from the perspective of the State and History.[7] Over the past decades, the anthropology of the region has renewed its interest in the historical dimensions of the indigenous societies and in ethnohistorical research,[8] and was also interested in the identity and land claims which accounted for the active role played by the indigenous peoples (see Carrasco 2009; Salamanca 2011).

Likewise, classic and contemporary Chaco ethnography makes reference to non-human entities at various moments and in relation to several practices in the historical development of the region (in wars, the Conquest, evangelization, shamanism, and hunting).[9] However, these studies either ignored the weight of ontology and cosmology in the historical development of the Qom or considered non-human personas as part of the backdrop on which the true protagonists of History (indigenous people, military men, missionaries, and colonizers) carried out their interactions (Tola and Suarez 2016). The narratives that we selected show that, for the Qom, intersubjectivity includes not only human people but several rational and sentient subjects (owners of animals, plants, thunder, lightning, stones, birds, and dead people) that exert influence on them.

AN ONLY-HUMAN HISTORY

As we know from historiography, in 1862 Chaco became part of the national territory and was thus governed from Buenos Aires. General Julio A. Roca consolidated and carried out the project of expansion of the southern border, "liberating" the territories from indigenous control, thus allowing their subsequent colonization. In 1884, President Roca ordered the division of the Governorship into two federal territories separated by the Bermejo River: the national territory of Formosa and the national territory of Chaco. That year marks the beginning of the military campaign known as the Conquest of the

cal dimension of ontologies (see the ontographic method of Holbraad) and their strong political content. The French tradition, on the other hand, is more interested in the elaboration of models of intelligibility of the uses of the world (Descola 2005). Recently, the compilation *Non-human in amerindian South America* as well as the works of Brabec de Mori (2019) invoke debates about ontologies and perspectivism and propose original readings of these approaches.

[4] On conceptual renewal and the notion of worlds rather than representations, see Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007), Viveiros de Castro (2009), Descola (2010), Venkatesan (2010).

[5] All the translations are ours.

[6] See Iñigo Carrera (1979, 1983); Trinchero, Piccinini and Gordillo (1992); Gordillo (2004, 2006); Renshaw (2002).

[7] See Iñigo Carrera (2008); Cardin (2009, 2013).

[8] See Métraux (1946); Cordeu *et al.* (1969-1970); Combès (2005); Write (2008); Ceriani Cernadas (2008a); Richard (2008; 2011); Salamanca (2010); Tola, Medrano and Cardin (**Tola2013a**); Sendón and Villar (2013); Messineo (2014); Córdoba, Bossert and Richard (2015), among others.

[9] See Cordeu (1969-1970); Tomasini (1969-1970, 1978-1979); Miller (1979); Write (2008); Gordillo (2006); Ceriani Cernadas (2008a, 2008b); Citro (2009); López (2007 2013), López and Giménez Benítez (2008, 2009a, 2009b); Medrano (2012); Tola and Suárez (2013), among others.

Chaco Desert led by General Victorica to "pacify" the indigenous peoples of Chaco by attacking them on various fronts. In this context, the army first occupied the territories south of the Bermejo River. The indigenous people who refused to sign a peace treaty moved across the river to the national territory of Formosa, where the war continued.

From then on, the strategy to colonize the conquered territory was to reinforce the military outposts, the punitive expeditions, the religious missions, and the distribution of the conquered lands among the settlers. At the same time, the "civilizing" action became materialized in the economic development of the region. The *criollos* settled around the military units, giving rise to the towns and cities of Formosa. By the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, the main economic activities of the region were the tannin industry and cotton production, for which the indigenous seasonal labour force was of utmost importance.[10]

The military campaign of Rostagno, carried out in 1911, permanently re-established the military outposts along the Bermejo and a lowed the military occupation mission to conclude in 1915 (Altamirano, Sbardella, and Dellamea de Prieto 1987). Many specialists agree that the current location of the Qom is the result of the advance of the troops from the east of Formosa. In the same period, several confrontations between the Qom and the *criollos* settlers arose as a result of the advance of cattle, which caused the reduction of available territories as well as ecological changes that affected the indigenous people.

After the successive military attacks, cattle penetration, reduction of vital spaces, and exploitation to which the indigenous peoples of Chaco were subjected to in the mills and textile plants, a period of proliferation of evangelism and missions began around 1920 (Cordeu and Siffredi 1971; Miller 1979; Wright 1992, 2008; Ceriani Cernadas 2017). Thus, the sedentarisation of these hunter-gatherers took place not only around agricultural colonies located on the margins of the territories colonized by the *criollos* for agricultural and cotton exploitation, but also around the missions that promoted the development of agriculture.

At present, the Qom live in rural communities in the Gran Chaco or in settlements surrounding big urban areas (Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Rosario, Resistencia, Formosa). Those who still dwell in the regions of their ancient territory do not live entirely off the forest and its resources since the plundering of the land, the sedentarisation, and the colonization restricted their access to former areas of hunting, fishing, and gathering. Several recovery processes have recently led the indigenous groups to renew their claims over these territories, which were formerly interconnected by seasonal routes.

The following sections are devoted to three moments in the history of Chaco (conquest, colonization, and land claims) in relation to certain episodes recalled by the elders. Although the way in which the Toba narrate past events does not follow a chronological order, we will begin with the Conquest and conclude with the present time, more out of an interest to show the continuity of the human-non-human assembly in the narratives of the past than by an intention to project our own way of conceiving the passage of time onto Qom historicity. We intend to account for the way in which Qom stories assimilate the official reading while at the same time integrating the non-human beings that for them also compose the world.

NON-HUMANS IN THE WAR

What are the central milestones in their accounts of the past, especially regarding the military occupation and colonization? When some leaders narrate the "indigenous history" by reorganizing elements of the elders' memory according to a chronological order, they attempt – as Menget (1999) reflects for the Brazilian case – to avoid misunderstandings and engage in dialogue with non-indigenous people. This strategy, as well as our selection of stories, does not reflect the way in which the Qom organize their understanding of past events. They seem to be more the result of the interrelated swaying of indigenous people, military men, toads, storms, captive women, and elephants of the sky than a linear sequence of actions perpetrated by exclusively human actors.

The selection of stories which took place during the conquest, colonization and land claims reflects our interest in showing that, at crucial moments in the conflictive relations with the "whites" (*blancos*), the Qom way of dealing with violent events did not exist outside their ontology, because the ontology does not operate at an essential level and aside from history and politics. Quite the opposite, the ancestors of the Qom and the contemporary Qom faced traumatic and politically significant events by making use of their ontological and cosmopolitical presuppositions.

The Campaign of the Gran Chaco, and the succession of events which took place during it, is remembered by the Qom elders, who refer to it as The War. During The War, several indigenous peoples were taken captive, killed, tortured, or moved away from their territories in order to be used for domestic work and slave labour. Their experience during The War, led by the *huataxanatpi* (military men, the police), was transmitted from generation to generation up to the present. Many adults refer to events that their ancestors told them either because they had lived them or heard them from others. Anywhere in Chaco it is possible to record stories of The War and reconstruct the experiences lived by the sub-groups or factions that populated the region in the years before and immediately after the Conquest. These stories that describe traumatic moments for them are also plagued with non-human beings who played an important role in the historical development of the Qom. Many episodes describe the way in which the indigenous people managed to escape and defeat their enemies thanks to the communication with entities that, despite not being human, helped them and allied with them against their enemies.

There are several stories that account for the way in which non-humans influenced the historical development of Chaco by helping, allying with, advising, or guiding the Toba who

[10] See Osuna (1977); Altamirano, Sbardella, and Dellamea de Prieto (1987); Gordillo and Leguizamón (2002).

were persecuted. On one occasion, according to what *Rachiyi* told his grandson Valentín Suárez – current leader of the central area of Formosa –, all his "race" (band) was saved thanks to the action of a woman who could communicate with the toad. When *Rachiyi* was still a child, the army carried women and children on a boat along the Bermejo River, while the men were taken along the river bank by the side of the boat guarded by a military man. *Rachiyi* narrated that the indigenous people walked for several days until arriving, as Valentín says, at a "concentration camp" located on the banks of the river and called, in Toba, *Qaiuaxa'añi*. The elders locate this place near the current site of El Espinillo (province of Chaco), whose name refers to the sticks nailed to the ground where, upon arriving, the captives were moored after suffering from hunger, thirst, and various forms of mistreatment.

This situation changed due to the action of a woman who was a well-known *conaxanaxae*; a term that, in spite of being usually translated as "witch," refers more particularly to the "holder" (the one who performs the action referred to by the verbal root *-cona-*: 'to take hold'). That is to say that although the term is translated as witch, in Toba it refers to the action commonly attributed to the *conaxanaxae*, the one who holds objects that were in intimate contact with the body of whom one desires to attack through these actions.[11] They usually take place in the deep forest and consist of associating parts of the body or belongings of the victim with elements of animal bodies or the dead. In the story narrated by Valentín, the *conaxanaxae* suggested that the Qom collected the cigarette butts smoked by the military men. They did so and, once the butts were gathered, in the words of Valentín:

> [They] gave them to her. Then, there was a moment during the night when the soldiers rested and they [the Qom] were free to make a fire. And she tells the people to make a fire and, at that moment, a toad appears, a big, giant toad. That toad worked with her. She took hold of it [...] and put the cigarette butts inside that toad's mouth [...]. So she put them in its mouth until everything went to the toad's belly. And [...] she said that she was going to throw that toad into the fire with all the cigarette butts [inside]. Then she says, 'if the toad bursts [it is] because something will happen,' revenge against the soldiers, against those who smoked those cigarettes.

The toad burst and, according to the *conaxanaxae*, the revenge was successful: the next day the soldiers began to feel discomfort, pain, and overall weakness. At night, with the troop devastated by the effects of the action of revenge, the Qom managed to escape and return to their places of origin. The *conaxanaxae*, the fire, and the toad are the actors who, in this episode, changed the course of history for the Qom. This woman who had the power to communicate with other entities, together with the fire and the toad, were necessary to defeat the army and keep the Qom alive.

This is also read in another narrative that refers to this same period and was told to us by an elder of the community *Dañalec lachiugue* (Riacho de Oro). The story narrates how several Toba women, captured by the army, fled helped by an entity from the sky. According to the narrator, an elderly lady and five young women who had left the community to collect carob fruit (*Prosopis spp.*) disappeared. Later it transpired that they had been kidnapped by the military men, who held them captive, tied them up, and made them walk to the south. The soldiers, mounted on donkeys or on horseback, forced them to march "three *qa'agoxoic* [moons]" until arriving at a new "concentration camp," in the words of our collaborator Valentín. When they arrived, there was a wooden construction and a stock to which the prisoners were tied. However, one of the women had the ability to "communicate with *Qasoxonaxa*," and it was thanks to this relationship that the story could be told. *Qasoxonaxa* is the name given to a non-human being of the sky who has the ability to control weather events, mainly rain, thunder, and lightning.[12] One morning, the woman got a message from this entity telling her that they had to escape that night. This ability to interact with animals, plants, and weather events that "holders" and other people in the past had was also a typical attribute of the ancient leaders called *oiquiaxai*. They were chiefs in times of war and played a leading role during the military Conquest. In fact, thanks to the dialogues of the *oiquiaxai* with the birds and the stars, they succeeded, in the words of a Qom leader, in leading "the tribe in times of war." In this regard, Francisco Segundo, from the neighbourhood of La Paz, told us that the ancient chieftain Taigoye was accompanied by

> angels that moved with him [...], at night, [they were] like the radio, so he knows how the community lives. Sometimes the *villen* comes [a bird, *Euphonia chlorotica*] and speaks. The *pitogüe* [a bird, *Pitangus sulphuratus*] sometimes comes, the *pitogüe* tells him [...]. All the bugs, the birds that there are, he knows, listens to, and already knows what news they bring. Very powerful.[13]

Military men and indigenous peoples were not the only protagonists who fought, resisted, or attacked and thus gave rise to the contemporary ethnic, historical, and territorial scenario. At certain moments, non-human beings played a role that the Toba themselves highlight in most of their narratives of

[11] Several authors describe the behaviour of the "witches". Miller (1979), for example, states that the most effective method of the *conaxanaxae* is to burn the captured object alongside animal parts, preferably frogs, vipers, or cats. Salamanca and Tola (2002: 111) argue that the witchy behaviour consists of "expanding the person to be attacked into certain animals, generating a fusion between them".

[12] *Qasoxonaxa* designates the owner of lightning, thunder, and rain as well as the mountains of the west, the Andes (see Tola 2010).

[13] The reference to the angels hints at the Christian influence on Qom cosmology. In the mid-19th century, the first Protestant missionary attempts were carried out in the Gran Chaco. Around 1940, in the province of Chaco, an American preacher founded another Pentecostal mission called Go Ye. Mennonites, Baptists, and other denominations also engaged in missions (see Miller 1979; Wright 1992; Ceriani Cernadas 2014). The work of all of them was central to the sedentarisation of the indigenous peoples: they promoted the development of agriculture and family economy and founded colonies on the margins of the territories colonized by *criollos* and whites for agricultural and cotton exploitation. The action of missionaries gave rise to the indigenous churches created around indigenous leaders who became shepherds. *Gospel* is how the Qom call this religious expression that combines elements of Pentecostal Christianity with elements of shamanism.

this period. Owners of animals, stars, toads, birds, and fire are some of the characters in those stories that constitute the human-non-human assembly that composes life in common for the Qom.[14]

NO-HUMANS DURING COLONIZATION

According to Gordillo and Leguizamón (2002), towards the end of 1930 the cycle of violence deployed by the Argentine army to consolidate the borders and occupy the indigenous territories came to an end in Chaco. As contemporary anthropology and ethnohistory suggest,[15] after this period of violent conquest began a period aimed at the productive development of capitalist enclaves dedicated to the production of sugar, timber, and agriculture, together with the progressive colonization by national and foreign population. In those decades, the indigenous peoples' labour as harvesters and craftsmen generated important social, parental, and territorial reconfigurations. Amid these rearrangements – also plagued with violence – various subjects of the Qom sociocosmology carried out actions that, on many occasions, helped human beings survive in a new disadvantageous landscape.

According to what the current inhabitants of the community of Km. 503 of Formosa say, during the first years of its permanent location in the outskirts of the homonymous *criollo* village, the provincial State carried out several actions and works to urbanize the area (Tola and Medrano 2014). The *criollo* village of Km. 503, close to the Bermejo River, constituted a privileged tourist hub. For that reason, in those years the government tried to drain the water out of a lagoon and build a bridge instead. However, the Qom argue that every time the State employees engaged in the drainage, unexpected misfortunes prevented it. A Toba hunter explained to us that the cause of these hindrances was linked to the actions and intentions of "the *siaxaua* [person] of the water", who did not allow the modification of the habitat of the lagoon where it lived. The employees of the local council, without imagining that the cause of their misfortunes was a non-human being, had to make a detour and build the gate without affecting the lagoon. That is why the history of the occupation and resistance of the Qom of Km. 503 cannot be narrated without including episodes that account for the fact that their territories were also protected by other inhabitants of the area: the *siaxaua* which, just like humans, live in particular places and express desires and needs.

The Qom name of this community refers, in fact, to this. Km. 503 is, in Toba, *Lapel saq emapec loxolqai*. This expression contains in itself the name of a non-human entity (*loxolqaí*) that lives in the lagoon (*lapel*) that never dries up (*saq emapec*). As Palmira, an old lady of the area who recently passed away said:

> They gave it that name because the natives were formerly in that lagoon and water was drawn for drinking. Surrounding it were the little houses made of branches. And there was animal leather on the walls. And there was something [a non-animal] that lived in that lagoon. Some days it takes its head out of the water and people look at it. It seems strange. And the head of that animal is long. But they say that it had compassion for only one person [a shaman] and it gave him power. That is why it communicates [with him] during the day. But the man died and then, little by little, that lagoon dried up because it is believed that the animal that was there left. That is why that lagoon is called "long-headed being (loxolqai) of the lagoon that never dries up (*lapel saq emapec*).

More than a non-human being, this entity of the water is described as an animal, but not just as any animal. It can sympathize with humans and give them power to heal, and it is also responsible for the permanence of water in the lagoon: if it leaves, the water runs out. And that is what happened when, after the shaman passed away, his non-animal companion left with him.[16]

NON-HUMANS IN THE CLAIMS FOR TERRITORY

At present, Toba communities have limited access to their ancestral territory and are immersed in conflicts over the use of the land with their *criollo* neighbours or the provincial State. Given the vulnerability of the collective rights, in recent years they have organized roadblocks, occupied schools, gone on hunger strikes, filed administrative complaints and denunciations within the framework of an independent – and incipient indigenous movement known as "the struggle" (*la lucha*). In the case of Formosa, this goes against "the politics," which is often associated with the indigenous insertion into patronage networks of the State and political parties.

During the different public demonstrations of "the struggle," the support and participation of animals and other non-humans (owners of animals, weather events, the dead, among others) are also central. Several Qom leaders told us that they used *quiyoc* (*jaguar*, *Panthera onca*) (Medrano 2018) or *sauaxaic* (*puma*, *Felix concolor*) fat when they met or confronted a white politician. One of these leaders said, "when I confronted the police, to talk [...] about laws, [it was] as if everyone fell, they could not answer me. [...] The *quiyoc* are protectors. If there are mounted police those things are used, because that cannot [come] close to the horses". The horses would perceive these components that come from animals they fear in the humans. By anointing themselves with tiger or puma fat, human beings would acquire properties of those animals, causing in others (humans and animals) the same reactions that the tiger and the puma generate.

In these contexts of struggle, in 2013 the community

[14] In the South American lowlands, there are already numerous ethnographies that during the last decade have developed several aspects of the owners of plants and animals, the relationships that several indigenous societies establish with them, and the relational schemes that are activated around them (see Fausto 2001, 2008, 2012a, 2012b; Kohn 2007; Daillant 2003; Bonilla 2005, 2007; Santos Granero 2009; Cesarino 2010).

[15] See Richard (2008, 2011), Villar and Combès (2012), Sendón and Villar (2013), Messineo (2014), Córdoba, Bossert, and Richard (2015), among others .

[16] On the concept of non-animal in Chaco, see Medrano (2016, 2019).

Da'añalec lachiugue put forward an educational claim and occupied the school for several days, while returning to their homes at night. According to what we were told in the community, after a few days "the provincial government sent the police to repress. There was an eviction order that day scheduled for two pm". But apparently the hundred policemen sent did not dare to carry out the eviction and waited until it was dark. At that moment, when the Qom had gone to their homes, the police began the occupation of the school. Upon hearing the news, the inhabitants of Riacho de Oro gathered and agreed to set up a double roadblock so that the police would be trapped in the middle. According to what Valentín Suárez experienced:

> At two o'clock in the morning, in the place of the assembly, an electrical storm of thunder and lightning struck, and then the young men, some of the elder, and the women were there, in one place, gathered, and then we would go together to the place of the roadblock. But the rain, thunder, and lightning did not stop. For us [it was] a protection in the sense that the policemen could not even think that a person could be walking [outside] at that moment [...]. But for us it was so good... [It was] a key moment to get to the place where we wanted to settle. The rain did not stop until we blocked the road on both sides. And when the policemen woke up, they realized, but we were already there and they couldn't do anything [...].

Qasoxonaxa, again, assists the Qom in times of conflict with the military. What they see as a natural and neutral weather event (a storm) is perceived by the Qom as an intentional collaboration of a non-human entity (*Qasoxonaxa*). In fact, it was due to this help that the Toba of Riacho de Oro managed to surround the police during their claim. Now, the storm and *Qasoxonaxa* are far from being two different terms; one translatable for the other, they are employed in two different languages to denote the same phenomenon. *Qasoxonaxa* would not be a cultural representation (the elephant of the sky) of an objective fact (the storm). She is rather, from the point of view of the Qom, a non-human, other-than-human, or more-than-human person who inhabits the world that the Qom compose and interacts with human beings at special times. She is not a simple storm, just like not every storm is neither *a priori* nor always *Qasoxonaxa*. At specific times, in certain interactions, *Qasoxonaxa* acts – at the request of the shamans or other humans with power – and collaborates with the Qom sending a storm. But at other times – without prayers or shamans – the storm is just a storm.

More-than-human histories

In the field of history it seems to be difficult to argue for the existence of a single world (objective events experienced by white and indigenous people) represented differently by each culture (the Qom/white version of history), as well as the categorical separation between history and ontology. On the one hand, in Chaco there are abundant stories and historiographical references that prove that the events that each one describes sometimes differ (Tola 2016). Further, in the Qom narrative of the past we find trans-temporal and trans-spatial events and characters (such as Taigoye and the posts moved by *Qasoxonaxa*) that the historiographical narrative hardly identifies or even locates in a timeline or in a particular place of the Chaco territory.

On the other hand, the stories selected show that the Toba narration of past events linked to non-indigenous actors is filtered by particular ontological presuppositions according to which the universe, social life, history, and interethnic relationships are the result not only of the actions that human beings carry out consciously and intentionally, but also of the articulations occurring at the core of the human-nonhuman assembly that composes the world in which the Qom and the whites coexist. In our view, the stories show a particular way of articulating different temporalities and spatialities and recognize not only the Qom agency in moments of interethnic confrontation, but also the strength of non-human agency.

Taking the Qom regimes of historicity seriously implies accepting that historicity is not limited to History, that the "history of the indigenous peoples" does not begin or end in their interactions with the State and that there is not one single and dogmatic "History of the indigenous peoples", but a multiplicity of histories or "[. . .] a plural, heterogeneous mythology [...]" (Boelscher 1988, quoted in Menget 1999: 159).

In short, departing from the idea that history for the Qom is not a chronologically ordered sequence of objective events but a way to update transtemporal relationships between humans and between humans and the non-human beings deployed in multiple scenarios in which they all connect, separate, merge, and disarticulate again, when addressing the Qom way of referring to past events we could think in terms of 'ontohistories'. That is, 'historical ontologies' not only because of the transformations that the ways of composing worlds undergo over time, but because of the importance of including ontologies in historical approaches. The 'Qom ontohistories' are the result of the articulated comings and goings of natives, military men, witches, toads, storms, captive women, and elephants, as well as the product of a critical reflection that intends to include more-than-human dimensions in the historical development of Chaco. Now, this attempt benefits from and is in dialogue with the witty work of the Qom, which consists in introducing into the dominant onto-history, without major contradictions, places, characters, and events of the world described by the elders; a world plagued with not just human agency and intention.

Acknowledgment

This article is based on some field notes presented in a previous article (Medrano and Tola 2017). It constitutes a renew reading and analysis of that data.

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