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Title: 'Healing the Institution': Conflict and Democratic Sovereignty in an Indigenous Community of the Argentine Chaco

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Highlights

- Institutionalisation of Indigenous Communities is central to democratic governance.
- Government by community creates ambiguous space for recognition and empowerment.
- Centralised authority, representation and majoritarian rule transform local politics.

Abstract:

This article provides an ethnographic exploration of democratic sovereignty in an indigenous Guaraní settlement of Argentina's Gran Chaco. Focussing on legally instituted Indigenous Communities, it analyses political assemblies, elections, and bureaucracy as practices of self-government that mediate indigenous recognition and extend state authority. The article hones in on the social drama of a particular settlement to show how extractive engagements combine with recognition to generate new forms of conflict. As state entities and officials mediate between factions, institutionalisation advances, enfolding conflict and replicating state forms among local populations. This makes certain forms of political action legible, while rendering others opaque. In drawing attention to how indigenous leaders and state officials play on and utilise opacity and legibility to further their own agendas I show how democratic institutions are co-produced through everyday interactions. The article argues that procedural efforts to incorporate and recognise indigenous societies through communal forms have resulted in ambiguous forms of sovereignty. Shifting the emphasis away from multiculturalism to forms of institutionalisation highlights the overlaps between indigenous and national forms of sovereignty and draws attention to the fact that many of the key political relations that structure indigenous recognition partake in broader mechanisms of democratic rule.

Keywords: Latin America, Community, Representation, Factionalism, Recognition, Governance

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‘Healing the Institution’: Conflict and Democratic Sovereignty in an Indigenous Community of the Argentine Chaco

1. Introduction

In Argentina’s northwestern province of Salta, Highway 34 runs parallel to the forested foothills of the Andes. The highway traverses the multi-ethnic city of Tartagal and runs past the decrepit oil town of Aguaray, until it connects with Bolivia’s southern border. Along the way, soybean plantations, refineries, electric plants, and heavily laden logging trucks provide visible indicators of the region’s extractive economy. Less conspicuously, numerous rusty signs on either side of the highway signal the presence of ‘Indigenous Communities.’

Despite its primordial ring, the term Indigenous Community or *Comunidad Indigena* is a relatively new legal label. Originating with Argentina’s constitutional reform of 1994, the term reflects the administrative mechanism through which the state recognises indigenous collectivities as rights-bearing legal persons. The creation of these institutions reflected a global push towards forms of legal recognition that sought to grant indigenous populations a political and cultural autonomy (see ILO 1989). While these multiculturalist policies have had emancipatory and mobilising effects (Van Cott 2007), they have also extended state authority over indigenous people (Hale 2005). This article explores how legal recognition was part of a broader wave of democratisation (Huntington 1991), good governance (Andolina et al. 2009), and government through community (Rose 1999) that influenced the sorts of politics that became available to indigenous citizens.

Focussing on Argentina, a country often neglected in regional analyses of indigenous politics (Brent 2015), I explore how recognition and the institutionalisation of what I will call ‘democratic sovereignty’ created political conflicts among indigenous Guaraní settlements in Argentina’s Gran Chaco region. We will see how engagements with extractive industries challenged local expectations of redistributive leadership and tested the Indigenous Community’s capacity to deal with conflict. This led Guaraní people to demand state mediation, which, in turn, furthered the institutionalisation of procedural principles of participation, representation and community that centralised authority and created permissible forms of political competition. Far from a unidirectional process of domination, the Guaraní case shows how state functionaries and indigenous leaders co-produce institutions through administrative techniques of legibility and opacity.

The problems of democratic governance I will discuss are not new. In fact, they reflect longstanding concerns about consensus and conflict, unanimity and division, majorities and minorities, that have to do with the translation of multiplicity into representative singularity or ‘political monism’ (Calderón and Thibaud 2010: 135). In post-colonial Latin America, these issues have long haunted attempts to forge popular sovereignty (ibid) and we will see that they continue to play a part in the lives of Guaraní people. Here, though, I draw attention to the community-based, procedural forms through which indigenous populations have been incorporated into democratic polities over the last 30 odd years. As recognition and institutionalisation generate conflict among the Guaraní, they raise questions about the legitimacy of leadership, the form of political participation and the limits of the body politic.

This article builds on a total of 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork among seven Guaraní communities, the bulk of which was conducted between 2012 and 2013, as well as during month-long return visits in 2015 and 2017. Research comprised extensive participant observation in various aspects of life in Guaraní settlements, as well as archival research, in-depth interviews, genealogical data collection and oral histories. This article will follow the ‘social drama’ (Turner 1980) of a single Guaraní settlement that I have given the fictitious name of Aguararenta. The single-settlement focus allows me to shed light on the subtle intricacies through which democratic sovereignty extends, but the kinds of conflict I describe were prevalent in all the Guaraní settlements I worked with. Short-term fieldwork among Chorote communities along the Pilcomayo river, local news reports, social media and interviews with officials and NGO workers suggest that similar forms of conflict and institutionalisation are occurring among several of the Chaco’s indigenous populations (see e.g. Carrazán 2018).

The next section outlines the concept of democratic sovereignty and how I am applying it to Latin America’s indigenous contexts. The article then offers two contextual sections. The first details the relationship between recognition and democracy in Argentina. The second provides information about the Guaraní and the settlement of Aguararenta. The article then describes how disputes over the availability of jobs and resources gave rise to the settlement’s factional conflict. It traces the contours of this conflict up to a culminating point in 2015 when state functionaries conducted a territorial survey that sought to fix the settlement’s institutional and ethnic composition. Before concluding, a discussion section analyses how democratic sovereignty operates through a dialectical process of institutionalisation that builds on state

interventions and the integration of democratic procedural principles, even as it creates ambiguous opportunities for indigenous autonomy.

2. Democratic Sovereignty in Indigenous Latin America

As part of a global ‘third wave of democratisation’ (Huntington 1991), Latin America in the 1980s and 90s saw the demise of the region’s military governments, the weakening of its revolutionary movements, and a surge in democratic reforms. In this transitional moment, the legitimacy of state sovereignty was bound up with a growing human rights agenda (Guilhot 2005) and an attempt to embed ‘representative institutions’ that took precedence over social welfare (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012: 6). Along with a newfound emphasis on representation came a growing push for decentralisation that was closely associated with the loans and structural adjustment programmes that international institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund sponsored (Postero 2007: 127). Such reforms typically resulted in procedural, replicable, models of democracy (Hetherington 2011: 4), that aimed to facilitate political stability through institutional means (Oxhorn and Ducatzenzeiler 1998; Bowen 2011). As it progressed, this project of democratisation was further inscribed within a transnational policy agenda focussed on the notion of ‘good governance’ that combined an emphasis on the developmental role of markets alongside ‘social’ criteria regarding education, health, cultural diversity, and gender balance as development goals (Andolina et al. 2009: 9-10; Rose 1999: 16; Li 2011).

The confluence of democratisation, development and neoliberalism called for a ‘reorganization of “political society”’ that emphasised the role of non-state entities, social capital and collective rights for “disadvantaged” cultural groups’ (Hale 2005: 12). It is within that process of reorganization that indigenous recognition took place. Furthermore, it arose alongside a new form of sovereignty that Nikolas Rose has termed ‘government through community’ (Rose 1999). ‘The institution of community’, Rose explains, brought into existence a sector that ‘encourage[d] and harness[ed] active practices of self-management and identity construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances’ (176). In projects as distinct as participatory rural appraisal in Indonesia (Li 2011) or New Labour’s Third Way in the UK (Rose 2000), the institutionalisation of communities became central to the government of citizens who were incorporated within communal political arrangements and bound through administrative, legal, and bureaucratic interventions. In the case of indigenous recognition, the assertion of collective rights and the communal institutional forms through which incorporation took place,

exemplify the kinds of ‘self-generating formation[s] capable of governing [themselves]’ (Li 2011: 60) that were central to the new mode of governance.

Throughout Latin America, this ‘round of democratization’ led to ‘a wave of political organizing across indigenous communities’ (Yashar 1998: 23). As a result of recognition and mobilisation, unprecedented numbers of collective land titles were granted to indigenous populations (Offen 2003; Bryan 2012). Throughout the region, this ‘territorial turn’ enabled states, international institutions, corporations and indigenous collectivities to pursue a wide array of political and economic strategies. In some cases, communal land titles permitted states to establish control over territory (Rubenstein 2001: 281). In others, they provided a key vehicle for conservation policy (Offen 2003; Anthias and Radcliffe 2015), even as they enabled natural resource extraction and indigenous autonomy in still others (Anthias 2018). In addition, processes of land titling generated new forms of conflict for indigenous groups who were now obligated to protect and control communal land (Correia 2019). Recognition and the territorial turn created a political and physical space for autonomy, but also compelled indigenous actors to negotiate their political projects with nation-states that also exert territorial sovereignty (Simpson 2014; Postero and Fabricant 2019).

Recognition, institutionalisation, and land titling had a powerful effect on indigenous social and political life throughout the region. They transformed indigenous spatial arrangements (Killick 2019), furthered a sense of collective self that may not have previously existed (Rosengren 2003; Buitron 2020), and created novel forms of leadership (Killick 2007; Sarmiento Barletti 2017), and bureaucracy (Allard 2012; Allard and Walker 2016). On the ground, these processes have proved fundamentally ambivalent. On the one hand, recognition limited the discursive space indigenous populations can inhabit (Ramos 2003) and created new political structures of domination (Whitehead 2005). On the other, some populations have welcomed these changes as tokens of ‘civilization’ that enable them to reject racial discrimination (Gow 1991: 207-211) and further their aspirations to a good life (Sarmiento Barletti 2016).

In this article, I use the term ‘democratic sovereignty’ to explore the paradoxical forms of political authority that emerge when indigenous societies are recognised and incorporated through procedural democratic forms and communal institutions. In doing so, I propose an understanding of indigenous recognition and state formation that moves away from analyses of multiculturalism and neoliberalism, with their emphases on culture and markets (Warren

and Jackson 2002; Hale 2005: 18; Bessire 2014), towards a focus on institutional procedures, bureaucratic strategies and administrative interventions. Emphasising democracy over multiculturalism also highlights the overlaps between supposedly indigenous and national forms of sovereignty and draws attention to the fact that many of the key political relations that structure indigenous recognition are not unique to indigenous contexts. While assumptions about the kinds of moral community that ‘traditional’ people live in inform the process (Strathern 2005: 96), I will describe a form of democratisation that emerges through the ‘dialectics of rights and authority’ (Lund 2016: 1202) and constrains the forms of political agency available to citizens (Goldman 2013: 171). In this regard, we can situate indigenous recognition alongside the global expansion of ‘instituted representational democracy’ (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014: 2) and inscribe it within a broader moment of consensus around normalising political frameworks that limit the possibilities of political action (Rancière 2010).

The marginal Guaraní case explored here does not involve World Bank representatives, well-funded state agencies, or large-scale land conflicts, but it sheds light on a constantly ongoing process of state formation in which citizens anticipate the state’s presence and attempt to conjure its authority (Campbell 2015). As we will see, the design of indigenous institutions around democratic principles both enables and pressures Guaraní settlements to become ‘legible’ (Scott 2008) to state officials. Rather than a top-down imposition, though, my ethnography illustrates how democratic sovereignty allows indigenous leaders and government authorities to find common ground in ways that create converging forms of political agency. I will therefore focus on subaltern processes of government through community and show how low-level state officials and indigenous leaders converge around assemblies, documents, elections, and surveys that become sites for navigating and creating state authority. In doing so, democratic institutions enfold conflict, create novel forms of rupture and consensus, and, ultimately, extend particular forms of political authority.

3. Recognition and democracy in Argentina

Argentina has historically denied the existence of indigenous populations on its territory (Gordillo & Hirsch 2003; Briones 2004), but democratisation and recognition have run parallel to each other. Early overtures during the Peronist years of the mid-20th century incorporated indigenous populations through the extension of workers’ rights, but did not constitute a form of recognition premised on difference (Lenton 2010: 69). During the 1970s, indigenous activism, often supported by religious organisations, emerged within a broader context of social

mobilisation (Leone 2018), but it was not until the 1980s, after seven years of military dictatorship and the return to democracy, that recognition began in earnest.

The National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INAI), the organism dedicated to the vouchsafing of indigenous citizens, was created in 1985, just two years after the return to democracy. In subsequent years, the National Congress sanctioned numerous ‘indigenous laws’ while newly drafted provincial constitutions legislated the recognition of indigenous populations (Altabe et al. 1996). The process was furthered during the constitutional reform of 1994 which established the indigenous right to land and guaranteed the legal and administrative recognition of indigenous populations through the creation of *Comunidades Indigenas* or Indigenous Communities with distinct legal personhood (Author 2016). As elsewhere in Latin America, the World Bank became involved in implementing these new policies; particularly through capacity building programmes (see World Bank 2004). Argentina’s federal political structure, in which provincial legislation and the mandates of provincial indigenous institutes often clash with national laws and institutions, further complicate juridical and administrative recognition (Castelnuovo 2016: 32). For Briones and Carrasco (2003), these new juridical frameworks constituted a ‘neo-indigenist’ project, that no longer sought assimilation, but created ‘restricted consultation and participation’ (147). Nonetheless, neo-indigenism created a political aperture and led to increasingly visible forms of indigenous mobilization (e.g. Hirsch 2003.)

After Argentina’s economic and political collapse in 2001, the post-neoliberal Kirchnerista governments that governed between 2003 and 2015 reclaimed the project of democratisation, seeing in it an opportunity to rally the support of marginal populations (Rossi 2017). Despite pursuing a neo-extractive agenda that often conflicted with indigenous activists (Briones 2015; Savino 2016; Svampa 2019), the Kirchnerista governments sought the allegiance of indigenous populations, expanded the neo-indigenist legal framework and strengthened the role of the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INAI) (Soria 2019). In 2004, the government created the Council of Indigenous Participation (CPI), which brings together representatives from each of Argentina’s recognized indigenous ethnicities and incorporates indigenous representation within the INAI (Briones 2015: 26). Two years later, Congress approved an emergency law (Ley Nacional 26.160) that suspended land evictions and created a register of lands occupied by indigenous people that was intended to pave the way towards future land claims (Re.Te.CI - National Programme for the Territorial Survey of Indigenous Communities) (Castelnuovo 2017). On the ground, the revamped policy framework and the strengthening of the INAI

translated into mounting pressure to conform to legislative and administrative procedures in order to facilitate incorporation into the national Territorial Survey. For, as one INAI functionary explained to me in 2013, the institute's main objective was to 'impress the legal framework onto the territory' so that indigenous citizens could exercise their constitutional rights.

4. Aguararenta and the Guaraní

Currently, the Argentine Guaraní population exceeds 20,000 (INDEC 2004), but they are part of a broader ethnic group, with a larger in population in Bolivia, that used to be known as the Chiriguano-Guaraní. These groups descend from Guaraní populations that migrated from the Atlantic coast of Brazil as early as the 16th century (Calzavarini 1980: 53; Pifarré 1988). Since then, they have played an important, but ambiguous, role in the political and economic history of the Gran Chaco. While they resisted colonial encroachments and managed to retain an impressive degree of political autonomy until the 19th century, they also played a key role in brokering relations between colonial settlers and other indigenous groups (Langer 2009). In the mid 19th century, they were gradually incorporated into missionary establishments and increasingly employed in the sugar cane plantations of northern Argentina (Hirsch 1999). At about the same time, the new independent republics of Bolivia and Argentina expanded their territorial control, restricted Guaraní political autonomy and sought to assimilate them. The Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay in the 1930s further disrupted Guaraní life and prompted refugees to migrate into northern Argentina (Bossert et al. 2008.)

In this article, my focus is on, Aguararenta, a rural settlement with a population of about 1000 people that is located roughly 20 kilometres away from the multi-ethnic town of Tartagal. The settlement's current spatial organisation reflects a history of displacement, ethnic segregation and external centralizing pressures. Like most indigenous settlements in this part of Salta Province, Aguararenta does not hold a land title (Buliubasich and Gonzalez 2009) and it lies on a large tract of private, yet unexploited, land that is owned by an absentee landlord. It was initially populated by Guaraní refugees who fled during the Chaco War and the first families to arrive lived at a distance from each other and were not related. However, by the 1960s, what was little more than a haphazard refugee settlement had been reduced into a Franciscan mission with a centrally-located chapel, school and football pitch. Most of the people who live there today identify as indigenous Guaraní, while a minority identify as non-indigenous *chaqueños* of European descent. Some of the *chaqueño* families also descend from Chaco War refugees,

while others lived in the area before the war. Guaraní and *chaqueños* live in separate parts of the settlement and social interactions between the two are cordial, but infrequent.

Today, unemployment, precarity, and an increasing reliance on welfare benefits characterise life in Guaraní settlements (Author 2018; 2020). While older Guaraní men pursue small-scale slash-and-burn agriculture, younger people prefer temporary waged employment and disdain agriculture as a backward and unprofitable enterprise. *Chaqueños* have historically made a living through a combination of cattle ranching and are more likely to be employed than their Guaraní neighbours. While *chaqueños* are marginally better off and more firmly incorporated within Argentina's imagined community, the Guaraní dominate settlement politics.

Given the lack of employment opportunities, insecure land tenure, and the unprofitability of small-scale agriculture, local politics revolves around the possibility of eliciting resources from extractive actors. Leaders are respected for their ability to broker these demands through confrontation and negotiation, but the failure to do so creates resentment and suspicion among the settlement's inhabitants. As a result, in all the Guaraní settlements I worked with, leaders were accused of failing to distribute wealth equitably and suspected of misappropriating resources for their own gain. Extended family membership typically provided a good indicator of political loyalty, but, as in the case discussed below, kinship-based alliances proved fragile as friends and family shifted loyalties, sought new leaders and turned on existing ones. People spoke of the need for 'unity' and communal solidarity (Author 2017), but lamented the widespread reality of factionalism that they called *divisionismo* or division-ism. Despite some attempts to create pan-Guaraní organisations (typically by individuals with connections to Bolivian Guaraní) (Hirsch 2003), many of my interlocutors were wary of such projects and felt that they were used to further 'personal ambitions' and only divided people further.

5. Aguararenta's Social Drama

3.1. Aguararenta as 'Indigenous Community'

In the mid 1960s, Franciscan missionaries appointed Benito Segundo, who had fled Bolivia during the Chaco War, as Aguararenta's first *cacique* or chief. Upon his death, one of his sons inherited the position, but he ceded authority to Benito's godson, Rogelio Hernández, who had always demonstrated a keen interest in the settlement's affairs and used to aid his godfather in his political duties. By the time I met him, Rogelio Hernández was in his mid-50s and worked part-time as a handyman in a municipal office. He was articulate and well versed in the idioms of multiculturalism. He was also notably wealthier than most of his neighbours – a fact which

he attributed to his thrifty disposition, but which nonetheless raised the suspicions of his fellow community members.

Along with many other Guaraní leaders in the region, Hernández, capitalised on the multicultural opening that followed the 1994 constitutional reform and registered Aguararenta as an Indigenous Community in the year 2000, a move that formally instituted his leadership. Reflecting the overlap of both provincial and national multicultural legislation, the new Indigenous Community received provincial and national legal personhood, each with its own set of similar – yet distinct – internal statutes. The statutes define the institution’s overarching objectives and determine the political relationships that should exist internally. Here, I will briefly describe the institutional groundwork they set out and describe the procedural forms of representation and participation they list. Though the statutes are schematic, their underlying principles – and the sites of opacity and legibility they created – proved central to how the settlement’s conflict would later unfold.

Despite the lack of a land title, both national and provincial statutes echo the language of the 1994 constitution and note the Community’s right to land as a means for economic development. With slight variations, both sets of statutes also specify that the settlement is required to have a governing council and an assembly, both of which are justified as being ‘in accordance with [Guaraní] cultural and organizational norms.’ An *mburuvicha* (chief in Guaraní) and a *ñeerenduka* (spokesperson) lead the community council. Further positions include several *isundaro* (coordinators), a *ñobatu* (treasurer) and *jerakua* (sub-coordinator). Despite the list of positions, in practice the chief and spokesperson are the central leading figures. In everyday speech, people loosely use Spanish terms like ‘president,’ ‘cacique’ and ‘secretary’ for their authorities, a practice that does not always reflect the actual distribution of leadership roles.

According to the statutes, the chief and spokesperson are ‘the sole representatives of the community before official and private organisms.’ These positions thus monopolise representation in order to mediate between Communities and external actors like private companies or politicians. To legitimate their positions, members of the governing council must receive the community’s popular support through an assembly. ‘The assembly,’ the statutes state, ‘is the supreme organism where the most important issues that face the community are resolved definitively.’ Within the assembly, ‘members of the community above the age of 18

with apt mental faculties for taking decisions on their own (...) will have a valid voice and vote (*voz y voto válido*) in the assembly’.

Overall, the statutes describe a ‘Community’ of individuals who gather in assemblies to reach consensual decisions through deliberation. Adult community members are expected to participate in assemblies by voicing their opinions and casting their votes; always, the statutes are quick to stress, in accordance with local ‘cultural and organizational norms.’ The ‘supreme’ nature of the assembly thus presumes a public sphere where free deliberation fosters the creation of ‘definitive’ resolutions. Communal leaders gain legitimacy through the presumption of participation within the assembly and, in cases of misconduct, the assembly must come together to agree on the need to replace leaders. Thus, the Assembly appears as a deliberative democratic space where ‘the common interest of all results from a process of collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals’ (Benhabib 1996: 69). At the same time, the Community statutes replicate a monist state logic of absolute representation that endures beyond individual incumbencies. This logic opposes the centrifugal tendencies found in earlier forms of Guaraní politics in the Chaco (Saignes 1985; 1990) and creates a political institution that endures over time.

Guaraní assemblies have a long history in the Chaco, but their logic has tended to differ from that portrayed in the statutes. Often celebrated alongside feasts (Saignes and Combès 2007: 241), assemblies have been described as fragile moments of reciprocity that rarely endured through moments of conflict (Meliá 1988: 66); and conflict was a common occurrence (Saignes 1985). As in other parts of Latin America, centralised representative authority is believed to have emerged alongside colonial influence (Meliá 1988: 66). However, where historical instances of Guaraní assemblies placed chiefs as equals alongside other participants (Meliá 1998: 68), the statutes enable contemporary chiefs to monopolise representation and generate what Bourdieu (1991) terms political alienation, whereby ‘isolated agents (...) cannot constitute themselves as a group (...) unless they dispossess themselves and hand over their power to a political apparatus’ (Bourdieu 1991: 249). Here, we find a first instance of how the communal form becomes a site for political self-regulation, a process that receives ‘its authority from the moral voice of the community’ (Rose 1999: 186).

In the next section, I trace how problems emerged when consensus could not be reached, leaders lost legitimacy, and assemblies no longer deliberated. The fact that leaders’ representative authority was under constant scrutiny but also institutionally entrenched meant

that leadership change became institutionally problematic. In the face of divisions, establishing authority through consensus became a key political goal for the state and also for Aguararenta's inhabitants, but it was also one that proved impossible to achieve.

3.2. Divisionismo

By the time I began fieldwork in September 2012, Aguararenta was in the fifth year of a seemingly irresolvable conflict. Problems began in 2007 when an Argentine energy company purchased 50 hectares of land from a private landowner to make room for a new thermal power plant. The plant would be constructed on land that was part of a larger territory Aguararenta laid claim to, but did not legally own. Invoking the principle of prior consultation, company representatives met with Rogelio Hernández, recognised that Aguararenta was waiting for a judicial decision on its claim to 'ancestral property' and signed an agreement to let the Community use 20 hectares of the land it had purchased. The company also agreed to temporarily hire Community members for the work of clearing the forest, while promising to create three permanent positions for basic maintenance jobs.

While this agreement might have become a way of recognising the Community's right to land through corporate recognition (see Anthias 2018), conflict erupted over the matter of jobs and redistribution. A group of young men suspected that Rogelio Hernández was not being forthcoming about the deal and accused him of pocketing funds that were intended for the community. Hernández's legitimacy took another blow when, in the context of works conducted on a nearby refinery (see Author 2020), the group of young men once again voiced their dissent and accused the chief of not securing sufficient resources for his followers. This time the break was final. The dissidents called an assembly, denounced Hernández and decided to depose him.

Diego Romero, a man in his mid 30s who was Hernández's cousin and a close former ally, emerged as the new faction's leader. Diego was not considerably younger than his rival cousin and also significantly poorer. Nonetheless, in his early 20s he had cultivated relationships with a pro-indigenous Catholic NGO through which he had learnt about Argentina's multiculturalist legal regime. In addition, he had been a keen observer of the political volatility that engulfed the Chaco after the political and economic crisis of 2001 and drew lessons from the unemployed workers movement that gained strength in the region (see Author 2020).

In calling for Hernández to resign, Diego and his followers referenced the statute that states that 'the community' can expel leaders who do not 'behave according to norms.' But they

soon found that it was difficult to act on this in practice. This was because instituted leaders like Hernández possessed Community documents on which their names were printed alongside position of authorities. Until new documents could be printed – a process that required evidence that ‘the Community’ was asking for a change as well as the coordination of dispersed national and provincial government offices – leaders like Hernández continued to wield authority because they could show official documentation to anyone they dealt with.

As long as communal documents still listed Hernández as the ‘sole’ authorized representative, his rivals could not oust him. It also meant that as illegitimate challengers, Diego’s faction had no standing before the state agencies that created these all-important documents. Furthermore, when Diego called for an assembly he was only able to summon those people who were already predisposed to follow his lead and, in the meantime, Hernández organized assemblies attended by his own followers. Both factions were therefore incapable of creating communal consensus. This was where the idealisation of the deliberative assembly, with its emphasis on consensus and homogeneity, became problematic. In positing the assembly as an arena for the deliberation of equals in which collective decision making takes place, pre-existing social divisions were bracketed off and the realities of conflict disavowed. From the perspective of states and regulatory bodies, conflict derailed the supposed normalcy of settlement politics, which ought to have been consensual.

Aguararenta’s conflict was an instance of what my interlocutors called division-ism, in which a leader’s mediatory role and his inability to secure sufficient resources clashed with followers’ expectations of equitable redistribution. In this form of division-ism, the interplay of opacity and legibility begins to emerge. What we see is that external actors, including private companies, establish relations with indigenous leaders in ways that presume the reliability of representation. Leaders as ‘authorized representatives’ (Bourdieu 1991: 11) become ‘the group incarnate’ (ibid: 248) and can make agreements on the Community’s behalf. The presumption of consensus renders disagreement illegible, especially when participatory, deliberative, assemblies are assumed, but not actually taking place. The problem is not only that the statutes set out the kind of political relationships that ought to exist within settlements, but also that they become templates that external actors like bureaucrats, companies and politicians can use in their interactions with Guaraní populations. Thus, what was originally an internal matter concerning the morality of redistributive politics, soon devolved into a problem of political administration; one that concerned the possibility of self-government, but required the mediation of state bureaucrats.

3.3.Documenting legitimacy

Seeing that deposing Hernández was not an easy task, Diego's faction organized regular assemblies to provide updates on the situation and to discuss potential next steps. As they did so, they also produced a series of documents that generated a paper trail of their search for support and mediation from governing institutions. These documents primarily took the form of letters directed at particular government offices and meeting minutes that documented assemblies. Here, I analyse the form these documents took and suggest that they are performative devices (Allard and Walker 2016) that legitimated leaders' standing, because they invoked the procedural principles set out in statutes, but also frustrated Aguararenta's inhabitants, who were unable to determine the document's actual effects.

The entries in Diego's meeting minutes book broach a number of topics: from the distribution of donations to meetings with mayors, and even GPS training for a potential territorial survey under Law 26.160, but what stands out when reading them is the recurring use of phrases that capture the quality of participation within assemblies: 'egalitarian debate,' 'total support,' 'decided by unanimity,' 'the people in general decide,' 'conformity,' 'several hours of debates,' 'accepting this decision.' The documents do not record differences of opinion, they hint at debate and deliberation, but always yield communal unanimity. For instance, the minutes that Diego's faction wrote when they decided to demand Hernández's deposition in 2008 claim that the community in its entirety attended the assembly, and that 'after coherent opinions from all those who live in this place a consensus is reached'. The list of signatories under the minutes indicates, however, that only those people who supported Diego had attended the assembly. Nevertheless, the picture that emerges from reading Diego's minutes book is that of a united, deliberating community that gathers in large assemblies.

My sense is that these documents operate as demands for legibility from below. Rather than state-driven attempts to render terrain legible, Diego and his followers invoked the legal and administrative principles set out in the statutes. Their documents became performative artefacts that represented leaders as popularly supported representatives. Perhaps for this reason, people expected documents to have an almost immediate efficacy, or, as one man put it: 'the paper is done, so they [functionaries] must come [to the community].' As in other indigenous contexts in the region, their efficacy seemed to devolve from the fact that they deployed the logics of powerful entities in a context of asymmetrical relations (Allard 2012). The formalism and state-like formulations drew on the language of participation and representative legitimacy, while eliding the reality of factionalism and separate assemblies. In

the face of uncertainty, acts of deliberation within assemblies seemed to be translated and fixed in meeting minutes for an unknown future readership. In artefacts like the meeting minutes book they sedimented and turned into an archive of a settlement's political life that was also an 'anticipatory stance' towards future recognition (Campbell 2015).

However, despite being potentially efficacious, these bureaucratic interpellations of the state also proved frustrating because their outcomes were unclear, thus increasing the state's opacity (see also Allard 2012). Letters often went unanswered, their receipt unacknowledged. From the perspective of people on the ground it was rarely clear which politicians or bureaucrats had the authority to resolve issues. They were performative documents, but their usefulness in the present was unclear. Here another form of illegibility became evident. As I soon learned through my own attempts to contact and interview INAI agents and oil company representatives, the fact that these external entities required that written requests be handed in to reception offices or sent to generic email addresses meant that they were shrouded in their own kinds of bureaucratic opacity, a tactic that, from the supplicant's point of view, diffused responsibility and reduced commitments. It was precisely when INAI representatives failed to acknowledge one of Diego's desperate written demands for mediation that his faction decided to blockade the highway. The move drew the attention of the municipal government and catalysed subsequent events.

3.4. *'Healing the institution'*

Two weeks after the road block, shiny pick-up trucks drove through the settlement and parked beneath the gnarled carob tree that grew in front of the communal assembly hall. By usual standards, an impressive array of political authorities had shown up. They included the mayor of the nearby town, the provincial secretary of state, a representative of the Province's General Inspection of Legal Persons office (*Inspección General de Personería Jurídica*) and the head of the municipal office for Native Peoples (*Pueblos Originarios*). Diego seemed pleased with the visit as it demonstrated his ability to draw the attention of high-status politicians. He hospitably pulled up white plastic chairs for the dignitaries and sent one of his daughters to ring the school bell that also called for assembly. Slowly, a crowd arrived. All in all, roughly sixty adults came to the meeting, but none of them belonged to Hernández's faction.

Diego sat at a table to one side of the dignitaries, purposefully going through the documents that he kept neatly arranged in a folder and proceeded to open the meeting. He pointed out that the co-existence of 'two legal personalities' was the cause of Aguararenta's conflict and told

the authorities that his council held the legal personhood granted by the province but that his rival, Rogelio Hernández, held the national legal personhood. The gist of his speech was that the conflict between the two factions prevented the community from progressing on its land claims and its ability to develop productive projects. The people, he explained, were in a state of ‘confusion’ and ‘ignorance’. ‘Every time we try to bring down a project, that one, [referring to Hernández] comes from behind and destroys it.’

The secretary of state spoke next. It soon became evident that his interpretation of the problem was different from Diego’s. His first point reflected that the government’s main concern was not about Aguararenta’s internal struggle, but about a more general problem of governance in the face of upcoming national and provincial elections. He told the assembly that the provincial government emphatically opposed the use of road blocks as a political strategy and then explained that the provincial government had no jurisdiction over Indigenous Communities as private organizations and could not dictate the content of the community’s statutes or decide who the governing council should be. However, he emphasised the government’s interest in ‘clarifying’ (*aclarar*) the community’s internal structure and ‘healing it as an institution’ (*sanear la institución*).

In support of this argument, the representative of the Legal Persons Registry explained that communal statutes may include any articles the community wants it to and that they ought to be informed by ‘cultural values.’ To illustrate his point, he gave the example of the chief and pointed out that this is a ‘cultural’ role that lies outside of the community’s legal personhood. However, he then stated that while a chief’s position may be held for life – given a community’s ‘cultural’ norms – the members of a governing council are legally obliged to run for re-election at periodic intervals. Finally, the head of the municipal Office of Indigenous Affairs – himself the leader of a neighbouring Guaraní community – explained that, although in his community there were three chiefs who had tried to sabotage his projects, he had been able to render his rivals powerless by obtaining the required documentation that confirmed him as the community’s ‘president.’

Where Diego was asking for arbitration and involvement from the state to sanction his leadership, the secretary of state established distance between the government and the Community by defining the limits of the government’s jurisdiction. However, Diego and the three functionaries were all concerned with issues of governance. The presence of multiple leaders complicated the state’s ability to relate with the community as a cohesive body.

Furthermore, all seemed to agree that a ‘healthy’ community was one where, in accordance with communal statutes, representation was effectively monopolised. Conflict, the presence of multiple leaders and two different legal personalities complicated recognition by fragmenting authority and creating multiple sources of legitimacy.

As an institution, the Indigenous Community provided a common language around which Guaraní leaders and state authorities could agree. Conflicts were made legible in the sense that they could be understood as requiring the strengthening of the institution, rather than the recognition of an altogether different form of politics. Conflicts around redistribution, expectations of leaders as brokers, and the possibility of multiple sites of authority – all central to everyday life – were irrelevant to the discussion. Rather, the main concern was with fixing the institution as a channel for monopolised representative authority.

3.5.Elections

As a direct result of this assembly, the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs finally responded to Diego’s demands for mediation. After a failed attempt to facilitate a reconciliatory meeting between Diego and Hernández, the INAI side-stepped the communal statutes, with their emphasis on collective deliberation and the supremacy of the assembly, and called for communal elections – the first to ever be celebrated in Aguararenta.

Mimicking the conduct of non-indigenous politicians in nearby towns, Diego and Hernández created ‘lists’ of candidates for their proposed commissions. Diego strategically decided to run with his uncle Eliseo Segundo, a son of Benito Segundo, Aguararenta’s first mission-appointed leader, as a way of drawing on his charisma and attracting support from his large extended family. The lists were distributed to every household in the settlement, stapled on lamp posts, and pasted onto walls. The INAI asked both sides to nominate election monitors and vote counters who would support the work of INAI functionaries and dissuade accusations of misconduct.

On election day, voting booths were set up in the settlement school. Overall, the event transpired quietly and by nightfall all the votes had been cast and vote counting began. In total, 312 votes were cast and Diego and his uncle, Eliseo Segundo, won by a margin of 80 votes. Diego, Eliseo, three INAI officials, members of the municipal government, representatives of few provincial level offices, Guaraní leaders from other settlements, and some of Diego’s closest allies gathered in the assembly hall where they penned, signed, and sealed a statement in Diego’s meeting minutes book that confirmed the electoral results.

In quantifying support, elections provided an immediate numerical index of legitimacy and, at an administrative level, it meant that a leader's authority could not be contested until new elections were held. Consensus was no longer to be achieved through the unpredictable and externally illegible means of deliberative assemblies but through the choice of a verifiable majority. The INAI's technical decision to celebrate elections violated the principles of cultural and political autonomy that multicultural policy and legislation promulgate and created a new form of political participation as it did. This push towards majoritarian democracy meant that fundamental disagreements and deep-seated rifts were harder to express through administratively recognisable channels, a fact that contributed to the deepening of ethnic divisions.

3.6. The territorial survey

It was precisely during my return visit in 2015 that the INAI initiated the next stage of institutionalisation in Aguararenta. According to a Guaraní representative of the INAI's Council for Indigenous Participation (CPI) – the organism created to represent indigenous participation within the INAI – the conflict between Diego and Hernández had prevented the INAI from surveying Aguararenta in accordance with law 26.160. But with the issue now resolved, the process could go ahead.

Not long after my meeting with the CPI representative, the INAI's Operative Technical Team (*Equipo Técnico Operativo* or ETO) drove up in a pair of new 4x4s. The team was composed of a lawyer, a geographer, and a social psychologist, none of whom identified as indigenous. They were accompanied by the Guaraní CPI representative, who was also the leader of a nearby Community, and his son who had been employed to help with the process of drawing up a map of the territory with GPS devices. An assembly was called and the ETO was given the opportunity to explain the purpose of its visit.

The technicians began by invoking the representational and participatory logic enshrined in communal statutes and explained that 'our work must be approved and ratified by the entire community.' Further, they clarified that 'the community is the one who gives the orders through the chief.' On the following day, they explained, they would carry out a survey of Aguararenta's houses while the others would venture out into the forest to mark the places where the people of the settlement grew crops, hunted, gathered, and logged. The purpose was to provide a broad picture of the territory that the people of Aguararenta employed. They made no promises regarding the actual delivery of land titles, but argued that the fruits of their labour

– a series of maps and documents – would provide a tool for the community to use in future legal proceedings.

As promised, the technicians returned the next day - this time in full khaki forest gear. The CPI representative and his son were given the task of charting out the forest in the company of Diego, three of his brothers, Eliseo and a few other men who all clambered onto a pickup truck, armed with shotguns. The lawyer, geographer, and psychologist chose to take on the less arduous task of charting the settled area of the community. Lidia, the only female member of Diego's Communal Commission, accompanied them and asked me to tag along.

Over the course of a blistering hot day we walked throughout the entire settlement. At each house, the geographer asked whether its inhabitants were 'communitarian' or '*criollo*' and clicked the appropriate button on his GPS device. This distinction was meant to protect indigenous inhabitants from non-indigenous encroachment. However, it ignored the subtle histories that made up a place like Aguararenta. Here, the houses that were being marked as *criollo* were the houses of *chaqueños*, many of whom had settled on this land at about the same time as the Guaraní. Nonetheless, by being excluded from the 'communitarian' category, the complexity of their lives and historical trajectories were elided and they were effectively marked as having a less legitimate claim to the land and to the political institution of the Indigenous Community.

In the meantime, the social psychologist took the opportunity to ask how many 'communitarian' people lived in each house and what they did for a living. The ETO marked the churches, the school, the first aid building, the assembly hall, and even an NGO sponsored apiary. In between houses, the technicians asked questions about the community, its social customs and its history. We visited the local cemetery where we tried to find evidence of old burial grounds. The purpose was to begin to provide a sense of how long the community had inhabited this particular territory and to give a sense of the kind of socio-economic activities in which its inhabitants were involved. The technicians asked questions about crops and livestock, about local celebrations, and stories from the past. Curious about the political structure of Aguararenta, they asked Lidia whether the chieftainship was a hereditary position. In response, she answered, that 'that's what the statutes say.'

This briefest of exchanges is illuminating in as much as it sheds light on two converging yet contradictory logics. Throughout the survey process, the technicians were attempting to aid the people of Aguararenta by providing them with a tool that might help them gain full legal

recognition as a long-standing indigenous settlement. To do so, they interviewed settlement inhabitants in an effort to gain insight into the ‘authentic culture’ of the place. In so doing, they managed to erase the lived history of the settlement by creating a strong division between ‘*criollos*’ and ‘communitarians.’ This tactic reflects the ‘Janus-faced logic’ whereby experts establish ‘the birth-to-presence of a [communal] form of being which pre-exists’ Rose 1999: 177). At another level, the exchange regarding the hereditary nature of the chieftainship perfectly captured the extent to which the institutional logic of the Indigenous Community interacted with attempts at recognition. While the ETO sought an ‘authentic’ cultural response regarding the settlement’s political culture, Lidia responded by invoking the very statutes on which the corporate institution of the Indigenous Community was built. As with the documents Diego produced, Lidia’s response seems to reflect an anticipatory stance towards state recognition.

It would be mistaken, however, to assume that this process was a monolithic imposition by the state. Upon further questioning, the ETO members explained that the INAI, the CPI and the provincial government of Salta, simultaneously financed the surveys under the umbrella of the National Ministry of Human Rights. One technician explained that the provincial government ultimately had the upper hand because it was the main funder of the surveys, but that the CPI, which had its own budget, also pushed to prioritise the survey of certain communities over others. The survey process I describe here sheds light on the numerous strategies and motivations that drive the actors involved in the process of institutionalisation.

The process itself, though, is concerned with the abstraction of Indigenous Communities as particular kinds of institutions that are ‘separate from the particular practices it frames’ (Mitchell 1991: 94). As such, Communities are imagined to have certain kinds of economic activities, particular political forms and even specific kinds of people with specific permitted histories. On the one hand, the documentation and cartographic representation of this data becomes legible ‘evidence’ meant to enhance the Indigenous Community’s, future, juridical potency. On the other, it is also a technique through which the historical experiences and social specificities of communities are elided in accordance with pre-existing models of what indigenous community ought to be like. In time, these bureaucratic artefacts are likely to wield significant power, not least, because they will stand as coherent documents depicting a consensual community, produced by authorised technicians, from which competing political agendas will be erased.

6. Instituting recognition

In taking a longitudinal view of conflict and mediation we have seen how details like statutes, unacknowledged documents, roadblocks, and surveys all contribute to make Indigenous Communities legible, but opaque. Hernández's brokering role between extractive industries and local communities generated dissatisfaction around perceptions of inequitable resource distribution. The principle of delegated authority enabled private companies to strike deals with Hernández, based on the assumption of legitimacy and deliberative consensus. These principles were further enshrined in the communal statutes, which lay out the procedural dynamics that dictate the relationship between the Community Assembly and its governing council. Extractive engagements were made possible through the centralisation of authority and the monopolisation of representation, for these were the legible relations that enabled negotiations and facilitated agreements like the one Hernández signed. However, these engagements were themselves opaque to Community inhabitants. Thus, in Aguararenta, as in all of the Communities I worked with, people's inability to participate in leaders' negotiations led to suspicion and discontent, especially when there was a sense that leaders were benefitting personally and failing to redistribute.

Community statutes reappear in Diego's faction's attempts to replace Hernández. Again, communal decision making through the Assembly is set out as the procedure for leadership change, but this ignores the reality of shifting factional alliances – more akin to the politics of scission described in other parts of Latin America (Rivière 1984; Vanzolini 2011) – than to the kinds of deliberative public sphere imagined in the statutes. As Diego and Hernández each rally their own supporters, they create blocs of support that do not come together to negotiate or deliberate but rather lay separate claims to their own representative legitimacy. The logic is neither majoritarian nor consensual, instead it tends towards centrifugal fission in ways that challenge the political monism the statutes assume.

Profoundly divided but administratively centralised, Guaraní people interpellate the state as mediator. Documents emerge as performative techniques that channel the deliberative, communal, and representational language set out in the statutes. These artefacts anticipate the state's presence, rooting indigenous demands within dominant legal, administrative, and political procedures – a strategy that, as among colonists in Brazilian Amazonia, 'prefigure[s] the return of governance to ratify their own position' (Campbell 2015: 27). In doing so, they elide division-ism, presenting rivals as illegitimate rather than alternative authorities who have

their own bases of support. While such documents archive political life and may become future sites of legibility for the state, in the present they are often insufficient. The lack of state responses generates frustration and, in Aguararenta, led Diego and his followers to blockade the highway – a form of political intervention that was administratively illegible, but disruptive and effective.

In the assembly that resulted from the roadblock, Diego and state officials demonstrated different yet converging objectives. For Diego, factionalism and the duplication of legal personhood stopped him from making the kinds of progress he desired for the Community because it challenged his ability to monopolise representation and present himself as a legitimate broker. For state officials, the issue was to ‘heal’ and ‘clarify’ the institution, moreover, they demonstrated the ambivalence surrounding cultural and administrative norms. While institutional organisation might reflect cultural particularities, officials also noted the importance of institutionalising channels for leadership change and the efficacy of bureaucratic recognition as a tactic for achieving centralised representative authority. That assembly demonstrated how institutional procedures had become legible scripts around which indigenous political strategies and state administration could coalesce. It also showed how recognition entailed, not so much a right to different forms of politics, as much as a procedural alignment around legitimated political forms.

Unable to render Guaraní division-sim legible, the INAI side-stepped the assembly, organised elections and effectively instituted majoritarian rule. Aguararenta’s inhabitants became ‘voters’ - a particular kind of social agent who was ‘not excessively passive’ but also not ‘too active’ and who participated politically ‘only in the instances and moments that are seen as appropriate’ (Goldman 2013: 232). Unlike the road block which was deemed to be too volatile as a form of political action, voting in planned elections granted a periodic, legible, moment of acceptable politics. The ‘losing’ minority, in this case led by Hernández, had to accept the legitimacy of Diego and Eliseo’s majority. From the deliberative form it took in the statutes, the state’s intervention created a procedural form of democracy; that is, an ‘institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’ (Schumpeter 2005: 241). Where deliberative assemblies had been imagined to generate unanimity and had, in practice, created co-existing factions, the new procedural forms operated under the assumption of a majoritarian rule in which those who lost the political struggle had to accept the majority’s legitimacy.

The legitimization of authority led directly to Aguararenta's inclusion within the National Territorial Survey Register. As Natalia Castelnovo (2016) has noted in her analysis of Argentina's territorial surveys, these processes frame indigenous demands and translate them into 'grammars of the state,' that confine indigenous populations to the 'communitarian space' (29). In Aguararenta, this communal space included conformation to specific procedural forms but also the erasure of ethnic co-existence and a homogenisation of communal identity. Yet these administrative forms have also come closest to furthering projects of indigenous sovereignty. Like the letters and minutes Guaraní leaders produce, surveys anticipate the state's future intervention, homogenising socio-cultural forms and documenting a demand for land. They have also reproduced the majoritarian principle by recognising the Guaraní majority and delegitimising potential *chaqueño* claims to recognition. For their part, the state officials who appear on the scene are often assembled haphazardly on short-term contracts and with contradictory agendas, but they conduct the work of institutionalisation with considerable discretion. In determining next steps, or simply beginning new processes of institutionalisation they rely on the legible contours of Indigenous Communities as institutions and on the presumptions of pre-existing communal forms. Simultaneously, they shape the future channels through which the Indigenous Community will be able to seek recognition.

What seems to characterise the kind of democratic sovereignty through which indigenous populations have been incorporated, then, is a combination of procedurally minimal institutional arrangements and an administrative commitment to community. Aguararenta's story captures the state's technical interventions – its institutional 'healing,' the celebration of elections, and territorial surveys – which have rendered the Indigenous Community legible to the state even as they furthered the possibility of land titling and political autonomy. The process exemplifies the way in which government through community brings into being a social form that is meant to pre-exist (Rose 1999: 177): in this case the administrative procedures carried out by state experts create a communitarian, ethnically homogeneous, indigenous society, but doing so requires the institutionalisation of political procedures that centralise representative authority and legitimate majority rule. At the same time, we see how Guaraní leaders benefit from the elision of political division and ethnic co-existence. In this regard, the Indigenous Community's institutional opacity can also further the political authority and representational discretion of Guaraní leaders.

7. Conclusion

Aguararenta's conflict provides a paradigmatic case of the confluence of extractive engagements, political overtures towards indigenous citizens, and the navigation of political autonomy that have been important aspects of indigenous life under Latin America's postneoliberal regimes (Svampa 2019). Among Guaraní Communities of the Argentine Chaco, principles of participation, representation and consensus and new community-based institutions create ambiguous combinations of legibility and opacity that facilitate a community-based form governance.

I have suggested that the origins of this form of governance can be traced back to the widespread political reforms that accompanied democratisation and 'social neoliberal' (Andolina et al. 2009) reforms throughout Latin America. While Guaraní people see internal conflicts as the result of leaders' inability to fairly redistribute resources elicited from extractive interests, external bureaucrats and politicians understand them as problems of internal governance that can be fixed through technical-administrative interventions in institutional design. As local conflicts are mediated, though, new institutional layers are added on to the Indigenous Community: bureaucracy, elections, and ethnically coded maps become the institution's legible marks even as they create new forms of opacity.

On the one hand, the imposition of such institutional forms from above enables state officials and bureaucrats to 'see' into marginal populations. In this sense, the creation of Indigenous Communities, the 'healing' of their institutional forms and the 'clarification' of their internal structures might be thought of as instances of domination, a quintessential example of state sovereignty expanding onto a territory. On the other, there is a sense in which Guaraní people themselves are striving to be seen. They draw attention to themselves through roadblocks, letters, and phone calls and demand recognition after decades of marginality. It is through these interpellations that Indigenous Communities – as administrative and legal entities designed in accordance with state legislation – become recognisable in the first place.

The people described here were not without room for manoeuvre, but they were compelled to work within the Indigenous Community as an embryonic, 'twilight institution' that was constantly taking shape (Lund 2006). Despite their competing and contradictory political agendas, state functionaries and Guaraní leaders were both involved in their own kinds of bureaucratic production. The routine practices of minute-taking and document-production alongside the historically novel experiences of elections and territorial surveys channelled the

direction of state sovereignty, giving shape to a form of political monism that endured beyond instances of conflict. Ultimately, these were spaces in which Guaraní leaders and followers, state functionaries and extractive interests articulated their discordant visions of the public good and shaped the political trajectory of the settlements they took place in.

My suggestion is that among indigenous populations of the Argentine Chaco, recognition has enabled certain kinds of political relations and erased others, even as it empowered indigenous citizens to self-administer these relations. This extension of ‘state quality’ (Lund 2016) depends upon the constant interaction of legible and opaque forms of politics. An understanding of democratic sovereignty as a ‘form of institutionalized political life’ (Swyngedouw 2011: 370) can help disentangle the ways in which democratic states further their sovereignty through communal forms. While the politics of recognition is often seen to bring about political plurality, I have shown that in the Argentine Chaco democratic sovereignty constitutes the expansion of a specific form of collective political life that is implemented through the creation of weakly territorialized institutions. The result is a paradoxical form of incorporation: one that creates procedural and institutionalised spheres of recognition, even as it undermines the premise of recognition.

8. References

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