

Amerindian Misfortunes: Ethnographies of South American Rituals and Cosmologies on Danger, Illness, and Evil. Introduction to the Dossier¹

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The articles compiled here are dedicated to exploring conceptions found in South American ethnographic contexts that are linked to the perception of danger and risk. In the contexts analysed here, which belong to the Andes and the Amazonia, the authors stress the symbolic and practical aspects of the relationships between humans and non-humans. What do rituals and myths related to misfortune tell us about Amerindian forms of conception and interaction with the other-than-human beings that co-exist with indigenous peoples in their environments? Examining these interactions as they occur in diverse cases, this dossier calls attention to the sociocultural norms, spatio-temporal locations, and performative modes that characterize human and non-human relations. Finally, high-lighting those current dynamics of continuity and change lived by South American Amerindians, it contributes to the debate on the contemporary relevance of classical ethnographic symbolic structures, and provides elements to review the heuristic scope of regionalism for the understanding of societies in constant contact with other cultures.

- 1 This dossier was originated from a selection of the papers presented in the symposium “Rituales y entidades no humanas: etnografías y comparaciones entre tierras altas y bajas de Sudamérica”, that took place in the “6ta Reunión Alemana de Investigación sobre América del Sur, Mesoamérica y el Caribe” (organised in the University of Bonn, in May 23-26, 2013). To this first selection, a second group of works (inspired in the same topics but that could not be presented in the congress) was added.
- 2 I am particularly indebted to Marieka Sax, Kathryn Woolard and Sander Adelaar for their insights on former drafts of this introduction. Finally, this dossier also inherited some of its topics from the discussions held, along with Olivia Angé, Margarita Valdovinos and Fabiana Maizza in Bonn, where my research stay would not have been possible without the continuous support of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung. Finally, I also would like to thank both the program Beatriu de Pinós of the Agencia de Gestió D’Ajuts Universitaris I de Recerca (AGAUR) and the Programa Estatal de Fomento de la Investigación Científica y Técnica de Excelencia. Subprograma de Generación del Conocimiento (HAR2013-40445-P) 2014-2016, whose support allowed me to stay at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona during the final stages of the production of this compilation.



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Current debates on non-human beings

Bringing together researchers from various institutions working in their different manners and angles, and in diverse ethnographic areas, this dossier engages with debates over the practical, symbolic and transformative aspects of human versus non-human interactions in the lowlands and highlands of South America. The relations between humans and non-humans both in South America and abroad have been usually considered in the frame of ‘animism’ (Vilaça 1992; Bird-David 1999; Pedersen 2014; Lima 1996). Animism is in fact one of the oldest concepts in anthropology, representing the “century-old problem [of] why people animate what we regard as inanimate objects” (Bird-David 1999: 70). As is known, the efforts of ethnologists to understand this “bizarre scandal” (Kohn 2009: 136) could be traced at least as far back as to the seminal works of Edward B. Tylor, who explained ‘animism’ in accordance to the thesis of David Hume’s *Natural History of Religion* and seem to have taken the label from “contemporary spiritualists” (Brightman, Grotti & Ulturgasheva 2012: 3). Although it is usually redefined and sometimes has taken on a rather specific sense – i.e., “Animism’s enigma of subverting same into other” (Willerslev 2013: 43) –, this attribution of a social character to relations between humans and non-humans has been traditionally understood as configuring a world in which the default form of interaction between beings is seen as that which occurs between subjects (Costa & Fausto 2010: 94).

Some of the most important current theories dealing with animism and the studies of Amerindian systems of knowledge – promoted primarily by the studies of Viveiros de Castro (2004a, 2004b) and Descola (2011) – are at the base of the so-called ‘ontological turn’ in anthropology. Here, animism has been redefined as an ontology concerned much more with being than with how we come to know it, and has been used as an argument for a critique of a Western European mononaturalism–multiculturalist ideology based on a (particular) binary nature-culture (Latour 2009). In fact, they assert that “the space between nature and society is itself social” (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 481), and that a sort of dialogue with the environment is possible only if we deny the existence of one unifying nature and if we ignore a dualism that opposes it to society. In short, if we abandon an intellectualist perspective that stabilises universality “too fast” and accepts plurality “too lightly” (Latour 2014: 302). Thus, the distinction between some things of the world that would fall within the jurisdiction of human intentionality and other ones that would obey to the universal laws of the material (Descola 2011: 34) would neither be universal nor demonstrable but merely a conventional form “of carving ontological domains in the texture of things” (Descola 2014a: 271) or even a contingent dichotomy, “historically situated and just one of many other possible and indeed empirically existing modes of understanding relations” (Brightman, Grotti & Ulturgasheva 2012: 1).

The epistemic opposition between interiority and physicality is key in this point. On one side, the spirit, soul or interiority (a reflexive form, a certain awareness that one is animated by an immaterial intern flow, but not necessarily by an inner substance) integrates. On the other side, the body or *physicalité* (a system of intensive affects, the awareness that one is embedded in systematic material constraints, but not necessarily an extended material organism) differentiates (Viveiros de Castro 2004a: 475; Descola 2011: 94). If the first has been considered as the “principle tenet of animism”, the latter would be “the minimum condition” for perspectivism (Costa & Fausto 2010: 94).

Descola has recognised that considering the awareness of a sort of Husserlian distinction between material processes and mental states, as a universal or a pan-human cognitive propensity (Kohn 2009: 138) is not exempt at all from a certain “irony” and from “an esthetic addiction to symmetry” (Descola 2014c: 440). This recognition could be considered as a reaction to the critiques of the concept of interiority of an animism that “humanizes all actants” (Kelly 2014: 358) as unnecessarily permeated by (or charged of) a human quality.

Always in the case of Amerindian societies, the elaborations of perspectivism on the physical discontinuity between the beings of the cosmos – the counterpart of the meta-physical continuity implied in animism – have lead it to define the body as “the great arena” (Seeger, Da Matta & Viveiros de Castro 1979: 14), or as the “site and instrument of ontological differentiation and referential disjunction” (Viveiros de Castro 2004b: 4). The theoretical consequences of this view are described by Viveiros de Castro’s well-known definition of perspectivism (2004a, 2004b).

Besides the consideration of perspectivism as an extension of animism (Kohn 2009: 139), some scholars take seriously perspectivism’s potential to constitute a sort of “bomb” that could “explode the whole implicit philosophy” (Latour 2009: 2) that is too present in the interpretations ethnographers make of their material. Perspectivism not only stresses (as animism) a certain porosity between the ontological status given to humans and non-humans (Cesard, Deturche & Erikson 2003: 394), but it also privileges the study of ‘indigenous anthropologies’ rather than the mere collecting of data about indigenous peoples for Western theoretical elaborations (Brightman, Grotti & Ulturgasheva 2012: 13).

Recent debates about the ‘ontological turn’ have evolved into various proposals (Ingold 2011, 2013; Kohn 2013). They have, for instance, raised concerns about its expression of anthropomorphism, its flaws concerning the ontological hybridations or ontodiversity (Descola 2014b: 298), the possible internal differences within ontologies, and also the ponderability of the ontological classifications.

Some scholars subscribing the notion that conceptions of non-human beings constitute a particular form of perceiving the environment and its elements have recently paid

more attention to the fact that the cosmologies of Amerindian peoples are inextricably linked to (or even produced by) their practices and everyday engagement with the environment.

In the frame of Ingold's phenomenology on the context-specific generation of the 'life process', the frequently advanced hypothesis that indigenous peoples call upon their social relationships in order to shape their relationships with the environment faces the issue of intentionality and agency in the 'natural' world. In various recent works, Ingold recovers Jakob von Uexküll's theory of the *Umwelt*, a term that denoted a system in which the world is constituted within an animal's circuit of perception and action. For this 'pioneer of bio-semiotics', meaning is bestowed by the organism on its environment, is located in the immediate coupling of perception and action (Ingold 2011: 64). His form of considering meaning allows Ingold (2011: 77) to fight the usual idea that meaning is related to the correspondence between an external world and its interior representation.

A similar concern to that of Ingold has been recently expressed in the perspectives of Eduardo Kohn. Although more explicitly grounded in ethnography, his recent elaborations do not only pay similar attention to the ideas developed by the Estonian-born ethologist during the forties, but also contest a similar kind of boundaries between humans and their environment. The main difference would be, in this case, that while Ingold's theories decidedly maintain humans-environments relationships at the centre of their concerns, Kohn seems more interested in what he called first an "anthropology of life" and later an "anthropology beyond the human". This can be illustrated by his notion of knowing: "Humans are not the only knowers, and knowing (i.e., intention and representation) exists in the world as other than human, embodied phenomenon that has tangible effects" (Kohn 2007: 17).

If significance is not exclusive of humans and all living beings have semiotic devices, we need to consider then, according to Kohn (2007: 6) organisms as selves and biotic life as a (nonsymbolic and highly embodied) sign process, we should consider how non-humans represent themselves to humans. Kohn considers the ecological relations of the Ecuadorian Runa as constituted both by the ways in which human and non-human beings perceive and represent their environment, and by the interaction of phenomenal worlds that are specific to their perceptual and bodily dispositions, motivations, and intentions (Kohn 2007: 5).

The perspectives of "Kohn's pansemiotic approach" (Costa & Fausto 2010: 98) are not only close to Ingold's, but also to Descola's latest elaborations on 'collectives', which the latter defines rather as "hybrid multispecies groupings wherein humans strive, through complex rituals, to disentangle themselves from the mass of beings with whom they share an origin and an identity and to carve out some functional mechanisms for their specifically human life concerns" (Descola 2014b: 296-297). In fact, and at least

since the classic work of Marcel Mauss on the issue of personhood, animistic societies have not only raised frequent doubts about the universality of the category of nature, but also (and consequently), as Kohn's sylvan thinking proposes about the very object of study of anthropology.

Taking into account its current relevance in mainstream anthropology, the concept of ontology has also been considered as a sort of 'buzzword' giving a "sense of déjà-vu" (Pedersen 2014). Despite their interest in different ontologies around the world, various authors have produced a critique to it, or at least a recognition that "we don't know what it [the 'ontological turn'] means yet" (Kelly 2014: 264). For instance, Willerslev (2013: 49) has questioned whether anthropologists are taking indigenous animism too seriously. Isn't this seriousness in fact failing to recognise the ability of indigenous people to distance themselves from their official rhetoric? A tacit reply to this question has asserted that what distinguishes the ontological turn is not the assumption of taking indigenous peoples seriously but its proposal of 'deliberate and reflexive' misunderstandings in ethnography, its aim to "pass through what we study, rather as when an artist elicits a new form from the affordances her material allows her to set free" (Holbraad, Pedersen & Viveiros de Castro 2014).

Among the scholars who have developed a critique of certain components of the 'ontological turn' (Halbmayer 2012), some focus on its "level of abstraction that rarely deals with ethnographic material" (Fischer 2014: 348), others on its indifference to indigenous political concerns and adversities and "disquieting potential to add to indigenous political difficulties and intellectual fragility" (Ramos 2012: 483-484). Some of the latter have usually compared it with a "dogma" (Ramos 2012: 489) and a "fundamentalism" (Oyuela-Caycedo 2014). Following previous critiques of the representation of Western modern thought as an integral, homogeneous system of abstract type-concepts (Turner 2009: 16), Bessire & Bond have suggested that the ontological turn involves an "easy dismissal of modernity" and has questioned the conditions under which ontologies are "made amenable to ethnographic analysis" (Bessire & Bond 2014: 443). The restriction of "indigenous ontological legitimacy" to the terms of an "orthodox dialectic of Otherness" might be excluding from ethnography those individuals who do not 'agree' with the mythology in which it is exclusively grounded (Bessire & Bond 2014: 444). This concern is in fact reflecting previous analogue debates about the reduction of the anthropological gaze to "the class perspective of urban cosmopolitans making career out of objectifying the rural and the local" (Hornborg 1999: 81).

Paying attention to the 'hardening matrices' that select what must be safeguarded and what could be left, would actually prevent us from ignoring "the actually existing politics of nature and culture", from thinking about "the more consequential makings" (Bessire & Bond 2014) of an urgent present whose challenge lies in "contributing to actualize some possibilities and not others" (Blaser 2014). In this context, what could

be the relevance of embracing an ‘anachronistic retreat’ towards outdated topics such as the non-modern, the “colonizing binaries of structuralism” (Bessire & Bond 2014: 442-449) and the isolated field site?

Finally, it has also been suggested that trying to avoid the dualism between nature and culture, the so-called ontological turn could not avoid at least three general consequences. First, a “misrepresentation and mistranslation” (Turner 2009: 16) of Amerindian societies. According to Turner, Lowland South American ethnography shows that here culture “neither excludes nor suppresses natural contents or qualities”. On the contrary, culture “rather retains and reproduces them through the employment of more abstract and generalised meta-forms” (Turner 2009: 22). Actually, culture would be understood as “an incremental transformation of these natural elements”, a sort of “super-nature” (Turner 2009: 34). Secondly, focusing on the dualism between nature and culture reifies “the most modern binary of all: the radical incommensurability of modern and non-modern worlds” (Bessire & Bond 2014: 442). Regarding the fetishisation of otherness, it has been suggested that advocating incommensurable differences as an analytical point of departure could lend itself to potentially dangerous political constructions of otherness that could actually be misused against some marginalised groups of people (Vigh & Sausdal 2014). Thirdly, besides the issue of the problematic broadening of the scope of applicability of the ontological approach, it also “standardises multiplicity and fetishises alterity” (Bessire & Bond 2014: 449). This second issue could be elaborated a little more. It has been suggested that “to attribute so much uniformity to native thinking [...] is to flatten down (if not deny) their inventiveness and aesthetic sophistication and to ignore their specific historical trajectories” (Ramos 2012: 483).

Among the arguments of the various authors described until here, two poles can be detected – a radicalisation and a questioning –, and a sort of intermediate position: a contextualisation. I will summarise them here. First, some scholars have acknowledged that there is a diversity of animisms, each one with its local authority, status, history, and structure (Bird-David 1999: 79). Secondly, other scholars have made remarkable efforts of generalisation or even a radicalization: to amplify the perspectivist phenomenology would have been intended either heading in the direction of a semiology (Kohn 2007, 2013) or unpacking the logical propositions that organise the relationship between beings (Praet 2013). Finally, some authors claim this is an unfortunate substitution of an urgently needed “ethnography of the actual” in favour of a soteriological “sociology of the possible” (Bessire & Bond 2014: 449), a displacement of located analysis of afflictions, dominations and fights for the sake of mere “anticipatory evocations” (Bessire & Bond 2014: 441). Most of them follow the assertions that reality is constructed through the practices of human and non-human beings, and that the description of the sociality of animistic ontologies should include at least those non-human beings with whom human society and life and interactions are considered inextricably tied up.

And many of them could probably agree that it is still much to be known about, first, how indigenous groups detect and use particular properties of their environments and, second, how they change this environment “by weaving with it and between themselves” diverse kinds of relations (Descola 2014a: 273). It is actually not difficult to perceive a sense of “challenge” (Ramos 2012: 485) among the scholars interested in a study of human/non-human interagentivity leading “‘away,’ ‘underneath,’ ‘elsewhere,’ and definitely ‘without’” (Latour 2014: 305) what has been applied so far, which includes those who are sceptic about the ‘ontologic turn’.

In this context and between these alternatives, this dossier is rather interested in underlining the pre-eminence of detailed fieldwork-based ethnography for theoretical developments as those needed to understand the multiplicity of conceptual and practical relationships that humans establish with their environment.³ Strangely enough, this introduction does not try to fix any particular statement inasmuch as it does not intend to find a position among the sharp contrast that separate the arguments summarised above or to discuss in detail the adequacy of any of them. This introduction only aims to situate the issues at stake in order to facilitate the use of anthropological imagination and the forging of new concepts and approaches that could help to release anthropology from the “centrality and paradigmatic clout” of certain “conventional tools” (Descola 2014a: 278-279).

The risks of the relations with non-humans

The search of “ethnographic sites to conceptualize otherwise” (De la Cadena 2014) and alternative forms of describing – or ‘composing’ (Latour 2014) – specific Amerindian worlds would need, at the same time, to avoid both naturalist reductionisms and semiologist idealisms, and to leave “a way out for the people” that is described (Holbraad, Pedersen & Viveiros de Castro 2014). The following articles want to highlight human/non-human relations’ ethnographic complexities that allow “the apprehension of more differentiated semiotic regimes” (Lima 1999: 51). Amerindian non-human beings in South America are explored here through the concrete cases of the Apurinã (Brazilian western Amazonia), the Quechua-speaking peasants of Huancavelica (southern Peruvian Andes), Jasimaná (Argentinian northwestern highlands), and the Aymara and Quechua-speaking inhabitants of the city of Oruro (southwestern Bolivia). Themes explored include the relationships between Amerindian peoples and natural resources, subsistence peasants (or lower-class workers) and

3 All the articles included here are a direct product of the fieldwork conducted by their authors. The only exception could be Dimitri Karadimas’ contribution. Nevertheless, even in this case, it is important to consider that his bibliographic knowledge of the Oruro region in Bolivia is closely accompanied by his reflections and findings after his own fieldwork in northwestern Amazonia.

syncretic religious forms and entities, humans predatory and entities, communities and their past, and also among indigenous community members. Authors consider topics such as the subjectivity and agency of non-human beings, humans taking on non-human subjectivities, production and reproduction, cultural continuity, religious change, and the situated context of time and symbolic landscapes and places. These topics are illustrated through their rituals, musical expressions, narratives, material cultures, conceptions of personhood and of the past, images of the devil, ethno-taxonomies and treatment of illnesses.

This dossier explores the local variations of the socialities that the diverse relationships between human and non-human beings in South America can afford. The articles deal with what could be named as ‘canonic’ non-human beings, those that ethnographic accounts are usually ready to consider as a ‘traditional’ part of the cosmology they study. They emphasise components of the environment with which humans establish relationships that mirror those particular socialities that emerge in front of danger, illness and evilness.

The authors address the issue of sociality between humans and non-humans, through the ethnographies of rituals and narratives of the above-mentioned Amerindian peoples (which include both highlanders and Amazonian groups from western Brazil to northern Argentina, crossing southern Peru and various areas of Bolivia), focusing on those aspects linked to danger, illness and evil.

The article written by Luisa González Saavedra concerns a little explored group in the northern Peruvian Amazon called the Chayahuita or Shawi. How do the Shawi conceive and manage their relationships with the *tanán huayan*, dangerous non-humans who have retained the original condition they once shared with the Shawi before they became humans? González Saavedra examines a series of narratives about the most intimate places of Shawi territory, many of which address the profound transformations suffered by their ancestors at the beginning of time. If we acknowledge that one of the most important transformations that happened to the Shawi in the past is their conversion from a proto-human state (that of the *tanán huayan*) to their current human state, we need to accept that these changes concern not only the history of the Shawi, but also their own conception of themselves. González Saavedra identifies this process as the very beginning of the Shawi self-identification as *piyapi* (which could be translated as ‘person’) and of their inextricable relationships with those threatening non-human beings that stayed in their original form and who populate the forest today.

In his explicitly comparative article, Dimitri Karadimas writes about the figure of the Andean devil, both as a folkloric character and as a ground for popular beliefs in past and contemporary indigenous societies. Although today there are many Andean rituals in which one can find iconographical expressions of the devil, its grandest and most complex version may be found in the *diablada* or *carnaval* of Oruro (Bolivia).

Karadimas pays attention not only to this popular ritual, but also to the local legends linked to it, such as the repentant thief called *nina nina*. Building on previous approaches (particularly those of Fernández Juárez and Bouysse-Cassagne), Karadimas explores the significance of certain pre-Columbian Andean entities related to the mountains (as those considered by Sax) to ideas of the devil in this part of the southern Andes, where it is also called *El Tío*. He suggests a number of affiliations through which the mythological thief appears as an anthropomorphised version of a particular kind of insect whose form of reproduction is attributed to the devil. Following a path he already outlined in previous works on the genesis and the presence of the devil in contemporary South American Amerindian religious forms, Karadimas recalls the identification between the devil, Yurupari (a mythological and ritual figure of the northwestern Amazon, characterised by its wings, claws, bestial dentition, hairiness, visible phallus and horns) and a wasp that reproduces itself using other insects as vessels and as food for its larva. According to the author, entities equipped with horns (like those present in pre-Hispanic iconography) are an anthropomorphised form of parasitic wasps. Could a similar figure be intermingled with the features of the Christian devil in the Andes? Karadimas proposes that in spite of the different historical situations of the northwestern Amazon and the Bolivian and Peruvian Andes, contact between distinct religious forms could have produced similar results. The usual association between the devil and the Andean spirit of the mountain would thus be a result of this adaptive cultural response.

Marieka Sax examines the so-called ‘mountain spirits’, whose relationships with humans can entail many benefits but also extreme dangers. These entities, broadly distributed throughout the Andes, are considered by as a specific kind of ‘place’, which she defines as “a ‘gathering’ and ‘holding’ of innumerable bodies, objects, experiences, events, intentions, and meanings in dynamic interaction and coexistence”. The author examines Andean places such as the deified mountains as animated by supernatural beings that are attributed with agency, subjectivity, individuality and even independent will and the capacity to act upon it in the world. What are the consequences of these features if we contrast them with the disembodied, de-individualised powers that are associated with other Andean places linked to illness, danger and evil in the Andes such as high-altitude lagoons (*encantos*) and monoliths (*wankas*)? Sax argues ritual feeding to these place-based non-humans are efficacious because these agential forces can act on Andean offerers in turn. When they find themselves to be addressed by place-based powers who demand to be fed, they would in fact experience what the author understands as “a corporeal interpolation of place through the bodily and material conditions of household members, their crops and herds, and their livelihood activities”.

In the next article, the case of the Apurinã of the Purus River (western Brazil) is considered by Pirjo Virtanen. She addresses the relationships the Apurinã have with places or things that may produce dangerous transformations related to certain subjectivities,

particularly when people are travelling for hunting, visiting or trekking. Because of their links with powerful non-human beings, these places and things are approached with the utmost caution. These non-human beings may shoot invisible arrows towards Apuriná people, contaminating them with substances that are fatal to the body. These substances – called *mapitxiry*, which only shamans can remove from the body – are similar to the illnesses and body pains caused by eating specific animals forbidden to certain Apuriná clans. Virtanen explores the specific rituals practiced to avoid both the arrows and the *mapitxiry* (such as consuming earth substances of the place of origin and cleansing the body, before and after a journey), and shows that in spite of their dangers (and of those Apuriná myths that consider kin's absence as risky or even deadly), frequent travels are important elements of Apuriná notions of personhood, humanity and kinship. In contrast to previous approaches (and drawing on Arawakan peoples' roles as historical mediators between lowland and highland South America), Virtanen suggests that "it is not only co-residence that produced kin, but also mobility, a significant element in community making". Either visiting neighbouring settlements or returning to ancestral places, Apuriná can turn people into kin, produce new networks, or constitute their territory.

Finally, Daniela Salvucci addresses the ritual world of the shepherds in the Jasimaná highlands (in the province of Salta, in northwestern Andean Argentina), which include processions, pilgrimages, healing rites, offerings to the Mother Earth (Pachamama), and agro-pastoral and life cycle rites. Following Ingold's conceptualisation of the environment as a set of ecological relationships including human and non-human beings, Salvucci aims to go beyond both the approach of ecological functionalism in Andean rites and the perspective of cultural symbolism on indigenous animistic cosmologies in the Andes. Salvucci aims to show that certain actions (like binding, burying, offering or going in procession) produce relations that bring different degrees of danger (e.g. in the case of the Pachamama, who can cause falls, shocks and diseases if people are not ritually protected or do not make offerings), and also different types of intimacy (e.g. the relations with the saints, which are based on familiarity, cohabitation and care). In order to do so, Salvucci focuses on different practices and rites that materially produce simultaneously risky ties and environmental relations of intimacy between humans and non-human beings.

In addition to the original differentiations that are integral to risk, illnesses and evil spirits (discussed by González Saavedra), this dossier also aims to bring forward a comparative description of the forms of adaptation and permanence that the conceptions of the devil (as in the case analysed by Karadimas). This group of studies also examines the degrees and forms of individuality that some very broad entities can assume (like the 'mountain spirits' addressed by Sax). The last two texts offer two more interrelated aspects of the dangers of illnesses and evilness: one is the benefits these risks could entail

(as showed by Virtanen) and the other is the intimacy this kind of exposure to danger it implies (as discussed by Salvucci).

Is ‘culture’, as opposed to ‘nature’, sufficient to understand the challenge that indigenous politics and its quest to promote their rights represent (De la Cadena 2010)? Nowadays, what we call the ‘cultures’ of the Amerindian peoples of South America are actually facing remarkable dilemmas. Ideologies and processes characteristic of globalisation continuously affect and transform their so-called “traditional cultural manifestations”. Previous approaches to the conceptualisation of these processes among contemporary Amerindian societies have tended to focus on questions of individualism, monetisation, and inequalities between indigenous peoples and capitalist modes of production. While other studies have focused on the relationship between ethnic groups and external capitalist agents, this dossier rather examines the relationship between the individual and his or her own group, asking how Amerindian groups can maintain their ability to be part of a community (in a socially legitimate manner) whilst simultaneously facing, for example, the forceful expansion of late liberal economic policies in Latin America. Taking into account this encounter between different perspectives, ideologies, and praxis – by no means new, but in many cases reloaded – the articles of this dossier on Amerindian societies in South America has tried to broaden the scope of our current reflections.

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